



Highlights from Reprieve 2016

Stop the Lethal Injection Project (SLIP)

Our Stop the Lethal Injection Project (SLIP) recognised that by cutting of the supply of FDA-approved drugs to US executions chambers, executions would begin to halt – giving potential Supreme Court challenges on the constitutionality of the death penalty the space needed to succeed. This year Pfizer became the final FDA-approved manufacturer to block their sale to death rows. This lack of access to drugs for lethal injection has resulted in the lowest number of US executions since 1991, while public support for the death penalty in the US fell below 50% for the first time ever

At the end of 2015, US executions dropped from 35 the previous year to just 28. And 2016 has seen execution rates dropped off 32% compared to the previous year.; this time last year, the US had executed 25 people compared to 17 people so far in 2016, with only 3 more executions scheduled between now and the end of the year.

Even if the US executes every person currently scheduled to die this year, 2016 will have witnessed a 29% reduction in executions from 2015 and a staggering 43% reduction in executions from 2014. Both 2015 and 2016 recording the lowest number of US executions since 1991. If any of these prisoners are granted reprieves or execution stays, this decrease will be even more substantial. Lethal injection is now a vanishing method of execution; this year 85% of States that retain the death penalty will not have carried out executions – with executions being limited to just 5 States. Furthermore, 82% of all lethal injections took place in just 2 of the 31 States that retain the death penalty on the books: Georgia and Texas.

MENA (Middle East and North Africa): Acquittals in UAE

Since February 2016, Reprieve's death penalty team has been working on the cases of two British nationals detained in the UAE on drugs related charges, a death eligible offence in the country. Shortly after taking the case we ensured we were liaising with our clients' family and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to put together a complete picture of the circumstances behind their arrest, and advised the families on how they should go about instructing counsel, as good counsel is critical for achieving good outcomes in the region. In April and again in June, we visited them, firstly in prison and then to attend a hearing in their trial. We spent a considerable amount of time carrying out investigation into the cases: collecting criminal records, school transcripts, and medical records, whilst also pursuing character references from individuals who knew them prior to detention. We further briefed the relevant members of the UK parliament to ensure they were aware of the situation and were able to properly support them. On October 18th both men were acquitted during their sentencing hearing – an incredible result for two clients facing a possible death penalty in a region where such wins are few and far between.

Malawi

Since October 2014 Reprieve has worked with the Malawi Human Rights Commission and partner organisations to ensure that 200 people entitled to have their unconstitutional mandatory death sentence reviewed receive a fair hearing. In a huge administrative and logistical effort involving all the actors in Malawi's drastically under-resourced criminal justice system, over 100 new sentences have been handed down since February 2015, when the judiciary began to hear cases. Since February 2015 87 people have been granted new sentences that result in immediate release or have been immediately released – for example where they had been sentenced to death as juveniles or where there is overwhelming evidence of innocence. 19 people have been resentenced to determinate sentences which will see them released in the future - no one has been re-sentenced to death or life imprisonment.



The overwhelming majority of prisoners have been released to communities where community sensitisation has been conducted by paralegals and Reprieve Fellows and the community has expressed willingness and desire to receive the prisoner back. At least 16 people have been identified as being children at the time of the commission of the offence for which they were convicted and sentenced to death. Evidence of their juvenility has been presented to and considered by the courts, resulting in many cases in their immediate release.

Guantánamo Bay

Reprieve has been at the forefront of both the fight to close the US detention facility at Guantánamo Bay and challenges to the abuses carried out there. Our persistent investigative, litigation and media work has ensured that Guantánamo and its remaining 60 detainees have been kept on the political agenda and in public consciousness. We continue to work through political, diplomatic, legal and media channels to secure the release of our clients; to seek accountability from the perpetrators of their abuses; and to assist in their resettlement and reintegration. We currently represent eight clients illegally detained at Guantánamo, having taken on a number of new clients this year.

Since last year, we have secured the release of three of our cleared clients bringing our total to 77 freed Guantánamo detainees – more than any other law firm or NGO – whilst significantly raising awareness of the inhumane conditions experienced by those detained at the facility.

Reprieve has received much praise from those involved in the Periodic Reviews Boards held at Guantánamo Bay; these boards are designed to assess whether or not detainees can be cleared for transfer. Reprieve supports both our own clients through this process and have recently assisted seven other detainees and their legal teams (with one more scheduled in the near future) to make their case for transfer.

In April, Bashir Nasir Ali al-Marwalah – who the board admitted was held on mistaken charges was cleared for transfer. Bashir’s lawyer immediately contacted us to say:

“I had the chance to speak with Bashir yesterday, and he is, of course, thrilled with the news. I wanted to note that the Board specifically referred to the “extensive letters of support to include offers to assist with his integration in a new country upon transfer” as a factor that it considered in making this decision. Thank you, and Reprieve, for playing a role in getting Bashir cleared. I am confident that he has a bright future ahead of him when he is finally transferred”.

Life after Guantánamo (LAG)

We have also continued with our innovative Life After Guantanamo Project (LAG). Since its inception in 2009, and with the support of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, LAG has provided legal, social and psychological support to 109 former detainees and their families, helping them to rebuild the pieces of the shattered lives and go on to live productive, fulfilled and peaceful lives (LAG has a 0% recidivism rate). This programme recognises that getting our clients out of Guantánamo was only half of the fight. This year we supported the resettlement of Mohammad Sa'id S Bin Salman and Samir al Hassan Moqbel to Oman, the latter of whom captured global attention in April 2013 when Reprieve channelled his voice into a New York Times op-ed “Gitmo Is Killing Me” (January 2016); and Mohsen Aboassy.