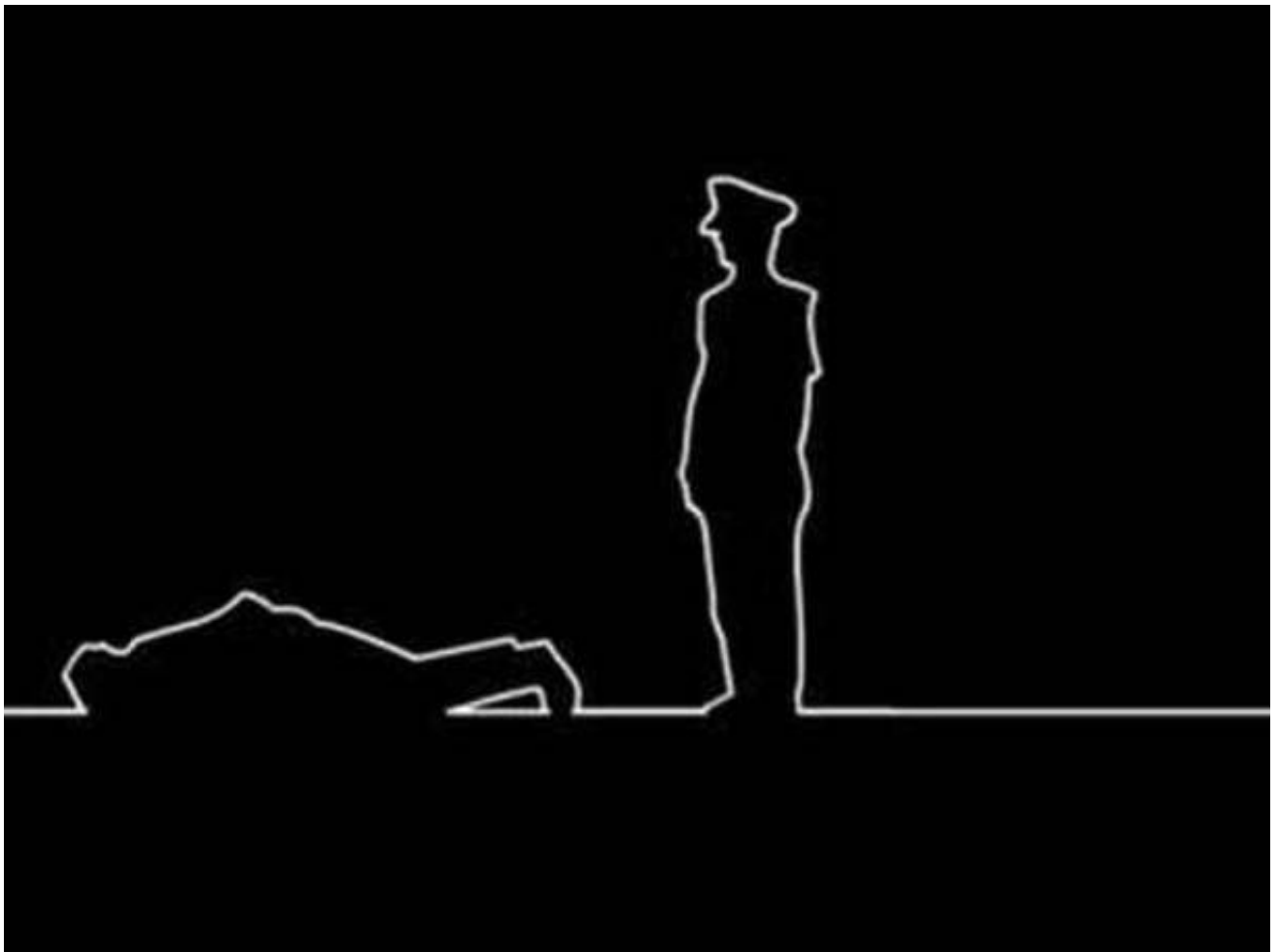




## **The U.N. Human Rights Committee Votes for a Moratorium on the Death Penalty**

Rodrigo Praino (November 17, 2007)



99 countries, including Italy and all European countries, voted for the moratorium; 52 voted against, including the United States, China, the Organization of Islamic Countries and the League of Arab States.

"The UN vote... is a great success for Italy and the cause of peace," said Italian President Giorgio Napolitano after Thursday night's human rights committee vote at the United Nations calling for a moratorium on the death penalty. According to President Napolitano "now all that's missing is the



final seal of the General Assembly" on this initiative for which Italy has lobbied for a very long time. In mid-December the resolution will be brought in front of the General Assembly. President Napolitano stated also that Italy played a leading role throughout the approval process.

On November 15, Italy's Ambassador to the U.N. Marcello Spatafora, declared:

I strongly hope that, in approving this resolution, we will be starting a process in which we will be all working together, we will be all walking together along the same path, with equal dignity, with full mutual respect.

This should always be the culture of the United Nations, the culture of all those who believe in the United Nations, not a culture of fighting each other, but a culture of building together, a culture of commitment to a common endeavor, with the guidance of the Charter, a culture of bridge builders among different visions, sensitivities, interests.

I feel that it would be appropriate for me, in this delicate juncture, to recall what a former President of the General Assembly, Ian Eliasson, used to tell us, it is to say that "Without passion nothing happens in life, without compassion, I repeat compassion, wrong things happen in life". I feel that this is the spirit with which we should approach the vote.

Twice in the past the UN General Assembly has adopted resolutions on capital punishment, and Italy played a key role both times. The first was adopted in 1971, while the second came in 1977. Both stated that it was "desirable" that the death penalty be abolished in all countries. According to Amnesty International, leading worldwide human rights organization based in London, 130 of 192 member states have already abolished the death penalty in law or practice, while in 2006 only 25 countries carried out executions in 2006. It is also important to point out that since 1990 over 50 countries have abolished the death penalty for all crimes.

Critics of the resolution have dismissed it as a mainly European affair, since it was drafted by 27 EU member states. It was however approved thanks to the vote of 99 countries and against the will of 52 countries, with 33 abstentions. Among the countries against it are the United States, China, the Organization of Islamic Countries, the League of Arab States and several Caribbean and Asian countries. About 90% of all executions worldwide are carried out by China, Iran, Iraq, the US, Pakistan and Chad alone. Since 1998 over five million signatures were collected in 152 countries around the world demanding a worldwide moratorium of the death penalty.

A number of prominent international figures declared their sympathy for the moratorium initiative, including Rowan Williams, the head of the Church of England, Adolfo Perez Esquivel, Argentinean Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Siti Musdah Mulia, prominent Muslim theologian, and Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino, President of the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace. According to Cardinal Martino "you cannot punish one crime with another crime, and the death penalty is murder".



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