



## SECRETARIASTATUS

Declaration at the 4<sup>th</sup> World Congress against the Death Penalty

Geneva, 24-26 February 2010

First of all, I would like to convey my sincere best wishes to all the participants at the Fourth World Congress Against the Death Penalty in Geneva.

Indeed, this event highlights once more the awakening of consciences to the need for greater recognition of the inalienable dignity of the human person and the universality and inseparability of human rights, beginning with the right to life. In continuity with its practice at the three previous Congresses, the Holy See reiterates its support for all initiatives aimed at defending the inherent value and inviolability of every human life from the moment of conception until natural death.

The growing public opposition to the death penalty is strictly connected to the fact that modern society has the means of effectively suppressing crime by rendering criminals harmless without definitively denying them the chance to reform. Presuming that the identity and responsibility of the guilty party has been fully established, the traditional teaching of the Church does not exclude the death penalty when this is the only practicable way to defend the lives of human beings effectively against the aggressor. However, non-lethal methods of deterrence and punishment are preferred as they better correspond to the concrete conditions of the common good and are more in conformity to the dignity of the human person.

The increasing number of countries adopting provisions to abolish the death penalty or suspend its application is also proof of the fact that cases in which it is absolutely necessary to execute the offender are very rare, if not practically non-existent.

The Geneva Congress takes place at a time when the campaign to abolish the death penalty has made considerable progress in the Western world, but is still facing the disturbing fact that executions are on the increase in other parts of the world. For this reason, I invite the participants to reflect on suitable guiding principles and effective measures for a criminal justice system which would better correspond to present day needs and concerns, while defending the common good and making possible the correction and rehabilitation of the guilty.

With these sentiments, I extend to all the participants my cordial regards.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Tarcisio Card. Bertone". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent initial 'T' and 'B'.

TARCISIO CARD. BERTONE  
*Secretary of State*