



United States Mission to the OSCE

Right of Reply Regarding the Death Penalty

As delivered by Acting Political Counselor Lane Darnell Bahl
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 23, 2020

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In response to the statements issued by the European Union, I would like to exercise my Right of Reply.

On July 14, Daniel Lewis Lee was executed in accordance with a death sentence imposed by a U.S. federal district court. Lee, a member of a white supremacist organization, brutally murdered William Frederick Mueller and Nancy Ann Mueller, along with her eight-year-old daughter, Sarah Elizabeth Powell. After robbing and shooting them with a stun gun, Lee duct-taped plastic bags around their heads, weighed down each victim with rocks, and drowned the family in the Illinois Bayou River. In 1999, a jury in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Arkansas found Lee guilty of numerous offenses, including three counts of murder in aid of racketeering, and he was sentenced to death.

On July 16, Wesley Ira Purkey was executed in accordance with the death sentence imposed by a U.S. federal district court. Purkey violently raped and murdered 16-year-old Jennifer Long, and then dismembered, burned, and dumped the young girl's body in a septic pond. He also was convicted in state court for using a claw hammer to bludgeon to death 80-year-old Mary Ruth Bales. In 2003, a jury in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Missouri found Purkey guilty of kidnapping a child resulting in death, and he was sentenced to death in 2004.

On July 17, Dustin Lee Honken was executed in accordance with the death sentence imposed by a U.S. federal district court. In 1993, Honken, a methamphetamine 'kingpin,' kidnapped, fatally shot and buried Lori Duncan, a single, working mother, Duncan's two young daughters, and Greg Nicholson, a government informant who testified against Honken on federal drug trafficking charges. Honken also murdered Terry DeGeus, who Honken thought might also testify against him, by beating him with a bat and shooting him. In 2004, a jury in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Iowa found Honken guilty of numerous federal offenses, including five counts of continuing criminal enterprise murder, and he was sentenced to death.

The federal death penalty has been upheld by U.S. federal courts, supported on a bipartisan basis by Congress, and approved by Attorneys General under both Democratic and Republican administrations as the appropriate sentence for the most egregious federal crimes.

International law does not prohibit capital punishment, and each country—and in the case of the United States, each state in the union as well as our federal government—may make its own choice on this matter. The U.S. judicial system provides protections to ensure capital punishment is only imposed and carried out subject to extensive constitutional and legal protections and requirements, and after exhaustive appeals at both the federal and state levels.

The United States reaffirms our longstanding position on the legality of capital punishment when imposed and carried out in a manner consistent with a state's international obligations. The United States is committed to complying with our Constitution, other domestic laws, and our international obligations, and we encourage other countries that employ capital punishment to comply with their international obligations as well.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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