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Pope Francis received in audience members of the International Commission against the Death Penalty on Monday. In prepared remarks which were given to members of the Commission, Pope Francis begged countries still applying the death penalty to “adopt a moratorium”.

Every life is sacred

Since the beginning of his ministry, **Pope Francis told Commission members, the truth that “every life is sacred” had convinced him to commit himself to abolishing the death penalty at the international level.** This commitment became concrete, the Pope said, with the recent change of paragraph 2267 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. He said Church teaching now reflects “the doctrine of the latest Pontiffs as well as the change in the conscience of Christians who reject a penalty that seriously harms human dignity”. Pope Francis reiterated that the doctrine accepting the death penalty came from a “period that was more legalistic than Christian” which “ignored the primacy of mercy over justice”. The Pope affirmed the Church’s current teaching that “in the light of the Gospel, the death penalty is always inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person”.

Moral rehabilitation

At the same time, an ongoing prison sentence that does not allow the moral rehabilitation of the person and his or her reinsertion into the community is a “hidden death”, Pope Francis said. No one can be deprived either of life, or the hope of “redemption and reconciliation”, he said.

Obligation of nations

The Church’s commitment to opposing the death penalty needs to be equalled by the international community, Pope Francis continued. The sovereign right of nations to determine their legal systems cannot be in contradiction with international law or “the universal recognition of human dignity, the Pope said. He also praised the UN’s resolution encouraging that member nations “suspend the application of the death penalty”.

Direct appeal to nations

Pope Francis then made a direct appeal to countries who have not yet abolished the death penalty. To those countries where the death penalty is legal but not applied, he asked that they continue applying the moratorium not only by not carrying out death sentences, but by not imposing death sentences in the first place. “The moratorium”, he said, “cannot be lived by the person condemned to death as a mere prolongation” of the time until the execution of the sentence. To the countries still applying the death penalty, the Pope begged them to “adopt a moratorium in view of abolishing this cruel form of punishment.”

Ethic of caring

Society has developed its penal culture around the concept of injury caused to another or to their rights. “Less attention has been paid to the omission of doing good to others”, the Pope said. The traditional approach to justice “must be complemented with an ethic of caring”. Such an ethic would consider “causes of behaviour, the social context, the situation of vulnerable offenders of the law, and the suffering of the victims”. Reasoning in this way is guided by divine mercy and takes each specific case into account. In the end, “we need a style of justice that besides being a father, is also a mother”. This ethic

of reciprocal care for one another is the basis for a loving society in which people are committed to the common good, Pope Francis said.

Commitment to abolition of death penalty

Returning to the theme of the abolition of the death penalty, Pope Francis' prepared remarks concluded with a declaration that both the Church and the Holy See desire "to collaborate with the International Commission against the Death Penalty in building the necessary consensus to eradicate capital punishment and every form of cruel punishment. "It is a cause", he said, "that all men and women of good will are called to and it is a duty for those of us who share the Christian vocation of Baptism".