

**1996/15. Safeguards guaranteeing protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty**

*The Economic and Social Council,*

*Recalling* General Assembly resolutions 2857 (XXVI) of 20 December 1971 and 32/61 of 8 December 1977 and Economic and Social Council resolutions 1745 (LIV) of 16 May 1973, 1930 (LVIII) of 6 May 1975, 1990/51 of 24 July 1990 and 1995/57 of 28 July 1995,

*Recalling also* article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,<sup>49</sup>

*Recalling further* the safeguards guaranteeing protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty, annexed to its resolution 1984/50 of 25 May 1984, and its resolution 1989/64 of 24 May 1989 on the implementation of the safeguards,

*Taking note* of the report of the Secretary-General on capital punishment and implementation of the safeguards guaranteeing protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty,<sup>50</sup>

*Recalling* the Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions, set forth in the annex to its resolution 1989/65 of 24 May 1989 and endorsed by the General Assembly in its

resolution 44/162 of 15 December 1989, and taking note of the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions concerning the death penalty contained in his report to the Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-second session,<sup>51</sup>

*Taking note* of Security Council resolution 827 (1993) of 25 May 1993, in which the Security Council decided to establish the International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia since 1991 and to adopt the statute of the International Tribunal annexed to the report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 2 of Security Council resolution 808 (1993) of 22 February 1993,<sup>52</sup> and taking note also of Security Council resolution 955 (1994) of 8 November 1994, in which the Security Council decided to establish the International Criminal Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Genocide and Other Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of Rwanda and Rwandan Citizens Responsible for Genocide and Other Such Violations Committed in the Territory of Neighbouring States between 1 January and 31 December 1994 and to adopt the statute of the International Tribunal for Rwanda annexed to that resolution,

1. *Notes* that, during the period covered by the report of the Secretary-General on capital punishment and implementation of the safeguards guaranteeing protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty,<sup>50</sup> an increasing number of countries abolished the death penalty and others followed a policy reducing the number of capital offences and declared that they had not sentenced any offender to that penalty, while still others retained it and a few reintroduced it;

2. *Calls upon* Member States in which the death penalty has not been abolished to effectively apply the safeguards guaranteeing protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty, which state that capital punishment may be imposed for only the most serious crimes, it being understood that their scope should not go beyond intentional crimes with lethal or other extremely grave consequences;

3. *Encourages* Member States in which the death penalty has not been abolished to ensure that each defendant facing a possible death sentence is given all guarantees to ensure a fair trial, as contained in article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,<sup>49</sup> and bearing in mind the Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary,<sup>53</sup> the

<sup>49</sup> See General Assembly resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex.

<sup>50</sup> E/CN.15/1996/19.

<sup>51</sup> E/CN.4/1996/4 and Corr.1.

<sup>52</sup> See *Official Records of the Security Council, Forty-eighth Year, Supplement for April, May and June 1993*, document S/25704 and Add.1.

<sup>53</sup> *Seventh United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, Milan, Italy, 26 August-6 September 1985: report prepared by the Secretariat* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.86.IV.1), chap. I, sect. D. 2, annex.

Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers,<sup>54</sup> the Guidelines on the Role of Prosecutors,<sup>55</sup> the Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment,<sup>56</sup> and the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners;<sup>57</sup>

4. *Also encourages* Member States in which the death penalty has not been abolished to ensure that defendants who do not sufficiently understand the language used in court are fully informed, by way of interpretation or translation, of all the charges against them and the content of the relevant evidence deliberated in court;

5. *Calls upon* Member States in which the death penalty may be carried out to allow adequate time for the preparation of appeals to a court of higher jurisdiction and for the completion of appeal proceedings, as well as petitions for clemency, in order to effectively apply rules 5 and 8 of the safeguards guaranteeing protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty;

6. *Also calls upon* Member States in which the death penalty may be carried out to ensure that officials involved in decisions to carry out an execution are fully informed of the status of appeals and petitions for clemency of the prisoner in question;

7. *Urges* Member States in which the death penalty may be carried out to effectively apply the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, in order to keep to a minimum the suffering of prisoners under sentence of death and to avoid any exacerbation of such suffering.

*45th plenary meeting  
23 July 1996*

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<sup>54</sup> *Eighth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, Havana, 27 August-7 September 1990: report prepared by the Secretariat* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.91.IV.1), chap. I, sect. B. 3, annex.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, sect. C. 26.

<sup>56</sup> General Assembly resolution 43/173, annex.

<sup>57</sup> *First United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, Geneva, 22 August-3 September 1955: report prepared by the Secretariat* (United Nations publication, Sales No. 1956.IV.4), annex I, sect. A.