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Introduction

As 2006 came to a close, the use of the death penalty in the United States was at a historic low, according to a report from the Death Penalty Information Center. The number of executions, death sentences, and inmates on death row have all decreased over the past several years, and public opinion is gradually shifting toward a preference for life without parole over the death penalty.

2006 was also a year in which victims' family members who oppose the death penalty served on legislative study commissions, testified before major hearings, and were featured in large-circulation newspapers and magazines. These are all examples of a slow but significant shift in the deeply entrenched cultural assumption that anyone who loses a family member to murder will automatically support the death penalty.

Worldwide, this was a year in which yet another country – the Philippines – decided to abolish the death penalty, and it was notable that a victim's family member was one of the lawmakers speaking out in favor of abolition. As well, the UN Human Rights committee criticized the United States's use of the death penalty and recommended that the U.S. place a moratorium on capital sentences, with the goal of abolishing the death penalty entirely.

Meanwhile, 2006 marked the second year of operation for Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights, an organization that brings together all types of survivors to declare that the death penalty, a profound human rights violation, has no place in a just society. This year's annual report demonstrates that MVFHR has already become an integral part of the movement against the death penalty and for victims.

U.S. Program

Policy Work

Because survivors of murder victims are commonly assumed to favor capital punishment, the voices of survivors who *oppose* the death penalty are in demand whenever the issue is under review or debate. In 2006, MVFHR members testified before a special U.S. Senate hearing, “Examination of the Death Penalty in the United States,” and before the New Jersey study commission that later recommended abolition of the death penalty in that state. MVFHR members met with lawmakers in Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, Maryland, New York, Illinois,

Virginia, and Wisconsin, wrote op-ed pieces and letters to the editor, gave interviews to print and broadcast journalists, and spoke out in connection with specific cases where a death sentence was at stake – most notably the federal trial of Zacarias Moussaoui.

Organizationally, we were active members of several groups and coalitions that come together to discuss strategies for opposing the death penalty: the Ad Hoc Death Penalty Network (a coalition of state and national groups), the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty affiliates, the Northeast Regional Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, and a working group of abolitionists and attorneys thinking about how to reduce the number of death sentences in the United States.

Public Education

Voices of victims who oppose the death penalty help move the minds and hearts of people who are considering the issue. Ongoing public education is a central part of our organization's work, and during 2006 members spoke at schools, universities, churches, conferences, and other gatherings. Several members participated in speaking tours on the death penalty, including the Virginia Journey of Hope, Texas Alternative Spring Break, and a series of public events organized by New Jerseyans for Alternatives to the Death Penalty. As well, members spoke out on the steps of the United States Supreme Court during the fast and vigil commemorating the 30th anniversary of reinstatement of the death penalty in the United States.

In addition to publishing two issues of our newsletter, *Article 3*, in 2006 we developed a new public education and membership outreach tool: an online gallery of victims' stories, featuring photos of victims and their family members, summaries of the case and of the family members' abolition work, and direct quotations articulating the family members' reasons for opposing the death penalty, all in accessible "gallery pages" that can be viewed online or printed out for distribution to policymakers and other audiences.

Training Abolitionists about Victims and the Death Penalty

Anti-death penalty arguments are more persuasive, and less likely to be dismissed by pro-death penalty (or undecided) audiences, if they do not come across as focusing only on the suffering of the offender. One of MVFHR's ongoing contributions to the death penalty abolition movement is to provide guidance and training about victim-sensitive messaging, organizing strategy, and outreach. In 2006 we formalized an agreement with New Yorkers Against the Death Penalty (NYADP) to provide expertise, training, and logistical support for their new Victims' Outreach Coordinator. We served as consultants to NYADP

“A vague focus on executions as the potential source of closure for families too often shifts the focus away from other steps that could be taken to honor victims and to help victims’ families in the aftermath of murder.”

– from MVFHR member testimony before the U.S. Senate, February 2006

throughout the year and conducted a training workshop for the board and staff of the organization.

We also helped to organize an NCADP Affiliate conference call dedicated to the question, “How can the abolition movement become more victim-centered?”, and we offered guidance, based on our experience doing individual case work, to the working group on reducing death sentences, mentioned above.

“No Silence, No Shame” Project

Following the successful launch of MVFHR’s No Silence, No Shame: Organizing Families of the Executed project in October 2005, that project continued to be a major focus throughout 2006. After conducting interviews with families of the executed during the spring and summer months, we released a report called *Creating More Victims: How Executions Hurt the Families Left Behind* on December 10th (International Human Rights Day) 2006. The report, which includes a foreword from Amnesty International USA Director Larry Cox, demonstrates that families of the executed are victims according to the Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power. MVFHR’s report is the first publication to situate a discussion of families of the executed in a human rights and victims’ rights context. With the help of several colleague organizations (see below), we distributed advance copies of the report to death penalty and human rights activists, victims’ advocates, mental health professionals, child welfare advocates, attorneys, and others with a stake in the issue, and we will continue to disseminate the report and arrange public speaking opportunities in the coming year.

“In the contentious death penalty debate, they are a group that usually goes overlooked. Family members of the condemned haven't committed the crimes that landed their loved ones on death row. But they often feel punished anyway, by a society that sometimes shuns and vilifies them, by a grief that few understand.”

-- *Associated Press*,
December 23, 2006

Working with Colleague Organizations

As noted elsewhere, MVFHR worked with international, national, and local groups to amplify the voices of murder victims’ family members and families of the executed within the death penalty debate. As well, we collaborated with Amnesty International USA, the American Civil Liberties Union Capital Punishment Project, and the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty to distribute our *Creating More Victims* report. We provided written material for a special series of NCADP’s “Abolish the Death Penalty” blog and for Amnesty International USA’s Faith in Action Resource Guidebook, and we released a joint statement, with the Journey of Hope and Murder Victims’ Families for Reconciliation, during National Victims’ Rights Week 2006. We were asked to present one of the Death Penalty Information Center’s Thurgood Marshall Journalism Awards, and we participated throughout the year in the Death Penalty Caucus of the U.S. Human Rights Network.

Media

From the *Chicago Tribune* to the *Austin American-Statesman*, from the *Baltimore Sun* to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, MVFHR members' work against the death penalty and for victims was featured in newspaper articles throughout the U.S., and when members have spoken in other countries, newspapers have covered those events as well. Letters to the editor and stories about our members were featured in such periodicals as *Psychology Today* and *Mother Jones*. Members were interviewed by a variety of print, radio, and television journalists, and an *Associated Press* story about the release of our *Creating More Victims* report was picked up by several large-circulation newspapers, including *USA Today*.

In addition to coverage by journalists, our work was featured in an afterword to the new book *Dead Wrong: Violence, Vengeance, and the Victims of Capital Punishment*, by Richard Stack, and noted in the book *Back from the Dead: One Woman's Search for the Men Who Walked Off America's Death Row*, by Joan Cheever.

New Voices

Through our distinct membership, MVFHR is able to offer an anti-death penalty perspective from people in groups commonly assumed to favor capital punishment. For example, in 2006 we published an interview with a Texas member whose brother, a correctional officer, had been killed by an inmate serving a sentence of life without parole. Clearly articulated opposition to the death penalty from a family member in this situation is a valuable and persuasive counterpoint to familiar pro-death penalty arguments.

Also through our distinct membership, we are able to draw attention to particular – and often previously unconsidered – harm that the death penalty causes. For example, in our newsletter and in the *Creating More Victims* report we have written about the experience of children who are related both to a murder victim and to the person executed for that murder. Cases of domestic violence, in which one parent is executed for the murder of the other parent, leave children doubly victimized, and these stories raise new awareness about the scope and nature of the harm that an execution can cause.

International Program

Though MVFHR's focus during our three-year start-up period is on work within the United States, members are already bringing our message to audiences out-side the U.S. and making connections with international victims' family members and activists. MVFHR speakers addressed the Lifelines conference in England, the Cities of Life conference and other abolition events in Italy, and several audiences in Malawi, Africa. We offered help, support, and materials to the family member of a murder victim in Japan who is working to create a network there, and we reached

“All across the United States, family members of murder victims are protesting executions, testifying in support of bills that would abolish the death penalty, and educating the public about the possibility of being both pro-victim and anti-death penalty.”

– from MVFHR's letter in *Mother Jones magazine*, May/June 2006

out to the family member of a murder victim in the Philippines and published a statement about his opposition to the death penalty.

At a New York gathering organized by September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows, members of MVFHR were able to meet and talk with people from around the world who have lost family members to terrorist violence. The connections we made there helped to lay the groundwork for the growth of our international membership and the further development of our work in countries outside the U.S.. In conjunction with this, we began the process of setting up an international advisory board, which we expect to establish officially in 2007.

As well, MVFHR continued to serve on the steering committee of the World Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, where we helped with planning for the 3rd World Congress Against the Death Penalty, to be held in Paris in 2007.

Organizational Development

Having achieved official recognition as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization at the end of 2005, we continued to build our organizational infrastructure throughout 2006. Board Treasurer Vicki Schieber, working from her DC-area home office, joined the staff in September by assuming responsibility for the maintenance of our membership database and other administrative tasks. Summer intern Sarah Wisely set up our central office in Massachusetts so that we are able to accommodate more staff as we grow. Our long-range planning committee, comprised of members of the board and staff, met at regular intervals throughout the year to develop a financial plan for the organization over the next three years. We continued to build our membership and donor lists, and added three new institutional funders to the list of those providing support for MVFHR's work.

Looking Ahead

Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights is based on the belief that executions do not achieve justice for victims and that the death penalty is, at heart, a human rights abuse rather than a criminal justice issue. Taken together, these two beliefs form a uniquely compelling message of opposition to the death penalty, which has fueled our organization's work throughout our successful first two years of operation. In the coming year, we intend to build on these successes in several specific ways. We will continue to distribute and present workshops on the *Creating More Victims* report; we will replicate, for other state organizations, the training on victim-sensitive abolition work that we offered to New York activists in 2006; we will work with national organizations to include victims' voices in the debate about executing people suffering from mental illness; we will add more member pages to our online gallery of victims' stories. We will work with national and international organizations to include victims' voices in the death penalty debate. In these and other ways we will continue to build MVFHR as a strong and effective voice for abolition of the death penalty.

“If executing those men would bring back my brother, I would be all for it. But it doesn’t – it just makes us guilty of the same crime. Why not rechannel our efforts into destroying the conditions of poverty, injustice, abuse, and neglect that breed men like those who murdered my brother?” – *Murder victim’s family member in the Philippines, quoted in MVFHR’s newsletter*

2006 Board of Directors and Staff

Bill Babbitt, member of the Board of Directors, has spoken publicly about the way the death penalty affects families of the executed since his brother was executed by the state of California in 1999. His story is told in the book *Capital Consequences* and in the documentaries *And Then One Night* and *A Question of Justice*. Babbitt has testified before legislative committees in Massachusetts and New Jersey and has addressed many college audiences about mental illness and the death penalty. He is currently involved in an initiative to promote legislation that would make it a mitigating factor in a capital case when a family member has turned the offender in to the police.

Jennifer Bishop-Jenkins, member of the Board of Directors, testified before the Illinois Governor's Commission on Capital Punishment and in the death penalty clemency hearings before the Illinois Prisoner Review Board. She has also spoken before state legislative committees and the Chicago City Council on issues of gun violence, crime prevention, and criminal justice reform. She is the head of the Million Mom March/Brady Campaign in Illinois. Her story was featured in the documentary *Too Flawed to Fix* and the book *Don't Kill in Our Names*. Because her sister was murdered by a juvenile offender, Bishop-Jenkins has been outspoken about the reasons for victim opposition to the juvenile death penalty in particular, and she was interviewed about her work with MVFHR by National Public Radio and other media following the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in the *Simmons* case.

Tamara Chikunova, Vice-Chair of the Board, is the founder and director of the Uzbekistan-based group Mothers Against the Death Penalty and Torture. Following her son's execution in Uzbekistan in 2000, Chikunova and the other members of her group have worked on dozens of individual death penalty cases and have joined Amnesty International in campaigning against the death penalty in Uzbekistan. Chikunova has addressed a European Bank of Reconstruction and Development meeting in Tashkent, received a Colombo d'Oro in Rome in 2004 for her human rights work, and led the effort to hold an international conference against the death penalty in Tashkent in December 2003, a conference that the authorities blocked only hours before it was due to begin. Chikunova and her colleagues continue to work against the death penalty in Uzbekistan despite regular threats and harassment.

Renny Cushing, Executive Director, whose father was murdered in 1988, is a lifelong social justice activist and a pioneer in the effort to bridge the death penalty abolition movement and the victims' rights movement. He has testified before the U.S. Congress and several state legislatures and addressed hundreds of audiences in other venues in the U.S. and abroad regarding victim opposition to the death penalty. A former two-term New Hampshire lawmaker, Cushing sponsored a measure that would have abolished the death penalty in that state. He is the co-author of *Dignity Denied: The Experience of Murder Victims' Family Members Who Oppose the Death Penalty* and *I Don't Want Another Kid to Die: Families of Victims Murdered by Juveniles Oppose the Juvenile Death Penalty*. He is Vice-Chair of the board of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty and also serves on the board of the American Society of Victimology and the steering committee of the World Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty.

Reverend Walt Everett, member of the Board of Directors, serves on the board of Pennsylvanians United Against the Death Penalty and speaks several times a month to audiences around the state. He

has testified before the Joint Judiciary Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly and spoken at numerous events surrounding Connecticut's efforts to carry out its first execution in 45 years. Everett's son was shot and killed in 1987, and after a long struggle Everett was able to reconcile with the man convicted of the murder, to the extent that the two now speak together at prisons, universities, and churches. Reverend Everett has been active in several restorative justice organizations, including the Restorative Justice Task Force of the Christian Conference of Connecticut (for which he has served as Chair) and the Hartford-based Board of Community Partners in Action.

Bill Jenkins, member of the Board of Directors, is the author of *What to Do When the Police Leave: A Guide to the First Days of Traumatic Loss*, which he wrote for other victims following the murder of his own son in 1997. Jenkins serves on the Cook County (IL) Juvenile Probation Department's Victim Advisory Board and, through the Virginia Institute of Forensic Science and Medicine, trains those who work with victims of crime. He regularly gives workshops for the National Organization for Victim Assistance, Compassionate Friends, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, and Parents of Murdered Children, bringing a dual focus on victims' rights and human rights.

Toshi Kazama, member of the Board of Directors, is a photographer who spent eight years gathering the images for "Youth of Death Row: A Photodocumentary Exploration." The documentary includes photos of 20 American youths on death rows across the country – photos that Kazama was able to take after being granted unprecedented access to the prisoners and the facilities – and portraits of the prisoner's family members, the victim's family members, the prison, the prison cemetery, the state's execution chamber, and the crime scene. Kazama has shown the documentary at universities, conferences, and other public forums in the United States, Japan, and Taiwan, and received considerable press coverage for the presentation and the discussions that follow.

Kate Lowenstein, Program Staff, is an attorney and social worker with five years of experience organizing and advocating for victims who oppose the death penalty. In 2004, Kate co-wrote *amicus curiae* briefs on behalf of victims' family members in two high-profile cases that were before the U.S. Supreme Court: *Schriro v. Summerlin* and *Roper v. Simmons*. In her work with MVFHR, Kate contributes expert knowledge about victims' rights issues and death penalty abolition work and keen sensitivity to the issues involved in working with victims and helping them to assert their rights and become effective spokespeople against the death penalty.

Robert Meeropol, member of the Board of Directors, is the younger son of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, who were executed by the United States government in 1953 for "conspiring to steal the secret of the atom bomb." In 1990 he founded the Rosenberg Fund for Children, which provides support to children of parents who have been harassed or jailed for their progressive beliefs. Meeropol is the author of the book *An Execution in the Family*, and he speaks widely against the death penalty, tracing the connection between the fight against Communism in the 1950s and the attacks on civil liberties and human rights in the current, post-9/11 era.

Bill Pelke, member of the Board of Directors, is the president and co-founder of "The Journey of Hope ... from Violence to Healing," an organization that hosts annual speaking tours led by murder victims' family members who oppose the death penalty. He is also the chair of the board of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty and a board member of Alaskans Against the Death Penalty, and he has spoken against the death penalty in numerous forums across the United States and in 10 other countries. Initially a supporter of the death penalty, Pelke eventually became involved in an international effort to spare the life of the 15-year-old girl who was sentenced to death for the murder of Pelke's grandmother. He continued to speak out against the juvenile death penalty up until the Supreme Court's recent ruling in the *Simmons* case. He has been interviewed for numerous radio, television, and magazine stories.

Financial Report

Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights (MVFHR) was founded in 2004 and was incorporated in the state of New Hampshire as a non-profit organization in 2005. MVFHR has received a determination letter from the Internal Revenue Service that it is a tax-exempt non-profit organization within the meaning of Section 501(c)3 of the Federal Tax Code.

Donations to MVFHR may be claimed as a deduction for charitable contribution purposes on federal tax returns. We are registered to receive online donations through the Network for Good.

A copy of our Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, and Financial Statements are available at guidestar.org, and our IRS Form 990 for 2006 will be available there in April.

MVFHR maintains an account at Bank of America. Deposits are made at branches in New Hampshire and Maryland. The Executive Director and the Treasurer regularly review the bank statements and cash flow and consult with the organization's finance committee via telephone conference calls.

The unaudited statements that appear on the following page show the organization's financial position as of December 31, 2006.

MVFHR is grateful for the support of the following foundations: Grassroots Exchange Fund, Maverick Lloyd Foundation, MCADP Fund, United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries Neighbors in Need Fund, Unitarian Universalist Fund for a Just Society.

Submitted by Vicki Schieber, MBA
Treasurer

Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights
Income & Expense
 January through December 2006

INCOME

Contributions Income	108,764.54
Grants	20,350.00
Interest, credits, rebates	323.09

Total Income **129,437.63**

EXPENSE

Bank Service Charges	347.72
Computer Equipment	2,598.97
Fees and Registration	150.00
Miscellaneous	307.00
Occupancy	700.00
Office Supplies	454.92
Payroll Expenses	58,428.37
Personnel	2,075.96
Postage and Delivery	5,185.54
Printing and Reproduction	15,385.33
Professional Fees	15,168.29
Program Expense	1,004.72
Supplies	400.52
Telecommunications	2,996.04
Travel	15,686.57

Total Expense **120,889.95**

Net Ordinary Income 8,547.68

Net
Income **8,547.68**

Balance Sheet as of December 31, 2006

Total Assets	18,797.05
Total Liabilities	12,759.55
Net	6,037.50

Equity

Opening Bal Equity	458.68
Retained Earnings	10,745.53
Net Income	<u>4,002.96</u>
Total Equity	<u>15,207.17</u>

