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MVFHR

2161 Massachusetts Ave
Cambridge MA 02140
617-491-9600
www.mvfhr.org
www.mvfhr.blogspot.com
info@murdervictimsfamilies.org

Introduction

A look back at 2007 shows several significant markers of a decline in support for the death penalty. The U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear a case that challenges the constitutionality of the current method of lethal injection, creating a de facto moratorium on executions throughout the U.S. while states await the court’s ruling; the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution calling for a global moratorium on executions; New Jersey passed a death penalty repeal bill, making it the first U.S. state in several decades to abolish the death penalty legislatively.

Headlines announcing these historic victories frequently included mention of victims’ families speaking out against the death penalty and challenging the idea that executions offer closure to a grieving family. Victims’ family members served on legislative study committees, testified before major legislative hearings, were featured in large-circulation newspapers and magazines, and collectively addressed thousands of listeners at schools, churches, conferences, rallies, workshops, and other gatherings.

2007 marked the third 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 continues to be 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. Providing an organizational context and affiliation for individual family members to express their opposition to the death penalty, and helping victims speak out against the death penalty in specific cases or at specific junctures in the debate, is a core part of MVFHR’s work.

In 2007, lawmakers at hearings in New Jersey, Montana, Maryland, Colorado,

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“The death penalty offers a false promise of closure to victims’ families who are led to believe that an execution will bring relief. ... The death penalty is a distraction from victims’ real needs, not a solution.”
—from MVFHR’s letter to the editor, which was published in several newspapers around the country after New Jersey voted to repeal the state’s death penalty, December 2007

Washington, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire heard testimony from MVFHR members, and in June, a Tennessee law created a Committee to Study the Administration of the Death Penalty and stated that one of the 16 members of the committee should be a representative appointed by MVFHR. In September, MVFHR officially appointed a Tennessee victim’s family member to the committee, and since then we have been working with the state group, the Tennessee Coalition to Abolish State Killing, to take advantage of this opportunity by participating in speaking events and other efforts to draw attention to victim opposition to the death penalty.

Organizationally, in 2007 we were active members of several groups and coalitions that came 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. As well, several of our members participated in a series of strategy sessions convened by the Funders Against the Death Penalty group, which culminated in a coordinated national plan to abolish the death penalty by 2025.

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 2007 members spoke to an array of audiences in a variety of venues. Examples include a gathering of students from all across Tennessee; a conference of black police officers; several church groups, one after the other, in an intense five-day speaking tour; a Massachusetts event commemorating the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti; a tour at California’s San Quentin prison – and many other school groups, church groups, conferences, and other gatherings.

We reached out to a new generation of activists by co-sponsoring and participating in the Anti-Death Penalty Alternative Spring Break, organized by Texas Students Against the Death Penalty. MVFHR members also participated in the annual Fast and Vigil in front of the U.S. Supreme Court and in the annual Journey of Hope speaking tour, held in Texas this year.

In addition to publishing two issues of our newsletter, *Article 3*, and continuing to develop our online Gallery of Victims’ Stories, we added a third component to our regular cycle of public education materials: the blog “For Victims, Against the Death Penalty,” which launched in early September. With posts several times a week, the blog presents our message of victim opposition to the death penalty through updates about our members’ work around the country, excerpts from

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their testimony, letters to the editor, op-ed pieces, and speeches, and summaries of relevant research and commentary.

“No Silence, No Shame: Organizing Families of the Executed” Project

Throughout the year, we continued to work to draw attention to the ways in which the death penalty harms families of the executed. After publishing our report *Creating More Victims: How Executions Hurt the Families Left Behind* in December 2006, we worked with colleague organizations to disseminate the publication to death penalty and human rights activists, victims’ advocates, mental health professionals, child welfare advocates, attorneys, and others with a stake in the issue. The report, which includes a foreword from Amnesty International USA Director Larry Cox, demonstrates that families of the executed are victims according to the UN Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power. It is the first publication to situate a discussion of families of the executed within a human rights and victims’ rights context.

2007 included two significant public presentations based on the material in *Creating More Victims*. The first, a workshop at the annual conference of the American Society of Victimology, introduced scholars of the victim experience to the idea that families of the executed are victims as well. The second, a panel presentation at the Third International Women’s Peace conference, brought the MVFHR message to activists from around the world. Two U.S. family members of the executed were joined on the peace conference panel by the founder of the Uzbekistan-based group Mothers Against the Death Penalty and Torture.

In another component of the No Silence, No Shame project, we worked with defense attorneys and mitigation specialists to explore the possibility of presenting testimony in capital trials about the potential effect of executions on the surviving family members. We view our involvement in this innovative and as-yet-untried mitigation strategy as part of a broader effort to reduce death sentences in key jurisdictions, which the anti-death penalty movement has identified as a priority.

“If we would use just one tenth of the money that’s spent on imprisonment and execution to have some prevention, if we had mental health treatment for anybody who needs it, these horrible, horrible crimes like my son committed would not happen.”
—from remarks made by a participant on an MVFHR panel, July 2007

Preventing Violence, Honoring Victims

Anti-death penalty activists often make the point that the time, money, and effort spent carrying out the death penalty could be better spent meeting the real needs of victims in the aftermath of violence. Many MVFHR members, in addition to working against the death penalty, devote themselves to providing support, information, and practical assistance to victims and their families. In a special “Preventing Violence” series that ran in our “For Victims, Against the Death Penalty” blog, we featured the work of several members who have founded, or work closely with, violence-prevention and victim-support organizations. We also

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reported on significant occasions during which MVFHR members were part of efforts to honor victims of violence, such as the presentation of the “Resolution in Support of the Victims and Families at Virginia Tech” and the annual “Remembering Victims of Homicide” service organized by victims’ groups in New York. As well, in an issue of our newsletter we published an article about the ways in which anti-death penalty organizations can engage in victim-support activities.

“We are expected to keep our sense of injury and rage whipped into a constant call for retribution, as if the only decent way to honor loss is to take another life, to create more brokenhearted families ...”

-- from an essay by an MVFHR member in a new book about victims and the death penalty

Our participation in events like the remembrance ceremony in New York is part of an effort to build bridges to victims’ organizations that do not necessarily have an explicitly anti-death penalty position. Toward that goal, we also promoted events connected with National Crime Victims’ Rights Week and participated in the annual National Organization for Victim Assistance conference and the National Victim-Offender Dialogue summit.

Working with Colleague Organizations

In 2007, as in our previous two years of operation, 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. Many, perhaps most, of the activities reported here are collaborative efforts to one degree or another. Whether we were working with a state group to organize victims’ testimony for a legislative hearing or joining with others in the delegation supporting the United Nations resolution, whether we were participating in strategy discussions or linking to stories of other groups’ related efforts, our work was closely connected to the work of other anti-death penalty activists in the U.S. and across the globe.

In several specific instances, we served as trainers to colleagues seeking to deepen their understanding of victim opposition to the death penalty. We held a training for capital defense lawyers at the National Legal Aid and Defender Association “Life in the Balance” conference and held another training, by teleconference call, for members of the U.S. Human Rights Network. We also confirmed plans to develop a Training Academy, with curriculum and materials, for use with affiliates of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (NCADP).

Media Work

“Families of Victims Reject the Death Penalty,” “State’s Death Penalty Debate Puts Families on Both Sides,” “Victims’ Relatives Added to Chorus of Opposition.” These and other similar headlines from 2007 showcase the increasing media recognition of victim opposition to the death penalty. In addition to giving interviews to members of the print and broadcast media, MVFHR members wrote op-ed pieces and letters to the editor and were featured in films examining specific aspects of the death penalty. Throughout the year we received frequent inquiries from U.S., European, and Asian journalists, and we were asked to provide background information for documentary filmmakers, such as those involved in creating the ACLU Freedom Files project, “Freedom to Live: The Death Penalty.”

International Program

In June we celebrated the launch of the first MVFHR affiliate outside the U.S.: the Japanese group Ocean, whose members are families of victims, families of inmates, and attorneys and other allies. A press conference and a speaking tour at the time of the launch led to some good publicity within Japan, and the Japanese group is gradually growing despite the enormous secrecy and shame surrounding victims and opposition to the death penalty in Japan.

We also participated in a speaking tour in Taiwan called “Victims, We Care,” delivering public presentations in several cities, and we worked with the Taiwan Alliance to End the Death Penalty to lay the groundwork for the development of an MVFHR group there. We became official members of the Asian Death Penalty Abolition Network (ADPAN) and continue to work with our Asian colleagues to oppose the death penalty in those countries.

Several MVFHR members attended the Third World Congress Against the Death Penalty, held in Paris in February. Members gave public talks, met with other victims' family members, death penalty abolitionists, and human rights activists from around the globe, gave interviews to members of the Asian, African, and European press, and marched through the streets of Paris with thousands of others calling for a worldwide end to the death penalty.

MVFHR members participated in public events on World Day Against the Death Penalty and spoke at events that were part of Cities for Life, an annual effort organized by the Italian Community of Sant Egidio, in which cities around the world join together to declare their opposition to the death penalty. This year over 700 cities participated.

In November, we joined with the Community of Sant Egidio, the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, and Amnesty International, and Death Penalty Focus to present the president of the United Nations General Assembly with a petition containing over five million signatures in support of the UN resolution calling for a world-wide moratorium on executions. MVFHR members and others in the delegation met with the president of the General Assembly, spoke at a press conference at the UN., and gave interviews to members of the international press.

“As survivors with a direct stake in the death penalty debate, and as people who believe in the value of basic human rights principles, we join today in the call for a worldwide moratorium on executions.” – *from MVFHR’s statement on World Day Against the Death Penalty 2007*

MVFHR Annual Report

Looking Ahead

Three years ago, the Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights board of directors sat around a meeting table after the organization's successful founding ceremony at the United Nations Church Plaza. The group discussed plans, hopes, and goals for the newly formed organization, and determined that the first three years would be viewed as a start-up period during which the organization would focus on building its infrastructure and establishing its core program. Now, at the conclusion of that three-year period, we are proud of our record of accomplishment and ready to build on these successes and take the organization into its next phase of growth.

We are looking ahead to a variety of projects and plans, including developing the Training Academy described above and collaborating with the National Alliance on Mental Illness to produce a report about the intersection between mental illness and the death penalty from the victim perspective. In order to increase the effectiveness of our work, we plan to develop state advisory boards, composed of active members who can represent MVFHR locally, reach out to new and prospective members, and keep the central office informed about local news and happenings. We will continue to collect and amplify the voices of victims opposed to the death penalty and work with colleague organizations to present these voices effectively within the death penalty debate.

As always, we will continue to put into action our belief that executions do not achieve justice for victims and that the death penalty is a violation of basic human rights. We remain extremely grateful to all who support our work.

2007 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 spoken at a press conference at the United Nations, testified before legislative committees in Massachusetts and New Jersey, and addressed many college audiences about mental illness and the death penalty..

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 works for the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence as the National Program Director for Victims and Survivors. 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.

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 serves on the board of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty and the steering committee of the World Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty.

Reverend Walter 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 states. He has testified before the Joint Judiciary Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly and spoken at numerous events surrounding the state'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: *Schrivo 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, Vice-Chair 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.

Sister Helen Prejean, member of the Board of Directors, is the author of *Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States*, which became an international bestseller and has been translated into 10 languages and made into a film that opened many people's eyes to the issues surrounding the death penalty. Prejean has witnessed five executions in her home state of Louisiana and today travels the world educating people about the death penalty. Her new book, *The Death of Innocents*, is dedicated to Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights.

Vicki Schieber, Treasurer, has been outspoken in her opposition to the death penalty since her daughter was raped and murdered in 1998. Vicki and her husband Sylvester actively opposed the death penalty for their daughter's murderer and subsequently testified in support of a moratorium and death penalty study commission bill in Maryland and for an abolition bill in Pennsylvania. They have published op-ed pieces about the death penalty in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Washington Post*, and their story is included in an NBC film on the death penalty sponsored by the Robert Kennedy Foundation. Vicki has long been active in leadership positions in non-profits dedicated to literacy and programs for elderly, disabled, and low-income residents of Washington, DC. She holds a Masters in Business Administration and served for many years as Executive Director of the Council on Employee Benefits in Bethesda, Maryland.

Susannah Sheffer, Program Staff, has developed numerous written materials about victim opposition to the death penalty, including *Dignity Denied: The Experience of Murder Victims' Family Members Who Oppose the Death Penalty* and *Creating More Victims: How Executions Hurt the Families Left Behind*, both of which were co-authored with Renny Cushing. She is the author of four books, and in her work with MVFHR she draws upon two decades of experience interviewing, writing, and editing.

Bonnita Spikes, member of the Board of Directors, has a long history of working for social justice, including work for the NAACP, the Coalition of Labor Union Women, the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, the Teamsters Black Caucus Women Committee, and the Washington, DC and Baltimore Metro Labor Councils. The wife of a murder victim, she has testified against the death penalty in Maryland and works as an organizer for Maryland Citizens Against Sentenced Executions (CASE), which does outreach to murder victims' and prisoners' families and conducts trainings on the death penalty for religious and other organizations.

Bud Welch, President and Chair, became an ardent spokesperson against the death penalty after his daughter, along with 167 others, was killed in the bomb blast that destroyed the Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City in 1995. Welch has testified before 22 state legislative bodies, the U.S. House Judiciary Committee, the Russian Duma, and the British and European Parliaments, and addressed groups at universities, law schools, and religious organizations across the U.S. and Europe. He serves on the board of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty and was a member of the board of the Oklahoma City National Memorial Foundation. For his work as an anti-death penalty activist, he has received several "abolitionist of the year" awards and other honors and been interviewed for numerous print and broadcast news 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 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 monthly telephone conference calls.

The unaudited statements that appear on the following pages show the organization's financial position as of December 31, 2007.

MVFHR is grateful for the support of the following foundations: Maverick Lloyd Foundation, Solomon Fund, United Methodist Board of Global Ministries.

Submitted by Vicki Schieber, MBA
Treasurer

12:29 PM
01/17/08
Cash Basis

**Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights
Profit & Loss
January through December 2007**

Jan - Dec 07

Ordinary Income/Expense

Income

Contributions Income	100,943.64
Grants	60,000.00
Total Income	160,943.64

Expense

Bank Service Charges	286.59
Computer Equipment	239.00
Dues and Subscriptions	80.00
Payroll Expenses	86,007.83
Postage and Delivery	12,505.80
Printing and Reproduction	15,636.27
Professional Fees	237.00
Program Expense	5,314.11
Rent	1,300.00
Supplies	393.69
Telecommunications	3,910.81
Travel	16,703.85
Total Expense	142,614.95

Net Ordinary Income **18,328.69**

Net Income **18,328.69**

Cash Basis

**Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights
Balance Sheet
As of December 31, 2007**

Dec 31, 07

ASSETS

Current Assets

Checking/Savings

Bank of America	24,661.81
Network for Good	80.00
Total Checking/Savings	24,741.81

Total Current Assets

24,741.81

TOTAL ASSETS

24,741.81

LIABILITIES & EQUITY

Liabilities

Current Liabilities

Credit Cards

MVFHR AMEX	263.90
Total Credit Cards	263.90

Other Current Liabilities

Payroll Liabilities	2,365.35
Total Other Current Liabilities	2,365.35

Total Current Liabilities

2,629.25

Total Liabilities

2,629.25

Equity

Opening Bal Equity

6,606.15

Retained Earnings

-2,822.28

Net Income

18,328.69

Total Equity

22,112.56

TOTAL LIABILITIES & EQUITY

24,741.81