

JOINT STATEMENT ON PRISON REFORM AND ENDING DEATH PENALTY IN NIGERIA

Abuja, 22 August 2019

The previous days, a week after the Nigerian Correctional Service Bill was signed, senior representatives of the Community of Sant'Egidio, the World Coalition for the Abolition of the Death Penalty, and Life Wire International Foundation, have made visits to different prisons in Nigeria (Ikoyi, Kirikiri, Port Harcourt and Enugu) and met and discussed with different stakeholders, both official and non-governmental organizations, on prison reform and death penalty.

We wish to make the following statements:

WE WELCOME

- the recent adoption of the Bill on prison reform, changing the name of the Nigerian Prisons Service to Nigerian Correctional Service, especially where it focusses on human rights, restorative justice and rehabilitation of the prisoners.
- The professional commitment of many people in the prison system, comptrollers, directors, wardens and staff, to improve the Nigerian Correctional system, and to treat the inmates with respect and humanity.
- The efforts of many NGO's, church groups, human rights organizations and activists and volunteers to improve the conditions of those in prison and to make sure they feel they are not forgotten

WE EXPRESS CONCERN

- For the continuing flaws in the system, especially the prison congestion which is also due to the presence of an abnormally high number of non-convicted inmates waiting for their trial in prison
- For the many stories of corruption, which burdens the life and the condition of – sometimes innocent – inmates
- For the lack of preparation and follow-up of the release of prisoners into society

WE URGE

- All stakeholders that the recent adopted Bill should be more than a name change and window dressing, but the start of real shift of mindset, which helps to make the Nigerian Correctional System more human and effective
- All lawmakers and people involved in the judiciary to make sure and impose that the laws are properly implemented, especially for quicker and better procedures, so that non convicted suspects do not spend endless time behind the bars.

Therefore we call for the institution of a Commission to be settled by the State governments to make sure that files move on a daily basis from the magistrates courts to the Ministry; this Committee should mount pressure for the release of those files.

- All stakeholders to prepare for a more effective and humane preparation and follow-up of convicts after their release

As for the Death Penalty

We welcome

- The fact that the new Law provides the possibility to change capital punishment to life imprisonment after ten years
- The fact that the death penalty is not carried out frequently (only seven in the last decade), resulting in a kind of 'de facto moratorium' on executions

We express concern

- For the fact that Nigeria continues to have many death sentences, despite the proven fact that this is not a deterrent factor for new crimes to be committed, and that, on the contrary State violence increases rather than decreases the level of violence in the society

We urge

- Nigerian policymakers and governments to be part of the growing worldwide movement, especially also in African countries (the majority of the African Union's Member States have actually legally abolished the death penalty or applied a de facto moratorium on capital punishment), to withdraw from capital punishment and to move towards abolition of the death penalty

We invite

- The Attorney General, Mr Abubakar Malami, Minister of Justice, to participate in the annual meeting of Justice Ministers in Rome, Italy, to discuss the abolition of capital punishment

All signatories commit themselves and their respective organizations to increase collaboration in order to make sure that the new prison reform is properly implemented, that the Nigerian Correctional System continues to improve, and to move forward in the direction of a complete moratorium on executions and the abolition of the Death Penalty.

For Sant'Egidio: prof. Jan De Volder

For the World Coalition for the Abolition of the Death Penalty: Ms Annemarie Pieters

For Life Wire International Foundation: Mr Arthur Judah Angel

Co-signatories:

His Excellency Albert Omotayo, ambassador

Ms Favour Ochulor (Youth for International Human Rights - Nigeria)

Barr. Pascal Ignatius Idogbe (YHRI- N)

Ms Angela Uwandu (Avocats sans Frontières – Nigeria)

Prince Henry Ezike (Sant'Egidio – Nigeria)

Contec Global Foundation

Social Inclusion of the voiceless and neglected (SIvon)

Catholic Prison Apostolate Ministry

Christian Lawyers Network

412 executions – individual business

Ambassador reinforce idea DP is serious flaw –

Goods done is lost, goods to be done by the person is lost

Need of education –

Chaplain of prison: 7 years in prison n- his case is not attended to –

Returning citizens (ex-prisoners – returning to the society – what he can do to contribute to society

Faith-based organizations – not unaware of what is happening –

Abolition of DP – amend the Constitution –

We monitor bills – lobby legislator – head directorate –

NBA – human right desk – DP does not satisfy anything –

Stakeholders need to unite themselves – magistrate courts – synergy –

Correctional aspect of sentence must be approved

Miss Angela – access of – provided legal aid – primary problem: mandatory nature of D”P – Access to Justice –

Tricky one – promotion of the right to life -

Youth for International human rights

- 1) Civil society network for abolition