

President Zapatero Defends the Universal Abolition of the Death Penalty

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The president of the Spanish Government, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, has put forward that during the Spanish presidency of the EU he will propose that the EU's new Exterior Service have among its missions that of providing judicial and diplomatic assistance to European citizens who may "be subjected to the sentence of capital punishment" in any part of the world.

In the inaugural conference of the International Colloquium on the Universal Abolition of the Death Penalty, celebrated in the Reina Sofia Art Museum in Madrid, the president of the Spanish Government stated that this proposal has already been brought before the high representative of the EU for External Politics, Catherine Ashton, and has been received "very favourably".

"I believe that the status of European citizens deserves to be enriched by this additional guarantee: the protection by the Union against the risk of the imposition of capital punishment in any country where this risk may exist", he stated.

Thus, he announced that by the second semester of 2010 an International Commission against the Death Penalty, comprising personalities from the whole world, which must demand "the universal, immediate and definitive proscription" of capital punishment against people below legal age at the time of committing the crime for which they are condemned, pregnant women and mentally disabled people, will be created.

Rodríguez Zapatero chose 2015 as a date for the universal moratorium "not by coincidence", but because that year the completion of the Millennium Development Goals will be reviewed and, in his view, the fight to protect human dignity must be "fought on all fronts at once".

The head of the Executive affirmed that during the Spanish presidency of 2010 the universal abolition of the death penalty will be a priority in human rights matters.

For his part, the president of the Republic of Benin, Boni Yay, whom Rodríguez Zapatero had previously received in the Moncloa and whose Government has just introduced a constitutional reform to abolish the death penalty, promised to support the Spanish president in his initiative for the universal abolition of capital punishment and expressed his "admiration for this goal", which he called "a great defiance in favour of human dignity".

Rodríguez Zapatero referred to Benin as an "example for Africa" and praised its clear promise to defend human rights and important related achievements. At the same time he guaranteed his support in the whole programme of social and economic reforms undertaken in the country.

French judge, Simone Rozés, the honorary president of the International Society of Social Defence, announced, with the support of the Spanish Government, the inauguration of an Academic Network for the Abolition of the Death Penalty, an organisation which will coordinate the efforts of some of the most renowned academic experts on the death penalty, in order to design viable abolitionist strategies. The Network is an initiative of the Instituto de Derecho Penal (Institute of Criminal Law) of the University of Castilla-la-Mancha, which is directed by university professor Luis Arroyo and which also coorganised the colloquium. Rozés commented on the success of the Network even in its early phases, given the involvement of the four "great" international scientific organisations in the field of criminal law and penal policy: the Asociación Internacional de Derecho Penal (International Association of Criminal Law), the International Society of Social Defence, the Fundación Internacional Penal y Penitenciaria (International Criminal and Penitentiary Foundation) and the Sociedad Internacional de Criminología (International Society of Criminology), as well as 25

university research institutes from all over the world: Peking, Kyoto, Manila, Chicago, Mexico, Sao Paulo, Buenos Aires, Galway, Paris, Freiburg, Milan, Naples, Castilla-la-Mancha, Coimbra, Pretoria, and Istanbul. The Network already also has the support of a wide group of personalities from the judicial world, such as Silvia Steiner, judge from the International Criminal Court, Sergio García Ramírez, judge from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, Peter Hodgkinson, president of the Centre for Capital Punishment Studies in Great Britain, William Schabas, president of the Irish Centre for Human Rights, Anabela, professor from the University of Coimbra and director of the Judicial School of Portugal, Raul Pan-Galangan, dean of the Law Faculty of the University of Manila, Shizhou Wang, professor from the University of Peking, Francisco Muñoz Conde, professor of criminal law from Pablo de Olavide University, Mireille Delmas Marty, from the School of France, or Ulrich Sieber and Hans J. Albrecht, from the Max Planck Institute in Freiburg, among others.

Defence of Human Rights

The head of the Executive wanted to make it clear that with his Government human rights have become part of the “backbone's core” of Spanish foreign policy.

He emphasised that to have human rights as a priority “is not an easy cause, it requires firmness, coherence and clear ideas and efficient diplomatic action, constructed through dialogue and, on occasions, through discretion” he argued.

He added that all States have the obligation to protect human rights in their own territory and “denounce the violation of them when they are not respected in conformity with international law”, he added.

The president of the Spanish Government called for firmness, prudence and international cooperation to resolve the kidnapping of the three Spanish aid workers in Mauritania and affirmed that they “are in these days, the Government's main object of attention and action”.

Thus, he indicated that the Executive has put into action “all” of the resources at its disposal to first determine their location and then attain their freedom.

“Against terrorism there are no shortcuts. There are, and there must be, firmness, prudence, international cooperation, social isolation and use of all of our capacity”, he underlined.