

ABOLISHINGVoices of Victims Against
the Death Penalty**European Union**European Instrument for
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Mary Verzulli's 29 year old sister was one of eight women murdered by a serial killer in New York. She says she had never thought much about the death penalty until the District Attorney asked how she felt about it. "I couldn't imagine what, if anything, could lessen my pain or despair" she says, "But I knew it wasn't that." With her sister's killer serving life sentences, Mary's testimony is taken from a gallery of victims' stories displayed by Murder Victims Families for Human Rights.

Supported by the EU, the gallery puts real faces on victim opposition to the death penalty by presenting photos and statements of murder victims and survivors, challenging the common assumption that anyone who has lost a family member to murder is in favour of capital punishment.

The death penalty is a profound violation of human rights. Defying the notion that executions are the way to achieve justice or closure, MSVHR is involved in a worldwide movement to abolish the death penalty.

Testimony ranges from families affected by the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York to that of Hector and Susie Black, who told the sentencing judge they did not want the death sentence for the man who raped and killed their daughter in 2000, to Robert Meeropol, whose parents Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were executed for espionage in 1953 when he was six years old, accused of passing information about the atomic bomb – a decision that was and still is controversial.

Founder and Executive Director Renny Cushing's own father was killed by two shotgun blasts fired by a stranger. Already opposed to the death penalty before his father's murder, Cushing states: "For me to change my beliefs because my father was murdered would only give more power to his killers, for then they would take not only his life but also his main legacy to me: the values he instilled."