

## **Italian radical politician and rights 'warrior' Marco Pannella dead**

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**Rome:** Marco Pannella, civil rights campaigner and founder of Italy's Radical Party, who played a key role in campaigns to legalise divorce and abortion in the overwhelmingly Catholic country, died today, his party said. He was 86.

The maverick politician, who was an early supporter of Green party movements across Europe, a peace activist, friend of the Dalai Lama and fan of slain US civil rights leader Martin Luther King, had been seriously ill for some time and died in a Rome clinic where he was admitted on Wednesday.

The white-haired former member of the Italian and European Parliaments was one of Italy's most prominent public figures during a career spanning over 60 years, despite never serving in government.

He was known for his hunger strikes including a three-month one in 2011 aged 81 over Italy's overcrowded prison conditions, and another one on the same issue in 2014, protests that caused him to be hospitalised.

Pannella was famed for sit-ins and for promoting dozens of referendums including on abortion, legalising cannabis, the abolition of life imprisonment and hunting.

He founded the Radical Party, a bastion of Italian liberalism, in 1955, and formed political alliances on the left and the right, a versatility hailed as "post-ideological" by his supporters.

Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi joined tributes that poured in from across the political spectrum and hailed Pannella as a "lion of freedom".

"He was great political leader... who left his mark on this country's history with his sometimes controversial but always courageous battles," he said.

Pannella turned 86 on May 2 and received a telegram with birthday good wishes from Italy's President Sergio Mattarella.

A cigar-chomping life-long chain smoker, he had been diagnosed in recent years with tumours in his lung and liver and had frequent spells in hospital.

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