

**REPORT OF GCL'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
TO
THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**Gran
Caribe por
la Vida**  **Greater
Caribbean
for Life**



**stop crime,
not lives**

**Saturday October 24, 2020
10:00 a.m.**

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This Executive Report covers the period between June 9, 2019 and October 24, 2020.

1.2 The Greater Caribbean for Life (GCL) is an independent, not-for-profit civil society organisation, incorporated under the laws of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico on January 31, 2014. GCL is the only organisation in the Greater Caribbean region that is devoted to working on the abolition of the Death Penalty. It is important to recall the history of how GCL was created.

1.3 From October 17-19, 2011, the first International Conference on the Death Penalty in the Greater Caribbean took place in Madrid. This event was organized by the Community of Sant'Egidio, sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Spain, in collaboration with the International Academic Network for the Abolition of Capital Punishment, the Puerto Rican Coalition Against the Death Penalty, the Puerto Rico Bar Association, the International Commission against the Death Penalty and the Death Penalty Project.

1.4 During this conference, the participants from the Caribbean region agreed to create a Steering Committee with the objective of creating an abolitionist organisation in the region. The current Chair and Deputy Chair of GCL, who had participated in this Conference, were members of this Steering Committee.

1.5 GCL was established in October 2013 following a Conference in Trinidad and Tobago, which was attended by abolitionists from 12 Greater Caribbean Countries as well as abolitionists further afield. GCL's main objective is to campaign for and work towards the permanent abolition of the death penalty in the Greater Caribbean and to support Caribbean abolitionist activists and organisations in this region. GCL has been active in raising awareness of the issues surrounding the DP since its establishment.

1.6 While GCL condemns the rise of violent crime in our region and expresses solidarity with victims, it has continuously made it clear that it rejects the notion that capital punishment will act as a deterrent or foster respect for life in our communities. GCL is committed to promoting peace, respect for life, and good neighbourliness as appropriate methods of reducing crime in the Greater Caribbean region.

GCL has promoted the opinion that this strategy provides a more durable and effective solution than the taking of life. GCL's aim has therefore been to stop crime, not lives. The global trend is moving away from the death penalty. To date 143 countries, about two-thirds of the countries in the world, have abolished the death penalty in law or practice. GCL's aim is that the entire Greater Caribbean should become part of this global trend.

2. GCL'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Greater Caribbean For Life held its General Assembly on June 8, 2019. For personal reasons, Ms. Leela Ramdeen, who had been Chair of GCL since its inception in 2013, did not present herself for election. The following persons were elected unopposed:

Sir Clare Roberts, Chair – Antigua and Barbuda
Ms Melinda Janki, Deputy Chair - Guyana
Ms Cara Shillingford, Treasurer - Dominica
Ms Jeanie Ollivierre, Secretary – St Vincent and the Grenadines
Ms Miselle O'Brien, Deputy Secretary
Mr Carmelo Campos-Cruz, Executive Member – Puerto Rico
Mr Gregory Delzin, Executive Member – Trinidad and Tobago

(NB: Mr Delzin subsequently resigned due to a conflict of interest in his new appointment)
Ms Leela Ramdeen re-joined GCL's Executive to fill the vacancy left by Mr Delzin.

On May 31, 2020, Sir Clare tendered his resignation as Chair of GCL. Members of GCL's Executive expressed their sincere thanks to Sir Clare for his leadership during his tenure as Chair and for his commitment to the abolitionist movement in the Caribbean region and globally and wished him every success in his future endeavours.

On June 2020, Ms Melinda Janki assumed the position of Chair and Carmelo Campos-Cruz re-assumed the position of Deputy Chair. Ms. Janki resigned as Chair in August 2020 and Leela Ramdeen re-assumed the position as Chair of GCL in August 2020.

2.1 GCL's Executive Committee currently comprises:

- Chair: Ms. Leela Ramdeen (Catholic Commission for Social Justice, Trinidad and Tobago & Attorney-at-Law),
- Deputy-Chair: Mr. Carmelo Campos-Cruz (Puerto Rican Coalition Against the Death Penalty),
- Secretary: Ms. Jeanie Ollivierre, (St Vincent & the Grenadines Human Rights Association), Secretary
- Executive Member: Akola Thompson, Journalist & Activist, Guyana,
NB: GCL's Treasurer, Cara Shillingford, has recently resigned due to other commitments. There are 3 vacancies on the Executive Committee.

2.2. Since it has not been feasible for GCL's Executive to meet physically, all meetings are held via Zoom platform. Executive Members are also in regular communication with each other via telephone, WhatsApp and e-mail.

3. MEMBERSHIP

3.1 GCL's Membership List is included in section 7 of this report. It shows a total of 34 individual members and 16 Organisations.

3.2 All members in the various countries have been encouraged to recruit new members for GCL. The membership form has been emailed to each of them and it is also posted on the Website and the Facebook account. This is an on-going drive to increase membership in our organisation.

4. POSITIVE MOVEMENTS IN OUR REGION

4.1 The Greater Caribbean (also known as the Caribbean Basin) is composed of 25 countries, and the territories and dependencies of France, the Netherlands, United Kingdom and United States.

4.2 The 25 Caribbean States falls in the following categories:

- 13 countries are considered abolitionist in the following classes:
 - *10 countries are abolitionist for all crimes:* Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Suriname and Venezuela.
 - *two countries are considered abolitionist for ordinary crimes only:* El Salvador and Guatemala.
 - *one country is considered abolitionist in practice:* Grenada.
- 12 countries are retentionist: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Cuba, Dominica, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago.

4.3 Puerto Rico presents a unique situation among Caribbean territories. Although statutory abolition was approved in 1929 and the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico of 1952 explicitly prohibits capital punishment, the United States government has been actively pursuing capital cases in US federal court for crimes committed on the Island. Seven capital trials have been held in the Federal District Court of Puerto Rico, but none of them have ended in a death sentence.

4.4 Suriname and Guatemala are the most recent countries in the region to have abolished the death penalty. The Parliament of Suriname abolished the death penalty on March 3, 2015. The Constitutional Court of Guatemala declared unconstitutional the articles in the Penal Code and the Anti-Narcotics Law allowing for the imposition of the capital punishment penalty on October 24, 2017. From that date, the number of abolitionist States in this region has surpassed the number of retentionist States for the

first time since the independence process of the West Indies began during the second half of the 20th century.

4.5 On June 27, 2018, in a significant judgment, the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) ruled that the mandatory death penalty as stated in section 2 of the Barbadian Offences Against the Persons Act (OAPA), Ch 141, for persons convicted of murder is unconstitutional. Convictions under section 2 of the OAPA have previously been treated as automatically attracting the mandatory death penalty without any consideration of the mitigating factors in their cases or their individual circumstances.

4.6 The CCJ stated that savings clauses, which had 'saved' the mandatory death penalty in Barbados, should be condemned. The same savings clause exists in the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago. With this CCJ judgment, Trinidad and Tobago remains the only country in the Caribbean that imposes the mandatory death penalty. GCL invited the government of Trinidad and Tobago to approve the necessary reforms to immediately overrule the mandatory death penalty.

4.7 Since the ruling of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in *Pratt and Morgan v the Attorney General of Jamaica* (1993) and following the restrictions contained in a number of rulings in subsequent cases, particularly the judgment of the Privy Council in the *St. Vincent and the Grenadines* appeal, *R. v. Trimmingham*, which limit the imposition of the death penalty to the 'worst of the worst' cases, it is now very difficult for the retentionist countries to implement the death penalty.

4.8 The last execution in the Caribbean region took place in December 2008 in St Kitts and Nevis when Charles Elroy Laplace was hanged. In recent years very few death sentences have been handed down by Courts in the region. Death row is empty in Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, and St Lucia.

The last executions in the countries of Greater Caribbean are as follows:

Country	Year of the last execution	Number of years after last execution
Grenada	1978	41
Barbados	1984	36
Belize	1985	35
Dominica	1986	34
Jamaica	1988	32
Antigua and Barbuda	1991	29
St Vincent and the Grenadines	1995	25
St Lucia	1995	25
Guyana	1997	23
Trinidad and Tobago	1999	21
The Bahamas	2000	20

Country	Year of the last execution	Number of years after last execution
Guatemala	2000	20
Cuba	2003	17
St Kitts and Nevis	2008	12

4.9 Even though the Caribbean retentionist states have not carried out any execution for over eleven years, some have sentenced persons to death during this decade. Nevertheless, the number of countries sentencing persons to death has decreased over the last ten years.

4.10 Although the island states in the English-speaking Caribbean are small, the 12 retentionist countries in the Greater Caribbean basin comprise about 25 per cent of the total votes opposed to the call at the UN General Assembly’s sessions in 2007, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016 and 2018, for countries to adopt a resolution to establish a moratorium on the use of the death penalty with a view to work towards abolition. Most of the Caribbean retentionist states have consistently voted against the resolution and have signed the *Note Verbale*, dissociating them from the moratorium.

4.11 However, on 17 December, 2018, when the General Assembly voted for a resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty, for the first time Dominica voted in favour of the resolution and Antigua & Barbuda abstained, rather than voting against it, thus indicating that for the first time the English-speaking Caribbean countries were modifying their strict support of the death penalty.

4.12 From November 12–14, 2018, a delegation of international experts on the death penalty met in Guyana to “advocate for the abolition of the use of capital punishment” in that country.

4.13 The prison in Georgetown, Guyana, was burnt in 2017. It is heartening to note that the Minister of Public Security, Hon Khemraj Ramjattan, subsequently stated that the gallows will not be rebuilt in the new prison. His personal view is that the death penalty “should be abolished totally”.

4.14 Given the fact that the English-speaking Caribbean comprises a significant number of Catholics, GCL was pleased to note that in Pope Francis’ Encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, on fraternity and social friendship, released on October 4, 2020, he closed the door on the death penalty. “There can be no stepping back from this position,” says Pope Francis, referring to the opposition to capital punishment expressed by St. John Paul II. “Today we state clearly that ‘the death penalty is inadmissible’ and the Church is firmly committed to calling for its abolition worldwide.”

4.15 From the above, GCL concludes that there is a need for continued advocacy to rid the countries in the region of capital punishment and to adopt non-lethal means of making offenders accountable for their crimes.

5. GCL PROJECT ACTIVITIES SINCE ITS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON JUNE 8, 2019

5.1 In February 2018, GCL entered into an agreement with 4 other partners, to embark on a "joint" 3-year EU-funded project entitled: *'Building a Platform for Abolition: strengthening the AntiDeath-Penalty Movement in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean'* (GCL/EU Project Activities [IWOV-WSDOCS.FID119979]). The Death Penalty Project is the lead applicant for this Project. Other partners are: GCL, The World Coalition against the Death Penalty, St Vincent and the Grenadines Human Rights Association, and the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, Barbados.

The Project has four main strands of work, namely, to:

- create tools for education and advocacy,
- advocate for the abolition of the death penalty,
- conduct educational awareness campaigns, and
- strengthen and build capacity of local civil society organisations.

The Project Countries are Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, and St Vincent and the Grenadines.

An EU organised Pre-Action meeting was held in Barbados from June 22-23, 2018. Ms Leela Ramdeen, GCL's Chair, had represented all 5 partners at that meeting. Also present at the meeting were individuals who would lead the Project in each country.

Nancy Anderson, Attorney-at-Law, Jamaica, was appointed by GCL as Project Manager for the Project. Ms. Anderson was substituted by Annetta Jackson, Attorney-at-Law, Antigua, on July 2020.

5.2 A brief outline of GCL's activities under the Project is as follows:

- Information Packs and Mobilisation Kits on the Death Penalty
- Bi-annual newsletters
- Speaking and Outreach Tours
- Sub-grants – this include support for local campaigns and specific activities coordinated by local groups (around World Day on October 10)
- Local Advocacy/public education – including film screenings and ongoing engagement with stakeholders
- Media Engagement

- Lobbying

5.3 It is envisaged that at the end of the Project there will be:

1. Increased awareness of the issues surrounding the retention of the death penalty;
2. Increased support for reform of the death penalty and public engagement on death penalty issues;
3. Strengthened civil society links with decision-makers and the media;
4. Increased participation of Civil Society Organisations working in the field of the death penalty in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean States (ECS).

5.4 ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

5.4.1 Creating Tools for Education, Awareness and Advocacy

- Three Newsletters have been produced. Two were released in August 2020 and September 2020.
- On April 7, 2020, the Results of Interviews of “opinion leaders’ was launched.
- An Educational Tool Kit has been updated and redeveloped
- GCL has produced Media Releases on World Day against the Death Penalty and on Human Rights Day. These are included in GCL's Newsletters.

5.4.2 Advocacy for reform of the death penalty

Some of the seven target countries have submitted shadow reports for the Universal Periodic Review.

5.4.3 Conduct education and awareness raising campaigns

The pandemic Covid-19 delayed any speaking tours and we moved ahead with a virtual webinar on October 10, 2020, the 18th World Day against the Death Penalty, GCL hosted a **FREE** virtual panel discussion on the theme for 2020: **Access to Counsel: A matter of life or death.**

[View the recording here.](#)

The Moderator was Cara Shillingford –Attorney-at-Law, Dominica, and the then Member of GCL Executive.

Mr Luís Maia, Head of Cooperation, Delegation of the European Union to Barbados, the Eastern Caribbean States, the OECS and CARICOM/CARIFORUM expressed words of solidarity.

Featured speakers included:

- Archbishop Charles Jason Gordon – Trinidad and Tobago
- Kevin Rivera-Medina – President of the World Coalition Against Death Penalty, Puerto Rico
- Gregory Delzin – Attorney-at-Law, Trinidad and Tobago
- Dr David Dorsett – Attorney-at-Law and Anti-Death Penalty Activist, Antigua and Barbuda
- Juan Melendez-Colon – Death Row Exoneree (Witness to Innocence).

The event was well subscribed and feedback has been positive.

5.4.4 Capacity building: strengthening local civil society organizations

Sub-grants were given for activities in Barbados, St. Vincent, St. Kitts, Dominica and Grenada in 2019 and in 2020 Antigua and Barbuda was the sole beneficiary of sub-grant funding.

5.5 Due to COVID-19, it has not been possible to undertake some of the planned activities. Currently the Death Penalty Project, the Lead Applicant, is in discussions with the EU Body to negotiate an extension of the Project until December 2021. Hopefully, once the restrictions are lifted, plans can be implemented e.g. GCL is planning a Speaking Tour to Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, and St Vincent and the Grenadines. Activities during the Speaking Tour would include: Media appearances, Meetings/Seminars with targeted groups e.g. Law students, 6th Form Students, Law lecturers, Human Rights Activists, Politicians, Members of the Judiciary and so on.

GCL's Chair, Deputy Chair, Juan Melendez-Colon, a former death row inmate who is a member of the US's organisation Witness to Innocence, as well as Renny Cushing, founder of Murder Victims Families for Human Rights and State Representative of New Hampshire, are scheduled to form the Team that will go on the Speaking Tour during the latter part of 2021. Since GCL has already organised two previous Speaking Tours since its inception in 2013, it will build on the success of these Tours to ensure that the planned Tour in 2021 will be successful.

5.6 Since the inception of the Project in 2018, several successful initiatives have been conducted in Dominica, Grenada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, St. Lucia and Barbados, to achieve the goals of the Project.

The following projects were completed with the assistance sub-grants in the various target countries:

5.6.1 Project 1 [Dominica]:

In 2019 GCL collaborated with the **Dominica Bar Association** and the **Kiwanis Club of Roseau** (Dominica) to hold a public speaking competition. The topic for discussion was "Should the death penalty be abolished in the Commonwealth of Dominica?"

Five secondary schools participated in the competition allowing for the conversation around abolishing the death penalty to take root within a younger population in Dominica.

This project was spearheaded by Ms Cara Shillingford, the then Treasurer GCL.

5.6.2 Project 2 [Grenada]:

Several activities were planned between October 2019 and January 2020. The activities and grassroots organising led to the formation and launch of a local chapter of GCL in Grenada furthering the efforts of the organisation in that country.

5.6.3 Project 3 [St. Vincent & the Grenadines (SVG)]:

Jeanie Olliviere, member of the SVG Human Rights Association and Secretary GCL, conducted educational outreach with a number of secondary schools across St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The outreach event focused on 4th form students from the SJC Kingstown School.

GCL has also been collaborating with Marion House in St. Vincent and the Grenadines to roll out a Death Penalty Abolition plan of action for that country. The plan includes:

1. Development & staff training;
2. Presentation of the Death Penalty Project with the Bishop and clergy of the Roman Catholic
3. Public Speaking Competition
4. Documentation

5.6.4 Project 4 [Barbados]:

Greater Caribbean for Life collaborated on a project in Barbados under the theme **Empowering Youths for Change: Training a Generation in Human Rights Advocacy.**

The project is inter-linked and supports ongoing youth-based human rights outreach projects administered by the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office for Barbados and the OECS ("UN RCO"), under the guidance for Ms. Michelle Brathwaite, UN National Human Rights Officer. The Project is a collaboration between the UWI, Cave Hill Campus and the Death Penalty Project, London;

5.6.5 Project 4 [St. Lucia]:

A lecture and panel discussion was held on *World Day Against the Death Penalty (October 10th 2019)* concerning the country making a move towards abolition.

5.6.6 Project 5 [Eastern Caribbean Report]:

Sentenced to Death without Execution: Why capital punishment has not yet been abolished in the Eastern Caribbean and Barbados

In order to gain insight into the views and attitudes of those who favour retaining the status quo and those who favour abolition, 100 'opinion formers' from Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia and St Vincent and the Grenadines were interviewed.

The interviews were conducted under the auspices of the University Of The West Indies (Cave Hill) and the individuals were selected from four areas of public life: politics and the higher civil service; criminal justice and legal practice; religious leadership; and well-regarded and influential members of civil society.

The research study was commissioned by The Death Penalty Project, and led by Professor Roger Hood (University of Oxford), assisted by Florence Seemungal (University of West Indies, St Augustine) and Amaya Athill (Former Project Assistant at GCL). A report of findings was published on 7th April 2020. The research study and the publication are completed and produced with the financial support of the European Union.

6.CONCLUSION

6.1 Positive news have been emerging in the Greater Caribbean since GCL's creation. There is evidence that our region is following the global trend to abolish the death penalty:

- no person has been executed for more than ten years,
- abolition has been achieved in Suriname and Guatemala,
- there has been a substantial decrease in the number of countries imposing death sentences,
- the landmark decision by the Caribbean Court of Justice in the Barbadian case is a sign of hope, and
- recent changes in the vote of some of our countries on UN's resolutions asking for a moratorium on the application of the capital punishment augurs well for those working to achieve abolition in the region.

6.2 As long as the death penalty exists in the world, there will be a need for advocacy to abolish it and to find non-lethal means of making offenders accountable to society. In the Caribbean, this effort still needs to empower local voices from our region to demonstrate

that capital punishment is not a feasible solution against crime and violence, it will not promote respect for life, or build communities.

6.3 GCL's Executive Committee would like to thank all members for their continued support of our work. We are in this for the long haul. Let us all use this opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to achieve GCL's goals.

7.CURRENT MEMBERSHIP of GCL

ORGANIZATIONS

- Amnistia Internacional Puerto Rico
- Bahamas Bar Association
- Bahamas Human Rights Network
- Cátedra UNESCO de Educación Por la Paz (Puerto Rico)
- Catholic Commission for Social Justice (Trinidad and Tobago)
- Comisión Cubana de Derechos Humanos y Reconciliación Nacional, (Cuba)
- D´Infinite (Dominica)
- Frazer, Housty & Yearwood, Attorneys at Law (Guyana)
- Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (Guatemala)
- Human Rights Commission of Belize
- Human Rights for All (Antigua and Barbuda)
- Co-Jamaica Independent Council for Human Rights
- Main Parade Chambers (Belize)
- Movimiento Pro Justicia (Guatemala)
- Puerto Rico Coalition Against Death Penalty
- St. Vincent and the Grenadines Human Rights Association
- Justice Institute Guyana

INDIVIDUALS

- Peter Espeut, Jamaica
- Madeeta Branche
- A.N. Carter (Barbados)
- Brian Clarke (Barbados)
- J. Leon Fox (Bahamas)
- Mary Frabcus
- Rev. Gwen Ruth Greaves
- Janet P. Kemp (Bahamas)
- James McGregor Millington (Barbados)
- Antoinette Moore (Belize)
- Nefaste Morris (Guyana)
- Ayana Nelson (Grenada)
- Carmen-Jackie Leanna Pinder
- Aida Ibarra (Bahamas)
- Crystal Annastacy Robinson (Guyana)
- Cara Shillingford
- Carmelo Campos
- Jeanie Olliviere
- Leela Ramdeen
- Elsworth Johnson
- Mia Mascoll
- David Berry
- Florence Seemungal
- Ramon Raveneau
- Angelina Sokoo-Bobb
- Jessica Corredor
- Ruggles Ferguson
- Kendrickson Kentish
- Akola Thompson
- Andrew Pilgrim
- Mariana Nogales
- Mary Francis
- Safiya Roberts

LEELA RAMDEEN, CHAIR, GCL
ON BEHALF OF GCL'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE