



Five years without death penalty

The group “Against Death Penalty” calls upon citizens, civil society organizations, political parties, and grassroots movements to support the demand of putting an immediate moratorium on the death penalty for at least five years. During this period a broad societal dialogue shall be initiated to enable all stakeholders to perceive the dimensions of this penalty and to allow society to undertake the duty thereof to discuss this issue seriously.

Death penalty is a unique punishment. It denies the right to life. Thus, this penalty is final and irreversible; and if the convict is later proven innocent, life would never be restored to him/ her. This is indeed a case experienced in Egypt, when death sentence was issued based on laws ruled subsequently unconstitutional. It is generally believed that this penalty offers a decisive and radical solution for all forms of political and criminal delinquency; and that it is a magical potion for uprooting all evil – despite the fact that death penalty has never proven efficacy as a deterrent in any country or society. During turbulent times, such as ours, this solution is increasingly favored. Usually, widening the scope of the use of execution at such times is the shortest path for mainstreaming violence and primitive vengeance rather than offering a pathway towards achieving justice.

Apart from the fact that we are a group strongly opposed in principle to the use of death penalty in political and criminal cases alike; we alert to the special and urgent importance of this matter particularly nowadays with the conspicuous deterioration of the justice and legal systems of Egypt. This is indeed attested to by scores of indicators including, *inter alia*, fabrication of charges, confessions under torture, contaminating evidence, poor due process, collusion among justice dispensing agencies,

issuing sentences without conclusive evidence readily, and heedlessness towards many justice safeguards and due process of investigations and just trials.

It is impossible to reach full and categorical justice under the best circumstances of stability, during which state institutions and justice agencies operate efficiently and in a transparent manner, let alone such times as ours with the lack of any minimum fulfillment of any of the conditions to attain this situation.

It is observed that the more heinous the crime, the more the public is attentive to it and the lower the level of scrutiny of the conditions of trial and due process of justice. This is particularly the case with the issuance of decisions banning publication in the media, which enables yellow press to thrive. The public, under such circumstances, tends to accept any stark sentences such as collective executions because they invoke a false sense of revenge. Such became but cards in a bad game used as a bribe and to numb the senses of the public terrorized by the magnitude of crimes, and a public suffering from a blurred ability to scrutinize detail. This is particularly applicable in the cases of death penalty for the vulnerable and powerless who have no cronies and no price. This situation is also closely tied to lack of accountability and impunity of criminals, which makes influential persons and the institutions to which they belong more immune. The outcome is that we are eternally deprived from coming to know the truth and holding offenders accountable.

This matter has never been put to discussion before in Egypt, unlike other countries in which it is widely considered and on which fundamental political and moral positions are determined - to the extent that states are internationally ranked according to their positions thereon. It is noteworthy that two-thirds of the world countries abolished this penalty or at least put a moratorium thereon, including Arab and Muslim countries such as Algeria and Morocco that have not conducted any execution since 1993 - according to Amnesty International reports.

It is necessary that we all realize that we share a weighty moral responsibility should this penalty persist. All the advocates

thereof must recognize that they are personally responsible and that had they not been fully assured of the uprightness of the administration of justice in all the steps thereof, then they must know that the wasted life of any victim of injustice is their personal responsibility.

During such times of turbulence and chaos we experience currently, we need to be particularly aware of the procedures that produce irremediable and irreversible damage. We decry wholeheartedly, for instance - and rightly so - the poor protection of our monuments threatened with disintegration and loss of agricultural land because these are severe invaluable losses. Nevertheless, nothing is as invaluable as taking lives that could be innocent.

“Against Death Penalty”

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