

STATEMENT ON CAPITAL PUNISHMENT - 8TH JUNE 2005

While the Catholic Commission for Social Justice (CCSJ) welcomes some of the positive crime reduction strategies outlined in recent statements made in Parliament, CCSJ does not believe that capital punishment will provide solutions to the many complex problems that we face in Trinidad and Tobago today.

In the face of a country/world community that is growing more violent with every passing day, we must use our human ingenuity to develop more effective methods to provide for the safety and well being of the public. Human life is precious. In T&T human life seems to be losing its value. Violence pervades the very fabric of our society and there is no empirical evidence that shows that hanging acts as a deterrent to criminal activity. How are we to move forward?

We need to ask ourselves: "What Vision do we have for T&T"? Our vision should be one that is concerned to build a culture of life and a civilisation of love. Catholics are devoted to defending life. Thus, while the Church has not denied its traditional position that the State has the right to employ capital punishment, Pope Paul VI and the late John Paul II have both spoken against the exercise of that right by the State.

The view of the Catholic Church is that capital punishment undermines the sacredness of human life and only serves to inflame the culture of violence that is already too prevalent in society. Violence begets violence. In the strongest papal denunciation of the death penalty, the late John Paul II wrote in his encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae* (the Gospel of Life, 1995):

".the nature and extent of the punishment must be carefully evaluated and decided upon and ought not to go to the extreme of executing the offender except in cases of absolute necessity: In other words, when it would not be possible otherwise to defend society. Today, however, as a result of steady improvements in the organisation of penal systems, such cases are very rare, if not practically non-existent."

While society needs to defend itself from crime and violence and to uphold the value of the lives of its citizens, we should not sacrifice the values we seek to protect. CCSJ supports an ethic of respect for life and urges the Government to devise crime reduction strategies that are more humane. Let us build a society that respects, affirms, enhances and promotes the dignity, worth and potential of every human person.