
JOINT OPEN LETTER

USA/CALIFORNIA: 46 INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS CALL ON GOVERNOR TO COMMUTE ALL DEATH SENTENCES

Gavin Newsom
Governor of California
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento
CA 95814
USA

30 July 2026

Dear Governor Newsom,

We, the undersigned 46 organizations, write to you today to ask you for your immediate action to end the threat of execution for more than 550 people currently living under sentence of death in California. Your move towards commuting all death sentences in the US state with the highest number of people under sentence of death would not only significantly change the face of the death penalty in the USA; it would also send a strong signal internationally and help us advance the cause of abolition globally.

Our organizations work united as members of the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, based in all regions, as an alliance of death row exonerees, family members of people on death row as well as of crime victims, NGOs, bar associations, local authorities and unions, among others.

We have been confronted daily by the cruel realities of the death penalty, as well as adverse public opinion and vengeful calls for retribution. We are alarmed by the rise of dehumanizing narratives on public safety that often see the death penalty exploited by authorities as a tool of fear and control, a weapon in the authoritarian playbook to entrench power.

We stand united in our unconditional opposition to the death penalty as a violation of human rights and reject in full misinformed portrayals of the death penalty as a uniquely effective deterrent to crime, detracting resources from measures that would address the root causes and make our society safer.

From afar, we have followed closely the steps that you have taken on the death penalty. From the moratorium on all executions that you established in 2019, shortly after taking office, when you described California's death penalty system as "unfair, unjust, wasteful, protracted and [which] does not make our state safer", and your ultimate goal as ending it; to your powerful [acknowledgment](#) before the Supreme Court of California of the discrimination that is pervasive in the state criminal justice system; to your support for legislative amendments to expand safeguards in death penalty cases.

In our respective roles and responsibilities, we make a conscious choice – every single day – to live our values. We choose not to be defined by the death penalty, even when we face resistance, are ostracized and even when some among us face threats to our own lives because of our activism.

We do not stand alone. We stand on the shoulders of giants—those who came before us and carved indelible paths toward justice. They fought for civil liberties, racial justice, human dignity and rights. They dared to imagine a world free from what has been described as "justice that kills". Robert Badinter, Minister of Justice of France (1981 – 1986), spoke of this choice as he led on the abolition of the death penalty before the National Assembly of France:

“The choice that is lying in front of your consciences is thus clear: either our society refuses a justice that kills and accepts, in the name of its fundamental values – those that made it great and respected among all –, to take on the lives of those [...] that horrify it, and that is the choice of abolition; or this society believes, in spite of the experience of centuries, it can make crime disappear with the criminal, and that’s elimination. This elimination justice, this justice of anguish and death, decided with its margin of hazard, we refuse it. We refuse it because it is, for us, anti-justice, because it is passion and fear prevailing over reason and humanity.” (1981)

Before him, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. stated so powerfully:

“Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” (“Loving your enemies”, 1957).

These words continue to guide us, as they call on us to resist the cycle of violence and retribution that the death penalty epitomizes.

Your last months in office as the Governor of California offer you an unmissable opportunity to leave an enduring mark on the death penalty in the USA and internationally, by acting to commute all death sentences in the US state that holds close to one third of the national total.

Despite the setbacks and alarming [global rises](#) in executions that we have been confronted with, we are more hopeful than ever that we are on an unstoppable journey towards global abolition. We ask for your leadership to initiate the process to commute all death sentences in California and add another brick in our collective journey to build a world free of “justice” that kills.

This open letter is co-signed by:

1. ACAT Belgium
2. ACAT Burundi
3. ACAT Canada
4. ACAT Chad
5. ACAT Central African Republic
6. ACAT DRC
7. ACAT France
8. ACAT Germany
9. ACAT Liberia
10. ACAT Luxembourg
11. ACAT Switzerland
12. ACAT United Kingdom
13. The Advocates for Human Rights
14. Amnesty International
15. Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network (ADPAN)
16. Balochistan Human Rights Group
17. Business Leaders Against the Death Penalty
18. Capital Punishment Justice Project (Australia)
19. Centre d’Observation des Droits de l’Homme et d’Assistance Sociale - (CODHAS-RDC)

20. Coalition of Somali Human Rights Defenders (CSHRD)
21. Colegio de Abogados y Abogadas de Puerto Rico
22. Cornell Center on the Death Penalty Worldwide
23. French Collective Libérons Mumia
24. German Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (GCADP)
25. Hands off Cain
26. Human Rights Dallas
27. Humanity Diaspo
28. Italian Coalition Against the Death Penalty
29. Italian Federation for Human Rights (FIDU)
30. Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC)
31. LDH (Ligue des droits de l'Homme/droits humains)
32. lifespark (movement against the death penalty) - Switzerland
33. MADPET-Malaysians Against Death Penalty and Torture
34. Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN)
35. Observatoire Burundais des Prisons (OBP)
36. Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA)
37. Paul Rougeau Committee (Italy)
38. Prison Radio/The Redwood Justice Fund
39. Redemption Pakistan
40. SOHRAM-CASRA (Centre Action Sociale Réhabilitation et Réadaptation pour les Victimes de la Torture et de la guerre)
41. Southern Methodist University Human Rights Program
42. Stand Up Jamaica
43. Society for Human Rights and Development Organization (SHRDO)
44. Transitional Justice Working Group (TJWG)
45. World Coalition Against the Death Penalty
46. Youth Safety Awareness Initiative (Crime Si Poa)