

‘Practical tools and tips for advocacy, possible alliances and links between the abolitionist movement and the women's rights movement’

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Introduction

In the face of inequality and deep discrimination against women across the globe, women began to organize themselves in groups and associations to promote their interest and I daresay to protect themselves against discrimination/marginalization. They had realized that any real progress would come when they pushed their own agenda. This culminated in the formidable women rights movement across the globe as we know it today. These very courageous women have become a voice and indeed a force that must be reckoned with. Having successfully led and still leading various important campaigns, advocacy and legislative reforms, the abolitionist movement can definitely learn from their experience. This presentation will therefore focus on how abolitionists can leverage on this unique experience.

One of the practical ways of highlighting the conditions of women facing the death penalty is to develop an alliance with women’s rights movement.

Women’s rights groups have highlighted various issues pertaining to women but never have they focused on the conditions of women on death row. This however can be changed by how well abolitionists can engage with such groups.

This can be done in the following ways:

- **Advocacy visits:** Organization of Advocacy visits to women rights organizations and leaders of women’s rights groups in our various countries to present specific conditions of women on death row. Abolitionists can use and even share the report from Cornell centre on the Death Penalty World Wide: *“Judged for More Than Her Crime: A Global Overview of Women Facing the Death Penalty”*, to highlight these issues. It’s important to also highlight peculiar challenges of women in prisons and on death row in the particular country and to include local statistics. Communication tools like pamphlets summarizing issues relating to women on death row and impact on their families and children can be developed and distributed at such advocacy visits. Abolitionists can take the great work done by Cornell forward by producing country reports focusing on this particular issue and to update the report on annually basis. Having up to date information is crucial to carry out advocacy actions.

The broader objective of such visit should be to sensitize women groups on issues relating to the death penalty gently providing points on why the death penalty is not a solution. This will go a long way in dissuading women groups who often seek the

death penalty for gender based violence. This is particularly true in Nigeria where some women's group have called for the death penalty to be introduced as a punishment for rape. This in turn will help avoid widening of the scope of the death penalty in countries where it is still in use and also to see the impact of death penalty on women on death row.

- **Legislative advocacy:** Women rights groups in various countries have developed expertise in legislative advocacy as a means of influencing laws and policy reforms on issues of interest to them. It will therefore be important to learn from their experience in legislative advocacy and leverage on any mechanisms set in place within this movement for political lobbying or legislative advocacy. For example, women rights group in Nigeria set up a liaison office at the National Assembly to enable them effectively engage from within the legislative house. Experts were employed in this office to study the entire dynamics of legislation and monitored bills that came up at the Assembly to ensure they supported those within their interest and opposed those against their interest. The unit also identified specific parliamentarians to be lobbied to champion women's rights at the legislative house. They also facilitated security passes for thousands of women groups who attended the public hearings on relevant bills. This office was instrumental to the passage of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act into law (VAPP), a major milestone and success for women's rights advancement in Nigeria in 2015. Collaboration with such unit has been very useful in monitoring bills presented to the National Assembly prescribing the death penalty for some offences in Nigeria.
- **Collaboration on specific cases:** Partner and involve women's rights groups in legal cases of women facing the death penalty. As a lawyer, I am passionate about using symbolic cases to advocate for abolition. The case of Wasilu Tasiu is a great example of how fruitful such collaboration could be. This case involves a child bride who was alleged to have killed her husband on April 5, 2014 at the age of 14. She was alleged to have administered poison to her 35 year old husband and 3 of his friends. ASF France collaborated with her defence counsel from the women's rights group: FIDA by providing a legal opinion, offering expert advice and sharing its experience in handling a case with similar facts (Maimuna Abdulmumini's case) the previous year before the ECOWAS Court of Justice. Both cases involved child brides accused of killing their husbands as minors therefore raising issues of early forced marriage which is of interest to many women groups and minors facing the death penalty which is of clear interest to abolitionists. The prosecutor eventually decided to drop the charges against Wasilu Tasiu after a lot of wide spread coverage of the case from local and international media.¹

¹ <https://www.voanews.com/a/nigerian-child-bride-accused-of-killing-husband-to-be-freed/2815935.html>

ASF France lawyers had also provided technical support to the defence counsel of Amina Lawal, a young lady sentenced to death by stoning in 2002 for adultery and for conceiving a child out of wedlock under the sharia law in Katsina state, Nigeria. The death sentence was overturned on appeal.

Since many women on death row cannot afford the services of a lawyer, abolitionist groups can partner with women organizations specialized in the provision of legal aid to provide effective legal representation to women facing the death penalty. If well represented at the trial stage, many women will avoid the death row completely.

- **Involvement in international women's day/ campaigns :** Abolitionists can leverage on international women campaigns dates such as 16 days of activism to organize events to highlight issues relating to women on death row or facing the death penalty. According to the UN Women, the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence Campaign is a time to galvanize action to end violence against women and girls around the world². It usually holds from 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, to 10 December, Human Rights Day. Abolitionists can for example organize events or talk shows in partnership with women rights groups during this period to highlight the conditions and specific issues relating to women on death row or facing the death penalty.

Similarly abolitionists should consider involving the women movement in activities planned to mark the world day against death penalty on October 10 as well as during future world or regional congresses against the death penalty.

- **Social media engagements:** Social media has also become a formidable and important tool in creating or raising awareness on any issue. Abolitionists can commit to tweeting about the conditions of women on death row during specific events.
- **Capacity building:** Abolitionists organisations who provide trainings should also consider involving women groups in such training activities on the death penalty as a way of building their understanding of issues relating to the death penalty.

² <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/take-action/16-days-of-activism>