

A Statement on the Death Penalty

Adopted by the Alliance of Baptists

April 28, 2000

Austin, Texas

The Alliance of Baptists hereby states;

- We oppose the death penalty because:
- We believe Christ calls us to ministries of grace and reconciliation;
- We believe the death penalty perpetuates a culture of violence;
- We believe the story of our faith is a story of people who have been forgiven for great wrongs;
- We believe God's power to forgive is greater than humanity's power to do evil; and
- We believe the use of the death penalty cannot bring life or healing to victims and their families, or to offenders and their families.

We also oppose the death penalty because:

- It is racist in application. While only 12.7 percent of the population is African American, 43 percent of the people on death row are.
- It is used most often against the poorest and most vulnerable members of our society. Across our country people facing the death penalty are often represented by court-appointed and grossly underpaid attorneys who may have had little or no trial experience, let alone any experience handling capital cases or even criminal cases.
- The United States, with its ongoing support for the death penalty, stands among some of the worst violators of human rights -- China, Libya, Iran and Iraq. Each year two more countries stop using the death penalty, while over the past 30 years the United States has progressively increased the number of people under death sentence and the number of people executed.
- There is a very real danger of executing an innocent person. For every eight people executed in the United States, one innocent person is released from death row because of proof of innocence. At the same time, efforts to limit the appellate process make it likely that a wrongfully convicted person will not even be able to present evidence of innocence in a judicial proceeding.

Even if the problems with the application of the death penalty could be corrected, as members of a forgiven people we now speak out to oppose the use of the death penalty in our country and around the world.

We call upon legislators to abolish the death penalty in their jurisdictions.

We call upon jurors to resist imposing death sentences.

We call upon governors and members of boards of pardon and paroles to commute death sentences that come before them.

Finally, we call upon churches actively to pursue ministries that promote healing and justice for victims of crime, while opposing pseudo-solutions, such as the death penalty, which perpetuate violence, hatred and revenge.