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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Sikh Human Rights Group, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[01 February 2021]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



Seeking an End to Death Penalty

There is no empirical evidence to justify death penalty as a form of punishment. Death penalty is an emotional form of revenge which brutalises society as much as it dehumanises the end life of the incarcerated individual.

Many countries have given up death penalty. There is no evidence that this has increased homicidal or extreme crime. There is evidence that such crimes may have gone down in countries that have given up death penalty as a punishment.

Those countries that continue to have death penalty have not shown that there is any benefit in carrying out this form of sentence.

Societies that continue with death penalty, also seem to be those that have more internal tensions and unhappiness. The sentence merely satisfies the public and the Government for a short time. But the lingering injustices and crimes in society continue.

It is also interesting that most religions claim that all human life ultimately belongs to God. They claim that it is only God who can take life away. Yet it is countries with a heavy influence of religion that seem to appropriate to themselves the very role that they say belongs to God. The contradiction between statements of faith and the practice of these countries reduces confidence in the institutions of religion.

Death penalty takes away the possibility of redemption and an individual changing. Most people do reflect upon their crimes and regret. Most crimes are crimes of passion and not premeditated.

More importantly, systems of justice are not infallible. Injustices occur and people falsely get charged and convicted. There have been many cases in jurisdictions around the world where a person charged with life sentence has finally been found to be innocent. It is not without foundation to state that police forces around the world often feel compelled to bring closure to a crime and cut corners, or become creative with evidence to ensure a conviction even if the person is innocent. Such convictions have been overturned later when full facts become evident.

It is a tragedy that society sends people convicted, who may in fact be innocent, to the gallows. Once a death penalty is carried out, there is no way of redeeming the injustice.

It will be of interest that the one Sikh Kingdom that existed before British colonialism in South Asia, the Kingdom of Maharajah Ranjit Singh, had no capital punishment. This was introduced as State policy long before any other country in the world had adopted a 'no death penalty' policy. Ranjit Singh was advised that no human being or institution created by human beings should take life of another, except in war as defence.

It is hoped that as more and more countries move towards removing death penalty on their statute books, the cultures and countries that continue to practice it, will also think calmly and rationally on its empirical and ethical need.
