



PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY
TO THE OSCE

STATEMENT ON THE DEATH PENALTY IN
BELARUS AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Delivered by Ambassador Steffen Kongstad to the Permanent Council
Vienna, 16 January 2020

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

I am speaking on behalf of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, and Norway.

Only two participating States, the United States of America and Belarus, retain the death penalty in both law and in practice.

There is a growing global trend to move away from the use of the death penalty. More than two out of three countries worldwide have abolished the death penalty by law or in practice. In 2018, the United Nations adopted a resolution with a record-high number of states voting in favour of a moratorium on the death penalty.

Still, since 6 September, when we last raised this issue with the Permanent Council, nine executions have taken place in the United States, bringing the number of executions to 22 in 2019 and one in 2020. Belarus carried out its third execution of 2019 on 17 December, bringing the number of known executions in Belarus to three in 2019. We remain concerned about the lack of transparency regarding the death penalty and its application in Belarus

Last week Belarus imposed two death sentences on top of the three from 2019. Four prisoners are incarcerated on death row. So far in 2020, no one has been sentenced to death in the United States of America. However, in 2019, the states of Alabama, Arizona,

Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, as well as the Federal Government, sentenced a total of 34 people to death; more than 2 600 prisoners remain on death row.

We oppose the death penalty in all cases without exception. The death penalty is a cruel, inhuman, and degrading punishment, incompatible with human rights and human dignity. It does not itself deter crime and it is irreversible. States that retain the death penalty risk perpetuating the miscarriage of justice. While wrongful conviction is a regrettable, but inherent, risk of every criminal justice system, execution of the innocent need not be and should not be.

We continue to call on both Belarus and the United States of America to suspend all executions, take immediate, further steps towards abolition, and join our efforts to free our region of the death penalty.