

What will you do for the abolition movement this year? On Monday March 1, 2010 National Lawyers Guild student chapters across the country will collectively raise our voices to mark NLG Law Student Day Against the Death Penalty (SDADP). Please join us.

This year presents a rare opportunity for death penalty abolitionists. Those of us who have long expressed moral indignation at our nation's capital punishment laws have recently been joined by individuals and groups who are attacking the death penalty on theoretical, financial, and practical fronts. Here are some highlights from 2009 and early 2010:

- In what the *New York Times* dubbed a “tectonic shift in legal theory,” the American Law Institute, a group that established the theoretical framework for modern capital punishment in the early 1960s, abandoned its prior reasoning and cast doubt on whether legal procedures for a death sentence “are likely ever to meet basic concerns of fairness in procedure and outcome.”
- New Mexico became the second state (after New Jersey in 2007) to abolish the death penalty since 1976, when the Supreme Court reinstated capital punishment. Fifteen states now ban the death penalty.
- Fewer death sentences were issued in 2009 than in 2008. According to the Death Penalty Information Center, “around the country, death sentences have declined 60% since 2000 and executions have declined almost as much.”

While these developments represent the tremendous momentum that is gathering behind abolition, the bleak reality is that 3,297 people are still on death row. This jarring contrast with the positive recent developments presents us with an opportunity to make compelling arguments in favor of abolition to our colleagues in law school and our greater communities.

To help you generate ideas, this year's online packet—viewable at www.nlg.org/deathpenalty—includes a page of **Ideas for Action** as well as an accounting of what NLG chapters did last year; a **Yellow Pages** resource lists useful websites, organizations, and programs you can contact for speakers. The online packet also includes excerpts from the **Death Penalty Information Center's year-end report** and the **American Law Institute's Report on the Death Penalty**.

Finally, we have an update on the case Mumia Abu-Jamal, NLG Jailhouse Lawyer co-Vice President. On January 19, the Supreme Court remanded Abu-Jamal's case back to the Third Circuit, which had determined in 2003 that his case required a new sentencing hearing because of flawed jury instructions. While this ruling is a setback for Mumia, it must serve as a rallying cry for those who believe that the death penalty is morally indefensible.

Please remember to email me at membership@nlg.org with details of your chapter's plans for SDADP or any questions regarding organizing, media work, or anything else.

In solidarity,

Jamie Munro