

Thursday, 10 July 2008 - Strasbourg

The death penalty, particularly the case of Troy Davis

Ana Maria Gomes, author. – (PT) Mr President, the first human right is the sanctity of life. The death penalty is the most disrespectful of all the instances of contempt for dignity, civilisation and progress. Right now, at this precise moment, when we are breathing and speaking freely, one man, Troy Davis, is locked up in a cell, counting the minutes left of his life. He has been on death row for more than 15 years and has always denied committing the crime he was accused of. Some of those who testified against him have recanted or contradicted themselves in their statements, which were obtained under police coercion. There is no clear, objective and convincing evidence in this case. The application of the death penalty to Troy Davis by the authorities of the State of Georgia runs completely counter to the moratorium on the death penalty adopted last December by the United Nations General Assembly.

Although the moratorium is not legally binding, it carries enormous moral and political significance. It is now up to the States who do not abide by it to review their policy with a view to abolishing the death penalty and respecting human rights in their entirety. The State of Georgia now has the opportunity with this case to give the most fundamental values of democracy the substance they deserve once again. Commissioner Louis Michel recently heard the President of Sudan himself, Omar al-Bashir, say that he would not hand over those who have been indicted for crimes against humanity to the International Criminal Court, just as the United States does not. The United States' example in these two areas is a disgrace, and we have to bring all means available to bear on the United States to show that we cannot accept this stance and the terrible example that is being set for the world in the field of human rights.

Therefore, as the resolution requests, it is vital that the Presidency of the European Union and the European Commission Delegation in Washington make representations so as to prevent Troy Davis' sentence being carried out and for the United States to effectively review its position on the death penalty.