



Position Statement

Torture, death penalty and participation by nurses in executions

ICN Position:

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) strongly affirms that nurses should play no voluntary role in any deliberate infliction of physical or mental suffering and should not participate, either directly or indirectly, in the preparation for and the implementation of executions. To do otherwise is a clear violation of nursing's ethical code of practice.

The nurse's primary responsibility is to those people who require nursing care. Nurses have a duty to provide the highest possible level of care to victims of cruel, degrading and inhumane treatment, and should speak up against and oppose any deliberate infliction of pain and suffering.

While ICN considers the death penalty to be unacceptable, clearly the nurse's responsibility to a prisoner sentenced to death continues until execution.

ICN urges its member national nurses associations (NNAs) to lobby for abolition of the death penalty; to actively oppose torture and participation by nurses in executions; and to develop mechanisms to provide nurses with confidential advice and support in caring for prisoners sentenced to death or subjected to torture.

ICN pledges to take appropriate action and urges NNAs and individual nurses to do the same in support of nurses who become victims of torture, cruel treatment or even death for upholding the professional ethical conduct and for their work in defending human rights.

ICN believes that all levels of nursing education curricula should include: recognition of human rights issues and violations, such as torture and death penalty; awareness of the use of medical technology including lethal injections for executions; and recognition of the nurse's right to refuse to participate in executions.

Background

Violations of human rights are pervasive and scientific advances have brought about sophisticated forms of torture. ICN supports the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and advocates upholding the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Istanbul Protocol on Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment¹.

¹ Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (The Istanbul Protocol) Submitted to the: United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 9 September 1999

International
Council of Nurses

3, place Jean-Marteau
CH -1201 Geneva • Switzerland
Telephone +41 (22) 908 0100
Fax +41 (22) 908 0101
e-Mail : icn@icn.ch
Website : www.icn.ch

/over...

The ICN Code of Ethics for Nurses states that *...the fundamental responsibility of the nurse is to promote health, prevent illness, to restore health and to alleviate suffering*. However we recognise that nurses are sometimes called upon to perform physical examinations before prisoners' interrogation and torture, to attend torture sessions in order to provide care, and/or to treat the effects of torture.

Efforts to regulate and 'humanise' the death penalty or even to 'medicalise' it have led to contradictory legal and ethical problems.

Adopted in 1998

Reviewed and revised in 2003 and 2006

(Replaces previous ICN Positions "Nurses and Torture", adopted 1989 and "Death penalty and participation by nurses in execution" adopted 1989).

Related ICN Positions:

- Nurses and human rights
- Nurses' role in the care of detainees and prisoners
- Rights of children
- Towards elimination of weapons of war and conflict

The International Council of Nurses is a federation of more than 130 national nurses associations representing the millions of nurses worldwide. Operated by nurses and leading nursing internationally, ICN works to ensure quality nursing care for all and sound health policies globally.