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For the abolition of the death  
penalty

## SEPTEMBER

**“We pray that the death  
penalty, which attacks the  
dignity of the human person,  
may be legally abolished in  
every country”**



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## PRAYER INTENTION REFLECTION

ENCYCLICAL LETTER

FRATELLI TUTTI<sup>11</sup>

Francis

3 October 2020

263. There is yet another way to eliminate others, one aimed not at countries but at individuals. It is the death penalty. Saint John Paul II stated clearly and firmly that the death penalty is inadequate from a moral standpoint and no longer necessary from that of penal justice.<sup>[246]</sup> There can be no stepping back from this position. Today we state clearly that “the death penalty is inadmissible”<sup>[247]</sup> and the Church is firmly committed to calling for its abolition worldwide.<sup>[248]</sup>

267. Here I would stress that “it is impossible to imagine that states today have no other means than capital punishment to protect the lives of other people from the unjust aggressor”. Particularly serious in this regard are so-called extrajudicial or extralegal executions, which are “homicides deliberately committed by certain states and by their agents, often passed off as clashes with criminals or presented as the unintended consequences of the reasonable, necessary and proportionate use of force in applying the law”.<sup>[256]</sup>

268. “The arguments against the death penalty are numerous and well-known. The Church has rightly called attention to several of these, such as the possibility of judicial error and the use made of such punishment by totalitarian and dictatorial regimes as a means of suppressing political dissidence or persecuting religious and cultural minorities, all victims whom the legislation of those regimes consider ‘delinquents’. All Christians and people of good will are today called to work not only for the abolition of the death penalty, legal or illegal, in all its forms, but also to work for the improvement of prison conditions, out of respect for the human dignity of persons deprived of their freedom. I would link this to life imprisonment... A life sentence is a secret death penalty”.<sup>[257]</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See full message:

[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html)

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269. Let us keep in mind that “not even a murderer loses his personal dignity, and God himself pledges to guarantee this”.[\[258\]](#) The firm rejection of the death penalty shows to what extent it is possible to recognize the inalienable dignity of every human being and to accept that he or she has a place in this universe. If I do not deny that dignity to the worst of criminals, I will not deny it to anyone. I will give everyone the possibility of sharing this planet with me, despite all our differences.