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for a world without the death penalty  
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Death sentence had been legalized by the British Empire by enacting the Penal Code for our country (then Ceylon) as far back in 1883 while ours was under British domination. Although it had been implemented quite often, there remains a de facto moratorium since 1976. Our law requires the assent of the President to execute the death penalty, in addition to the court's verdict. But none of the Presidents signed any death warrant since 1977.

We have adopted a system to commute the death sentence of an offender into an ordinary incarceration after a substantial period is spent in the prison depending on his good behavior. Since 2006, we have voted for the periodical resolution of the United Nations brought in every two years time for the extension of the moratorium on the execution of the death penalty, except the last one. We have decided to vote in favor of the said resolution scheduled to be tabled in this year too.

Regrettably, we underwent a period of turbulence of about 3 decades due to the civil war waged by the world's most brutal terrorist organization then prevailed, named LTTE ( Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) which was fighting to divide the country. Although the civil war was over in 2009, as it would have been the natural phenomena, society has been prone towards a vulnerability due to the illegal influx of weapons into the civil society. Drug mafia was the other menace that crept into the society whereas rehabilitation of the drug addicts has become a huge burden cast upon the Government.

As a result, it could be observed that there is a sharp increase of the crime rate in the recent past in our country and the people by and large are much alert and concerned on it at present. Three months ago there was an exhaustive debate in our Parliament as to whether the capital punishment shall be implemented or not, in which the members displayed a mixed reaction. It is apparent that the swaying public opinion on it also creates an uncertainty about the issue concerned.

Before the European invasion into the Indian Ocean, our societies were shaped and moulded on the principles of the Concept of Oriental Dhamma (righteousness) which had been replaced by the principles of the Concept of Justice with the introduction of the western judicial administration system during the colonial ruling ( Sri Lanka for 443 years 1505-1948). The administration of justice which evolved within the scope of the Occidental Concept of Justice in adjudicating criminal cases is based upon the principles of Hammurabi's Code of Law written by the King of Babylonia (6th) in the 18th Century BC, (39 centuries ago)

whereas the elements of vengeance has gradually overwhelmed the features of benevolence in our legal system too.

Principles of Buddhism, the religion of the majority of the country, fundamentally focus on the measures to be adhered to for the prevention of the commissioning of crimes and significantly concerned about the methods of rehabilitation of offenders with the objectives of getting them back to the society as corrected persons. Although the Buddhism, the Catholicism, the Hinduism and the Islam, the four religions practiced by the people in our multi-religious and multi-ethnic society do not intermeddle with the State governance, but their teaching in general is inclined towards a society without a capital punishment.

People also rather confused on the issue due the shilly-shallying attitudes of the various think tanks in many quarters of the world. Basically the death penalty could imposed on the offenders convicted for murders and drug related offenses. At present there are about 500 persons so convicted in our prisons. Although a substantial percentage of our people are for the abolition of the death penalty, their minds are tormented about the organized crimes such as underworld killings and mass scale drugs peddlers which could be considered the obstacle on the way forward for the abolition of death penalty.

It is appropriate to mention here that in addition to the protracted civil war prevailed, there were criticism about the despotic ruling during the recent past, which we overturned by electing a new President and a new Government in the last year. Our foreign relations has been fortified at present than never been in the history with the adventure of new National Unity Government which we formed for the first time in the country and it is dedicated for good governance, transparency and accountability. It is conceded nationally and internationally that we are marching forward towards the achievement of people's aspirations by upholding the democratic values and norms which include the rule of law, independence of the judiciary, protection of fundamental human rights, media freedom to mention a few.

Of course we are aware that we are obliged not to leave any stone unturned and to explore every avenue towards the upliftment of our nation. This prestigious International Conference of the Ministers of Justice, which is being held in this historic Holy City of Rome, that is considered as the fountain of the modern democracy will keep help us to positively analyse the theme of "A World Without Death Penalty" and thereby to usher the dream of every one on this earth by having the guarantee and the assurance for his or her "Right to Life".

Thank you