

# Jewish Statements on the Death Penalty

The following statements appear in "Religious Statements on the Death Penalty," a collection of readings compiled by the Rev. Jeffrey Spencer for "A Death Penalty Curriculum, which he developed.

**The American Jewish Committee** (165 E 56<sup>th</sup> Street, New York NY 10022 (212) 879-4500) adopted this statement on May 6, 1972 at its 66<sup>th</sup> Annual meeting:

## Statement on Capital Punishment

WHEREAS capital punishment degrades and brutalizes the society which practices it; and

WHEREAS those who seek to retain the death penalty have failed to establish its deterrent effect or to recognize the fallibility of criminal justice institutions; and

WHEREAS capital punishment has too often been discriminatory in its application and is increasingly being rejected by civilized peoples throughout the world; and

WHEREAS we agree that the death penalty is cruel, unjust and incompatible with the dignity and self respect of man;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the American Jewish Committee be recorded as favoring the abolition of the death penalty.

**The Rabbinical Assembly** (3080 Broadway, New York NY 10027 (212) 280-6000) – Referred from 1995 Convention Plenum

Whereas, the Torah teaches that all human beings are created in God's image;

Whereas, Jewish tradition upholds the sanctity of life;

Whereas, both in concept and practice Rabbinic leaders in many different historical periods have found capital punishment repugnant;

Whereas, no evidence has been marshaled to indicate with any persuasiveness that capital punishment serves as a deterrent to crime;

Whereas, legal studies have shown that as many as 300 people in this century have been wrongly convicted of capital crimes;

Therefore, be it resolved that The Rabbinical Assembly oppose the adoption of death penalty laws and urge their abolition in states that have already adopted them;

That the Rabbinical Assembly urge the enactment of laws that mandate that some capital crimes be punishable by life imprisonment without parole;

That the Rabbinical Assembly offer support and speak out on behalf of the victims of violent crime and their families;

That the Rabbinical Assembly encourage its members to send this resolution to their appropriate elected officials.

**Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Commission on Social Action** (633 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, 7<sup>th</sup> Floor, New York NY 10017 (212) 650-4160)

## Opposing Capital Punishment

We believe it to be the task of the Jew to bring our great spiritual and ethical heritage to bear upon the moral problems of contemporary society. One such problem which challenges all who seek to apply God's will in the affairs of men, is the practice of capital punishment. We believe that in the light of modern scientific knowledge and concept of humanity, the resort to or continuation of capital punishment either by a state or by the national government is no longer morally justifiable.

We believe there is no crime for which the taking of human life by society is justified, and that it is the obligation of society to evolve other methods in dealing with crime. We pledge ourselves to join with like-minded Americans in

trying to prevent crime by removal of its causes, and to foster modern methods of rehabilitation of the wrongdoer in the spirit of the Jewish tradition of tshuva (repentance).

We believe, further, that the practice of capital punishment serves no practical purpose. Experience in several states and nations has demonstrated that capital punishment is not effective as a deterrent to crime. Moreover, we believe that this practice debases our entire penal system and brutalizes the human spirit.

We appeal to our congregants and to our co-religionists, and to all who cherish God's mercy and love, to join in efforts to eliminate this practice which lies as a stain upon civilization and our religious conscience.