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**Statement at the Press Conference of
The Illinois Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty
Springfield, IL**

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My name is Bob Gilligan. I am the Executive Director of the Catholic Conference of Illinois and the Public Policy Chair for the Illinois Conference of Churches.

During this time, Catholics and other Christians are observing Lent, and we are called to reflect on the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This time of Lent, with the culmination of the crucifixion of Jesus on Good Friday and His resurrection on Easter, is an appropriate time to call for the abolition of the death penalty to ensure that no innocent life may be taken.

In the 1994 Pastoral Letter *Confronting a Culture of Violence*, the US Bishops observed that our society is increasingly looking to violent measures to deal with some of our most difficult social problems. Violence is not the solution; it is the clearest sign of our failures. We cannot teach that killing is wrong by killing.

The death penalty only serves to perpetuate the cycle of violence in our society.

Human life is sacred and is to be respected and protected. Humans have no right to take a human life.

In calling for the abolition of the death penalty, we do not wish to diminish the harm caused by the evil actions of others. We understand that people have legitimate concerns and fears about violence and the frequency of heinous crimes in their communities. The families and loved ones of victims require our compassion and support, and we must help them heal, but the continued imposition of the death penalty, in light of available alternatives, only brings an illusion of justice. The use of the death penalty when there are other means to protect our society weakens the respect for all human life and diminishes the common good.

We have all been created in God's image and every life is to be respected. Those who inflict harm and commit crimes are to be held accountable. Yet we must also understand that human dignity is a gift of God and respect for life applies to all.

Please join us in calling for the abolition of the death penalty now.