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Newsletter - February 2019

EDITORIAL



Dear reader

Assisted suicide is still prohibited by law in many countries. Free and responsible citizens continue to be patronised and prevented against their will from ending their suffering and life in a manner they personally consider dignified. Relatives and friends who respect the wish of a seriously ill person to die and who give him or her their support are still being treated as criminals.

Freedom of choice, self-determination and self-responsibility in life and at life's end: This is what DIGNITAS – To live with dignity – To die with dignity continues to work for internationally: in its political and legal work, in its daily advising of individuals seeking help and in preparing and providing assisted suicide for suffering individuals who have made a clear and well-considered choice and who are still denied this right in their home country.

Feel free to share our newsletter with other interested parties. You are also welcome to show support for our goals and international activities by [joining as a member](#) or by [making a donation](#).

Ludwig A. Minelli
Founder of DIGNITAS
Secretary General

Sandra Martino
Board Member

Silvan Luley
Board Member

COUNTRY UPDATE

USA

Hawaii legalizes medically assisted suicide

On 1 January 2019, the "Our Care, Our Choice Act", approved in April 2018, came into effect in



the US State of Hawaii. With this new Act, it is now possible for individuals in Hawaii to end their suffering and life safely and legally, by self-administering the lethal medication.

[read more](#)



ITALY

Will Parliament heed the Constitutional Court's instruction?

On 30 January 2019, the Italian Parliament started the debate on a popular initiative on the liberalisation of assisted dying submitted in September 2013. The fact that the initiative has now been put on the agenda after more than five years is due to the Italian Constitutional Court, which, in October 2018, [read more](#)



SWITZERLAND

Swiss voters acknowledge importance of international human rights safeguards

On 25 November 2018, Swiss voters clearly rejected the popular initiative with the misleading title "self-determination initiative". The initiative, launched by the right-wing Swiss People's Party (SVP), had threatened to tear down international legal safeguards necessary to rectify court judgments that... [read more](#)

INSIDE DIGNITAS

Review 2018 and Outlook 2019

In 2018, the general advisory work and suicide attempt prevention remained an important part of DIGNITAS' activities. In the frame of its legal and political efforts, DIGNITAS wrote several submissions for consultations, and supported and accompanied court cases and political advances in Switzerland and beyond. On 17 May 2018, DIGNITAS – To live with dignity – To die with dignity celebrated its twentieth anniversary. The number of DIGNITAS' members increases continually, whilst the number of accompanied suicides remains stable. In 2019, DIGNITAS will continue to engage in work for suicide attempt prevention, a dignified life and dying, and for the protection of real freedom of choice in "last matters".

For more details, read our [media release of 15 January 2019](#).

Summary

Date of founding of the member society:	17 May 1998
Employees:	24
Members as of end of 2018:	9,000 (incl. DIGNITAS-Germany)
Accompanied suicides in 2018:	221 (one less compared to previous year)
Investment in international legal further development:	CHF 230,000
Minimum annual subscription 2019:	CHF 80
Membership fee for an accompanied suicide:	CHF 2,500 (exception: reduction / exemption)
Reduction and exemption of fees in 2018:	CHF 123,000
Donations in 2018:	CHF 74,800

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

...DIGNITAS' goal is to make itself unnecessary?

A man living in Canada, suffering severely after brain haemorrhage, had recently requested DIGNITAS to start the preparation procedure for an accompanied suicide. At the same time, he had requested access to assisted dying at home. In Canada, following a Supreme Court decision of 6 February 2015*, it is no longer against the law, under certain circumstances, for a doctor to help someone who is severely ill to end their life. The man's request was granted in Canada, and he did not have to make the journey to DIGNITAS in Switzerland for an assisted suicide.

Such cases, unfortunately, are still relatively rare. In many countries, assisted dying remains prohibited or limited to individuals who are in the late stage of terminal illness with an estimated life expectancy of six months or less, excluding numerous severely ill and suffering individuals from having a real choice.

While starting an organisation with the purpose of dissolving it may sound like a strange idea, this is exactly what Ludwig A. Minelli had in mind when founding DIGNITAS over 20 years ago. Helping suffering individuals residing abroad to die in Switzerland in a way they consider humane has never been a goal in itself: it

MOREOVER

DIGNITAS pioneer Peter Holenstein has passed away

On Friday, 18 January 2019, Peter Holenstein died in Zurich at the age of 72. He was one of the driving forces in founding DIGNITAS in 1998 and was in many ways associated with our organisation. With Peter Holenstein, DIGNITAS has lost a dear friend and companion, and an inquisitive and passionate explorer of the twilight zones of human existence.

Holenstein was an early and fervent supporter of assisted dying. In particular, he had always been convinced that talking about a death wish openly and knowing that there is a safe and painless option to end one's life at a time of one's own choosing helps many to actually live on. In the 1990s he held various functions at EXIT Deutsche Schweiz, Switzerland's biggest assisted dying organisation. He became the organisation's managing director in 1997. A year later, after losing a dispute with the EXIT board about broadening the organisation's scope to include the prevention of suicide attempts, he, together with a small group of supporters (DIGNITAS founder and general secretary Ludwig A. Minelli, at that time a legal advisor for EXIT Deutsche Schweiz, among them) helped to found DIGNITAS and ensure its operability. In later years, Holenstein was, among other tasks, responsible for the association's media

is simply a consequence of their lack of freedom of choice in the country where they live.

It was and continues to be the main purpose of DIGNITAS – To live with dignity – To die with dignity to help remove legal prohibitions and discriminatory restrictions to assisted dying in countries everywhere in the world. Once the desired freedom has been achieved worldwide and integrated into the public health system, DIGNITAS will no longer be needed.

** Carter vs. Canada. DIGNITAS was involved in the case, and in September 2015, the "External Panel on Options for a Legislative Response to Carter v. Canada" visited DIGNITAS.*

monitoring.

In 2003, Holenstein conducted and published the study "Der Preis der Verzweiflung - Über die Kostenfolgen des Suizidgeschehens in der Schweiz" (The Price of Despair - On the Cost of Suicide and Suicide Attempts in Switzerland). The study showed that suicides and suicide attempts, even with very conservative estimates of the number of suicide attempts, generated annual costs of at least Swiss Francs 2.4 bn.

Holenstein was also a well-known journalist and author of a number of books. Death was a subject that intrigued him early and which would never let go of him for the rest of his life. His early journalistic assignments took him to conflict areas such as South Vietnam, India, Bangladesh, Israel, Lebanon and South America. In 1974, the first of his books to be published was "Lieber Luzifer: Totentexte - tote Texte" (Edizioni Casa poetica, Termine TI, 86 p.), in which he collected poems, aphorisms and short reflections about death. He published many more books, mainly in the field of criminology. His investigations into various murder cases led, among other, to the release of a Swiss citizen in Italy, who had been in prison for 24 years before proven innocent and being pardoned thanks to Holenstein's insistent and meticulous work. Later on, in Switzerland, the case of a man who was serving a long prison sentence for killing five children was reopened in a spectacular trial: Holenstein's investigations had uncovered new evidence which proved the man's innocence in one of the five murder charges.

In his late years, Peter Holenstein lived in an Italian village near the Swiss border, where he ran, together with his wife, an animal shelter.

"Cemeteries are the auditoriums of human feelings and emotions. They differ from modern sports facilities only in that they do not have floodlights. Since death for most people is something dark and lying in the black, its playing field is illuminated by candles at the most".

Peter Holenstein

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