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Enduring injustice

A review of the death penalty in Asia (2020-2025)



A sign is seen during a protest against the death penalty at Speakers' Corner in Singapore on 3 April 2022. © Roslan RAHMAN / AFP

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ADPAN	Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BNS	Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita
BNSS	Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita
BSA	Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam
CCTV	Closed-circuit television
CrPC	Criminal Procedure Code
CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
ECPM	Ensemble Contre la Peine de Mort
EU	European Union
FIDH	International Federation for Human Rights
GSP	Generalized System of Preferences
HRCP	Human Rights Commission of Pakistan
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICT	International Crimes Tribunal
IRTF	Inter-Regional Task Force
KontraS	Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence
KMT	Kuomintang
LDDHI	League for the Defence of Human Rights in Iran
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MPS	Ministry of Public Security
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NHRCT	National Human Rights Commission of Thailand
NKDB	Database Center for North Korean Human Rights
NLD	National League for Democracy
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
POFMA	Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act
TJC	Transformative Justice Collective
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
US	United States
VCHR	Vietnam Committee on Human Rights

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1- INTRODUCTION: NO PROGRESS TOWARDS ABOLITION

Asia remains the region of the world with the highest number of countries (20) that retain the death penalty.¹ Capital punishment in Asia is used with varying degrees of frequency and severity, and across different political systems - dictatorships; one-party states; military-run governments; and multi-party democracies.

This report aims to provide an overview of the death penalty in the 20 retentionist countries in Asia during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The report covers key trends, developments, and figures from 1 January 2020 to 30 June 2025.

In those five-and-a-half years, Asia witnessed no significant shift towards the abolition of capital punishment. During that period, no Asian country abolished the death penalty while, in the rest of the world, eight countries abolished capital punishment.²

The application of the death penalty in Asia continued to be associated with violations of fundamental human rights, including: the right to life; the right to be free from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; the right to be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person; the right to a fair trial; and the right to non-discrimination.

2- KEY FINDINGS: A GLIMMER OF HOPE

While the death penalty remained widely used across Asia, the region also witnessed a few progressive trends and developments, which could be used by governments and civil society for a renewed push for the abolition of capital punishment [See below, *Chapter 3*].

Below are the report's key findings, based on the information contained in the country profiles and in the Annexes [See below, *Chapters 5* and *Chapters 6*].

- The number of *de facto* abolitionist countries decreased from six to five, as a result of the resumption of judicial executions in **Myanmar** after 34 years of *de facto* moratorium. This development demonstrated the fragility of *de facto* moratoria and the necessity for official moratoria to be implemented as a first step towards the complete abolition of the death penalty. The next three countries that could acquire the status of *de facto* abolitionist are **Indonesia** (2026), **Malaysia** (2027), and **Thailand** (2028).³
- **Malaysia** was the only country with an official moratorium on the use of the death penalty in force.
- Executions were reported in 11 countries: **Afghanistan; Bangladesh; China; India; Iran; Japan; Myanmar; North Korea; Singapore; Taiwan; and Vietnam**. No executions were carried out in nine countries: **Brunei; Indonesia; Laos; Malaysia; Maldives; Pakistan; South Korea; Sri Lanka; and Thailand**.

1 Six Asian countries (Bhutan, Cambodia, East Timor, Mongolia, Nepal, and the Philippines) have abolished the death penalty.

2 The eight countries that abolished the death penalty for all crimes were: Chad (2020); Kazakhstan (2021); Sierra Leone (2021); Papua New Guinea (2022); Central African Republic (2022); Equatorial Guinea (2022); Zambia (2022); and Zimbabwe (2024).

3 "*De facto* abolitionist" refers to a country that, while not having legally abolished the death penalty, has not carried out any executions for 10 years or more.

- In most of the retentionist countries in Asia, the death penalty remained in force for offenses that did not meet the threshold of “the most serious crimes” under international law.⁴ Such offenses included: political and economic crimes; drug-related offenses; religious offenses; and sex-related offenses.
- In many countries, secrecy characterized the use of the death penalty. In **China, Iran, Laos, North Korea, and Vietnam**, authorities suppressed or failed to disclose information related to the death penalty, including official data and statistics. In some countries, such as **Japan** and **Singapore**, lack of transparency surrounded executions, with no or very short notice given to death row prisoners and their families.
- New laws expanding the application of the death penalty - largely to include offenses that do not amount to “the most serious crimes” under international law - were introduced or enacted in seven countries: **Afghanistan; Bangladesh; India; Iran; Maldives; North Korea; and Sri Lanka**.
- Positive legislative developments were recorded in: **Indonesia** (possibility of commutation of a death sentence after 10 years); **Malaysia** (abolition of the mandatory death penalty for 12 offenses and complete abolition for seven offenses); **Pakistan** (abolition of the death penalty for four offenses); and **Vietnam** (abolition of capital punishment for eight offenses).
- With regard to children (individuals under the age of 18), **Sri Lanka** prohibited the imposition of death sentences on them, and the **Maldives** prohibited their executions and required the commutation of their death sentences. However, in **Iran** and the **Maldives**, courts sentenced to death individuals who were under the age of 18 at the time of the offense. In **Iran**, the execution of at least one child was reported.
- In **Afghanistan, Brunei, and Iran**, women were affected by the imposition of the death penalty as a result of laws that were discriminatory on the basis of gender. In **Thailand**, women were disproportionately affected by the imposition of the death penalty for drug-related offenses.
- In many countries, criminal proceedings in cases involving the death penalty were characterized by serious violations of fair trial rights and/or insufficient procedural safeguards for defendants.
- Conditions for death row prisoners were well below international standards, and, in many cases, amounted to torture or ill-treatment.
- The death penalty faced legal challenges in **South Korea** and **Taiwan**. In both jurisdictions, the Constitutional Court was petitioned to rule on the constitutionality of capital punishment. In **South Korea**, legislation was introduced in the National Assembly to abolish capital punishment.
- Positive court rulings were recorded in: **Bangladesh** (improved conditions for death row prisoners); **Japan** (retrial and acquittal of a long-time death row prisoner; compensation to a death row prisoner for violation of his right to privacy); **Malaysia** (commutation of death sentences following the abolition of the mandatory death penalty for certain crimes); **Pakistan** (commutation of the death sentences of three individuals diagnosed with mental disabilities); and **Taiwan** (establishment of safeguards for the use of capital punishment).
- The average rate of acceptance of recommendations related to the death penalty received during the Universal Periodic review (UPR) was extremely low, at 9%. Of the 18 countries that participated

4 Article 6(2) of the ICCPR stipulates: “In countries which have not abolished the death penalty, sentence of death may be imposed only for the most serious crimes in accordance with the law in force at the time of the commission of the crime [...]” In its General Comment No. 36 on the right to life, the UN Human Rights Committee clarifies the meaning of the expression “the most serious crimes”. It states: “The term “the most serious crimes” must be read restrictively and appertain only to crimes of extreme gravity involving intentional killing. Crimes not resulting directly and intentionally in death, such as attempted murder, corruption and other economic and political crimes, armed robbery, piracy, abduction, drug and sexual offenses, although serious in nature, can never serve as the basis, within the framework of Article 6, for the imposition of the death penalty.” See, UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 36 - Article 6: Right to life*, 3 September 2019, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/36, para. 35; <https://docs.un.org/en/CCPR/C/GC/36>

in the UPR,⁵ 11 refused to accept all recommendations related to the death penalty, two accepted only one recommendation, while the remaining five had acceptance rates ranging between 9% and 48%.

- Nearly half (nine out of 19) of the countries consistently voted against the UN General Assembly's (UNGA's) biennial resolution on the moratorium on the death penalty in 2020, 2022, and 2024. Only three countries (**Malaysia, South Korea, and Sri Lanka**) voted in favor of all three resolutions. Only one country (**Bangladesh**) changed its voting pattern, from voting against the resolution in 2020 and 2022, to abstaining in 2024.⁶
- Only one country (**Malaysia**) included death penalty-related issues among its human rights pledges as part of its bid for membership of the UN Human Rights Council. Eleven other countries (**Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Maldives, Pakistan, South Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam**) failed to make death penalty-related pledges as part of their campaigns.

3 - THE WAY FORWARD: A PRAGMATIC PATH TO ABOLITION IN ASIA

This report illustrates that there was little or no progress towards the abolition of the death penalty in Asia between 2020 and mid-2025. In fact, some countries in the region took steps backward rather than forward.

In the majority of retentionist Asian countries, the application of capital punishment is underpinned by practices and policies that are biased and discriminatory on the basis of gender and/or socio-economic status, religion, or ethnicity.

Complete abolition across the region will be part of the broader struggle for the respect of democratic principles, universal human rights, and the rule of law – a goal which remains unfulfilled to varying degrees in all Asian countries.

Without dismissing the need to chart a comprehensive and locally-developed long-term regional strategy for abolition, this report suggests a medium-term pragmatic approach that builds on the few positive trends observed in the region during the period covered by the report: the reduction of crimes - particularly those involving drug-related offenses - that are punishable by death; the abolition of criminal statutes that prescribe a mandatory death penalty; and the adoption of more specific and stringent judicial safeguards for the application of the death penalty. In addition, it is vital that authorities in retentionist countries in Asia actively engage with civil society to ensure an open debate about the death penalty, with a view to making steady progress towards its abolition.

Undertaking these steps will lead to a progressive reduction of the use of the death penalty and greater compliance with international human rights principles and obligations.

These four key steps are elaborated below and are supplemented by a list of recommendations to all relevant stakeholders.

5 Taiwan is not a UN member state and cannot participate in the UPR. Myanmar's third UPR remained incomplete because of the ongoing question of the country's representation at the UN.

6 For Afghanistan, the representative of the government ousted by the Taliban did not vote in 2022 and 2024. Myanmar's vote in favor of the resolution in 2022 and 2024 was cast by the representative of Myanmar's National Unity Government - a government in exile formed by sitting lawmakers ousted by the military junta in the February 2021 *coup d'état*.

Reduction of capital crimes

In most countries in the region, the death penalty is still being imposed for numerous crimes that do not meet the threshold of “the most serious crimes” under international law. In recent years, several countries achieved a small reduction in the number of capital crimes. While the reasons for pursuing this reduction might have differed, reducing the number of crimes that are punishable by death not only has the effect of limiting the overall application of the death penalty, but also fulfils obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which most retentionist Asian countries are state parties.

Abolition of the mandatory death penalty

The abolition of criminal statutes that prescribe the mandatory death penalty, as was done in Malaysia in 2023, is an important step forward in the abolition of capital punishment. It provides judges with flexibility to conduct an individualized assessment of the circumstances that led to the commission of the offense in question, including mitigating factors, thus reducing the possibility of a biased and discriminatory imposition of capital punishment. In addition, judicial discretion can lead to a reduction in the application of capital punishment through the imposition of alternative punishments. It also serves to temper the retributive effect of the death penalty with the rehabilitation goals of criminal justice systems.

Adoption of judicial safeguards

In many parts of the region, law enforcement agencies and judicial systems are seriously flawed and have long contributed to the misuse of capital punishment. At the same time, judicial systems have the power to overturn death sentences imposed following unfair proceedings, ensure due process, and set legal precedents that can limit the use of capital punishment. For example, recent higher court rulings in Taiwan and Pakistan, or the initiation of judicial reviews, as in India, demonstrate that the judiciary can play an important role in establishing safeguards that limit the application of the death penalty. Such limitations include: prohibiting the application of the death penalty to children and people with psychological disabilities; mandating adequate legal counsel for defendants; prohibiting the use of evidence obtained through torture or coercion; and ensuring the fair application of appeal processes and procedures for pardons and sentence commutations.

Engagement with civil society

Authorities in retentionist countries in Asia should create the conditions for an open debate on challenges, strategies, and efforts towards the abolition of the death penalty. In addition, abolitionist countries and development partners should facilitate the creation of spaces and opportunities for experience sharing, especially with regard to successful litigation to enhance judicial safeguards to limit the application of the death penalty.

Amid the absence of a robust and effective regional human rights mechanism in Asia, authorities and civil society should strengthen cooperation and interactions with human rights bodies from other regions, such as the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR), which has made significant contributions to abolition and provided a useful space for civil society to influence regional dynamics in Africa. Asian civil society should also enhance the use of sub-regional fora to address the death penalty as a cross-cutting issue and to identify abolitionist strategies and plans of action.

4- RECOMMENDATIONS

To retentionist states in Asia:

- Abolish the death penalty for all crimes.

Until the abolition is in effect:

- Implement an official and permanent moratorium on all executions.
- Restrict the number of offenses that prescribe the death sentence to only “the most serious crimes” as articulated by the UN Human Rights Committee in its General Comment No. 36.
- Repeal the mandatory death sentence where it currently exists.
- Ensure that legislation provides clear definitions for all criminal offenses, especially those punishable by death.
- Prohibit the imposition of death sentences for:
 - Persons under 18 at the time of the offense.
 - Persons with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities.
 - Offenses criminalizing conduct protected under international human rights law.
- Prohibit certain methods of execution, to include: stoning; injection of untested lethal drugs; public executions; and other painful and humiliating methods of execution in accordance with Article 7 of the ICCPR.
- Publish complete and regular statistics on death sentences and executions every year, disaggregated by gender, age, and type of offense.
- Extend a standing invitation to all UN Special Procedure mandate-holders and accept, as a matter of priority, visit requests by the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading or punishment.
- Respond promptly and substantively to individual communications by UN Special Procedure mandate-holders and UN Treaty Bodies, including urgent appeals and letters of allegation, taking into account the urgency of the communications.
- Ratify the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty.
- Respect international human rights standards such as fair trial and due process guarantees, including the right to appeal to higher courts.
- Conduct comprehensive reviews of existing death row cases with a focus on ensuring due process and fair trial standards.
- Ensure thorough judicial reviews of death penalty convictions.
- Guarantee the right of everyone sentenced to death to seek a pardon or a commutation of the sentence and ensure that mechanisms for reviewing death sentences for inmates who have been on death row for a long time are implemented and respected.
- Ensure conditions for death row prisoners comply with international human rights law and standards, including the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners and the UN Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders.
- Prohibit the use of evidence obtained through torture or ill-treatment in any legal proceedings.
- Ensure adequate advance notification of execution to death row prisoners and their families.

- Engage in national, regional, and international debates about abolition and ensure participation of civil society organizations, victims' families, human rights advocates, and national human rights institutions.
- Ensure an enabling environment in which civil society organizations and the public can engage in open debate and advocacy on the abolition of capital punishment without fear of reprisal.
- Engage in regional cooperation and collaboration on platforms such as the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights, with a view to formally abolishing the death penalty in their respective countries.
- Facilitate education on the death penalty, its impacts, and alternatives.
- Pay greater attention to the gender dimension of the death penalty, including by addressing multiple forms of gender bias faced by women sentenced to death, and taking into account gender-related mitigating factors during sentencing, such as a history of surviving gender-based violence.
- Provide gender sensitive healthcare to women on death row and address the needs of women on death row who are incarcerated with children.

To abolitionist states in Asia:

- Ratify the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR.
- Organize, support, and actively participate in sub-regional, regional, and inter-regional dialogues and exchanges on the death penalty.
- Refrain from extraditing, deporting, or forcibly returning foreign nationals to countries where they face the death penalty.
- Actively participate in UN fora related to the death penalty, including the biennial High-Level Panel Discussion on the Question of the Death Penalty at the UN Human Rights Council, and the Inter-Regional Task Force (IRTF) for the UNGA's moratorium resolution.

To UN member states:

- Mainstream the death penalty as a human rights issue by raising it in debates under various agenda items of the UN Human Rights Council, in particular interactive dialogues with the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading or punishment; and actively participate in the biennial High-Level Panel Discussion on the Question of the Death Penalty.
- Actively pursue cross-regional engagement in human rights-based debates around the death penalty, including with states from the Asia region, in the context of multi-lateral negotiations, such as the UN Human Rights Council resolutions on the question of the death penalty and the UNGA resolutions on the moratorium on the use of the death penalty.
- Engage constructively in negotiations on UN resolutions on the death penalty, including by opposing sovereignty-based language and amendments, which seek to frame capital punishment as a matter of domestic jurisdiction.
- Encourage participation of Asian retentionist countries in the IRTF for the biennial UNGA resolutions.
- Ensure that country-specific UN Human Rights Council mandates systematically advocate for the abolition of the death penalty in relation to retentionist countries.
- Utilize the UPRs of retentionist countries in Asia to raise questions and concerns related to the use of capital punishment, and systematically include recommendations related to the abolition of

the death penalty, including intermediary steps, such as the restriction of the number of offenses prescribing a death sentence to only “the most serious crimes” and to remove mandatory death sentences when they exist, in particular for drug-related crimes.

To the European Union (EU) and its member states:

- In accordance with the EU Guidelines on the Death Penalty, raise the issue of capital punishment in the framework of all bilateral meetings with Asian retentionist countries, including the Human Rights Dialogues.
- Use the Generalized Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) and other bilateral arrangements to ensure that beneficiary countries in Asia respect their obligations under international treaties required under GSP+, including in relation to their application of the death penalty.
- Provide technical assistance to governments in Asia working towards reducing or abolishing the death penalty, including judicial and prosecutorial training and public human rights education.
- Suspend all financial support and aid to counter-narcotics programs in Asian countries that include the imposition of the death penalty for drug crimes and make future funding conditional on a commitment to not impose capital punishment for drug crimes.
- Provide adequate financial support for civil society initiatives in Asia working towards the abolition of the death penalty.
- Provide other types of support to civil society working for the abolition of the death penalty, including by demanding authorities allow human rights groups access to courts in death penalty cases.

To civil society organizations:

- Ensure that abolitionist efforts are locally-driven, inclusive, and diverse, working in coalition with feminist, LGBTIQ+, indigenous, and other grassroots movements.
- Engage with all relevant stakeholders, including authorities, member of the judiciary, legislators, media, independent experts, and academics.
- Identify and deconstruct narratives justifying capital punishment and develop compelling counter-narratives.
- Build and participate in networks for international and regional collaboration, information-sharing (including best practices and lessons learned), and advocacy on the death penalty.
- Utilize existing regional and international civil society fora to address the death penalty as a cross-cutting issue and to identify abolitionist strategies and plans of action.
- Continue to utilize UN human rights mechanisms, including by making submissions to the UPR, Special Procedures, and Treaty Bodies, to ensure that the abolition of the death penalty is consistently addressed in these fora.

5 - COUNTRY CHAPTERS

5.1 AFGHANISTAN

Taliban ramp up executions

Afghanistan experienced a resurgence in the use of capital punishment following the Taliban's illegal takeover in August 2021.⁷ Prior to the Taliban's takeover, Afghan authorities had taken some steps towards a reduction in the use of the death penalty, such as the halting of executions and the release of 156 death row prisoners in August 2020.⁸ However, capital punishment was vigorously enforced by the Taliban.

Between 2022 and 2025, public executions resumed, and the use of the death penalty was expanded. Although official data remained scarce due to the opacity of the Taliban, there appeared to be a substantial rise in both death sentences and executions.⁹ In 2022, Afghanistan resumed executions for the first time since 2018, including publicly.¹⁰ The first public execution under Taliban rule took place in December 2022 in Farah Province, following a direct order from the Taliban's supreme leader.¹¹ By April 2025, the number of reported public executions conducted since the Taliban's takeover had reached at least 10.¹² The Taliban's use of the death penalty drew widespread criticism, particularly concerning the absence of due process, including the lack of fair trial guarantees, the absence of defense counsels, and the use of confessions obtained through coercion in cases involving capital punishment.¹³



Afghan men leave after watching the public execution of a man by the Taliban at a football stadium in Gardez, Paktia Province, Afghanistan, on 13 November 2024.

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- 7 Amnesty International, *Death Sentences and Executions 2022*, 16 May 2023, p.22; <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act50/6548/2023/en/>
- 8 Amnesty International, *Death Sentences and Executions 2020*, 21 April 2021, p.25; <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act50/3760/2021/en/>; Guardian, *Afghanistan agrees to free 400 'hardcore' Taliban prisoners*, 9 August 2020; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/09/afghanistan-agrees-to-free-400-hardcore-taliban-prisoners>
- 9 Afghan Witness, *One year of Sharia punishments*, 28 November 2023; <https://www.info-res.org/afghan-witness/reports/one-year-of-sharia-punishments/>
- 10 Amnesty International, *Afghanistan: Amnesty International condemns public execution by the Taliban*, 7 December 2022; <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/12/afghanistan-amnesty-international-condemns-public-execution-by-the-taliban/>
- 11 UNAMA, *Corporal punishment and the death penalty in Afghanistan*, May 2023; <https://unama.unmissions.org/file/21156/download?token=4a7i4xoE>
- 12 UN OHCHR, *Afghanistan must immediately stop public executions and corporal punishment: UN experts*, 17 April 2025; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/04/afghanistan-must-immediately-stop-public-executions-and-corporal-punishment>
- 13 UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett (Advance Edited Version)*, 9 February 2023; UN Doc. A/HRC/52/84, para. 51; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc5284-situation-human-rights-afghanistan-report-special-rapporteur>; UN OHCHR, *Afghanistan must immediately stop public executions and corporal punishment: UN experts*, 17 April 2025; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/04/afghanistan-must-immediately-stop-public-executions-and-corporal-punishment>

Stoning of women, public executions

The Taliban reinstated their interpretation of *Sharia* (Islamic law), which included the use of capital punishment for a wide range of crimes that do not meet the threshold of the “most serious crimes” under international law and standards, such as adultery, apostasy, and “moral corruption.”¹⁴ In December 2022, public executions, a practice not carried out since the Taliban’s previous rule in the 1990s, returned.¹⁵ Such executions - often by shooting¹⁶ - were normally held in sports stadiums before large crowds, including senior Taliban officials and community elders.¹⁷ In February 2024, two men convicted of murder were publicly executed in a football stadium in Ghazni Province. Similarly, in April 2025 four men accused of murder were publicly executed in a single day.¹⁸

In May 2023, Taliban officials announced the endorsement of capital and corporal punishment, including stoning, flogging, and burying under a wall.¹⁹ This announcement came following the top leadership’s directive, instructing judges to fully enforce *hudud* (crimes against God) and *qisas* punishments (retribution in kind).²⁰ Of particular concern was the practice of stoning, especially its disproportionate impact on women, who were more likely to be sentenced to death by stoning due to deeply entrenched gender discrimination.²¹ In March 2024, Taliban leaders announced they would also begin enforcing public flogging and stoning of women for adultery.²²

The Taliban did not formally codify the use of capital punishment. Instead, courts operated based on a discretionary interpretation of *Sharia*.²³ Unlike pre-2021 procedures in cases involving the death penalty, there was no clear appellate process or mechanism for seeking clemency under the Taliban.

In its fourth UPR, which began in 2024, Afghanistan received 21 death penalty-related recommendations from UN member states.²⁴ The representative of the government ousted by the Taliban participated in the UPR and accepted, wholly or partially, 10 of the recommendations. He noted that in the absence of the rule of law, a moratorium on executions remained “critical.”²⁵

Afghanistan voted against the UNGA’s biennial resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty in 2020 and did not vote in 2022 and 2024.

Death penalty-related issues were not among the human rights pledges made in 2022 by the government ousted by the Taliban as part of Afghanistan’s unsuccessful bid for membership of the UN Human Rights Council for the 2023-2025 term.²⁶

14 UN Human Rights Council, Report of the *Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan*, Richard Bennett (Advance Edited Version), 9 February 2023; UN Doc. A/HRC/52/84, para. 7; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc5284-situation-human-rights-afghanistan-report-special-rapporteur>

15 *Ibid.*, para. 54.

16 Amnesty International, *Death Sentences and Executions 2018*, 10 April 2019, p.10, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act50/9870/2019/en/>; Amnesty International, *Death Sentences and Executions 2022*, 16 May 2023, p.11; <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act50/6548/2023/en/>

17 Amnesty International, *Afghanistan: Amnesty International condemns public execution by the Taliban*, 7 December 2022; <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/12/afghanistan-amnesty-international-condemns-public-execution-by-the-taliban/>

18 UN OHCHR, *Afghanistan must immediately stop public executions and corporal punishment: UN experts*, 17 April 2025; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/04/afghanistan-must-immediately-stop-public-executions-and-corporal-punishment>

19 UN OHCHR, *Afghanistan: UN experts appalled by Taliban announcement on capital punishment*, 11 May 2023; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/05/afghanistan-un-experts-appalled-taliban-announcement-capital-punishment>

20 *Ibid.*

21 *Ibid.*

22 Amu TV, *Taliban leader suggests implementing Sharia law could lead to stoning, beating of women*, 24 March 2024; <https://amu.tv/88500/>

23 UNGA, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights Afghanistan*, Richard Bennett, 1 September 2023; UN Doc. A/78/338; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/78/338>

24 UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – Afghanistan*, 11 June 2024; UN Doc. A/HRC/57/5; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/57/5>

25 UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – Afghanistan (Addendum)*, 9 September 2024; UN Doc. A/HRC/57/5/Add.1; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/57/5/Add.1>

26 UNGA, *Note verbale dated 3 October 2022 from the Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly*, 4 October 2022; UN Doc. A/77/504; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/77/504>

5.2 BANGLADESH

No progress in reducing death sentences, death row population

Courts continued to impose high numbers of death sentences, even though certain laws provided for alternative sentencing. Between January 2020 and December 2024, courts imposed a total of 1,573 death sentences - an average of approximately 315 each year.²⁷ The death penalty remained prescribed for 33 offenses across 16 laws, including for drug-related offenses. Authorities did not provide official statistics on capital punishment cases, but documentation by local NGOs showed that most death sentences were imposed for murder.²⁸ As of June 2025, there were more than 2,400 people on death row. Between 2020 and 2023, 16 executions were recorded, and none in 2024 and 2025.

In many instances, death sentences were imposed following trials based on forced confessions obtained through torture.²⁹ As a result of long delays in cases being heard at the appellate level, many individuals who had been sentenced to death were kept in so-called “condemned cells”³⁰ or in solidarity confinement for many years - some of them for over 20 years.

Capital punishment remained in force for various offenses that do not meet the threshold of “the most serious crimes.” For example, the Special Powers Act 1974 prescribed the death penalty as the maximum sentence for offenses such as “sabotage,” “hoarding,” “smuggling,” “dealing in the black market,” and “adulteration of, or sale of adulterated food, drink, drugs or cosmetics.”

Glimmer of hope under the interim government

Among the regressive developments, in 2020, the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act was amended to authorize the death penalty for rape. In January 2023, a man was executed for robbery and rape under the Act, although the case had been filed in 2004 - 19 years before the Act was amended to prescribe the death penalty.³¹

In other developments, in May 2024, the High Court Division of the Supreme Court ruled that keeping death row prisoners who had not yet exhausted all of their legal appeals in solitary confinement was unconstitutional, and that they should be moved to the general prison population within two years. However, the ruling was suspended by a Supreme Court Chamber Judge and remained so as of June 2025.

The fall of the Awami League-led government in August 2024 and the installment of an interim government under Chief Advisor Mohammad Yunus provided some hope that progress could be made towards abolition. Indeed, there were no executions under the interim government.

However, the interim government did not announce an official moratorium on executions or take any other concrete steps towards abolition. Disappointingly, the Enforced Disappearance Prevention and Redress Ordinance, drafted by the interim government in May 2025, included the death penalty as a sentencing option for violators.³² As of June 2025, the draft ordinance was still under review. Moreover, concerns were raised by civil society and the UN over the proposed use of the

27 Courts imposed 218 death sentences in 2020; 320 in 2021; 338 in 2022; 390 in 2023; and 307 in 2024; Odhikar, *Statistics on Death Penalty*, <https://odhikar.org/statistics/statistics-on-death-penalty/>

28 Odhikar, *Imposition of the death penalty and its impact (submission to the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions)*, 27 April 2022; https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/odhikar_replies-dp.pdf

29 Odhikar, *Annual Human Rights Report 2024*, 10 February 2025; https://odhikar.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/AHRR-2024_Odhikar_English.pdf

30 Condemned cells are in areas of prisons where prisoners under death sentence are kept alone prior to their execution. Prisoners held in condemned cells are only allowed to leave their cells to meet their family or lawyers.

31 FIDH, *Stakeholder Report for the United Nations Universal Periodic Review*, 5 April 2023; https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/bangladesh_upr_dp_final.pdf

32 FIDH, *Bangladesh: The Interim Government Must Ensure the Ordinance on Enforced Disappearances Aligns with International Standards Following Robust Public Consultations*, 15 May 2025; <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/bangladesh/bangladesh-the-interim-government-must-ensure-the-ordinance-on>

International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) to prosecute members of the former government for violations of international law, given that the ICT Act authorizes the ICT to impose death sentences.

In the fourth UPR of Bangladesh, which began in 2023, the government did not accept all 13 death penalty-related recommendations made by UN member states. The government claimed that the death penalty remained “a valid form of punishment and deterrence for the most serious and heinous crimes” and that it had been “gradually edging out” the death penalty with other forms of punishments, such as life imprisonment.³³

Bangladesh voted against the UNGA’s biennial resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty in 2020 and 2022 and abstained in 2024.

Death penalty-related issues were not among the human rights pledges made by the government in 2022 as part of Bangladesh’s successful bid for membership of the UN Human Rights Council for the 2023-2025 term.³⁴

5.3 BRUNEI

***De facto* moratorium holds**

Brunei last execution was carried out in 1957. The authorities continued to observe a *de facto* moratorium on executions, which stemmed from the announcement made by Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah in May 2019. However, this moratorium was not codified in law, and the death penalty remained in force.

Concerns persisted that the continued legality of the death penalty, particularly for adultery and consensual same-sex acts, left the door open to executions. The *Sharia* Penal Code continued to draw criticism for its disproportionate impact on women and LGBTIQ+ individuals, as well as for its potential to undermine the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief.³⁵

No commitment to abolition

In the fourth UPR of Brunei, which began in 2024, the government did not accept all 10 death penalty-related recommendations made by UN member states. The government claimed that there was “no international consensus on the death penalty,” and that capital punishment was not prohibited by international law.³⁶

Brunei voted against the UNGA’s biennial resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty in 2020, 2022, and 2024.

33 UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – Bangladesh (Addendum)*, 22 February 2024; UN Doc. A/HRC/55/13/Add.1; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/55/13/Add.1>

34 UNGA, *Note verbale dated 14 September 2022 from the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly*, 14 September 2022; UN Doc. A/77/342; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/77/342>

35 Human Rights Watch, *Brunei’s Pernicious New Penal Code*, 22 May 2019; <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/22/bruneis-pernicious-new-penal-code>

36 UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – Brunei Darussalam (Addendum)*, 18 February 2025; UN Doc. A/HRC/58/12/Add.1; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/58/12/Add.1>

5.4 CHINA

The world's top executioner amid increasing secrecy

China remained the world's leading executioner by a significant margin, in both absolute and per-capita terms. The exact numbers of executions continued to be classified as state secrets. Available public data on executions were intentionally limited and censored by the government, making precise figures unavailable. However, independent organizations assessed that China continued to execute "thousands" annually, as of 2024.³⁷

Beginning in 2021, transparency on the use of the death penalty further declined. Millions of court judgments were removed from China Judgments Online, the official online database for court judgments and decisions, most of which were criminal cases.³⁸ Additionally, all death penalty review decisions by the Supreme People's Court were not published from mid-2022 until a single isolated batch was posted in February 2024.³⁹ There were no other death penalty review decisions posted since then.

China retained 46 capital crimes, encompassing numerous non-violent offenses, such as drug-related offenses, corruption, economic crimes, and state security crimes. In cases that involved crimes with potentially serious social consequences, such as major graft, courts frequently imposed suspended death sentences with a two-year reprieve, which could be commuted to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Death penalty to tackle corruption, advance diplomatic interests

Under the rule of Xi Jinping and his ongoing, wide-reaching anti-corruption campaign, China saw a significant increase in the number of executions for officials found guilty of corruption and bribery. For instance, in 2024, a massive corruption case saw a former official in Inner Mongolia Province, Li Jianping, executed after being convicted on corruption charges totaling two billion yuan (more than US\$278 million).⁴⁰ In May 2025, a former senior political adviser of Shaanxi Province, Han Yong, received a suspended death sentence with a two-year reprieve for accepting over 261 million yuan (more than US\$36 million) in bribes.⁴¹ Despite these high-profile cases, no official statements were published to justify the use of the death penalty in these circumstances.

In June 2024, the Supreme People's Court, Procuratorate, the Ministry of Public Security, and the Ministry of State Security jointly issued "Opinions" that signaled that trials *in absentia* of "diehard Taiwan independence separatists" could warrant the death penalty.⁴² Separately, in early 2025, there was a string of executions of convicted "mass murderers," whose trials progressed with unusual speed and were surrounded by a lack of transparency.⁴³

In addition, while executions of foreign nationals were not common, in March 2025, four Canadians were executed in China for drug-related offenses.⁴⁴ Their deaths had been kept secret until the

37 Amnesty International, *Death sentences and executions in 2024*, 8 April 2025; <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act50/8976/2025/en/>

38 South China Morning Post, *Millions of court rulings removed from official Chinese database*, 26 June 2021; <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3138830/millions-court-rulings-removed-official-chinese-database>

39 Dui Hua Human Rights Journal, *Curious Timing: SPC Death Penalty Reviews Posted after Universal Periodic Review (Part I)*, July 15, 2024; <https://www.duihuajournal.org/2024/07/curious-timing-spc-death-penalty.html>

40 Bloomberg, *China Executes Former Official in \$412 Million Corruption Case*, 17 December 2024; <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-12-17/china-executes-former-official-in-412-million-corruption-case>

41 Xinhua, *Former senior political adviser handed death sentence with reprieve for bribery*, 19 May 2025; <https://english.news.cn/20250519/2bb283a3371547c5901a43776a48836e/c.html>

42 Reuters, *China threatens death penalty for 'diehard' Taiwan separatists*, 21 June 2024; <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-issues-guidelines-criminal-punishment-diehard-taiwan-separatists-2024-06-21/>

43 Voice of America, *China executes 2 mass murderers*, 22 January 2025; <https://www.voanews.com/a/china-executes-2-mass-murderers-/7945900.html>

44 BBC, *China executed four Canadians for drug crimes, says Ottawa*, 20 March 2025; <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c204ywy4kvo>

information was leaked to the press. The number of executed foreign nationals during the reporting period may have been even higher, suggesting that the Chinese government could have used such cases as diplomatic leverage.⁴⁵ For instance, China's Criminal Procedure Law contains guidance for handling criminal cases involving foreign nationals, including consideration of diplomatic interests.

In the fourth UPR of China, which began in 2024, the government "rejected" all 20 death penalty-related recommendations made by UN member states. The government claimed that its "basic policy" regarding capital punishment was that its application should be "strictly and prudently limited."⁴⁶

China voted against the UNGA's biennial resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty in 2020, 2022, and 2024.

Death penalty-related issues were not among the human rights pledges made by the government in 2020 and 2023 as part of China's two successful bids for membership of the UN Human Rights Council for the 2021-2023 and 2024-2026 terms.⁴⁷

5.5 INDIA

Death row prisoners increase

India's courts imposed death sentences at an alarming rate. Between January 2020 and December 2024, courts imposed a total of 594 death sentences - an average of approximately 119 each year.⁴⁸ In 2024, India recorded its highest number of people under death sentence over the reporting period.⁴⁹ By the end of that year, 564 individuals were on death row, the most since 2004. India's most recent executions took place in March 2020, in the high-profile case of four men convicted of the rape and murder of a woman in Delhi in 2012.

Supreme Court seeks reform efforts amid regressive legislative changes

Death sentences were often imposed without consideration for important mitigating factors, such as the mental health or socio-economic background of the defendants.⁵⁰ In response to the courts' widespread disregard for sentencing practices that take into account mitigating factors, in May 2022 India's Supreme Court delivered its judgment in *Manoj v. State of Madhya Pradesh*, which affirmed the need for an individualized approach when dealing with capital punishment cases.⁵¹ The ruling introduced procedural safeguards within the sentencing framework, including the requirement for background and conduct reports on defendants.⁵²

In September 2022, the Supreme Court referred the question of ensuring a fair sentencing hearing for individuals convicted of capital offenses to a Constitution Bench, which had not been

45 Walrus, *China Secretly Executed Four Canadians. A Former Prisoner Explains Why*, 23 July 2025; <https://thewalrus.ca/canadians-killed-in-china/>

46 UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – China (Addendum)*, 31 May 2024; UN Doc. A/HRC/56/6/Add1; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/56/6/Add1>

47 UNGA, *Letter dated 2 June 2020 from the Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly*, 4 June 2020; UN Doc. A/75/90; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/75/90>; UNGA, *Letter dated 21 September 2023 from the Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly*, 27 September 2023; UN Doc. A/78/389; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/78/389>

48 Courts imposed 65 death sentences in 2020; 114 in 2021; 154 in 2022; 122 in 2023; and 139 in 2024; Project39A, *Death Penalty in India – Annual Statistics Report 2024*, January 2025, <https://www.project39a.com/annual-statistics-2024>.

49 Project 39A, *Death Penalty in India – Annual Statistics Report 2024*, January 2025, p. 4; <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a843a9a9f07f5cccd61685f3/t/67aad6dc16a36d66788ff28d/1739249408252/Annual+Statistics+Report+2024+-+Digital+%281%29.pdf>

50 *Ibid.*

51 Lakshmi Menon, *Death penalty sentencing in India: The futility of introducing safeguards for an inhuman punishment*, 2 April 2025; <https://blogs.law.ox.ac.uk/death-penalty-research-unit-blog/blog-post/2025/04/death-penalty-sentencing-india-futility>; judgment available at: <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/179828917/>

52 *Ibid.*

constituted as of June 2025. The referral focused on sentencing procedures and specifically sought a clarification concerning what constitutes “sufficient time” to allow for individualized sentencing, amid India’s common practice of same-day sentencing.⁵³ Despite the Supreme Court’s efforts to reform the application of the death penalty, trial courts continued to ignore judicial safeguards and cultivated a culture of retributive justice.⁵⁴

The high rate of death sentences occurred alongside major legislative changes, including the adoption of India’s new Criminal Code and the addition of death penalty provisions in legislation in several states.

On 1 July 2024, three new criminal laws came into effect, following their approval by Parliament in 2023.⁵⁵ The new code includes the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA), which replaced the Indian Penal Code, the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), and the Indian Evidence Act, respectively.⁵⁶ The BNS expanded the range of offenses punishable by death from 11 to 15, to include the offenses of gang rape of a woman under 18 (Section 70(2)), murder by a mob (Section 101(2)), organized crime (Section 109), and acts of terrorism (Section 111).⁵⁷

The new legislation also introduced a procedural framework for the filing and handling of mercy petitions by death row prisoners, which raised significant concerns that the effective exercise of this right, guaranteed by Articles 72 and 161 of India’s Constitution, would be limited, compared to what had been previously established by the Ministry of Home Affairs and through jurisprudence.⁵⁸ Section 472(1) of the BNSS limited the right to submit mercy petitions to a “convict under the sentence of death or his legal heir or any other relative.” In addition, Section 472 of the BNSS prescribed specific time limits for various stages of the mercy process, including a 30-day limit for filing the petition after being informed of the outcome of the appeal. Such legislative changes were widely criticized for failing to recognize the institutional barriers death row prisoners faced in exercising their right to seek clemency.⁵⁹ Furthermore, Section 474 of the BNSS only allowed for the commutation of death sentences to life imprisonment, whereas under Section 433 of the CrPC, the government could commute death sentences to any other punishment at its discretion.

At the state level, new legislation was introduced to prescribe the death penalty for certain offenses, including rape. In West Bengal State, the Aparajita (Women and Child) Bill, which was passed by the Legislative Assembly in September 2024, made rape and aggravated sexual violence against minors punishable by life imprisonment or the death penalty.⁶⁰ It also mandated the death penalty in cases in which rape resulted in the victims’ death or left them in a persistent vegetative state.⁶¹ Lastly, the bill provided discretionary death sentences for the rape of adult women.⁶² As of June 2025, the bill was pending for assent by the President.⁶³ In Maharashtra State, the 2021 Shakti Criminal Laws

53 Supreme Court, *In Re: Framing Guidelines Regarding ... vs Unknown*, 19 September 2022; <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/11054598/>; Project 39A, *Death Penalty in India – Annual Statistics Report 2022*, January 2023, p.6; <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a843a9a9f07f5ccd61685f3/t/65a512e993dea03a45bac1d8/1741284579076/Annual+Statistics+2022+%281%29.pdf>

54 *Ibid.*

55 Project39A, *India’s New Criminal Laws: A Substantive Analysis*, December 2024; <https://p39ablog.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/p39aDigi.pdf>

56 Ministry of Home Affairs, *New Criminal Laws*, accessed on 13 September 2025; <https://www.mha.gov.in/en/commoncontent/new-criminal-laws>; International Bar Association, *Criminal law: new legislation leaves Indian lawyers confused and ruling missed opportunities*, 2 August 2024; <https://www.ibanet.org/criminal%20law-new-legislation-leaves-indian-lawyers-confused-and-ruling-missed-opportunities>

57 People’s Union for Democratic Rights, *Review Death Penalty Punishments in Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023*, 7 December 2023, <https://www.pudr.org/press-statements/review-death-penalty-punishments-in-bhartiya-nyaya-sanhita-2023/>

58 Project39A, *India’s New Criminal Laws: A Substantive Analysis*, December 2024, p.108; <https://p39ablog.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/p39aDigi.pdf>

59 *Ibid.*

60 Project39A, *Explained: Aparajita Women and Child Bill*, 2024, 20 December 2024; <https://p39ablog.com/2024/12/aparajita-bill-explained>

61 *Ibid.*; Amnesty International, *India: Death penalty never the solution to crime and violence against women*, 3 September 2024; <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/09/india-death-penalty-never-the-solution-to-crime-and-violence-against-women>

62 *Ibid.*

63 Hindu, *West Bengal Governor sends Aparajita Bill to President for consideration*, 06 September 2024; <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/west-bengal/wb-governor-sends-aparajita-bill-to-president-for-consideration/article68614676.ece>

(Maharashtra Amendment) Bill introduced the death penalty for “heinous” offenses against women and children, including rape and gang rape.⁶⁴ In March 2025, it was returned to the Maharashtra government for reconsideration.⁶⁵ In 2021, Punjab and Madhya Pradesh States enacted laws prescribing the death penalty for individuals convicted of manufacturing and distributing “spurious liquor” resulting in the death of the consumer.⁶⁶

In the fourth UPR of India, which began in 2022, the government did not accept all 19 death penalty-related recommendations made by UN member states and failed to provide an explanation for such position.⁶⁷

India voted against the UNGA’s biennial resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty in 2020, 2022, and 2024.

Death penalty-related issues were not among the human rights pledges made by the government in 2021 as part of India’s successful bid for membership of the UN Human Rights Council for the 2022-2024 term.⁶⁸

5.6 INDONESIA

Ongoing use of the death penalty for drug crimes

Indonesia could become *de facto* abolitionist in 2026. Although no executions were carried out after July 2016, Indonesian courts continued to impose death sentences, particularly for drug-related offenses.⁶⁹ The Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (KontraS) documented 71 people sentenced to death in 2024, up from 50 in 2023. As of 8 March 2024, there were 530 individuals on death row, including 360 prisoners convicted of drug-related offenses and 130 of murder. At least 88 death row prisoners were foreign nationals.⁷⁰

Possibility of commutation of death sentences introduced

The government maintained a firm stance on drug control and continued to call for harsher punishments for drug-related offenses.⁷¹ Notably, in December 2024, Minister for Political and Security Affairs Budi Gunawan suggested expediting the process to resume executions for drug offenses to reinforce deterrence.⁷²

In a key legislative development, under Articles 98 and 100 of the new Criminal Code, adopted on 8 December 2022 and set to take effect in January 2026, prisoners under death sentence may have

64 Project39A, *Annual Statistics Report 2021*, January 2022, p. 56-57; <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a843a9a9f07f5ccd61685f3/t/61f6d7e8f0e77848cc843477/1643567095391/Annual+Statistics+Report+2021+%281%29.pdf>

65 Hindustan Times, *Shakti bill denied Centre nod*, 1 March 2025, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/mumbai-news/shakti-bill-denied-centre-nod-101740771042425.html>

66 Times of India, *Madhya Pradesh assembly passes death penalty in spurious liquor cases*, 11 August 2021; <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhopal/madhya-pradesh-assembly-passes-death-penalty-in-spurious-liquor-cases/articleshow/85229497.cms>

67 UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – India (Addendum)*, 27 February 2023; UN Doc. A/HRC/52/11/Add.1; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/52/11/Add.1>

68 UNGA, *Note verbale dated 16 August 2021 from the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly*, 17 August 2021; UN Doc. A/76/195; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/76/195>

69 UN OHCHR, *UN Human Rights chief calls on Indonesia to stop executions*, 27 July 2016; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2016/07/un-human-rights-chief-calls-indonesia-stop-executions>; Harm Reduction International, *The Death Penalty for Drug Offences: Global Overview 2024*, March 2025, p. 27; <https://hri.global/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/HRI-GlobalOverview-2024-FINAL.pdf>

70 KontraS, *The Failure of Nawacita: Stagnation in the Abolition of the Death Penalty in Indonesia*, October 2024; <https://drive.google.com/file/d/16m9q02sgmkJZFzYzRw8zovUj-4ne1Xi/view>

71 Xinhua, *Indonesia to consider accelerating death penalty for drug offenders*, 5 December 2024; <https://english.news.cn/20241205/c36b86096de54ee190248c49943ea172/c.html>

72 Harm Reduction International, *The Death Penalty for Drug Offences: Global Overview 2024*, March 2025, p. 27; <https://hri.global/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/HRI-GlobalOverview-2024-FINAL.pdf>



Filipino death row inmate Mary Jane Veloso (C) exits Jakarta's Class IIB Women's Correctional Institution, Indonesia, on 17 December to be repatriated to the Philippines.

© Dasril Roszandi / ANADOLU / Anadolu via AFP

their sentences commuted after 10 years - if they maintain good conduct.⁷³ However, uncertainty surrounded the drafting of the implementing regulations.⁷⁴

Among other developments, in March 2023, then-President Joko Widodo granted a pardon to Merri Utami, a former domestic worker who had spent over 20 years on death row for drug trafficking after being coerced into unknowingly transporting drugs.⁷⁵ In addition, transfers of several foreign prisoners under death sentence, which were carried out on an *ad hoc* basis and under no clear legal framework, garnered significant media attention. For example, in December 2024, authorities repatriated to the Philippines Mary Jane Veloso, a Filipino woman who had been on death row since 2010 for drug smuggling.⁷⁶ In January 2025, the governments of France and Indonesia agreed to the repatriation of French national Serge Atlaoui, who had been under death sentence since 2007 for drug offenses.⁷⁷

In the fourth UPR of Indonesia, which began in 2022, the government accepted one of the 22 death penalty-related recommendations made by UN member states. The government claimed that the death penalty continued to be part of the country's "positive law" and was "viewed as an attribute of its sovereignty."⁷⁸

Indonesia abstained on the UNGA's biennial resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty in 2020, 2022, and 2024.

Death penalty-related issues were not among the human rights pledges made by the government in 2023 as part of Indonesia's successful bid for membership of the UN Human Rights Council for the 2024-2026 term.⁷⁹

73 Institute for Criminal Justice Reform, *Situation Report on Death Penalty Policies in Indonesia of 2023: Automatic Commutation of the Death Penalty Mandated by the New Criminal Code*, April 2024, p. 21-25; https://icjr.or.id/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/ICJR_Death-Penalty-Report-2023_EN.pdf

74 KontraS, *The Failure of Nawacita: Stagnation in the Abolition of the Death Penalty in Indonesia*, October 2024; <https://drive.google.com/file/d/16m9q02sgmkJZFIZrW8zovUj-4ne1Xi/view>

75 Amnesty International, *Death penalty reforms bring hope amid resumption of executions across Southeast Asia*, 16 May 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/2023/05/16/press-release-death-penalty-reforms-bring-hope/>; Harm Reduction international, *A death sentence for a drug offense: Merri Utami*, 17 July 2020; <https://hri.global/publications/a-death-sentence-for-a-drug-offence/>; ADPAN, *Statement on Merri Utami's Commuted Death Sentence*, 15 April 2023; <https://adpan.org/indonesia-president-joko-widodo-pardons-merri-utami/>

76 Amnesty International, *Indonesia: Transfer of woman on death row to the Philippines must be a pivotal moment towards abolishing death penalty*, 19 December 2024; <https://www.amnesty.org/2024/12/19/indonesia-transfer-of-woman-on-death-row-to-the-philippines-must-be-a-pivotal-moment-towards-abolishing-death-penalty/>

77 France 24, *Indonesia, France agree to repatriate French death row convict Serge Atlaoui*, 24 January 2025; <https://www.france24.com/en/france/20250124-france-indonesia-to-sign-agreement-for-transfer-of-frenchman-on-death-row>; ECPM, *Serge Atlaoui une lueur d'espoir*, <https://www.ecpm.org/campaigns/serge-atlaoui-dans-les-couloirs-de-la-mort-indonesiens-depuis-17-ans/> [in French]

78 UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – Indonesia (Addendum)*, 17 March 2023; UN Doc. A/HRC/52/8/Add.1; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/52/8/Add.1>

79 UNGA, *Note verbale dated 15 August 2023 from the Permanent Mission of Indonesia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly*, 16 August 2023; UN Doc. A/78/313; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/78/313>

5.7 IRAN

Relentless repression through executions

Iran remained the world's second most prolific executioner, with the death penalty serving as an instrument of repression and control. Despite the authorities' failure to publish official statistics about the application of the death penalty, civil society recorded 1,023 executions in 2024 - the highest annual figure since 2015.⁸⁰ These included executions of individuals who were minors at the time of the offense. Between January and June 2025, at least 705 executions were carried out.⁸¹ At least one minor was executed during the reporting period.⁸²

In 2024, while drug-related offenses and murder accounted for the majority of executions (538 and 419, respectively), cases of individuals executed under vaguely defined "security" charges were also reported. These included charges of *moharebeh* ("war against God"), "corruption on earth," and "insurrection," which were routinely used to criminalize dissent.⁸³ At least 46 political prisoners, arrested and sentenced on various charges over the years, were on death row as of June 2025.⁸⁴

Drug-related executions soar, executions used to suppress dissent

The 2017 reform of anti-narcotics legislation led to a significant drop in drug-related executions (25 in 2020) and the commutation of many death sentences.⁸⁵ However, 2021 saw a dramatic resurgence in such executions following the election of President Ebrahim Raisi and the appointment of Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei as Head of the Judiciary,⁸⁶ with hundreds carried out annually from 2021.⁸⁷ New anti-narcotics legislation, prompted by a decree from Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, was streamlined into a five-article bill that expanded the categories of drug-related offenses punishable by death. In a letter dated 9 October 2023, then-President Raisi submitted the proposed legislation to Parliament.⁸⁸ In January 2024, Parliament passed its general principles and sent it to parliamentary committees to work on its details. Its status was unknown as of June 2025.

The sharp escalation in the use of capital punishment coincided with the crackdown on the late 2022 "Woman, Life, Freedom" nationwide protests and the June 2025 Israeli military attacks on Iran. Following the "Woman, Life, Freedom" protests, the authorities increasingly resorted to the death penalty as a tool of repression to instill fear, silence dissent, and maintain strict control over the population.⁸⁹ This contributed to the dramatic surge in executions, with at least 867 people executed in 2023.⁹⁰ At least 11 individuals were executed in connection with the protests,⁹¹ following unfair

80 LDDHI, *Islamic Republic's atrocious crimes in June 2025*, 10 July 2025; <https://www.fidh.org/article31827> [in Persian]; FIDH/LDDHI, *The Iran Notes - Death penalty: A state killing machine*, 30 November 2023; <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/iran/the-iran-notes-death-penalty-a-state-killing-machine>

81 LDDHI, *Islamic Republic's atrocious crimes in July 2025*, 10 August 2025; <https://www.fidh.org/article31933> [in Persian]

82 LDDHI records.

83 Amnesty International, *"Don't let them kill us": Iran's relentless execution crisis since the 2022 uprising*, 3 April 2024, p.11-12; <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/7869/2024/en/>; FIDH/LDDHI, *op. cit.*

84 LDDHI records.

85 FIDH/LDDHI, *op. cit.*

86 Amnesty International, *op. cit.*, p.24

87 FIDH/LDDHI, *op. cit.*; LDDHI, *Iran Executions Report 2024*, 31 January 2025; <https://www.fidh.org/article31826> [in Persian]

88 Islamic Consultative Assembly, *Bill for amendment of the Law to combat drugs*; 9 October 2023; https://rc.majlis.ir/en/legal_draft/state_popup/1793966?fk_legal_draft [in Persian]

89 Amnesty International, *op. cit.*, p.6-9; Amnesty International, *Iran: two years after 'Woman, Life, Freedom' uprising, impunity for crimes reigns supreme*, 11 September 2024; <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/09/iran-two-years-after-woman-life-freedom-uprising-impunity-for-crimes-reigns-supreme/>

90 FIDH/LDDHI, *The Iran Notes - Death penalty: A state killing machine*, 10 January 2024; <https://www.fidh.org/30234> [figures updated in Persian version]

91 Amnesty International, *"Don't let them kill us": Iran's relentless execution crisis since the 2022 uprising*, 3 April 2024, p.3; <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/7869/2024/en/>

trials that involved the use of torture to extract confessions.⁹² At least 45 protesters, arrested and sentenced on various charges since September 2022, were on death row as of June 2025.⁹³

Following Israel's military offensive on Iran on 13 June 2025, Iranian authorities escalated arrests under broad allegations of "espionage" and "collaboration" with Israel and executed at least six people who had been charged with those offenses before the attacks. Three others accused of espionage for Israel had been executed earlier in 2025. On 17 June 2025, a proposed espionage law was introduced in Parliament, seeking to impose the death penalty for a wide and vaguely defined range of "activities against national security and interests by collaborators with the Zionist regime [Israel], the US and other hostile states to be determined by the Supreme National Security Council." As of the end of June 2025, the proposed law was under review by Parliament. At least eight other prisoners were facing charges of espionage, and it was feared many more could be tried, sentenced to death, and executed if the proposed law were adopted.

In addition, members of marginalized groups - including women and ethnic communities such as Baluchi, Kurdish, and Afghan nationals - were disproportionately targeted under vaguely worded national security related offenses, including charges of *moharebeh*, corruption on earth, and insurrection.⁹⁴

In the fourth UPR of Iran, which began in 2025, the government did not accept all 35 death penalty-related recommendations made by UN member states. The government falsely claimed that capital punishment was "exclusively reserved for the most serious crimes" in accordance with Article 6 of the ICCPR.⁹⁵

Iran voted against the UNGA's biennial resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty in 2020, 2022, and 2024.

5.8 JAPAN

Death sentences, executions continue

Executions continued to be carried out, with nine individuals hanged between December 2021 and June 2025. Meanwhile, courts imposed nine death sentences (two in 2020, four in 2021, and three in 2023), all involving murder cases. Japan retained the death penalty for 19 offenses, many of which do not meet the threshold of "the most serious crimes."⁹⁶ As of the end of June 2025, there were 105 prisoners on death row.

Historic acquittal, new initiatives seek review of the death penalty

Despite a few positive developments, the Japanese government showed no political will to make progress towards the abolition of the death penalty and to consider the inherent human rights violations it entails.

92 *Ibid.*, p. 14-16; LDDHI records; FIDH, *Iran: Report on the human rights situation for the Universal Periodic Review*, 16 July 2024, para. 19; <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/iran/iran-report-on-the-human-rights-situation-for-the-universal-periodic-review>; Amnesty International, *Iran: Arbitrary execution of Woman Life Freedom protester after sham trial and torture*, 12 June 2025; <https://www.amnesty.org.au/iran-arbitrary-execution-of-woman-life-freedom-protester-after-sham-trial-and-torture/>

93 LDDHI records.

94 *Ibid.*; UN OHCHR, *Minorities in Iran have been disproportionately impacted in ongoing crackdown to repress the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement*, UN Fact-Finding Mission says, 5 August 2024; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/08/minorities-iran-have-been-disproportionally-impacted-ongoing-crackdown>; LDDHI, *monthly newsletter - Islamic Republic's atrocious crimes, June 2025 issue*, 10 July 2025; <https://www.fidh.org/article31827> [in Persian]

95 UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – Islamic Republic of Iran (Addendum)*, 11 June 2025; UN Doc. A/HRC/59/12/Add.1; <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/upr/sessions/session48/irn/a-hrc-59-12-add.1-av-islamic-republic-iran.pdf>

96 FIDH, *UN body slams death row conditions, demands progress towards the abolition of capital punishment*, 9 November 2022; <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/japan/un-body-slams-death-row-conditions-demands-progress-towards-the-abolition-of-capital-punishment>



Former death row inmate Iwao Hakamada (2nd from R) receives an apology from Shizuoka District's Chief Prosecutor Hideo Yamada (left) at Hakamada's house in Hamamatsu City, Shizuoka Prefecture, Japan, on 27 November 2024.

© Nanako Sudo / Yomiuri / Yomiuri Shimben via AFP

One notable development was the Shizuoka District Court's acquittal of Iwao Hakamada on 26 September 2024, following a retrial.⁹⁷ At the time of his acquittal, Hakamada was 88 years old. He had been sentenced to death in 1968 for murder and arson and had spent nearly 48 years in solitary confinement at the Tokyo Detention House. This was the fifth case of exoneration of a death row prisoner since the 1980s, when four capital cases were overturned.

Another development was the convening by the Japan Federation of Bar Associations of the Roundtable for Reflecting upon the Death Penalty System of Japan in February 2024. Various experts joined the initiative, including members of Parliament, a former head of the Public Prosecution Office, a former head of police, and scholars. On 13 November 2024, the Roundtable published its report and submitted it to then-Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba.⁹⁸ The report called for the prompt establishment of a public conference or organization under the National Diet and the Cabinet, tasked with conducting a comprehensive review of the death penalty.

In addition, on 21 April 2025, the Minister of Justice established the Legislative Council on the Retrial System to review its effectiveness and the process of disclosing evidence, including for cases involving the death penalty.⁹⁹ This initiative was ongoing as of June 2025.

Beginning in 2020, several strategic legal cases were brought against the application of the death penalty. These cases challenged certain aspects of capital punishment in Japan, such as the inhumane nature of hanging, executions without advance notice, executions of individuals seeking retrials, and 24-hour CCTV surveillance of death row inmates. In response to one of these cases, on 5 June 2025, the Tokyo High Court found that the 24-hour CCTV surveillance of a man on death row

⁹⁷ BBC, *World's longest-serving death row inmate acquitted in Japan*, 26 September 2024; <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5y9x6zrkrr0>

⁹⁸ Roundtable for Reflecting upon the Death Penalty System of Japan, *Recommendations and Summary of Findings*, 13 November 2024; <https://shorturl.at/BdLcY>

⁹⁹ Japan Times, *Japan to start discussions on reviewing retrial system Monday*, 18 April 2025; <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2025/04/18/japan/crime-legal/retrial-system-review-start/>

for four years constituted a violation of his privacy and ordered the government to pay 550,000 yen (about US\$3,700) in compensation.

In the fourth UPR of Japan, which began in 2023, the government did not accept all 18 death penalty-related recommendations made by UN member states. The government claimed that the majority of Japanese citizens considered that the death penalty “was unavoidable for extremely malicious and atrocious crimes.” As a result, it said it had no plans to implement a “general moratorium” on capital punishment or to establish a forum on the death penalty system.¹⁰⁰

Japan voted against the UNGA’s biennial resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty in 2020, 2022, and 2024.

Death penalty-related issues were not among the human rights pledges made by the government in 2023 as part of Japan’s successful bid for membership of the UN Human Rights Council for the 2024-2026 term.¹⁰¹

5.9 LAOS

No executions amid lack of transparency

Laos showed no progress towards the abolition of the death penalty. Although no executions had been carried out since 1989, the Criminal Code retained the death penalty for 12 offenses, including drug trafficking and possession.¹⁰² Courts continued to impose death sentences for drug-related offenses, such as trafficking and possession, which accounted for the overwhelming majority of capital punishment convictions in the country.

A lack of transparency surrounded the use of the death penalty. Official information related to death sentences, the number of death row prisoners and their location, commutations, and clemency, remained scarce and opaque.¹⁰³

No steps towards abolition

In July 2023, Minister of Public Security Vilay Lakhamfong announced that the government was in the process of commuting existing death sentences, and that some prisoners under death sentence had already been released as a result. He also stated that the government intended to revise the laws governing death penalty procedures by the end of the year, with the aim to clarify how death sentences were implemented.¹⁰⁴ However, as of June 2025, no information was available on the status of these planned revisions.

In April 2024, as part of the review of Laos by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the government affirmed that in practice executions did not take place and that death sentences were commuted to life imprisonment.¹⁰⁵

100 UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – Japan*, 21 April 2023; UN Doc. A/HRC/53/15, para. 140; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/53/15>; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – Japan (Addendum)*, 8 June 2023; UN Doc. A/HRC/53/15/Add.1; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/53/15/Add.1>

101 UNGA, *Note verbale dated 16 February 2023 from the Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly*, 16 February 2023; UN Doc. A/78/64; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/78/64>

102 UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – Lao People’s Democratic Republic*, 22 January 2025; UN Doc. A/HRC/WG.6/49/LAO/2, para. 6; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/WG.6/49/LAO/2>

103 *Ibid.*, paras. 7 and 13.

104 Radio Free Asia, *Weak laws in Laos mean death row inmates won’t face execution anytime soon*, 7 July 2023; <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/laos/death-row-inmates-07072023161103.html>

105 CEDAW, *Replies of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic to the list of issues and questions in relation to its tenth periodic report*, 11 June 2024; UN Doc. CEDAW/C/LAO/RQ/10 para. 9; https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2FC%2FLAO%2FRQ%2F10&Lang=en

In the third UPR of Laos, which began in 2020, the government did not accept all 16 death penalty-related recommendations made by UN member states. The government falsely claimed that the Criminal Code prescribed the death penalty in line with Article 6 of the ICCPR.¹⁰⁶

Laos abstained on the UNGA's biennial resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty in 2020, 2022, and 2024.

5.10 MALAYSIA

No attempts towards complete abolition

The official moratorium on executions, established in 2018, remained in force. Progress was made in reforming death penalty legislation, particularly by abolishing the mandatory death penalty for certain serious crimes in 2023. The amendments resulted in a significant decrease in the number of prisoners under death sentence. As of January 2025, there were at least 140 prisoners under death sentence (including three women and 27 foreign nationals), down from 1,275 (-89%) in November 2023, when the resentencing process began. Forty of them had been found guilty of drug-related offenses.¹⁰⁷

Nonetheless, this progress was undermined by the continued imposition of death sentences by courts of first instance, including for drug-related offenses, which remained punishable by death.

Mandatory death penalty for certain crimes abolished

In April 2023, Parliament voted in favor of the Abolition of Mandatory Death Penalty Act. The Act completely abolished the death penalty for seven offenses, including attempted murder and kidnapping, and removed the mandatory imposition of the death penalty for 12 of 32 capital offenses, including drug trafficking, murder, treason, and terrorism.¹⁰⁸ Under the Act, the courts have the discretion to consider the facts of the case and mitigating circumstances and to impose alternative punishments, including prison terms of 30 to 40 years, accompanied by a minimum of 12 strokes of caning. The Act became effective on 4 July 2023.¹⁰⁹

On 12 September 2023, the Revision of Sentence of Death and Imprisonment for Natural Life Act came into effect. This law allowed individuals sentenced to death or life imprisonment and who had already exhausted their ordinary judicial proceedings to apply for a review of their sentences by the Federal Court.¹¹⁰ By October 2024, 860 of the 936 death row prisoners who had been eligible for re-sentencing as of November 2023, had their death sentences commuted.¹¹¹

Despite these positive developments, the death penalty continued to be imposed for drug trafficking under the 1952 Dangerous Drugs Act.¹¹² In these cases, the imposition of the death penalty often

106 UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – Lao People's Democratic Republic (Addendum)*, 16 September 2020; UN Doc. A/HRC/44/6/Add.1; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/44/6/Add.1>

107 HAYAT, *Data trends- Post-Abolition Trends on Death Row in Malaysia*, accessed on 2 September 2025; <https://www.hayat-life.org/data-vault>

108 ADPAN/ECPM, *The death penalty in law and in practice – Malaysia*; <https://www.ecpm.org/app/uploads/2023/02/flyer-malaisie-2021-261022-MD.pdf>

109 Bernama, *Act to abolish mandatory death penalty comes into force*, 4 July 2023; <https://www.malaysianow.com/news/2023/07/04/act-to-abolish-mandatory-death-penalty-comes-into-force>

110 Amnesty International, *Malaysia: First six months of sentencing discretion underscore urgent need for indefinite extension of moratorium for executions*, 26 February 2024; <https://www.amnesty.my/2024/02/26/first-six-months-of-sentencing-discretion/>

111 Malay Mail, *Two years after abolishing the mandatory death penalty, data shows Malaysia may be moving on for good*, 5 April 2025; <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2025/04/05/two-years-after-abolishing-the-mandatory-death-penalty-data-shows-malaysia-may-be-moving-on-for-good/170026>

112 ADPAN, *Joint stakeholder written submission on the death penalty in Malaysia for the 45th session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review*, January 2024; <https://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/Res/AHR%20ADPAN%20Malaysia%20UPR%20Final.pdf>

followed legal proceedings that failed to meet fair trial standards under international law.¹¹³ In October 2024, the Ministry of Health indicated there was no plan to remove the death penalty from the Act.

On 9 July 2025, the government approved a decision to set up a task force under the Criminal Law Reform Committee to undertake a comprehensive review of the death penalty policy “involving all stakeholders.” This decision was made following several consultation sessions involving government agencies, legal bodies, and civil society organizations.¹¹⁴

In the fourth UPR of Malaysia, which began in 2024, the government did not accept all 14 death penalty-related recommendations made by UN member states. The government reiterated its stance on the establishment of a just and equitable legal system for all, taking into consideration the views of all parties, including the victims’ families and the offenders.¹¹⁵

Malaysia voted in favor of the UNGA’s biennial resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty in 2020, 2022, and 2024.

The reform of the mandatory death penalty for certain offenses was among the human rights pledges made by the government in 2021 as part of Malaysia’s successful bid for membership of the UN Human Rights Council for the 2022-2024 term.¹¹⁶

5.11 MALDIVES

Shaky *de facto* moratorium

The Maldivian government’s position on capital punishment remained ambiguous and increasingly unpredictable, despite the continued observance of a *de facto* moratorium. While no executions had been carried out since 1952, developments that occurred during the reporting period - namely public announcements pledging a resumption of executions - indicated the possibility of a troubling departure from the Maldives’ earlier adherence to the *de facto* moratorium.

As of May 2025, 23 individuals were under death sentence in the Maldives, including three Bangladeshi nationals.¹¹⁷ By the end of 2024, an unknown number of prisoners remained on death row for offenses they had committed when they were below 18 years of age.¹¹⁸

New government announces plans to resume executions

The Maldives’ stance on capital punishment reflected the political shifts in government - a situation that was made possible by the absence of an official moratorium.

In June 2022, then-Home Affairs Minister Imran Abdulla reiterated before Parliament that the government would maintain its moratorium policy, reinforcing the Maldives’ position of restraint on capital punishment at that time.¹¹⁹ However, the Maldives’ stance on capital punishment shifted following the election of President Mohamed Muizzu in September 2023. Shortly after assuming

113 International Drug Policy Consortium, *Drug offences and the death penalty in Malaysia: Fair trial rights and ramifications*, 9 June 2020; <https://idpc.net/publications/2020/06/drug-offences-and-the-death-penalty-in-malaysia-fair-trial-rights-and-ramifications>; Amnesty International, *Malaysia: First six months of sentencing discretion underscore urgent need for indefinite extension of moratorium for executions*, 26 February 2024, <https://www.amnesty.my/2024/02/26/first-six-months-of-sentencing-discretion/>

114 Bernama, *Govt to form task force to review death penalty policy*, Direction - Azalina, 22 July 2025; <https://www.bernama.com/en/news.php?id=2448106>

115 UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – Malaysia (Addendum)*, 11 June 2024; UN Doc. A/HRC/56/11/Add.1; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/56/11/Add.1>

116 UNGA, *Note verbale dated 4 June 2021 from the Permanent Mission of Malaysia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly*, 9 June 2021; UN Doc. A/76/83, para. 2; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/76/83>

117 Advocates for Human Rights/MDN/World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, *Joint submission for The Maldives’ Compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, 19 May 2025, para. 1; https://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/International_Submissions/A/Index?id=607

118 *Ibid.*, para. 2.

119 PSM News, *Gov’t to uphold moratorium on death penalty*, 6 June 2022; <https://www.psmnews.mv/en/103871>

office, in December 2023, Minister of Homeland Security and Technology Ali Ihusan publicly announced plans to resume executions.¹²⁰ In October 2024, Ali Ihusan confirmed that preparations for executions were underway, including the construction of a death chamber and training of personnel, with executions expected to commence once preparations were complete.¹²¹

In August 2024, Ali Ihusan declared that proposed amendments to the Drug Act would introduce the death penalty for individuals convicted of trafficking more than 500 grams of drugs.¹²² As of June 2025, the bill had not yet been introduced in Parliament.

With regard to legislative developments, Article 29(d) and (e) of the Child Rights Protection Act, which was passed on 20 November 2019¹²³ and came into effect in February 2020, prohibited the execution of individuals for crimes committed when they were under the age of 18 and required the commutation of death sentences already imposed on such individuals. These provisions were then included in the Juvenile Justice Act. Despite the enactment of such important safeguards, courts continued to sentence to death individuals who were under the age of 18 at the time of the offense.¹²⁴

In the third UPR of the Maldives, which began in 2020, the government did not accept all 26 death penalty-related recommendations made by UN member states. The government claimed the death penalty could not be abolished “without preceding domestic legislation and wider public consultation on the issue.” It also reiterated its commitment to uphold the informal moratorium on the application of death penalty.¹²⁵

The Maldives voted against the UNGA’s biennial resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty in 2020, 2022, and 2024.

Death penalty-related issues were not among the human rights pledges made by the government in 2022 as part of the Maldives’ successful bid for membership of the UN Human Rights Council for the 2023-2025 term.¹²⁶

5.12 MYANMAR

Junta escalates the death penalty to terrorize opponents

After the February 2021 *coup d’état*, the military junta resorted to the death penalty to instill terror among the civilian population as part of its campaign of repression against all forms of opposition and resistance. Prior to February 2021, death sentences had been occasionally imposed by the courts for murder and usually commuted through mass amnesties.¹²⁷ Between February 2021 and June 2025, at least 172 individuals were sentenced to death by military tribunals, including 44 *in absentia*.¹²⁸ Death sentences were primarily used against political opponents, activists, and peaceful pro-democracy protesters. The junta’s hanging of four people in 2022 abruptly ended a period of over three decades without judicial executions in Myanmar.

120 Human Rights Watch, *Maldives: Reverse Plans to Reinstate Death Penalty*, 21 December 2023; <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/12/21/maldives-reverse-plans-reinstate-death-penalty>

121 FIDH/MDN, *Joint Submission for the 50th session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) – Maldives*, 7 April 2025, p.6; https://mvdemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/2025_fidh_mdn_maldives_upr.pdf

122 MV+, *Govt Proposes Death Penalty for Trafficking Drugs*, 15 August 2024; <https://www.plus.mv/english/govt-proposes-death-penalty-for-trafficking-drugs/>

123 UNICEF, *Maldives ratifies Child Rights Protection Act*, 24 February 2020; <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/press-releases/maldives-ratifies-child-rights-protection-act>

124 Amnesty International data, 2020-2024 Annual Reports on Death Sentences and Executions.

125 UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – Maldives (Addendum)*, 22 December 2020; UN Doc. A/HRC/46/10/Add.1; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/46/10/Add.1>

126 UNGA, *Note verbale dated 19 September 2022 from the Permanent Mission of Maldives to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly*, 20 September 2022; UN Doc. A/77/355; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/77/355>

127 Amnesty International, *Death sentences and executions 2021*, 24 May 2022; https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/2023-04/Amnesty%20International%20Global%20Report%20Death%20Sentences%20and%20Executions%202021.pdf?VersionId=XMhTmnlTWvkWb2LhSTM3_5MYt46knhWh

128 Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, *Daily Briefing in Relation to the Military Coup*, 30 June 2025; <https://aappb.org/?p=33146>



Young demonstrators hold a banner with a picture of Kyaw Min Yu, better known as Jimmy, during a protest against the military junta's execution of four individuals, including Jimmy, in Yangon, Myanmar, on 28 July 2022.

© STR / NurPhoto / NurPhoto via AFP

Executions resume as military courts try civilians

Following the junta's imposition of Martial Law Order 3/2021 on 16 March 2021 in 11 townships across Yangon and Mandalay Regions,¹²⁹ military tribunals were authorized to try civilians for 23 vague and broadly defined offenses in the Criminal Code and other laws, including treason and other politically motivated charges that had been used against peaceful protesters.¹³⁰ Under martial law, those convicted of such crimes faced severe sentences, including the death penalty or lengthy imprisonment with hard labor. The decisions made by military tribunals were final and could not be appealed, including in cases involving the death penalty – in many of which the defendants were tried *in absentia*.¹³¹ The only recourse available to those sentenced to death was to petition the junta head through prison authorities within 15 days of the conviction requesting to reverse the decision or to reduce the sentence.¹³²

On 23 July 2022, pro-democracy activist Kyaw Min Yu (aka Jimmy) and former National League for Democracy (NLD) member of Parliament Phyo Zayar Thaw, along with two other men, Hla Myo Aung and Aung Thura Zaw, were hanged in Yangon's Insein Prison.¹³³ This event marked the resumption of judicial executions in Myanmar since 1988. Kyaw Min Yu and Phyo Zayar Thaw were sentenced to death by a military tribunal in January 2022 after being convicted of politically motivated charges involving explosives, bombings, and financing terrorism under the Counter-Terrorism Law. Hla Myo Aung and Aung Thura Zaw were sentenced to death after being found guilty of the murder of a woman believed to act as an informer for the military in Yangon's Hlaing Tharyar Township.

The commutation of death sentences was largely discontinued under the junta. This practice was previously implemented by military juntas and military-backed civilian governments as part of

129 Since then, the junta extended martial law on townships across the country. By the end of 2024, at least 64 townships were under martial law; International Commission of Jurists, *Myanmar: A year after military takeover, no rule of law or judicial independence*, 10 February 2022; <https://www.icj.org/myanmar-a-year-after-military-takeover-no-rule-of-law-or-judicial-independence/>; Human Rights Watch, *Myanmar: Events of 2024*; <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/myanmar>

130 Military tribunals consisted of three members of the military and were authorized to try 23 offenses, including "disrupting or hindering government employees and services," "spreading false news," and "exciting disaffection towards the government"; UN OHCHR, *Myanmar: UN experts sound alarm over junta's decision to enforce death sentences*, 10 June 2022; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/06/myanmar-un-experts-sound-alarm-over-juntas-decision-enforce-death-sentences>

131 International Commission of Jurists, *Myanmar: Martial law is Another Dangerous Escalation of Repression*, 17 March 2021; <https://www.icj.org/myanmar-martial-law-is-another-dangerous-escalation-of-repression/>

132 Human Rights Watch, *Myanmar: Junta Vows to Enforce Death Sentences*, 7 June 2022; <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/06/07/myanmar-junta-vows-enforce-death-sentences>

133 FIDH, *Junta reaches a new low with shocking executions*, 25 July 2022; <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/myanmar/myanmar-junta-reaches-a-new-low-with-shocking-executions>

routine mass amnesties, particularly on Independence Day (4 January) and Thingyan (Myanmar New Year, celebrated in mid-April). A rare commutation of death sentences was granted on 3 May 2023, where 38 prisoners had their death sentence commuted to life in prison under Order No. 32/2023.¹³⁴

In October 2023, it was reported that prisoners facing the death penalty, including in Tharyarwaddy Prison in Bago Region and Insein Prison in Yangon, were not allowed to receive visitors, despite the resumption of prison visits following the COVID-19 pandemic.¹³⁵

In the third UPR of Myanmar, which began in 2021, the democratically elected government led by the NLD received 17 death penalty-related recommendations from UN member states.¹³⁶ However, following the *coup d'état*, Myanmar's third UPR remained incomplete because of the ongoing question of the country's representation at the UN.¹³⁷

Myanmar voted in favor of the UNGA's biennial resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty in 2022 and 2024 and abstained in 2020. The vote in 2022 and 2024 was cast by the representative of Myanmar's National Unity Government.¹³⁸

5.13 NORTH KOREA

Increasing secrecy and arbitrariness around executions

The death penalty remained the most severe form of state punishment and a secretive tool of control over the general population. This trend demonstrated not only the government's lack of willingness to reverse its policy direction, but also a continued reliance on executions, including for non-violent offenses that did not involve intentional killing.

The government did not make information concerning the death penalty available, including the number of individuals sentenced to death, the death row population, the number of executions, and the number of death sentences overturned or commuted on appeal or in which an amnesty or pardon was granted, and according to which procedure. In addition, the extremely limited number of escapees who fled the country following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 made external documentation increasingly difficult.

Public executions accounted for 33 (82.5%) of the 40 executions recorded by the Database Center for North Korean Human Rights (NKDB) between 2020 and 2024 - a finding that appeared to be tied to the enactment of new laws prescribing capital punishment. At the fourth UPR of North Korea on 7 November 2024, the government acknowledged the practice of public executions.¹³⁹ Secret executions accounted for seven (17.5%) of the executions recorded by NKDB during the same period. Typically reserved for politically sensitive cases and often conducted without trial, secret executions took place in publicly inaccessible and closed environments, such as political prison camps or detention facilities.

North Korea's criminal justice system did not provide minimum guarantees - such as adequate legal assistance at all stages of the proceedings - to anyone suspected of, or charged with, a capital crime.

134 Myanmar International TV, *Order No. 32/2023: 38 prisoners commuted to life imprisonment*, 3 May 2023; <https://www.myanmaritv.com/news/order-no322023-38-prisoners-commuted-life-imprisonment>

135 Myanmar Now, *Death row inmates, lifers continue to be denied prison visits*, 25 October 2023; <https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/death-row-inmates-lifers-continue-to-be-denied-prison-visits/>

136 UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – Myanmar*, 12 April 2021; UN Doc. A/HRC/47/13; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/47/13>

137 UPR Info, *Revised timeline for Myanmar's fourth UPR cycle*, 5 June 2025; <https://upr-info.org/en/news/revised-timeline-myanmars-fourth-upr-cycle>

138 The National Unity Government is a government in exile formed by sitting lawmakers ousted by the military junta in the February 2021 *coup d'état*.

139 UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – Democratic People's Republic of Korea (Addendum)*, 19 December 2024; UN Doc. A/HRC/58/11, para. 87; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/58/11>

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Pandemic, suppression of foreign influence prompt new death penalty provisions

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140 Ministry of Unification, 2024 Report on North Korean Human Rights, 27 June 2024; https://www.unikorea.go.kr/eng_unikorea/news/Publications/ronkhr/

141 The five addition offenses punishable by death were: anti-state propaganda or agitation (Article 66); illegal manufacturing of weapons or ammunition (Article 80); illegal use of weapons or ammunition (Article 81); illegal manufacturing or storage of explosives (Article 117); and illegal use or transfer of explosives (Article 118); Korea Institute for National Unification, *White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea* 2024, 16 May 2025; pp. 69-78; https://www.kinu.or.kr/eng/module/report/view.do?nav_code=eng1674806000&category=74&idx=128276

142 Human Rights Watch, *A sense of terror stronger than a bullet: the Closing of North Korea 2018-2023*, 7 March 2024; <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/03/07/a-sense-of-terror/stronger-than-a-bullet-the-closing-of-north-korea-2018%E2%80%932023>

143 FIDH/NKDB, Joint Submission for the 4th Universal Periodic Review of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, 47th Session of the Working Group on the UPR, 8 April 2024; <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/north-korea/north-korea-report-on-the-human-rights-situation-for-the-universal>

144 NKDB, 2024 *White Paper on North Korean Human Rights*, October 2024;
<https://www.nkdb.org/publication/?q=YToxOntzOjEwOiJrZXI3b3JkX3R5cGUiO3M6MzoiYWxslj9&bmode=view&idx=121771392&t=board> [in Korean]

145 UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – Democratic People's Republic of Korea (Addendum)*, 19 December 2024; UN Doc. A/HRC/58/11, para. 87; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/58/11>; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – Democratic People's Republic of Korea (Addendum)*, 5 February 2025; UN Doc. A/HRC/58/11/Add.1; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/58/11/Add.1>

5.14 PAKISTAN

Little progress toward abolition

Although no executions were recorded in Pakistan after 2020 and the number of death sentences remained lower than it had been prior to 2020, numerous challenges remained. As of June 2025, at least 30 offenses across nine different pieces of legislation were still punishable by death. Between January 2020 and December 2024, courts imposed a total of 680 death sentences – an average of 136 each year.¹⁴⁶ Pakistan continued to have a considerable death row population, with 3,646 inmates under death sentence as of the end of 2024.¹⁴⁷

Positive developments overshadowed by ongoing use of capital punishment for blasphemy

Capital punishment was removed from two laws. In August 2022, Section 127 of the 1890 Railways Act was amended to replace the death penalty with life imprisonment as the maximum punishment for violators. In July 2023, the Control of Narcotics Substances (Amendment) Act eliminated the death penalty for drug-related offenses.¹⁴⁸

In another positive development, in February 2021, the Supreme Court ordered the commutation of the death sentences of three individuals diagnosed with multiple mental disabilities. This landmark ruling, referred to as the “Safia Bano judgement,” established an important precedent for lower courts to impose alternative sentences in cases involving individuals with mental disabilities. Nevertheless, the Safia Bano judgement did not translate in legal provisions aimed at preventing persons with psychological or intellectual disabilities from being sentenced to death or executed.¹⁴⁹

Despite international pressure to do so, the government did not take any steps to decriminalize blasphemy or to remove the death penalty as a punishment in cases of blasphemy. In 2024, two persons were sentenced to death for blasphemy after having been convicted by courts that had been established to handle online offenses under the repressive 2016 Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act.¹⁵⁰

In the fourth UPR of Pakistan, which began in 2023, the government did not accept 24 of the 25 death penalty-related recommendations made by UN member states and failed to provide an explanation for such position.¹⁵¹

Pakistan voted against the UNGA’s biennial resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty in 2020, 2022, and 2024.

Death penalty-related issues were not among the human rights pledges made by the government in 2020 as part of Pakistan’s successful bid for membership of the UN Human Rights Council for the 2021-2023 term.¹⁵²

146 Courts imposed 177 death sentences in 2020; 129 in 2021; 98 in 2022; 102 in 2023; and 174 in 2024; HRCP, *State of Human Rights Reports 2020-2024*; <https://hrnp-web.org/hrnpweb/annual-reports/>

147 Dawn, *The prisons crisis of Pakistan*, 23 February 2025; https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=23_02_2025_524_004

148 Justice Project Pakistan, *Death row population in Pakistan*; <https://data.jpp.org.pk/api/files/1698921123753sw02agg2xd.pdf>

149 UN Human Rights Committee, *Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Pakistan*, 2 December 2024; UN Doc. CCPR/C/PAK/CO/2; <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4068203?ln=en&y-pdf>

150 HRCP, *State of Human Rights in 2024*, <https://hrnp-web.org/hrnpweb/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2025-State-of-Human-Rights-in-2024.pdf>

151 UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – Pakistan (Addendum)*, 6 June 2023; UN Doc. A/HRC/53/13/Add.1; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/53/13/Add.1>

152 UNGA, *Note verbale dated 18 June 2020 from the Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General*, 22 June 2020; UN Doc. A/75/119; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/75/119>

5.15 SINGAPORE

Persistent imposition of the death penalty, alarming execution rates

In Singapore, the death penalty remained applicable for a range of offenses under the 2012 Penal Code, the 2012 Misuse of Drugs Act, and other laws.¹⁵³ Between 2020 and June 2025, the number of prisoners under death sentence remained constant, at around 50.

No executions took place in 2020 and 2021 due to pending litigation and restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, between March 2022 and June 2025, at least 32 individuals, including one woman, were executed. Drug-related offenses accounted for 29 of the 32 death sentences that led to executions. The mandatory death penalty for drug-related offenses disproportionately affected Indian and Malay ethnic minorities, who constituted the majority of both prisoners under death sentence and those executed.¹⁵⁴

Obstacles to due process, harassment of abolitionist activists

On 30 March 2022, Singapore executed Abdul Kahar bin Othman, who had been convicted of drug-related offenses - the first execution to be carried out since 2019.¹⁵⁵ On 26 July 2023, Singaporean Saridewi Djamani became the first woman to be executed in the city-state since 2004. She had been convicted of drug-related offenses in 2018.¹⁵⁶

Singapore's resumption of executions reignited concerns over violations of fair trial rights and due process guarantees, particularly in drug-related cases involving the death penalty. For example, on 27 April 2022, Nagaenthran Dharmalingam, a Malaysian man convicted of drug trafficking, was executed despite suffering from mental disabilities and an intellectual impairment - an allegation the government rejected.¹⁵⁷

With regard to legislative developments, in November 2022, Parliament passed the Post-Appeal Applications in Capital Cases Act, which tightened rules surrounding appeals that might lead to a stay of executions.¹⁵⁸ Under the new law, prisoners sentenced to death who exhausted their appeals must be able to demonstrate a "reasonable prospect of success" and presenting "new relevant evidence," to be able to file applications with the Court of Appeal.

In September 2023, a group of 36 death row inmates filed a constitutional challenge against the law in the High Court.¹⁵⁹ They contended that the law was inconsistent with the right to a fair trial and access to justice guaranteed under Article 9 of the Constitution, because they argued it placed an unreasonable burden on applicants by requiring them to prove in advance that their case was likely to succeed. In December 2023, the High Court dismissed the challenge and determined that the law was a legitimate and proportionate legislative reform "in response to a surge in last-minute

¹⁵³ These include the Terrorism Act, the Arms Offenses Act, and the Singapore Armed Forces Act.

¹⁵⁴ UN News, *Singapore: Rights experts call for moratorium on executions for drugs offences*, 29 July 2022; <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/07/1123592>; Death Penalty Information Center, *Singapore Announces Plans to Execute More Death-Sentenced Prisoners Convicted of Non-Violent Drug Offenses*, 14 August 2023; <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/singapore-announces-plans-to-execute-more-death-sentenced-prisoners-convicted-of-non-violent-drug-offenses>

¹⁵⁵ UN OHCHR, *Singapore urged to halt two imminent executions*, 25 April 2022; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2022/04/singapore-urged-halt-two-imminent-executions>

¹⁵⁶ Guardian, *Singapore executes a woman for first time in almost two decades*, 28 July 2023; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jul/28/singapore-woman-execute-death-penalty-saridewi-djamani-executed>

¹⁵⁷ Al Jazeera, *Malaysian Nagaenthran executed on drugs charges in Singapore*, 27 April 2022; <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/27/holdnagaenthran-hanged-at-dawn-in-singapore>

¹⁵⁸ Transformative Justice Collective, *The Post-Appeal Applications in Capital Cases Bill: A brief*, 30 November 2022; <https://transformativejusticecollective.org/2022/11/30/the-post-appeal-applications-in-capital-cases-bill-a-brief/>; Al Jazeera, *Singapore tightens rules on last-minute death penalty appeals*, 30 November 2022; <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/30/singapore-tightens-rules-on-death-penalty-appeals>

¹⁵⁹ Straits Times, *High Court strikes out challenge by 36 death row inmates against new post-appeal process*, 11 November 2024; <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/high-court-strikes-out-challenge-by-36-death-row-inmates-against-new-post-appeal-process>



An activist wears a T-shirt with a sign against the death penalty during a protest against capital punishment at Speakers' Corner in Singapore on 3 April 2022.

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applications” and aimed to “filter out meritless applications.”¹⁶⁰ In March 2024, the Court of Appeal upheld the High Court’s ruling.¹⁶¹ The law eventually came into effect on 28 June 2024.

In November 2024, the government passed the amendments to the Administration of Justice (Protection) Act to determine what constituted “egregious” use of judicial process amounting to contempt of court.¹⁶² This included pursuing, or assisting in pursuing, legal proceedings that the person knew or should have known were “manifestly groundless” or for “improper purpose.” The amendment risked further undermining the rights of death row prisoners, whose late stage appeals against their executions could be deemed by authorities to be abusing court process. The law came into effect on 28 January 2025.

Despite repeated calls by the international community and local voices, including the families of death row prisoners, to establish a moratorium on executions and review the use of the death penalty, the government persistently defended its mandatory imposition, especially for drug-related offenses.¹⁶³

The government also harassed anti-death penalty campaigners. In December 2024, the Ministry of Digital Development and Information used the repressive Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) to target activists with the Transformative Justice Collective (TJC), a local abolitionist civil society group.¹⁶⁴ This forced TJC to deactivate its website and social media accounts.¹⁶⁵ In addition, several activists were investigated - and at least one of them charged under

¹⁶⁰ High Court of the Republic of Singapore, *Masoud Rahimi bin Mehrzad and others v Attorney-General*, 5 December 2023; https://www.elitigation.sg/gd/s/2023_SGHC_346

¹⁶¹ Straits Times, *Apex court dismisses appeal by 36 death row inmates who filed challenge against new process*, 27 March 2024; <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/crime/apex-court-dismisses-appeal-by-36-death-row-inmates-who-filed-challenge-against-new-process>

¹⁶² Ministry of Law, *Commencement of the Administration of Justice (Protection) (Amendment) Act 2024*, 27 January 2025; <https://www.mlaw.gov.sg/commencement-of-the-administration-of-justice-protection-amendment-act-2024/>

¹⁶³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Singapore's reply to joint urgent appeals from Special Procedures Mandate Holders*, 16 September 2022; <https://www.mfa.gov.sg/Overseas-Mission/Geneva-UN/Speeches-and-Statements-Permanent-Mission-to-the-UN/2022/09/Singapore-Reply-Joint-Urgent-Appeals-from-SPMH-16-Sep-2022>; Ministry of Home Affairs, *Ministerial Statement on Singapore's National Drug Control Policy – Speech by Mr K Shanmugam, Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Law*, 8 May 2024; <https://www.mha.gov.sg/mediaroom/parliamentary/ministerial-statement-on-singapore-national-drug-control-policy/>

¹⁶⁴ FIDH, *Singapore: End harassment and intimidation of Transformative Justice Collective*, 21 January 2025; <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/singapore/singapore-end-harassment-and-intimidation-of-transformative-justice>

¹⁶⁵ TJC, *Notice: TJC ceases operations of our website and social media accounts till December 2026*, 21 January 2025; <https://transformativejusticecollective.org/2025/01/21/notice-tjc-ceases-operations-of-our-website-and-social-media-accounts-till-december-2026/>

the draconian Public Order Act - in connection with their participation in peaceful gatherings in solidarity with death row prisoners.¹⁶⁶

In the third UPR of Singapore, which began in 2021, the government accepted four of the 20 death penalty-related recommendations made by UN member states. The government claimed that drug trafficking was one of “the most serious crimes” for which the death penalty was reserved and that capital punishment had been “an effective deterrent” against such crimes.¹⁶⁷

Singapore voted against the UNGA’s biennial resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty in 2020, 2022, and 2024.

5.16 SOUTH KOREA

Legislative and judicial initiatives to abolish the death penalty continue

South Korea maintained a *de facto* moratorium, with no executions carried out since December 1997. As of June 2025, 57 prisoners, including two foreign nationals, remained on death row. They had all been convicted of murder. Four were military personnel who had been sentenced to death by military courts and remained incarcerated in a military prison.¹⁶⁸

The latest judicial case that sought to declare the death penalty unconstitutional had been pending before the Constitutional Court since 2019.¹⁶⁹ On 14 July 2022, the Constitutional Court held a public hearing in the case but had yet to make a ruling as of June 2025. The Constitutional Court had ruled that the death penalty was constitutional in two previous judgments in 1996 and 2010. In addition, lawmakers introduced bills to abolish the death penalty in the 21st National Assembly in October 2021¹⁷⁰ and in the 22nd National Assembly in November 2024.¹⁷¹

Execution sunset clause removed, long-time death row inmates die

In June 2023, the government approved the revision of the Criminal Code to remove the 30-year statute of limitations for carrying out death sentences.¹⁷² The revision, which was approved by the National Assembly in July 2023, was mainly triggered by the case of Won Eon-shik, South Korea’s longest-serving death row inmate, whose death sentence became final on 23 November 1993.¹⁷³ Without the adoption of this revision, Won and other death row inmates whose death sentences had not been carried out for 30 years could have been released for the absence of a legal basis for their continued detention.

166 Straits Times, *Two activists among those under probe for public assemblies outside Changi Prison*, 27 June 2022; <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/two-activists-among-those-under-probe-for-public-assemblies-outside-changi-prison>; Straits Times, *Activist Jolovan Wham faces 5 charges over taking part in illegal vigils for death row inmates*, 3 February 2025; <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/activist-jolovan-wham-handed-5-charges-for-taking-part-in-public-assemblies-without-permit>

167 UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – Singapore*, 22 July 2021; UN Doc. A/HRC/48/16, para. 47; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/48/16>; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – Singapore (Addendum)*, 10 September 2021, UN Doc. A/HRC/48/16/Add.1; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/48/16/Add.1>

168 ChosunBiz, *Two condemned inmates pass away, leaving 57 on death row in South Korea*, 29 June 2025; <https://biz.chosun.com/en/en-society/2025/06/29/YKIIQHLYNNFWPOGPOWI4B4HCA/>

169 Human Rights Watch, *Joint Letter to South Korean President Lee Jae-myung*, 9 July 2025; <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/07/21/joint-letter-to-south-korean-president-lee-jae-myung>

170 National Assembly, *Special act to abolish the death penalty* (Bill no. 2112795), 7 October 2021; https://likms.assembly.go.kr/bill/billDetail.do?billId=PRC_P2K1H1I0C0B7F0V9D2D4H5N7Z1V2N6 [in Korean]

171 National Assembly, *Special act to abolish the death penalty* (Bill no. 2206080), 29 November 2024; https://likms.assembly.go.kr/bill/billDetail.do?billId=PRC_C2B4W0V6U0S3B1C3A4B1Z2H1G2H9G7 [in Korean]

172 National Assembly, *Bill to partially amend the Criminal Code* (Bill no. 2122586), 12 June 2023; https://likms.assembly.go.kr/bill/bi/billDetailPage.do?billId=ARC_U2A3W0P6J1B2G1M3O5B3K3K1X3M3M6 [in Korean]; Korea Herald, *Cabinet approves bill to remove sunset clause for death sentence*, 5 June 2023; <https://www.koreaherald.com/article/3140509>

173 Korea Herald, *Justice Ministry moves to nix execution sunset clause*, 12 April 2023; <https://www.koreaherald.com/article/3102784>

In October 2023, the National Human Rights Commission of Korea called for the abolition of the death penalty in response to a Ministry of Justice-backed and cabinet-approved bill to revise the Criminal Code to introduce the possibility of life imprisonment without parole as a punishment for serious crimes.¹⁷⁴ The bill lapsed in May 2024 with the end of the 21st National Assembly.¹⁷⁵ At the same time, following calls from family members of a murder victim to resume executions, then-Justice Minister Han Dong-hoon ordered four correctional institutions to inspect their execution facilities for proper maintenance.

Meanwhile, Lim Myung-gi, a death row inmate who had been sentenced to death in September 1996, died in January 2021. Two other long-time death row inmates died in 2024 in Gwangju Prison due to advanced age and illness. Oh Jong-geun, who had been sentenced to death for murder in June 2010, was 87 years old at the time of his death in July 2024.¹⁷⁶ Kang Young-sung received a death sentence in December 1996 and died at the age of 58 in August 2024.¹⁷⁷

Lee Jae-myung and Kim Moon-soo, the two frontrunners in South Korea's Presidential election, held on 3 June 2025, failed to answer questions posed by civil society organizations concerning possible commitments to make progress towards the abolition of the death penalty.¹⁷⁸

In the fourth UPR of South Korea, which began in 2023, the government rejected all 24 death penalty-related recommendations made by UN member states. The government said it was participating in the international community's ongoing discussions on the gradual reduction of the use of the death penalty.¹⁷⁹

South Korea voted in favor of the UNGA's biennial resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty in 2020, 2022, and 2024.

Death penalty-related issues were not among the human rights pledges made by the government in 2022 and 2024, as part of South Korea's two bids for membership of the UN Human Rights Council - unsuccessful for the 2023-2025 term and successful for the 2025-2027 term.¹⁸⁰

5.17 SRI LANKA

Rising death row population

Sri Lanka carried out its last execution in 1976. However, the death penalty remained a punishment for many offenses and mandatory for certain crimes - including drug-related offenses - that do not meet "the most serious crimes" threshold under international human rights law. Courts continued to impose death sentences, overwhelmingly for murder. Between January 2020 and December 2024, courts imposed a total of 364 death sentences (an average of approximately 73 each year), 309

174 Korea Herald, *Human rights commission urges Korea to abolish death penalty*, 10 October 2023; <https://www.koreaherald.com/article/3231001>

175 National Assembly, *Bill to partially amend the Criminal Code (Bill no. 2125236)*, 31 October 2023; https://likms.assembly.go.kr/bill/bi/billDetailPage.do?billId=ARC_C2Q3M1N0H3Y1S1H6E5S9A2E7N0J6I7 [in Korean]

176 ChosunBiz, *Boseong murderer Oh Jong-geun dies as oldest inmate on death row at 87*, 29 June 2025; <https://biz.chosun.com/en/en-society/2025/06/29/RZ3VM33SVFG6LH433Y3ZLVSS54/>

177 ChosunBiz, *Two condemned inmates pass away, leaving 57 on death row in South Korea*, 29 June 2025; <https://biz.chosun.com/en/en-society/2025/06/29/YKIIQHLYNNFWPOGPOWI4B4HCA/>

178 FIDH, *South Korea: Newly elected President must address human rights issues raised in survey*, 2 July 2025; <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/south-korea/south-korea-newly-elected-president-must-address-human-rights-issues>

179 UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – Republic of Korea*, 23 March 2023; UN Doc. A/HRC/53/11, para. 122; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/53/11>; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – Republic of Korea (Addendum)*, 13 June 2013, UN Doc. A/HRC/53/11/Add.1; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/53/11/Add.1>

180 UNGA, *Note verbale dated 9 May 2022 from the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly*, 10 May 2022; UN Doc. A/77/78; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/77/78>; UNGA, *Note verbale dated 28 June 2024 from the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly*, 2 July 2024; UN Doc. A/79/115; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/79/115>

(83%) of which were for murder.¹⁸¹ As of December 2023, there were 1,195 prisoners (1,170 men and 25 women) under death sentence, including six foreign nationals.¹⁸²

No attempts were made to resume executions. In August 2022, the Attorney General reported that then-President Ranil Wickremesinghe would not approve any executions.¹⁸³ On 23 February 2023, the Attorney General reiterated that the then-President would not authorize any executions.¹⁸⁴

Presidential pardons inconsistent, new capital crimes added

In December 2020, partly in response to pressure by civil society to decongest prisons during the COVID-19 pandemic, the government announced that all inmates on death row would have their death sentences commuted to 20 years in prison and that those who had already served 20 years in prison would be released.¹⁸⁵

Presidential pardons raised serious concerns over arbitrariness, political favoritism, and ethno-political bias. Individuals sentenced to death after being convicted of politically motivated killings - such as former Army Sergeant Sunil Rathnayake and former member of Parliament Duminda Silva - were granted clemency in March 2020 and June 2021, respectively. In contrast, others, including a woman imprisoned for killing her abusive husband and a man sentenced for a crime committed when he was under the age of 18, were denied clemency. Repeated appeals by civil society for the recognition of gender-based violence and juvenile status as mitigating factors were ignored. These inconsistencies in the President's exercise of clemency powers highlighted the absence of clear criteria and independent oversight, undermined equitable access to justice, and fueled the perception of politicized and ambiguous clemency decisions.

With regard to legislative developments, on 26 October 2021, Article 53 of the Penal Code was repealed and replaced with a provision that prohibited the imposition of the death penalty on individuals who were under 18 at the time of the offense, even if they turned 18 during the trial. However, this provision was not applied retroactively, leaving on death row individuals who were children at the time of the offense and had been sentenced under the previous version of the Penal Code, in violation of Sri Lanka's obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and international juvenile justice standards.

In November 2022, the Poisons, Opium, and Dangerous Drugs (Amendment) Act, which introduced the death penalty for methamphetamine-related offenses, came into effect. The amended Act also prescribed a mandatory death sentence for individuals found guilty of possessing more than five grams of heroin.

In the fourth UPR of Sri Lanka, which began in 2023, the government did not accept all 14 death penalty-related recommendations made by UN member states and failed to provide an explanation for such a position.¹⁸⁶

Sri Lanka voted in favor of the UNGA's biennial resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty in 2020, 2022, and 2024.

181 Courts imposed 93 death sentences in 2020; 33 in 2021; 54 in 2022; 105 in 2023, and 79 in 2024; Department of Prisons, *Statistics Information*; <http://prisons.gov.lk/web/statistics-information-si/>

182 Department of Prisons, *Performance report 2023*, http://prisons.gov.lk/web/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/performance-report-2024_EN.pdf

183 Daily FT, *President informs court his signature will not be used to execute death sentence*, 1 September 2022; <https://www.ft.lk/front-page/President-informs-court-his-signature-will-not-be-used-to-execute-death-sentence/44-739349>

184 World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, *Moratorium Stays in Place in Sri Lanka and Anti-Death Penalty Petitioners Secure an Official Record in Court Proceedings to Protect Future Rights*, 28 March 2023; <https://worldcoalition.org/2023/03/28/moratorium-stays-in-place-in-sri-lanka/>

185 Ada Derana, *Sri Lanka aims to release at least 8,000 inmates from prisons*, 8 December 2020; <https://www.adaderana.lk/news.php?nid=69762>

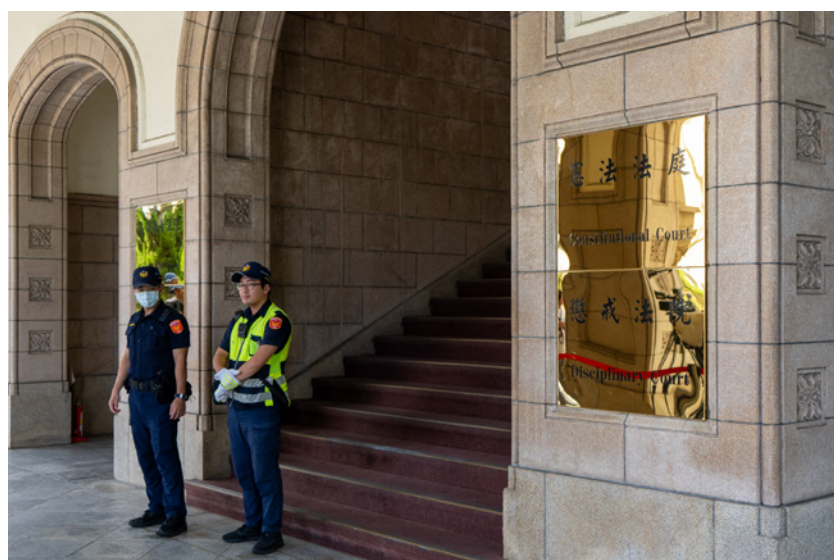
186 UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – Sri Lanka (Addendum)*, 30 June 2023; UN Doc. A/HRC/53/16/Add.1; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/53/16/Add.1>

5.18 TAIWAN

Executions continue amid contrasting developments

Contrasting developments characterized the situation of the death penalty in Taiwan. Two executions took place, highlighting the government's willingness to carry out death sentences despite international and domestic criticism. At the same time, the Constitutional Court mandated significant procedural and substantive safeguards for the use of the death penalty, which, if fully implemented, could reduce its application. Instead of embracing these protections, the legislative and executive branches increased the number of capital crimes and loosened rules that previously delayed executions.

Between January 2020 and June 2025, courts of first instance issued 15 death sentences. As of June 2025, 36 prisoners remained on death row.



Taiwan's Constitutional Court is seen at the Judicial Yuan in Taipei on 20 September 2024, ahead of a ruling on the constitutionality of the death penalty.

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Constitutional Court's ruling followed by regressive measures

On 16 January 2025, Huang Lin-kai was executed in the Taipei Detention Center for the 2013 murder of his ex-girlfriend and her mother.¹⁸⁷ This execution was the first one since 1 April 2020, when Weng Jen-hsien was executed for burning five family members and a caregiver to death on Lunar New Year's Eve in 2016.

On 20 September 2024, the Taiwan Constitutional Court delivered Judgment No. 113-Hsien-Pan-8, in response to petitions filed by 37 death row prisoners who challenged the constitutionality of capital punishment.¹⁸⁸ The court held that the death penalty was constitutional, but it could only be applied to "the most serious crimes." The court also introduced several strict procedural safeguards in cases involving capital punishment, including: 1) mandatory representation by counsel not only during investigation but also on final appeal; 2) mandatory oral arguments before the Supreme Court; and 3) a requirement that death sentences be imposed only through a unanimous decision by the collegial panel of judges (applying only to professional judges and not citizen judges). The ruling further held

¹⁸⁷ FIDH, *Taiwan: First execution under President Lai condemned*, 17 January 2025; <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/taiwan/taiwan-first-execution-under-president-lai-condemned>

¹⁸⁸ Constitutional Court, *Summary of TCC Judgment 113-Hsien-Pan-8 (2024)*; <https://cons.judicial.gov.tw/en/docdata.aspx?fid=5535&id=355776>

that individuals with psychosocial disabilities or severe mental disorders may not be sentenced to death if their conditions significantly impair their judgment or make them unfit to stand trial, and that inmates may not be executed if their mental state renders them incompetent for execution. The court declared unconstitutional the mandatory death penalty for homicide committed during extortionate kidnapping, finding that judges must consider the circumstances of each case. The ruling was binding for future cases, but it permitted petitions for extraordinary appeals with regard to previous proceedings that might not have met the criteria outlined in the Constitutional Court's ruling.

Despite the Court's call for greater caution, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) took steps that appeared to weaken the safeguards. In April 2025, the MoJ revised the Regulations for the Execution of the Death Penalty. Under the previous rules, once a death row prisoner filed an extraordinary procedure (such as a petition for extraordinary appeal, retrial, or constitutional review), the execution had to be suspended until the procedure was resolved. The April 2025 revisions permitted executions to proceed unless a court explicitly ordered a suspension, meaning that executions could take place even pending extraordinary procedures. Abolitionist organizations criticized the revision as a regression and warned that all 36 death row prisoners who had sought extraordinary relief after the Constitutional Court's ruling were at risk of imminent execution.¹⁸⁹

The government also moved to expand the scope of the death penalty. On 18 July 2025, the Legislative Yuan amended the Criminal Code to allow the death penalty to be imposed on offenders who abuse a child under seven years old resulting in the child's death.¹⁹⁰ Life imprisonment had been the heaviest penalty before the amendment.

The debate over alternatives to the death penalty intensified after the Constitutional Court's judgment. Within days of the judgement, the ruling Democratic Progressive Party legislative caucus announced plans to introduce life imprisonment without parole as a substitute for capital punishment. The Kuomintang (KMT) Party and the Taiwan People's Party submitted amendments to the Criminal Code that would allow courts to impose life imprisonment without parole. In addition, Justice Minister Cheng Ming-chien told legislators that the MoJ was examining how to "severely punish major crimes," including through a two-tiered system envisioning: 1) the possibility of parole after serving 25 years of a life sentence; and 2) life imprisonment without the possibility of parole - although details were still under consideration.

5.19 THAILAND

High number of death sentences imposed

Although Thailand's most recent execution took place in 2018, courts continued to impose high number of death sentences. Between January 2020 and December 2024, courts imposed a total of 729 death sentences - an average of approximately 146 each year.¹⁹¹ The number of prisoners under death sentence began to increase in 2023, ending a downward trend observed between 2019 and 2022.¹⁹²

Despite the reform of drug laws undertaken in 2021, the death penalty was retained for "serious drug offenses."¹⁹³ Drug-related offenses continued to account for the majority of the crimes for

189 Public Television Service, *The Ministry of Justice amended the Regulations for the Execution of the Death Penalty, overturned suspension upon petition for extraordinary procedures*, 17 April 2025; <https://shorturl.at/gvfhU> [In Chinese]

190 Focus Taiwan, *Taiwan passes harsher penalties for abusing children leading to death*, 18 July 2025; <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202507180020>

191 Courts imposed 164 death sentences in 2020; 100 in 2021; 171 in 2022; 140 in 2023; and 154 in 2024; Court of Justice, *Annual Statistical Reports*; <https://ppb.coj.go.th/th/content/category/articles/id/8/cid/2085> [in Thai]

192 FIDH, *Thailand Annual Prison Report 2023 – Chapter 5*, March 2023; <https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/thailandprison804a.pdf>

193 Serious drug offenses included production, sales, export, distribution, and unlawful possession of drugs, except for personal use. The death penalty could also be imposed on individuals convicted of being leaders or high-level drug traffickers; FIDH, *Thailand Annual Prison Report 2023 – Chapter 1*, March 2025; https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/thailand_annual_prison_report_2025_-_en.pdf

which a death sentence was imposed. As of May 2025, 278 (70%) out of the 397 inmates under death sentence had been convicted of drug-related offenses.

Women continued to be disproportionately affected by the imposition of death penalty for drug-related offenses. Between January 2020 and May 2025, the proportion of female prisoners under death sentence for drug-related crimes ranged between 83% and 100%, compared to that of male prisoners, which ranged between 55% and 67%.

Unclear path towards abolition

The government failed to make significant progress towards the abolition of the death penalty and continued to show a lack of political will to abolish capital punishment.

Between 2021 and 2025, the number of capital crimes decreased from 60 to 53, which included drug-related offenses and economic/financial crimes.¹⁹⁴

The 2021 Narcotics Act, which came into effect in December 2021, made progress in reducing the penalties and removing minimum sentences for most drug offenses. However, it failed to eliminate the death penalty from the list of punishments that can be imposed for drug crimes. According to the Act, individuals engaged in “serious drug offenses,” which includes commanding a drug network, could be sentenced to death.¹⁹⁵

Thailand’s most recent National Human Rights Plan for 2023-2027 included a commitment to move towards abolishing the death penalty for all crimes through supporting studies to review and amend laws that prescribed the death penalty and advocating for public understanding for the abolition.¹⁹⁶ However, the plan had yet to result in concrete measures or timeframe for the full abolition.

In December 2024, the Thai cabinet rejected a proposal made by the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand (NHRCT) that called for the abolition of the death penalty, citing an opinion of the courts that it remained necessary for certain crimes. The NHRCT recommended the government: 1) refrain from imposing the death penalty in new laws; 2) remove mandatory death sentences; 3) review the death penalty for offenses that do not meet the threshold of “the most serious crimes;” and 4) repeal the death penalty for all offenses.¹⁹⁷

In the third UPR of Thailand, which began in 2021, the government accepted nine of the 22 death penalty-related recommendations made by UN member states. The government claimed it was committed to moving towards the abolition of the death penalty but indicated it would use a “phased approach” in the implementation of such objective.¹⁹⁸

Thailand abstained on the UNGA’s biennial resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty in 2020, 2022, and 2024.

Death penalty-related issues were not among the human rights pledges made by the government in 2024 as part of Thailand’s successful bid for membership of the UN Human Rights Council for the 2025-2027 term.¹⁹⁹

194 National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, *2021 Human Rights Assessment Report of Thailand*, 1 December 2021, <https://www.nhrc.or.th/index.php/th/situation-assessment-report-thailands-human-rights/94> [in Thai]; Union for Civil Liberty, *Offences punishable by death*, 2025

195 Harm Reduction International, *Death penalty for drug offences: Global overview 2021*; <https://hri.global/flagship-research/death-penalty/the-death-penalty-for-drug-offences-global-overview-2021/>

196 Rights and Liberties Protection Department, *Fifth National Human Rights Plan (2023 - 2027)*, <https://www.rlpd.go.th/Content?ContentID=zLr8OyaC> [in Thai]

197 Bangkok Post, *Cabinet refuses to abolish capital punishment*, 17 December 2024; <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/2921596/cabinet-refuses-to-abolish-capital-punishment>

198 UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – Thailand (Addendum)*, 17 February 2022; UN Doc. A/HRC/49/17/Add.1; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/49/17/Add.1>

199 UNGA, *Note verbale dated 10 May 2024 from the Permanent Mission of Thailand to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly*, 13 May 2024; UN Doc. A/79/82; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/79/82>

5.20 VIETNAM

Increased use of capital punishment

The use of the death penalty in Vietnam continued to be characterized by a systematic lack of transparency and due process of law. The exact number of executions carried out between 2020 and 2025 is unknown, as data on the death penalty and execution remained classified as “state secrets” under the 2018 Law on State Secrets.

Nevertheless, internal government reports indicated an increase in death sentences imposed by the courts, especially for drug-related offenses.²⁰⁰ A report to the National Assembly in October 2020 revealed that death sentences had “increased rapidly” by over 34%, with 440 more death sentences imposed in comparison to 2019.²⁰¹ In May 2024, the Chief Justice of the Supreme People’s Procuracy told the National Assembly that 338 death sentences had been imposed between 1 October 2023 and 31 March 2024.²⁰² By the end of 2024, it was estimated that more than 1,200 inmates were under death sentence.²⁰³

Detention conditions on death row remained particularly inhumane. Prisoners were detained in shackles, which were removed for only 15 minutes per day, and could spend years, or decades, in shackles, awaiting execution.²⁰⁴ According to the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), as of 2025, at least 17 prisoners had been on death row for over 15 years.²⁰⁵

Legislative amendments fall short of complete abolition

Amendments to the Criminal Code resulted in the reduction of offenses punishable by death. In April 2025, the MPS submitted a proposal to amend its Criminal Code to remove the death penalty for eight crimes²⁰⁶ and replace it with life imprisonment.²⁰⁷ On 25 June 2025, the National Assembly approved the proposal.²⁰⁸ The legislative amendments came into effect on 1 July 2025.²⁰⁹

Nonetheless, Vietnam’s Criminal Code retained the death penalty for 10 offenses, many of which do not meet the threshold of “the most serious crimes” under Article 6 of the ICCPR, to which Vietnam is a state party. They include drug-related and economic crimes, as well as “national security” offenses that make no distinction between violent acts and the peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression.

Some death row prisoners were executed despite claims that their convictions were the result of confessions that had been extracted under torture. For example, on 22 September 2023, Le Van

200 Harm Reduction International, *The death penalty for drug offences: Global overview 2024*; <https://hri.global/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/HRI-GlobalOverview-2024-FINAL.pdf>

201 Pháp Luật (Law), *Directives on the death penalty remain insufficient*, 16 October 2020; <https://plo.vn/quy-dinh-ve-thi-hanh-an-tu-hinh-con-bat-cap-post597361.html> [in Vietnamese]

202 Pháp Luật (Law), *Supreme Procuracy calls on the President to abrogate death sentences of 31 persons*, 10 May 2024; <https://plo.vn/vksnd-toi-cao-trinh-chu-tich-nuoc-an-giam-an-tu-hinh-voi-31-bi-an-post789663.html> [in Vietnamese]

203 Amnesty International, *Death sentences and executions 2024*, 8 April 2025; <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act50/8976/2025/en/>

204 FIDH/VCHR, *Vietnam: Report on the situation of civil and political rights*, 26 May 2025; <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/vietnam/vietnam-report-on-the-situation-of-civil-and-political-rights-31589>

205 Voice of Vietnam, *Ministry of Public Security: Proposal to reduce death sentence to life imprisonment after statute of limitations expires*, 4 April 2025; <https://vov.vn/phap-luat/bo-cong-an-de-xuat-het-thoi-hieu-thi-hanh-an-tu-hinh-duoc-xuong-an-chung-than-post1189619.vov> [in Vietnamese]

206 The crimes included: subversion (Article 109); espionage (Article 110); sabotage of national infrastructure (Article 114); counterfeit pharmaceuticals (Article 194); drug trafficking (Article 250); embezzlement (Article 353); bribery (Article 354); and acts of aggression or war (Article 421); Vietnamese, *Viet Nam Considers Major Penal Code Reform: Death Penalty to Be Lifted for Eight Crimes*, 26 May 2025; <https://www.thevietnamese.org/2025/05/viet-nam-considers-major-penal-code-reform-death-penalty-to-be-lifted-for-eight-crimes/>

207 Voice of Vietnam, *Vietnam to replace death penalty with life imprisonment without parole*, 13 April 2025; <https://english.vov.vn/en/politics/domestic/vietnam-to-replace-death-penalty-with-life-imprisonment-without-parole-post1191703.vov>

208 FIDH/VCHR, *Briefing paper for the 13th European Union-Vietnam human rights dialogue*, 17 July 2025; <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/vietnam/vietnam-briefing-paper-for-the-13th-eu-vietnam-human-rights-dialogue>

209 UN OHCHR, *Viet Nam: Parliament votes to abolish death penalty for some offences*, 27 June 2025; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/06/viet-nam-parliament-votes-abolish-death-penalty-some-offences>

Manh, who was convicted of murder, was executed after 18 years on death row.²¹⁰ At his trial in 2005, he claimed he had confessed under torture, but the court refused his lawyers' request to examine him for physical evidence of beatings.²¹¹

Following the adoption of Decree 43, which came into effect in April 2020, executions were conducted by the administration of three drugs: one that caused unconsciousness; another that paralyzed the musculoskeletal system; and another that stopped the heart from beating. Decree 43 prescribed that the executions would be suspended if the person were still alive 10 minutes after the administration of the final drug, an aspect that could denote the impossibility of carrying out a death sentence in a humane manner and may amount to torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.

In the fourth UPR of Vietnam, which began in 2024, the government accepted, wholly or partially, four of the 14 death penalty-related recommendations made by UN member states. The government claimed it had implemented "numerous reforms" aimed at limiting the application of the death penalty, and that it reserved it "only for a very few cases of particularly serious crimes."²¹²

Vietnam abstained on the UNGA's biennial resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty in 2020, 2022, and 2024.

Death penalty-related issues were not among the human rights pledges made by the government in 2022 as part of Vietnam's successful bid for membership of the UN Human Rights Council for the 2023-2025 term.²¹³

210 Radio Free Asia, *One year after inmate's execution, Vietnam continues sentencing people to death*, 19 September 2024; <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/death-penalty-manh-09192024215945.html>

211 International Commission of Jurists, *Vietnam: Arbitrary execution of Lê Văn Mạnh violates the right to life and freedom from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment*, 27 September 2023; <https://www.icj.org/vietnam-arbitrary-execution-of-le-van-manh-violates-the-right-to-life-and-freedom-from-torture-and-cruel-inhuman-or-degrading-punishment/>

212 UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – Viet Nam (Addendum)*, 20 September 2024; UN Doc. A/HRC/57/7/Add.1; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/57/7/Add.1>

213 UNGA, *Note verbale dated 4 August 2022 from the Permanent Mission of Viet Nam to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly*, 8 August 2022; UN Doc. A/77/276; <https://docs.un.org/en/A/77/276>

6 - ANNEXES

6.1 Annex 1: Number of executions

Country	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025*
Afghanistan	0	0	1+	1+	4+	4+
Bangladesh	2	5	4	5	0	0
Brunei	0	0	0	0	0	0
China	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
India	4	0	0	0	0	0
Indonesia	0	0	0	0	0	0
Iran	267	333	582	867	1,023	705
Japan	0	3	1	0	0	1
Laos	0	0	0	0	0	0
Malaysia	0	0	0	0	0	0
Maldives	0	0	0	0	0	0
Myanmar	0	0	4	0	0	0
North Korea	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Pakistan	0	0	0	0	0	
Singapore	0	0	11	5	9	7
South Korea	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sri Lanka	0	0	0	0	0	0
Taiwan	1	0	0	0	1	0
Thailand	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vietnam	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

* January to June

6.2 Annex 2: Year of most recent execution(s) / *De facto* abolitionist / Method(s) of execution

Country	Year of most recent execution(s)	<i>De facto</i> abolitionist	Method(s) of execution	Accepted UPR recommendations
Afghanistan	2025	NO	Hanging, shooting	10/21 (48%)
Bangladesh	2023	NO	Hanging	0/13 (0%)
Brunei	1957	YES	Hanging	0/10 (0%)
China	2025	NO	Shooting, Lethal injection	0/20 (0%)
India	2020	NO	Hanging	0/19 (0%)
Indonesia	2016	NO	Shooting	1/22 (5%)
Iran	2025	NO	Hanging	0/35 (0%)
Japan	2025	NO	Hanging	0/18 (0%)
Laos	1989	YES	Shooting	0/16 (0%)
Malaysia	2017	NO	Hanging	0/14 (0%)
Maldives	1952	YES	Lethal injection, hanging	0/26 (0%)
Myanmar	2022	NO	Hanging	N/A
North Korea	2025	NO	Shooting, hanging	2/22 (9%)
Pakistan	2019	NO	Hanging	1/25 (4%)
Singapore	2025	NO	Hanging	4/20 (20%)
South Korea	1997	YES	Hanging, shooting	0/24 (0%)
Sri Lanka	1976	YES	Hanging	0/14 (0%)
Taiwan	2025	NO	Shooting	N/A
Thailand	2018	NO	Lethal injection	9/22 (41%)
Vietnam	2023	NO	Lethal injection	4/14 (29%)

6.3 Annex 3: UNGA resolutions voting records

Country	2020	2022	2024
Afghanistan	NO		
Bangladesh	NO	NO	ABS
Brunei	NO	NO	NO
China	NO	NO	NO
India	NO	NO	NO
Indonesia	ABS	ABS	ABS
Iran	NO	NO	NO
Japan	NO	NO	NO
Laos	ABS	ABS	ABS
Malaysia	YES	YES	YES
Maldives	NO	NO	NO
Myanmar	ABS	YES	YES
North Korea	NO	NO	NO
Pakistan	NO	NO	NO
Singapore	NO	NO	NO
South Korea	YES	YES	YES
Sri Lanka	YES	YES	YES
Taiwan*			
Thailand	ABS	ABS	ABS
Vietnam	ABS	ABS	ABS

* Not a UN member state

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Enduring injustice:

A review of the death penalty in Asia
(2020-2025)

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A sign is seen during a protest against the death penalty at
Speakers' Corner in Singapore on 3 April 2022.
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