I would like to congratulate the organizers of this meeting, which represents an excellent opportunity to champion further the cause for the abolition of the death penalty.

Portugal has been a longstanding supporter of the abolition of the death penalty. We were one of the first countries in the world to abolish capital punishment and remain actively committed to its worldwide abolition.

Capital punishment represents an irreversible loss of the right to life and a gross violation of human rights. We must also not forget that the impact of the imposition or carrying out of the death sentence goes beyond the accused. For instance, the human rights of children of parents sentenced to death penalty or executed are also negatively affected. The States which retain this type of punishment must ensure that adequate protection and assistance mechanisms are in place.

On the specific topic of this meeting, I believe that regional organizations play a crucial role in the fight for the abolition of the death penalty. Countries from the same region have closer historical, social and cultural ties. For this reason, initiatives taken at the regional level are more likely to be accepted and understood by countries from the same geographical area. The important contribution of regional organizations in the fight for abolition of the death penalty should therefore be recognized and further explored.

Moreover, since the adoption of the first General Assembly resolution on the moratorium on death penalty in 2007, several regional and civil society organizations have kept the momentum by adopting their own initiatives. For instance, in 2009 the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights adopted a resolution calling on state parties to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights to observe the moratorium on the death penalty. In 2009, the OSCE adopted in the Vilnius Declaration a resolution on a moratorium on the death penalty.
On the 10th of October of this year, we will celebrate the European and World Day against the Death Penalty. The number of countries which have abolished capital punishment by law or in practice has been slowly but steadily increasing. Currently, more than two thirds of the countries in the world have eliminated this form of punishment. The increasing support for the General Assembly Resolution on the moratorium on the death penalty also demonstrates growing international support for this noble cause. We are further encouraged by reports of public discussion on the death penalty in retentionist countries.

In conclusion, I would like to seize this opportunity to call on all countries which retain capital punishment to establish an immediate official moratorium, with a view to abolition. The Universal Declaration of Human rights, adopted by the General Assembly in 1948, proclaimed everyone’s right to life. Sixty-five years later, much remains to be done and we cannot rest until universal abolition is achieved.