

INTERVENTO DEL PRESIDENTE DEL CONSIGLIO, MATTEO RENZI, ALL'EVENTO ONU SU "MOVING AWAY FROM THE DEATH PENALTY: NATIONAL LEADERSHIP" (25 settembre 2014)

25/09/2014

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Mr Deputy Secretary General

Mr High Commissioner for Human Rights

Mr President of Mongolia

Mr President of Tunisia

Mr Foreign Minister of the Republic of Benin

Mr Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights

Ministers, Permanent Representatives, Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honor for me to speak today in front of such an influential audience during this event, promoted and organized by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights with Benin, Mongolia and Tunisia and Italy.

As Italian, I am proud to recall that the abolition of the death penalty has very solid roots in the history of my Country. In 1786 Leopoldo di Toscana abolished the capital punishment in his territories. He was inspired by Cesare Beccaria, who published – twenty years before - his famous treatise "On Crimes and Punishments", condemning torture and the death penalty. At that time, the Italian philosopher pointed that there is no scientific evidence of the deterrent power of the death penalty in reducing crime. It is also because of this long-standing tradition in favor of the abolition of the death penalty, that the issue represents still today one of the key priorities of the Italian human rights foreign policy.

We are deeply convinced that the universal abolition of the capital punishment would be a crucial achievement in the promotion of human dignity and rights around the world and our action is coherent with that. As you may be aware, Italy has been at the forefront of the fight for a universal moratorium on the death penalty since the beginning, with a view to its complete abolition, with full and unwavering support of all the constituencies of the Italian society: Government, Parliament and the Civil Society.

The first Resolution on this issue was tabled at the Third Committee by Italy in 1994. It failed to be approved only by a handful of votes. Italy's active role was instrumental, in close cooperation with the EU partners and the other Members of the Cross-regional coalition, in the successful process that led, in 2007, to the adoption by the General Assembly of the first historic Resolution on a moratorium on the use of the capital punishment. The constant increase of votes in favor of the successive three resolutions of 2008,

2010 and 2012 shows the existence of a clear international trend against the death penalty. This trend was also underlined by the Secretary General in his most recent report on the implementation of the Resolution. The adoption of these resolutions represents an extraordinary result for the International Community. They also highlight the ongoing debate on the death penalty in a high number of countries.

When we first started to pursue such objective, many looked at our efforts and to our chances of success with skepticism. However, we believed, and we still do, that every battle for human rights is worth being fought for. We therefore decided to engage with tenacity on this issue. The international campaign for a universal moratorium on the death penalty has proven that with time, patience and perseverance important goals can be achieved.

In the fight against the death penalty, there is not a unique approach or strategy that can be considered successful than another. The experience shows that in this campaign a holistic and multifaceted approach is the winning one.

Political leadership is necessary. The distinguished colleagues from Mongolia, Tunisia and Benin know it very well. Political leaders have the moral duty to enhance the conditions of life of their citizens, starting from the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. This action is an essential condition to guarantee sufficient levels of security within the country concerned. Allow me to make a practical consideration: a society with high standards of respect for human rights is almost always a society with lower rates of crime, and a society without crime can spend fewer financial resources in criminal justice and administration. These resources can instead be devoted to improve life conditions of the population, triggering a virtuous circle able to further reduce crime.

Nevertheless political leadership is not sufficient itself. The importance attached to the death penalty by the criminal law system of any given country is significantly influenced by public opinion. This is particularly true in those cases where attitudes to the death penalty are linked to expectations concerning the guarantee of public security.

Statistics are not always sufficient in convincing public opinion of the incorrectness of the assumption that the death penalty reduces crime. And political leaders often come to a standstill. Bottom-up initiatives can restart the process. Awareness campaigns, public debates, specific programmes of education in schools have to be launched with the crucial support of NGO's.

In many Countries religious leaders play a relevant role, in particular where religion and politics are closely intertwined, or, for instance, the judicial power is held by a religious authority. In these cases a positive interaction could be more complex, but our experience of a Country that is used to mediate between religions and cultures, demonstrates that dialogue is the best tool even in the hardest context. I am convinced that initiatives at academic or judiciary level with retentionist countries could produce significant results. In this regard I would take the opportunity to congratulate the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for its excellent publication "Moving Away from the Death Penalty: Arguments, Trends and Perspectives", that I am sure will be an useful tool for political leaders as well as NGOs, experts and private citizens.

Where a "de facto" moratorium exists, the interaction between Government and the Parliament is crucial in order to carry on normative reforms, passing to a "de jure moratorium".

In stressing the importance of campaigns of awareness - both at national and at international level - I would

like to draw again your attention to the need to fully engage with Civil Society and NGOs. In this regard, I believe that Italy's experience can supply a useful example of a positive drive towards a good synergy between the Government and the Civil Society.

The Session of the General Assembly starting this week will be crucial for our campaign. It will be a test for the trend towards a universal moratorium of the executions. Our engagement has to be intensified to obtain the best result for the new resolution, which will be tabled in a few weeks. The Italian rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union during this second semester of 2014 is a grateful coincidence but also a big responsibility for my Country.

Some worrying developments took place after the encouraging vote on the fourth Resolution on the universal moratorium in December 2012, with a record tally of 111 countries in favor. A number of countries, which had adopted a de facto moratorium, resumed executions and their tribunals inflicted new death sentences. We should not underestimate the signal given by countries which previously abstained in 2010 and backtracked in 2012, voting no. On the bright side, there is also a new trend by some retentionist countries to show some restraint in the use of the death penalty. All considered, we should keep up working hard in our campaign for the moratorium to avoid any involution during this fall's vote.

Let me conclude quoting the words of the UN Secretary General, whom I know is a strong advocate of the issue: "The death penalty has no place in the 21st Century. Together, we can finally end this cruel and inhumane practice everywhere around the world".

Thank you for your attention.