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HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIÈGE PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHL
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
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N. 160622c

Wednesday 22.06.2016

Pope's video message at the Sixth World Congress against the death penalty: for a criminal justice open to reintegration in society

Vatican City, 22 June 2016 – Yesterday the Holy Father has sent a video message to the Sixth World Congress against the death penalty, taking place in Oslo, Norway, until 23 June and organised by the French non-governmental organisation *Ensemble contre la peine de mort* and the *World Coalition Against the Death Penalty*, comprising 140 organisations.

The Pope greets the organisers of this World Congress against the death penalty, the group of countries supporting it, particularly Norway as its host country, and all the representatives of governments, international organisations and civil society taking part. He expresses his personal appreciation, along with that of men and women of goodwill, for their commitment to a world free of the death penalty.

"One sign of hope is that public opinion is manifesting a growing opposition to the death penalty, even as a means of legitimate social defence. Indeed, nowadays the death penalty is unacceptable, however grave the crime of the convicted person. It is an offence to the inviolability of life and to the dignity of the human person; it likewise contradicts God's plan for individuals and society, and his merciful justice. Nor is it consonant with any just purpose of punishment. It does not render justice to victims, but instead fosters vengeance. The commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' has absolute value and applies both to the innocent and to the guilty. The Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy is an auspicious occasion for promoting worldwide ever more evolved forms of respect for the life and dignity of each person. It must not be forgotten that the inviolable and God-given right to life also belongs to the criminal".

The Pope encourages work "not only for the abolition of the death penalty, but also for the improvement of prison conditions, so that they fully respect the human dignity of those incarcerated. 'Rendering justice' does not mean seeking punishment for its own sake, but ensuring that the basic purpose of all punishment is the rehabilitation of the offender. The question must be dealt with within the larger framework of a system of penal justice open to the possibility of the guilty party's reinsertion in society. There is no fitting punishment without hope! Punishment for its own sake, without room for hope, is a form of torture, not punishment".

"I trust that this Congress can give new impulse to the effort to abolish capital punishment. For this reason, I

encourage all taking part to carry on this great initiative and I assure them of my prayers", he concludes.
