



ADPAN AND PARTNER HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS DENOUNCE THE EXPANSION OF THE DEATH PENALTY FOR DRUG OFFENSES IN THE MALDIVES

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The Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network (ADPAN) and partner human rights organizations denounce the decision of the People’s Majlis (Parliament of the Maldives) to expand the scope of the death penalty to drug-trafficking offenses through amendments to the Drugs Act.

On 3 December 2025, the Parliament approved amendments which introduced capital punishment — subject to a unanimous decision of the Supreme Court bench — for the importation of more than 350 grams of cannabis, 250 grams of diamorphine (heroin), or 100 grams of other specified drugs. The amendments, which were ratified by the President on 6 December, also removed the possibility of commuting such sentences through clemency and barred plea agreements.

Drug Offenses are Not ‘Most Serious Crimes’ — Making Maldives’ Death Penalty Expansion Unlawful under International Law

The amendments are plainly incompatible with the Maldives’ obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which it acceded on 19 September 2006. Article 6(2) of the ICCPR provides that, where the death penalty remains, it may be imposed only for the “most serious crimes” — a phrase consistently interpreted as limited to offenses involving intentional killing. Several UN bodies have found that drug offenses do not fall within this category.

By widening capital punishment to drug trafficking, the Maldives is also acting against the stated goal of abolition of the death penalty enshrined in paragraph 6 of the same article of the ICCPR, steps outside accepted international norms, weakens its human rights standing, and embraces a policy with no demonstrated unique deterrent effect. It also heightens the risk of irreversible injustice, including in cases involving vulnerable individuals and flawed investigations.

The Amendments Do Not Address Actual Drug Policy Challenges

We recognize the serious challenges that the Maldives faces in relation to drug control. However, in addition to violating international restrictions to the use of the death penalty, the amendments do not respond to what Maldivian communities, public health professionals, and rights advocates repeatedly identify as the real root causes of those challenges.

For years, civil society groups and health practitioners have stressed that the country lacks a comprehensive **harm reduction framework**, including basic health-based interventions and overdose prevention measures. Access to rehabilitation and community-based treatment remains limited, leaving many people without meaningful pathways to recovery. Reintegration support for young people emerging from the justice system is similarly inadequate, contributing to cycles of vulnerability and relapse.

At the same time, the social and economic factors that contribute to people engaging in the drug market — such as marginalization, unemployment, and poverty — remain insufficiently addressed despite being central to long-term solutions. These gaps, rather than the absence of the death penalty, are what sustain the country's drug control challenges.

Experience across the region shows that effective drug control depends far more on addressing the root causes that increase the risks for people who use drugs or that lead people to engage in the drug trade, and not on the death penalty. Executions add nothing to the Maldives' ability to dismantle drug trafficking networks.

A Step Backwards for the Maldives

This legislative shift also isolates the Maldives from its own constitutional aspirations and global practice. The country has not executed a person for decades, even though a regulation aimed at facilitating executions was adopted in 2014 and officials repeatedly declared their intentions to resume executions, including last year. The government has long justified the use of capital punishment on the basis that Islamic Shariah prescribes it, but only for a narrow category of crimes – a category that does not include drug offenses. This expansion therefore also breaks the very rationale that the government has repeatedly invoked to defend its retention of the death penalty.

Expanding capital punishment for non-lethal offenses undermines its human rights commitments and further diminishes its international credibility.

What the Maldives needs is a public health oriented and community centered response that supports people instead of punishing them irreversibly through the death penalty. ADPAN stands ready to support the Maldives in building such a response.

ADPAN calls on the Government of the Maldives to:

1. Repeal the amendment introducing the death penalty for drug-related offenses;
2. Repeal the Regulation on Conducting Investigations Into and the Implementation of Penalties Arising from the Offense of Intentional Murder (2014/R-33);
3. Maintain the moratorium on executions and adopt a clear plan towards full abolition;
4. Invest in and implement comprehensive harm reduction programs, treatment services, and health and rights-based drug policies; and
5. Engage openly with civil society, public health experts, and international partners on sustainable and humane approaches to drug control.

Signatories:

1. Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network (ADPAN)
2. Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN)
3. Capital Punishment Justice Project
4. Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Masyarakat
5. Harm Reduction International
6. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
7. World Coalition Against the Death Penalty
8. Justice Project Pakistan
9. Odhikar (Bangladesh)
10. Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA)
11. Redemption Pakistan
12. Amnesty International
13. Transformative Justice Collective
14. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
15. Human Rights Watch
16. The Advocates for Human Rights
17. Freedoms Collective Trust
18. Coalition Against the Death Penalty