

WARSAW, OCTOBER 1st 2008

Intervention by Hands Off Cain

In the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting last year, many NGOs and several OSCE member states recommended the approval of a UN Resolution that would call upon all States that still maintain the death penalty to establish a moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing it. This was indeed realized when, on December 18, 2007, the United Nations General Assembly adopted such a historic document with 104 votes in favour, 54 votes against and 29 abstentions.

With this resolution, presented by the Italian government and supported by 86 governments from all over of the world, the United Nations, for the first time, declared that the death penalty is a human rights issue and its phasing out represents a serious progress for the world in this field. The approval of the Resolution came after 15 years of campaigning started by Hands Off Cain and the Nonviolent Radical Party, with the support of members of Parliaments, Governments and Public Opinion from around the world. This joined the historical efforts led by Amnesty International and conducted by a number of NGOs toward the abolition worldwide.

There are currently **148** countries and territories that to different extents have decided to renounce the death penalty. Of these: **95** are totally abolitionist; **8** are abolitionist for ordinary crimes; **1** (Russia) is committed to abolishing the death penalty as a member of the Council of Europe and currently observing a moratorium on executions; **3** have a moratorium on executions in place and **41** are de facto abolitionist, as no executions have taken place in those countries for at least ten years.

Countries retaining the death penalty worldwide are **49**. Among them, as we know, only 2 are members of the OSCE: Belarus and the United States. The last was the only country in the American continent to execute anyone in 2007: 42 people. Belarus is, instead, the exception that does not allow Europe to be a death penalty-free zone: at least one person was executed in 2007 and 3 in the first five months of 2008.

Of the **49** countries that retain the death penalty, **39** are dictatorial, authoritarian or illiberal States. **Twenty-one** of these countries were responsible for approximately **the 99%** of the world total executions in 2007.

Many of these countries do not issue official statistics on the practice of the death penalty, which is sometimes considered a State secret; therefore the number of executions may in fact be much higher.

This situation points to the fact that the fight against the death penalty entails, beyond the stopping of executions, a battle for democracy, for the respect of the rule of law and for political rights and civil liberties.

We ask the US and Belarus to consider adopting a moratorium, and the OSCE member States that did not completely abolish the death penalty *de jure* yet, to finalize this process. We also recommend the OSCE institutions to work out a specific programme to achieve this result.