



Pennsylvanians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty

P. O. Box 21373, York, PA 17402

Phone: 717-236-4840

Email: info@padp.org website: www.padp.org

Twitter @padp_org

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Contact: Kathleen Lucas at KLucas@padp.org or 717-236-4840

Milestone: Majority of US States have halted use of death penalty

Amnesty International Releases Global Report Death Sentences and Executions in 2015

(York, PA) For the first time, a majority of states have halted use of the death penalty, either by abolishing it in law or by not carrying out an execution in 10 years or more. Here in the US, both death penalty executions and death sentences hit a 25-year low. Governor Tom Wolf established a moratorium on executions on February 13th. The Nebraska legislature voted to abolish the death penalty and on May 27th overrode the Governor's veto of the bill.

In its Death Sentences and Executions in 2015, Amnesty International, which campaigns for total abolition of capital punishment, reported two starkly divergent developments. Four countries abolished the death penalty last year which means that two-thirds of countries have now halted the institution in law or in practice. Despite this, there was a more than 50% spike in executions, with Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Iran responsible for nearly 90% of all executions recorded in 2015. China has not published any figures on the death penalty but available information indicates that thousands of people are executed and sentenced to death every year, meaning China remains the world's top executioner.

Even as the use of the death penalty declined in the US, its most dangerous flaw remained apparent. Six death row prisoners from six different states were exonerated of all charges in 2015. Since 1973, a total of 156 inmates, including six in Pennsylvania, have been exonerated and freed from death row.

The following quote can be attributed to Kathleen Lucas, Executive Director of Pennsylvanians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty:

"Nick Yarris was sentenced to die by our state, and 21 years later, he was exonerated by DNA evidence. Five others were also sentenced to death here in PA and later exonerated. Add to that a pattern of racial and economic bias, ineffective defense counsel, incentivized snitches, prosecutorial misconduct and junk science and you've got a process so flawed that it's dangerous."

To speak about the state of the death penalty in Pennsylvania, contact Kathleen Lucas at KLucas@padp.org or 717-236-4840

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