

7th World Congress Against the Death Penalty

Video Message by Richard Branson

Hello everybody

It's a great privilege to address the 7th World Congress Against the Death Penalty.

As you know, I have long advocated for the universal abolition of the death penalty. I consider it a barbaric and inhumane practice that deserves no place in modern society. But while there has been consistent progress in ending capital punishment around the world over the last decades, executions continue in far too many countries. And more often than not, those executions are the result of arbitrary and unfair trials lacking due process and other basic protections under the law. There's no question the death penalty is a deeply flawed and deeply immoral punishment. And against what many of its proponents argue, it fails to deliver justice or act as a deterrent against crime. To make things worse, recent developments in the Philippines and Sri Lanka show that the death penalty continues to be used as a political bargaining chip around the world, particularly during the election season when political leaders seek to bolster their crime fighting credentials. It brings to mind the words my friend Salil Shetty, the former secretary general of Amnesty International. "Strong leaders execute justice, not people", Salil said, and I couldn't agree more.

But the last year has also seen positive developments. I think I speak for us all in welcoming the Malaysian government's plan to abolish the death penalty, and Iran's removal of the sentence for a number of drug-related crimes.

Thankfully, I see more and more businesses waking up to the need to speak out on these issues, and I commend companies like Lush who have taken the lead in bringing the fight against the death penalty to a wider audience.

My opposition to the death penalty is at its heart, a moral opposition, but I can also see other compelling reasons why businesses should get involved. From the perspective of an entrepreneur and an investor I think capital punishment is a strong indicator of a country's approach to governance, to fairness and the rule of law. It also tells a lot about misguided priorities and the lack of fiscal responsibility.

While the moral argument against the death penalty alone should be strong enough, these are good reasons why business leaders everywhere should become global advocates for universal abolition.

It's time that the businesses in collaboration with civil society and abolitionist governments step up to deliver a concerted collective effort that will end the use of the death penalty once and for all.

In my heart I know the death penalty is on its way out and I like to think the generation of my grandchildren will one day view the thought of killing a fellow human being in the name of justice as absurd and offensive. And without the tireless work of each and every one of you, that world won't become a reality. So I thank you all for your tireless and often difficult work, and wish you all a productive meeting over the coming days. I for one, is on your side.

Cheers !