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STATEMENT OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF CONNECTICUT

by

Most Reverend Christie A. Macaluso, Auxiliary Bishop of Hartford

January 12, 2005

I am Bishop Christie A. Macaluso, Auxiliary Bishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Hartford. I am here representing the eight Roman Catholic Bishops of Connecticut, to express our one united voice in support of the abolition of the death penalty in Connecticut.

The Gospel mandates us to respect all human life from conception to natural death. Over the years, the Bishops of Connecticut consistently have advocated for the abolition of the death penalty. At the present time there is an ongoing debate about the appropriateness of the death penalty as a means of punishment for convicted perpetrators of grave crimes. This debate has intensified in Connecticut as we face the possibility of our first execution in forty-five years. Aware of the serious moral implications of the use of the death penalty as a means of punishment for convicted perpetrators of grave crimes, the Roman Catholic Bishops of Connecticut consider it imperative to make our voices heard once again on this important issue.

First, we wish to state that we are deeply concerned for the just and fair treatment of all parties in this matter: the victims and their families, and those who have been accused or convicted of grave crimes. Next, we are motivated by the consistent ethic of life. We wish to make clear that, in accord with the teaching of Pope John Paul II, respect for human life must be "profoundly consistent." (*Evangelium vitae*, #87). Human life is a gift from God that must be respected from conception to natural death. Thus, we oppose capital punishment. Our profound respect for human life also explains why we are so involved in such matters as providing goods and services to the poor, the elderly and the sick. Specifically in regard to capital punishment, we note increasing reliance on the death penalty, which diminishes each of us. The death penalty offers the tragic illusion that we can defend life only by taking life.

We are guided by what Pope John Paul II wrote in his encyclical letter on the value and inviolability of human life (*Evangelium vitae*). Our Holy Father states that authority must

redress the violation of personal and social rights by imposing on the offender an adequate punishment for the crime. In this way, authority also fulfills the purpose of defending public order and ensuring people's safety while offering the offender an incentive to help change his or her behavior and be rehabilitated. Our Holy Father states:

The nature and extent of the punishment 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 organization of the penal system, such cases are very rare if not practically nonexistent. (*Evangelium vitae*, #56).

Recent highly publicized court cases have raised serious doubts concerning the effectiveness of our criminal justice system in detecting the true source and nature of crimes that have been committed, and in protecting the rights and dignity of those who have been accused of them. Moreover, we are not comfortable with the fact that so many of those in prisons and on death row are poor, young and minorities. They are less likely than others to be able to avail themselves of legal talent, as are those with more resources.

In conclusion, while conceding that the state has the duty to maintain public order and the right to punish convicted criminals, we, the Roman Catholic Bishops of Connecticut, express our considered opposition to the death penalty in the State of Connecticut. We join with the other leaders of faith communities, here present, and with the Connecticut Network to Abolish the Death Penalty, in this concerted effort to abolish the death penalty in Connecticut.