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A Statement of the Roman Catholic Bishops of Massachusetts on the Death Penalty

The Boston Marathon Bombing trial is a painful reminder of the harm that impacts many people even beyond those who are killed or maimed by violent criminal acts. Given that the defendant, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, is being tried in federal court with the possibility of capital punishment, and that the Bishops have testified against capital punishment in the past, we feel it is fitting to clarify the Church's teaching regarding the use of the death penalty.

The Church has taught that the cases in which the execution of the offender is an absolute necessity are "rare, if not practically nonexistent."¹ The Church's teaching is further developing in recognition of the inherent dignity of all life as a gift from God. As Pope Francis has recently stated, "[The death penalty] is an offense against the inviolability of life and the dignity of the human person. When the death penalty is

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) § 2267

applied, it is not for a current act of oppression, but rather for an act committed in the past. It is also applied to persons whose current ability to cause harm is not current, as it has been neutralized – they are already deprived of their liberty.”²

The defendant in this case has been neutralized and will never again have the ability to cause harm. Because of this, we, the Catholic Bishops of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, believe that society can do better than the death penalty. As the Bishops of the United States said in their 2005 statement *A Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death*, “no matter how heinous the crime, if society can protect itself without ending a human life, it should do so.” We believe these words remain true today in the face of this most terrible crime.

Cardinal Seán P. O’Malley, OFM, Cap.
Archbishop
Archdiocese of Boston

Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V.
Bishop
Diocese of Fall River

Most Reverend Mitchell T. Rozanski
Bishop
Diocese of Springfield

Most Reverend Robert J. McManus
Bishop
Diocese of Worcester

² His Holiness Pope Francis, *Remarks to the International Commission Against the Death Penalty*, March 20, 2015.