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STATEMENT ON  
THE DEATH PENALTY IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Delivered by Ambassador Steffen Kongstad to the Permanent Council  
Vienna, 14 May 2020

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I am speaking on behalf of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, and Norway.

On 23 March, the State of Colorado moved beyond its governor imposed moratorium on the death penalty, and signed abolishment into law. This made Colorado the 22nd state in the United States of America to abolish the death penalty. This is a welcome step towards abolishing the death penalty in the United States.

We are encouraged by the fact that three additional states retain their governor imposed moratoria on executions. However, the remaining 25 states, as well as the federal government and its military, maintain the death penalty in law and in practice. In 2020, five executions have been carried out in the United States.

We oppose the death penalty in all cases and without exception. We consider the death penalty to be a cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment, incompatible with human rights and human dignity. It is also irreversible. In retaining the death penalty, states risk perpetuating the miscarriage of justice. The inherent risk of mistake in all criminal justice systems sometimes leads to wrongful conviction of innocent people. The death penalty leads to their execution. Moreover, it is well documented that capital punishment does not itself deter crime.

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More than two out of three countries worldwide have abolished the death penalty by law or in practice. In 2018, the United Nations adopted a resolution on a moratorium against the death penalty with a record high number of states voting in favour. The vote demonstrated that the world is moving away from the death penalty.

We continue to call on the two participating States that retain the death penalty in practice, Belarus and the United States of America, to suspend all executions, take immediate, further steps towards abolition, and join our efforts to free our region of the death penalty.

Thank you