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## Media release

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### **Australian Lawyers for Human Rights calls on Government to do more to oppose the death penalty in our region following the execution of Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran.**

“Australian Lawyers for Human Rights (ALHR) is deeply saddened to hear of the execution by firing squad of Mr Andrew Chan and Mr Myuran Sukumaran,” said Nathan Kennedy, President of ALHR.

“Our thoughts are with their families and loved ones. These young men had been genuinely rehabilitated and demonstrated an understanding of the criminal nature of their acts and the tragic impact of illicit drugs on Indonesian society. The belief that we should respect the inherent dignity and value of human life is the foundation of all human rights and their executions are a seriously retrograde step at a time when there is a trend towards abolition of the death penalty in many regions of the world.”

“Whilst ALHR recognises that every country has the right to approach domestic criminal justice issues in a sovereign manner, the death penalty is inconsistent with international human rights law,” said Mr Kennedy.

“The taking of life is far too absolute and irreversible a measure for the State to impose, even when backed by legal process - a process which in this case has been cast into serious doubt by the recent allegations made by the former lawyer of the pair, Muhammad Rifan.”

“It is a fundamental human right that every human being has an inherent right to life, and that this right should be protected by law. Since 2007, the United Nations General Assembly has passed five further resolutions calling for a moratorium on the death penalty,” said Mr Kennedy.

By ratifying the *Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR, aiming at the abolition of the Death Penalty*, Australia has committed itself to opposing the death penalty. The United Nations Human Rights Committee has stated that where countries have abolished the death penalty, they have an obligation not to expose a person to the real risk of its application. This means that Australia should ensure our mutual assistance and agency assistance arrangements reflect Australia's commitment to abolishing the death penalty.

There is little evidence to suggest that the death penalty is effective in deterring drug related crimes or reducing drug use. Extensive studies have showed that criminals are deterred more by an increased likelihood of apprehension than by an increase in the severity of their punishment. For example, while executing prisoners for drug trafficking at an alarming rate between 2003 and 2006, Singapore did not experience a decline in drug trafficking, and drug use in fact rose,” Mr Kennedy said.

“Today’s grave news from Indonesia underscores the importance of ALHR’s call on the Australian Government to take a consistently stronger stand against the death penalty in all countries, under any circumstances, and for all peoples regardless of their nationality.”

“Australia’s position in the Asia Pacific, where mandatory death penalties are retained by many of our closest neighbours, means the Government is uniquely placed to take on a leadership role in advocating for the abolition of the death penalty in the region.”

ALHR calls on the Australian Government to strengthen its position on the death penalty following the executions of Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran. We can and should do more on a regional and international level to oppose its use in any country in any circumstances.

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**ALHR has been campaigning along with AACP (Australians Against Capital Punishment) and Lee and Christine Rush for a number of years against the death penalty in Indonesia and the welfare of the Bali 9.**

*ALHR was established in 1993 and is a national network of over 2600 Australian solicitors, barristers, academics, judicial officers and law students who practise and promote international human rights law in Australia. ALHR has active and engaged National, State and Territory committees and a secretariat at La Trobe University Law School in Melbourne. Through advocacy, media engagement, education, networking, research and training, ALHR promotes, practices and protects universally accepted standards of human rights throughout Australia and overseas.*

