



His Holiness Pope Francis / Sua Santità Francesco  
Segreteria di Stato  
Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano  
00120, Città del Vaticano

21<sup>st</sup> May 2017

Your Holiness,

I am writing to you from the human rights group Reprieve regarding your upcoming meeting with US President Donald Trump. I wanted to draw your attention to some urgent issues that we hope you will agree to raise during your meeting.

Reprieve assists those facing the death penalty and other victims of extreme human rights abuses around the world. Our work is founded on two principles that we believe you also hold dear: the sanctity of human life, and the inviolability of certain rights, especially the right to freedom from torture.

We are deeply concerned that the Trump Administration is overseeing practices that pose a serious threat to these values.

President Trump has been a vocal supporter of the death penalty – calling for the return of the mandatory death penalty in some instances, and advocating the execution of juveniles in the notorious Central Park 5 case.<sup>1</sup> This sends a dangerous message to those US States that continue to push ahead with the inhumane use of the lethal injection in executions – despite clear evidence it causes pain and suffering. In addition, the US' continued execution of those with severe mental health problems is alarming.

Your call for an end to the death penalty wherever it is used around the world was courageous. I hope you will make clear to President Trump that its continued use in North America is incompatible with the ideal of a 'great' nation that he has often espoused.

President Trump has also undermined the sanctity of all life by expanding the US policy of global assassinations, which amount to the death penalty without a trial. In January, just days into his Presidency, Mr Trump ordered a covert raid in the village of Yakla, Yemen. Our investigation after the raid found that at least 23 civilians were killed. Ten of these were children; one was a newborn.<sup>2</sup>

In the months since, President Trump has been responsible for a sharp increase in drone strikes in this desperately vulnerable country, with an inevitable rise in civilian deaths as a consequence.

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<sup>1</sup> See [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/12/10/donald-trump-wants-the-death-penalty-for-those-who-kill-police-officers/?utm\\_term=.8ef0474b2b08](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/12/10/donald-trump-wants-the-death-penalty-for-those-who-kill-police-officers/?utm_term=.8ef0474b2b08) and <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/feb/17/central-park-five-donald-trump-jogger-rape-case-new-york>

<sup>2</sup> [www.reprieve.org.uk/press/trumps-yemen-raid-killed-newborn-baby-scores-civilians/](http://www.reprieve.org.uk/press/trumps-yemen-raid-killed-newborn-baby-scores-civilians/)

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Reprieve, PO Box 72054      T +44 (0)20 7553 8140      info@reprieve.org.uk  
London UK, EC3P 3BZ      F +44 (0)20 7553 8189      www.reprieve.org.uk

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Patrons: Alan Bennett, Julie Christie, Martha Lane Fox, Paul Hamann, Gordon Roddick, Richard Rogers, Ruth Rogers, Jon Snow, Marina Warner and Vivienne Westwood



The new President has also gone back on a years-long consensus against torture, stating that “torture works”, and that he would like to see the return of discredited and inhumane techniques such as waterboarding.<sup>3</sup> He has also talked of plan to “load up” Guantanamo Bay – a prison camp that must urgently be closed, as you have rightly argued in the past.<sup>4</sup>

At Reprieve, we assist victims of the failed US War on Terror – including several men who are detained at Guantanamo Bay on the basis of false ‘confessions’ extracted through torture. We know from experience that torture is not only an appalling affront to human dignity – it is also ineffective and counter-productive.

As defenders of some of the world’s most vulnerable people, we are dismayed at President Trump’s actions and statements since he came to office 120 days ago. His support for the death penalty, assassinations, and the use of torture violates the sanctity of life that people of all faiths and none hold so dear. His stance has already made the world a more dangerous place.

We hope you will agree that the US President must lead by example, and that he urgently needs to demonstrate a greater commitment to human rights than he has shown thus far.

I urge you, therefore, to use your meeting with Mr Trump to:

- (1) Emphasise your opposition to the death penalty in all its forms, and reaffirm your desire to see a permanent end to executions in the US;
- (2) Urge President Trump to end his policy of assassinations in countries such as Yemen;
- (3) Repeat your earlier calls for the closure of the US prison camp at Guantanamo, and tell the President that he must reject the use of torture.

If you need any further information about these issues before your meeting, please do not hesitate to have your team contact me via the details below.

Yours sincerely,

**Maya Foa**  
Director, Reprieve  
[maya.foa@reprieve.org.uk](mailto:maya.foa@reprieve.org.uk)

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/26/donald-trump-torture-absolutely-works-says-us-president-in-first-television-interview>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/us-election/12171246/We-will-load-up-Guantanamo-with-some-bad-dudes-Donald-Trump.html>

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