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UN calls for death penalty abolition

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17th November, 2007

THE ARTICLE

A United Nations committee has voted for an immediate worldwide freeze on the use of the death penalty. A total of 99 countries voted in favor of a suspension of capital punishment, while 52 opposed the proposal and the remaining 33 nations did not vote. Those who campaigned against the death penalty said the abolition would "contribute to the enhancement and progressive development of human rights." They said capital punishment has not been a deterrent for crimes and many innocent people are still put to death by mistake. British ambassador to the UN Sir John Sawers said the vote showed that international opinion has changed in the past decade: "We now have a global coalition and I think it's an important sign that the death penalty is increasingly unpopular and is seen as unreliable," he said.

The vote followed two days of heated and at times bad-tempered discussions. Singapore, the USA, China, Syria and Libya were among those wanting to keep the death penalty. Singapore's ambassador Vanu Gopala Menon was very vocal in his support of it. He was angry at the European Union because it voted for a ban on capital punishment. He accused the EU of improperly linking the death penalty with human rights and said it was imposing its "values" on the rest of the world. He blasted the EU for trying "to force through a resolution that a significant number of other countries do not agree with." He argued that countries have a "right to determine the legal measures and penalties which are appropriate for their societies, including the death penalty for the most serious crimes".

WARM-UPS

1. PUNISHMENT: Walk around the class and talk to other students about different kinds of punishments. Change partners often. After you finish, sit with your original partner(s) and share what you found out.

2. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words from the article are most interesting and which are most boring.

committees / voting / the death penalty / human rights / global coalitions / heated discussions / ambassadors / being vocal / imposing one's values

Have a chat about the topics you liked. Change topics and partners frequently.

3. TWO-MINUTE DEBATES: Debate these arguments about the death penalty with a partner for just two minutes. Change partners often. Student A agrees with the first argument, Student B, the second.

- a. All killing is wrong. Vs. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.
- b. It saves taxpayers' money. Vs. No price can be put on human life.
- c. The death penalty stops crime. Vs. Murders happen with or without it.
- d. The death penalty goes against human rights. Vs. So does multiple murder.
- e. Mistakes are made. Innocent people die. Vs. No system is perfect.
- f. The death penalty gives society the message that killing is OK. Vs. No way.
- g. It provides closure for victims' families. Vs. That's a poor reason to kill someone.
- h. Life in prison is better. Vs. Life in prison means life watching TV, reading and chatting.

4. DEATH PENALTY METHODS: In pairs / groups, talk about the following methods of capital punishment that are used around the world. What are the worst things about each method?

- hanging
- guillotine
- firing squad
- stoning
- lethal injection
- beheading
- electrocution (electric chair)
- gas chamber

5. DEATH PENALTY: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the death penalty. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

6. QUICK DEBATE: Students A think the death penalty should be banned worldwide; Students B think individual countries should be able to decide whether or not to have the death penalty. Debate this with your partners. Change partners often.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- | | |
|---|-------|
| a. The UN has banned the use of the death penalty around the world. | T / F |
| b. 33 countries voted against the abolition of the death penalty. | T / F |
| c. Many countries believe the death penalty does not deter crime. | T / F |
| d. International opinion towards the death penalty has changed. | T / F |
| e. The discussions at the UN were, in general, good-natured. | T / F |
| f. Singapore's ambassador spoke strongly in favor of abolition. | T / F |
| g. Singapore's ambassador was very angry with the European Union. | T / F |
| h. The ambassador said countries needed to decide for themselves. | T / F |

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|----------------|------------------|
| 1. freeze | a. strengthening |
| 2. abolition | b. alliance |
| 3. enhancement | c. decide |
| 4. deterrent | d. ending |
| 5. coalition | e. stormy |
| 6. heated | f. outspoken |
| 7. vocal | g. suspension |
| 8. imposing | h. scolded |
| 9. blasted | i. obstacle |
| 10. determine | j. forcing |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| 1. an immediate worldwide freeze on | a. deterrent for crimes |
| 2. in favor of a suspension | b. through a resolution |
| 3. the enhancement and progressive | c. of capital punishment |
| 4. capital punishment has not been a | d. bad-tempered discussions |
| 5. We now have a global | e. with human rights |
| 6. heated and at times | f. development of human rights |
| 7. Menon was very vocal | g. coalition |
| 8. improperly linking the death penalty | h. measures and penalties |
| 9. He blasted the EU for trying to force | i. the use of the death penalty |
| 10. a right to determine the legal | j. in his support |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words into the gaps in the text.

A United Nations committee has voted for an _____ worldwide freeze on the use of the death penalty. A total of 99 countries voted in _____ of a suspension of capital punishment, while 52 opposed the proposal and the remaining 33 nations did not vote. Those who campaigned _____ the death penalty said the abolition would "_____ to the enhancement and progressive development of human rights." They said capital punishment has not been a deterrent for _____ and many innocent people are still _____ to death by mistake. British ambassador to the UN Sir John Sawers said the vote showed that international opinion has changed in the past decade: "We now have a _____ coalition and I think it's an important sign that the death penalty is increasingly unpopular and is seen as _____," he said.

global
favor
contribute
unreliable
immediate
put
against
crimes

The vote followed two days of _____ and at times bad-tempered discussions. Singapore, the USA, China, Syria and Libya were _____ those wanting to keep the death penalty. Singapore's ambassador Vanu Gopala Menon was very _____ in his support of it. He was angry at the European Union because it voted for a ban on capital punishment. He accused the EU of improperly _____ the death penalty with human rights and said it was imposing its "values" on the rest of the world. He _____ the EU for trying "to _____ through a resolution that a significant number of other countries do not agree with." He argued that countries have a "right to _____ the legal measures and penalties which are appropriate for their _____, including the death penalty for the most serious crimes".

societies
among
blasted
force
linking
heated
determine
vocal

LISTENING: Listen and fill in the spaces.

A United Nations committee has voted _____ worldwide freeze on the use of the death penalty. A total of 99 countries _____ suspension of capital punishment, while 52 _____ and the remaining 33 nations did not vote. Those who campaigned against the death penalty said _____ "contribute to the enhancement and progressive development of human rights." They said capital punishment has not _____ crimes and many innocent people are still put to death by mistake. British ambassador to the UN Sir John Sawers said the vote showed that international opinion has changed _____: "We now have a global coalition and I think it's an important sign that the death penalty is increasingly unpopular and _____," he said.

The vote followed two days of _____ bad-tempered discussions. Singapore, the USA, China, Syria and Libya were among those _____ death penalty. Singapore's ambassador Vanu Gopala Menon was very vocal in his support of it. He was angry at the European Union because _____ on capital punishment. He accused the EU of improperly linking the death penalty with human rights and said it was _____ on the rest of the world. He blasted the EU for trying "to force through a resolution that a significant number of other countries do not agree with." He argued that countries _____ determine the legal measures and penalties which are appropriate for their societies, including the death penalty _____ crimes".

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words **'death'** and **'penalty'**.

death	penalty

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • immediate • opposed • contribute • deterrent • opinion • sign 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • heated • wanting • angry • force • determine • serious
--	---

STUDENT DEATH PENALTY SURVEY

Write five GOOD questions about the death penalty in the table. Do this in pairs. Each student must write the questions on his / her own paper.

When you have finished, interview other students. Write down their answers.

	STUDENT 1 _____	STUDENT 2 _____	STUDENT 3 _____
Q.1.			
Q.2.			
Q.3.			
Q.4.			
Q.5.			

- Now return to your original partner and share and talk about what you found out. Change partners often.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a) What did you think when you read the headline?
 - b) What are your feelings after reading the article?
 - c) Do you agree with the death penalty?
 - d) Why do you think so many countries voted for the death penalty?
 - e) Do you think capital punishment is a deterrent to crime?
 - f) Is there a very strong link between the death penalty and human rights?
 - g) What is the history of capital punishment in your country?
 - h) Do you think the death penalty is similar to murder?
 - i) Is it OK to have the death penalty if 0.0001% of those sentenced to death are totally innocent?
-

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a) Did you like reading this article?
- b) Do you think most of the world will oppose the death penalty a decade from now?
- c) What do you think countries said to each other in the bad-tempered discussions?
- d) Why do you think the USA is so in favor of the death penalty while it also sees itself as a champion of human rights?
- e) Do you think the EU imposes its values on the rest of the world?
- f) Is the Singaporean ambassador correct in saying each country has to decide whether or not it wants the death penalty?
- g) What questions would you like to ask someone on Death Row?
- h) What questions would you like to ask an executioner?
- i) Did you like this discussion?

LANGUAGE

CORRECT WORD: Put the correct words from a–d below in the article.

A United Nations committee has voted (1) _____ an immediate worldwide freeze on the use of the death penalty. A total of 99 countries voted (2) _____ favor of a suspension of capital punishment, while 52 opposed the proposal and the remaining 33 nations did not vote. Those who campaigned (3) _____ the death penalty said the abolition would "contribute to the enhancement and progressive development of human rights." They said capital punishment has not been a (4) _____ for crimes and many innocent people are still put (5) _____ death by mistake. British ambassador to the UN Sir John Sawers said the vote showed that international opinion has changed in the past decade: "We now have a global (6) _____ and I think it's an important sign that the death penalty is increasingly unpopular and is seen as unreliable," he said.

The vote followed two days of heated and at (7) _____ bad-tempered discussions. Singapore, the USA, China, Syria and Libya were among those (8) _____ to keep the death penalty. Singapore's ambassador Vanu Gopala Menon was very (9) _____ in his support of it. He was angry at the European Union because it voted for a ban on capital punishment. He accused the EU of improperly (10) _____ the death penalty with human rights and said it was imposing its "values" on the rest of the world. He blasted the EU for trying "to force through a resolution that a significant (11) _____ of other countries do not agree with." He argued that countries have a "right to determine the legal (12) _____ and penalties which are appropriate for their societies, including the death penalty for the most serious crimes".

- | | | | | |
|-----|---------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 1. | (a) for | (b) with | (c) by | (d) to |
| 2. | (a) for | (b) in | (c) on | (d) to |
| 3. | (a) opposed | (b) opposite | (c) again | (d) against |
| 4. | (a) deterring | (b) deter | (c) deterrent | (d) determine |
| 5. | (a) to | (b) for | (c) by | (d) with |
| 6. | (a) collision | (b) condition | (c) coalition | (d) competition |
| 7. | (a) time | (b) times | (c) timed | (d) timely |
| 8. | (a) wants | (b) want | (c) wanted | (d) wanting |
| 9. | (a) vocalist | (b) vocal | (c) vocals | (d) vocal cords |
| 10. | (a) linking | (b) link | (c) linked | (d) links |
| 11. | (a) numerical | (b) numbers | (c) numeral | (d) number |
| 12. | (a) measure | (b) quantity | (c) measures | (d) quantities |

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information about countries that have and countries that do not have capital punishment. Talk about what you discover with your partner(s) in the next lesson.

3. DEATH PENALTY: Make a poster about the death penalty. Include information on the methods different countries use, and what opposition groups say about capital punishment. Show your poster to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all include similar things?

4. MAGAZINE ARTICLE: Write a magazine article about someone who is on Death Row but is innocent. Include imaginary interviews with the person and the judge who sentenced him/her to death.

Read what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Write down new words and expressions.

5. LETTER: Write a letter to the Singaporean ambassador. Ask him three questions about the death penalty. Give him three pieces of advice on how to keep Singapore safe without capital punishment. Read your letter to your partner(s) in your next lesson. Your partner(s) will answer your questions.

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

a. F b. F c. T d. T e. F f. F g. T h. T

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|----------------|------------------|
| 1. freeze | a. suspension |
| 2. abolition | b. ending |
| 3. enhancement | c. strengthening |
| 4. deterrent | d. obstacle |
| 5. coalition | e. alliance |
| 6. heated | f. stormy |
| 7. vocal | g. outspoken |
| 8. imposing | h. forcing |
| 9. blasted | i. scolded |
| 10. determine | j. decide |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| 1. an immediate worldwide freeze on | a. the use of the death penalty |
| 2. in favor of a suspension | b. of capital punishment |
| 3. the enhancement and progressive | c. development of human rights |
| 4. capital punishment has not been a | d. deterrent for crimes |
| 5. We now have a global | e. coalition |
| 6. heated and at times | f. bad-tempered discussions |
| 7. Menon was very vocal | g. in his support |
| 8. improperly linking the death penalty | h. with human rights |
| 9. He blasted the EU for trying to force | i. through a resolution |
| 10. a right to determine the legal | j. measures and penalties |

GAP FILL:

UN calls for death penalty abolition

A United Nations committee has voted for an **immediate** worldwide freeze on the use of the death penalty. A total of 99 countries voted in **favor** of a suspension of capital punishment, while 52 opposed the proposal and the remaining 33 nations did not vote. Those who campaigned **against** the death penalty said the abolition would "**contribute** to the enhancement and progressive development of human rights." They said capital punishment has not been a deterrent for **crimes** and many innocent people are still **put** to death by mistake. British ambassador to the UN Sir John Sawers said the vote showed that international opinion has changed in the past decade: "We now have a **global** coalition and I think it's an important sign that the death penalty is increasingly unpopular and is seen as **unreliable**," he said.

The vote followed two days of **heated** and at times bad-tempered discussions. Singapore, the USA, China, Syria and Libya were **among** those wanting to keep the death penalty. Singapore's ambassador Vanu Gopala Menon was very **vocal** in his support of it. He was angry at the European Union because it voted for a ban on capital punishment. He accused the EU of improperly **linking** the death penalty with human rights and said it was imposing its "values" on the rest of the world. He **blasted** the EU for trying "to **force** through a resolution that a significant number of other countries do not agree with." He argued that countries have a "right to **determine** the legal measures and penalties which are appropriate for their **societies**, including the death penalty for the most serious crimes".

LANGUAGE WORK

1 - a 2 - b 3 - d 4 - c 5 - a 6 - c 7 - b 8 - d 9 - b 10 - a 11 - d 12 - c