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Afghan Lives Matter, stop the death penalty

By Emilio Pérez de Ágreda, and Franz-Michael Mellbin
Oct 10, 2016

At the recent Brussels Conference on Afghanistan on 4-5 October, the joint communique stated that the protection and implementation of the constitutional and internationally guaranteed human rights in Afghanistan remains essential. The EU and its Member States present in Afghanistan welcome this firm and timely statement.

Afghanistan and the EU held its second Human Rights Dialogue on 1 June this year. There were profound and constructive discussions on a variety of areas, including the death penalty. Afghanistan probably has the most fruitful human rights dialogue with the EU in the region, something of which the Afghan Government can be truly proud. We have seen many strong signals of the willingness of the Government to respect the human rights of the Afghan people, and there is good reason to applaud the Government's action in this field.

On 10 October, we celebrate the European & World Day against the Death Penalty. It is worthwhile noticing that 98 countries have fully abolished the capital punishment, while another 42 are not putting it into practice. Afghanistan is among the 58 countries that keep the death penalty in law or in practice. Afghanistan should join ranks of the majority of countries and abolish the death penalty.

Any justice system in the world is exposed to human failure. In a weak judicial system, such as the Afghan one, that risk is particularly high. There have been and always will be cases of

executions of innocent people. Unlike prison sentences, the death penalty is irreversible. In addition, on several occasions since 2007, the General Assembly of the United Nations has resolved that “there is no conclusive evidence of the deterrent value of the death penalty”.

The Afghan Government has devoted itself to promoting human rights values – something which was clearly underlined at the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan. The death penalty is incompatible with human rights and human dignity, which are universal values. It also violates universally recognised human rights protecting people from torture and other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment.

The European Union and its Member States hold an adamant, principled position against the death penalty. The abolition of the death penalty represents one of the main objectives of our Human Rights Policy – not only in Afghanistan, but worldwide.

To honour the European & World Day against the Death Penalty we reiterate our position of encouraging the Government to establish a moratorium that suspends with immediate effect the execution of death sentences in Afghanistan. The EU and its Member States, as long-term partners to Afghanistan and friends of the Afghan people, would welcome such action by the Government of Afghanistan in favour of human rights.

Afghan lives matter and there have been too many killings already.