

Summary - Closing Ceremony

"You get this sense of injustice and it strangles you (with the literal meaning of the word), and it leaves a taste like ash."

This is what Antoinette Chahine says, the victim yet the hero who was sentenced to death before her innocence was issued.

I decided to start with this saying because if there is a primordial reason that makes me against the death penalty, then it's Antoinette, and many like Antoinette, in the Arab world especially, and most importantly, it's the existence of "Antoinette" inside each one of us, the existence of the victim, the hero, the fighter, inside each one of us.

Thank you very much to the organization "Together Against the Death Penalty" (Ensemble Contre la Peine de Mort ECPM) for her invitation and the many activities and the unique hard work it keeps doing around the world and especially in the Arab world.

I am Nadine Moubarak, I participated in the International Congress that took place in Berlin, along with young men and women as part of the "Abolition Now Tour". During the congress these two days, we had young volunteers with us and I address this to you as I insist, that we are the future, and we have a very big role to play in this fight.

I am also a researcher and a program officer at the Samir Kassir Foundation in Lebanon.

My law degree taught me that if someone committed a criminal act, then what would the sanction/legal consequence of that act be.

But in my masters in criminology, I learned why this person committed that act in the first place.

I attended the first class and the first thing that was said is:

We do not say a criminal person, but a person who committed a crime.

The act could be very ugly, but we should separate it from the person who remains a person and should not be treated but as a person.

I will not take long and I will summarize what I understood, learned, and most importantly: felt.

These two days were composed of 10 sessions and workshops. I divided the 10 topics into 3 main questions.

What? Who? How?

First, what? What is the situation in the Arab region in terms of the death penalty? What are the legal frameworks?

1&2- I used to think that referring to the Islamic Shariaa is a logical justification to the death penalty.

I was surprised positively with the opposite: the Qasas in the Quran does not necessarily (and exclusively) mean killing.

And according to the Prophet Mohamad, revenge is a crime even if done in the scope of administering justice.

Of the challenges in the region, we say the factor of poverty, the poor person does not appoint a lawyer and that's how they are sentenced to the death penalty. Statistics prove that the majority of cases are as such.

We suggest not to stop submitting complaints, always putting effort to spread awareness among the public opinion, and setting up preventive measures.

Second, who? Who plays a role in the fight against the death penalty? And who are the victims especially minorities and vulnerable groups?

3- Lawyers

Of the questions that were addressed here: does the law handcuff the lawyers and limit their freedom? And this is a major challenge in our region.

Of the suggestions, we insisted on the importance of developing an action plan for the upcoming 5 to 10 years and networking with politicians and decision makers in order to move forward.

4- Journalists

Media is a double-edged sword: it can play a positive role -and how wonderful!- but it can also impact negatively by inciting to violence as a reaction to news about a particular crime.

We need to differentiate between free speech on one hand and hate speech on another.

This is why we suggest not to mention the death penalty and the incitement to it as a reaction to certain news, even if the news contains the violation of some other human right.

It is important to conduct training to journalists on how to transfer the news -and it's the priority- rather than just making an opinion.

5- The judicial body and the administration of justice

Humanity has taken important and brave steps in terms of the death penalty which used to exist in monstrous and old-fashioned manners.

But we must not consider this enough.

It is not acceptable, neither possible, nor normal that more than 582 people were executed in Iran as we saw in the flyers! 582 people!

Laws and regulations remain empty words if there were not the law of conscience and heart among the judicial body, who should be the first guardian to protect human rights, and not the last.

6- Population groups

And here comes the shock! Children, women, foreigners and other minorities.

I could not absorb the injustice of the rights of these, especially their right to life!

Honestly, I had a headache and was very disturbed when I heard about the cases and the statistics.

The angle from which I saw this topic for the first time was the impact that violations leave on the families of the executed.

Third, how? How do we fight and stand against this unjust and inhumane sanction?

7- Awareness raising

A heavy session for sure, I felt (as we say it in Lebanon) a tile on my chest.

The bigger suffering than the execution is the waiting.

We should carry our fight for the live testimonies and through them, and we should use art and production to transfer the message and spread awareness.

8- The situation conflict and post-conflict

A thousand executions were implemented based on the decision to combat terrorism and that's a decision issued in 2005 in Iraq, as a result of conflicts.

There is a vicious circle of blood shedding: the death penalty kills in the name of justice, the conflict kills in the name of terrorism or other reasons. We should break this circle by stopping the death penalty.

9- Documentation and transparency

A major challenge is transparency.

Statistics and numbers contradict between those published by organizations and those issued by authorities (such as the 582 executions I mentioned, 88% of them are not issued by authorities).

Here, the hat is lifted for all organizations that monitor cases and publish figures such as those in Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

10- Universal Periodic Review (UPR)

5 countries have fully accepted all recommendations relating to the death penalty, of course in the region, and that is an accomplishment.

Recommendation: organizations should submit their reports 1 month and a half to 2 months before the session.

Finally:

When Walid Slaiby was asked "do you want us to face the tank and the plane with a flower?"

He answered: "You underestimate the flower."

As I began saying that there is an "Antoinette" inside each one of us, let us also have a "Walid" inside each one of us, so that each of us holds a flower in their hand, and resists violence with non-violence, and death penalty with life.

And thank you!