

Letter signed by Fr. David Fleming and other Superiors General

We, male and female Superior Generals of different Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, challenged once again by the words of the Lord Jesus "I was in prison and you came to see me" and by the commandment "Thou shall not kill", wish to commit ourselves and our religious families to work:

- to secure a better and different future for all the prisoners in the world;
- to humanize the conditions they live in;
- to cancel the shame of the death penalty from the laws of every State;
- to definitively eradicate the culture of vengeance from every society.

Social progress in the last century had awakened in many people the awareness that punishment for any crime, however severe, was not to be only a fair retribution of the evil done, but also a time to form a new conscience.

Under the pressure of fear and insecurity, prisons are again becoming secluded places, that segregate and cast aside without offering any hope to change.

In prison, people's lives grow worse: it is easier for people to get sick and it is harder for them to have access to treatment; the conditions of promiscuity due to overcrowding are sometimes unbearable. The chances of ending up in prison are higher for the poor. And in Countries where misery is rampant, the prisons are unliveable: prisoners are amassed in lurid corners, with no light, no water, no proper clothes. Often they are forgotten.

As Christians, we cannot accept all this. We believe in the power and grace of repentance, which changes everyone's hearts and lives, even of people who are guilty, even of people who have soiled their hands with criminal acts: amendment is a source of good and humanity that spreads and radiates to everyone and improves any society.

That is why we demand that governments all over the world abolish the death penalty: it does not protect society and it corrupts. There is no reasonable cause to take a human being's life. Everyone has the right to live and to hope.

Today commit ourselves anew:

- to shatter the solitude of prisoners and of people sentenced to death;
- to watch that while protecting the society, justice is also fair, impartial, reasonable, human, never excluding the chance to grant pardon;

- to increase the awareness of society, institutions and public opinion on prisoners' conditions;
- to make more human places out of prisons and – as far as possible – death rows, waiting for them to be dismantled.

A better world is possible!