



Ethical Action Report



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Human Rights: Support a Moratorium on Federal Executions

Capital punishment is still used in the United States despite wide-ranging ethical and legal concerns about its use. These concerns have been outlined by federal judges in New York and Vermont, who ruled that the death penalty is unconstitutional due to the likelihood of executing innocent people and the lack of due process safeguards. In light of these important issues, it is vital that Congress issue a moratorium on federal executions.

BACKGROUND

In the United States there are serious problems with the death penalty as it is applied. Racial disparities are severe and ubiquitous: 74 percent of people who are tried for capital offenses in the federal system are black and 81 percent of federal prisoners currently facing death sentences are racial minorities.

In addition, the likelihood of being convicted of a capital crime is dependent on the state in which a person is tried. The death penalty has been sought in at least 50 percent of

cases in sixteen states, whereas twenty-one states have never sought capital punishment. Moreover, 30 percent of those inmates currently awaiting the death penalty were prosecuted in Texas.

There are also major concerns that some prisoners who have been sentenced to death are innocent. Between 1973 and 2005 123 people were released from death row when new evidence proved their innocence.

Lastly, legal representation has a huge effect on who will receive the death penalty. According to the ACLU, “the quality of legal representation [in the USA] is a better predictor of whether or not someone will be sentenced to death than the facts of the crime.” Therefore, those who cannot afford high-quality legal representation will be more likely to face the death penalty.

It isn't ethical for our government to continue to use the death penalty when there are such concerns. Congress must pass a moratorium on the death penalty now!

ACTION

Call your members of Congress and demand that they support a moratorium on federal executions.

Family Health: Support Funding for Family Planning Programs (H.R. 1225)

The Bush Administration has drastically cut funding for international family planning programs, despite the fact that such programs greatly improve the health of mothers and children and alleviate hunger and disease. But with the 110th Congress we have the opportunity to restore funding.

BACKGROUND

Family planning is vital for women's empowerment and healthy families because it enables individuals to decide when and whether to have children, and it provides for safe environments for childbirth. In addition it also aids women and men in feeding, educating, and caring for their children. Yet due to funding shortages, there are millions who don't have access to modern contraception and women continue to give birth in unsafe conditions.

Representatives McCollum, Oberstar, Ramstad, Shays, and Payne introduced an important piece of legislation, the Focus on Family Health Worldwide Act of 2007 (H.R. 1225), which would significantly increase funding for the international family planning programs of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). In addition, the bill would also allocate funds proportional to needs so that the countries that have contraceptive shortages and high population growth rates would receive the aid they need.

Each year hundreds of thousands of women die from pregnancy or in childbirth. It is vital that we increase funding for family planning programs so that families stay healthy!

ACTION

Ask your members of Congress to support the Focus on Family Health Worldwide Act (H.R. 1225).

Stop the Abuse of Power: Reform the Patriot Act

In 2001 Congress passed the Patriot Act and, among other things, removed an important safeguard that had been in place to protect an innocent person's records from being accessed by the FBI. In light of current abuses of the FBI's use of National Security Letters (NSLs), however, Congress should reform the Patriot Act and restore the restrictions that it should never have removed.

BACKGROUND

On March 9, 2007, the Department of Justice released a report that found the FBI had widely abused the use of National Security Letters in its investigations. These letters can be sent to various companies or organizations, such as Internet providers or universities, and are used to acquire a wide range of information on an individual, such as e-mail and telephone records, and financial information including credit card and bank transactions. The number of NSLs issued since the passage of the Patriot Act has risen dramatically and, in 2005, approximately half of the records gathered were of U.S. citizens or permanent residents.

Prior to the Patriot Act the FBI was only allowed to access records belonging to someone under suspicion. But now anyone's records can be obtained if the FBI deems them relevant to a terrorism investigation. And in fact, the Department of Justice's report found that the FBI frequently accessed records of individuals who weren't involved in any approved investigations, which is a violation of federal law.

These abuses were allowed to occur because of the extraordinary powers granted the FBI in the Patriot Act. It is vital that this Act be revised so that innocent people are protected against misuse of National Security Letters.

ACTION

Please contact your members of Congress and demand that the Patriot Act be reformed to halt this abuse of power.

Global Warming: Urge Automakers to Support a National Cap on Pollution

The need for a national cap on harmful auto emissions has never been greater. The scientific community is nearly unanimous in acknowledging global warming and the part that human industry has played in it. The time to take responsibility is now.

BACKGROUND

The Earth's air temperature has risen approximately 1 degree Fahrenheit in the last century and has been rising more rapidly in the past few decades. To put this in perspective, the Earth's average air temperature has risen only nine degrees Fahrenheit in the previous *ten thousand* years.

This rise in temperature will have a drastic effect on the planet. More animal species will begin to die off and shorelines will creep slowly inland. Some areas of the earth where people now live will become uninhabitable.

Automobiles play a huge part in global warming. In the United States cars emit approximately three hundred million tons of carbon dioxide into the air each year, contributing to about a fifth of our nation's air pollution. But, there have been no improvements in average fuel efficiency in over ten years, and our cars today go fewer miles on a gallon of gas than they did in the 1980s. That extra fuel we're burning is extra pollution emitted into the air, speeding up global warming.

Carbon dioxide is a chief global warming pollutant, and any reduction of this greenhouse gas in the air will have beneficial results. So, if we want to do something about global warming, reforming the auto industry is an excellent place to start.

ACTION

Sign the Environmental Defense Fund's petition to leading automakers. Support a mandatory national cap on global warming pollution:

http://action.environmentaldefense.org/campaign/cars_2007?qp_source=an1. Also read these helpful tips on what you can do to burn fuel more efficiently in your own car: <http://www.fightglobalwarming.com/page.cfm?tagID=268>.

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