

Interview with Christiane Taubira on France 24

During the World Congress in Berlin, Christiane Taubira, former French Minister of Justice, member of ECPM and ardent abolitionist, answered questions from journalist Élizabeth Allain for France 24 television.¹



Christiane Taubira (Photo © Christophe Meireis)

[Extracts from the interview]

Élizabeth Allain: Thank you for giving us a few moments of your time to look back on this important event. We have just learned that a third protester, a “rioter” in the words of the Iranian regime, has been sentenced to death by the Iranian courts. I’d like to hear your reaction.

Christiane Taubira: Iran is one of the countries that persists in handing down death sentences. We are dealing with a regime, with theocratic authorities, and clearly, in this country with a great cultural and literary tradition, in this country with a thousand years of magnificent civilisation, the judicial institution often functions as the armed wing of a theocratic power that is obsessed with controlling and intimidating the population, that never stops imprisoning and sentencing people to death [...] and which clearly cannot tolerate this magnificent protest around the slogan “Woman, life, freedom”, which has

¹ France 24 is a French 24-hour international news channel broadcasting in French, English, Arabic and Spanish. Available in more than 180 countries, France 24 attracts 55 million viewers every week and its website is visited by an average of more than 18 million internet users every month.

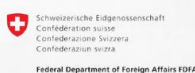
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been affecting and resonating with all of us around the world since the death of Jina Mahsa Amini, at the hands of the morality police.

We know that, unfortunately, we have failings in terms of international solidarity and that [although our civil societies have attempted to mobilise solidarity], at the level of institutions, that is to say our Heads of State and multilateral institutions, we note our powerlessness, we are unable to neutralise the abuses of this theocratic power and, in a way, we bear our share of the blame. [...]

É. A.: What are the possible levers? You have just mentioned the difficulty for states to make themselves heard by regimes such as Iran. This morning, the French Head of State denounced Iran's increasing aggressiveness, particularly towards France. He called for a return to calm, in what is an extremely delicate situation for him, given that seven French nationals are currently being held by the Iranian regime. That shows how difficult it is.

C. T.: Yes, it's undeniably a difficult situation. But clearly, the difficulty increases when we are in a situation of maximum tension. We have a diplomatic network that covers practically the entire planet and is very active and very determined, with a sense of diplomacy, resolve and constancy. But there is no doubt that with some governments it is impossible and sometimes derisory to engage in dialogue. Nevertheless, dialogue is the major and essential weapon of diplomacy. Obviously, the presence of our compatriots makes the situation delicate and calls for a great deal of effort and attention on the part of our representatives.

But we cannot let up [our efforts] and we are concerned about the situation of the French men and women detained or threatened in Iran. We are concerned about the situation of Iranians who are protesting, who care about democracy, who care about what Iran represents in the international consciousness, also as a great literary, democratic and civilisational power. We care about all these things, and we need to deploy a wealth of diplomacy and pressure in order to change a number of intolerable and untenable practices. In terms of our efforts to end the death penalty, Iran is, of course, one of our main targets.

É. A.: There are 51 countries, right now, that still have the death penalty. We are talking about Iran [...] but there are other states. China, a champion in this area, inevitably comes to mind. There is also Sudan, which recently sentenced a 20-year-old woman to death. It had been ten years since Sudan last sentenced a woman to death by stoning in this way. This is still a key issue and France is continuing to play a leading role in this area. You are taking part in this meeting in Berlin today. A French association, ECPM, Together against the Death Penalty, is organising the meeting. What is France's role? What is your role as a former Minister of Justice on an issue like this?

C. T.: You're absolutely right. There is also Saudi Arabia. There are other countries that still apply the death penalty. We can see that some countries are moving backwards, despite having adopted moratoriums on use of the death penalty and signing protocols. But it is true that we are making progress. We are making progress and we take heart from this progress. Once again this year, three new countries have abolished the death penalty, or at least removed capital punishment from their penal codes.

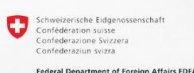
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Nevertheless, every day is a defeat for us. Every execution is a defeat for us. And it's true that France has always strongly supported this campaign, this struggle. And it's clear that ECPM – it's true that our governments are somewhat inconsistent – is a driving force behind this campaign for universal abolition. [...] And yes, this 8th World Congress in Berlin brings together delegations from every continent. We are making progress in Africa. It's difficult in Asia, but there are countries, heads of state and members of the International Commission against the Death Penalty who are very active. [...]

I repeat, every execution is a failure for us, but every country that makes a commitment is also a success. We are fighting with lucidity; we are fighting by building on our strengths. France must make use of its international prestige, of the international perception of its standing, of its commitment to human rights, of its commitment to high values, of the very meaning of the death penalty, which is anti-civilisation. And France must continue to fulfil this duty, which is what ECPM does by regularly holding these triennial congresses.

É. A.: [...] Is this the struggle that you are now pursuing as a left-wing woman politician?

C. T.: It's a long-standing allegiance. I stood alongside ECPM when it was set up in 2000. It's an association, an NGO, that I've worked with over the years, obviously with periods of absence, years when I was busy elsewhere. But it's an enduring allegiance. I was a preteen when I read Victor Hugo, Olympe de Gouges, Albert Camus, and of course speeches like those by Gambetta, Clemenceau, Jean Jaurès, Aristide Briand, those writers and French leaders. I was involved in the international campaign in support of Angela Davis, for example, and then twenty years later, for Mumia Abu-Jamal.

So, I was very strongly aware of the issue, but culture also played a part. A film like *Two Men in Town* (*Deux hommes dans la ville*) helped me to understand, when I was a student supporting the international campaign to save Angela Davis from the death penalty in the United States, that the death penalty was still in the French Penal Code and that executions were still carried out in France. And since then, of course, there have been many films that have raised my awareness. I'm thinking of Sidney Lumet's *Twelve Angry Men* and Iranian films such as Ali Abbasi's *Holy Spider* and Saeed Roustaei's *Just 6.5*. There's also a documentary about a cause I was involved in, *The State of Texas vs. Melissa*, by Sabrina Van Tassel.

So, I have this awareness [...]. I took part in international campaigns before I realised that I was concerned in the country of my nationality. And obviously, it's this battle being waged on a global scale that I am concerned about. I took it on as far as was possible as Minister of Justice. Today, I am putting all my enthusiasm, all my energy and all my strength, all my knowledge and all my ability into contributing to visibility, raising awareness and achieving universal abolition of the death penalty. And we are counting heavily on the new generations, who are very concerned about this issue.

Watch the full interview from 16 November 2022 on the France 24 website or by clicking [here](#)

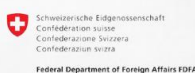
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