
JOINT STATEMENT

24 June 2026

2026 WORLD DRUG DAY: OVER 60 ORGANISATIONS URGE UNODC AND CND TO TAKE URGENT ACTIONS TO END UNLAWFUL USE OF THE DEATH PENALTY FOR DRUG-RELATED OFFENCES

On the occasion of the 2026 International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking (World Drug Day) and the Support Don't Punish Global Day of Action on 26 June, 63 national, regional and international organisations call on the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) and its Member States to unequivocally condemn the use of the death penalty for drug-related offences and to uphold international human rights obligations, including by adopting concrete measures to restrict the use of the death penalty with a view to its full abolition. We further urge UNODC to ensure that none of its technical assistance, capacity-building, or support to drug law enforcement in retentionist States risk contributing, directly or indirectly, to the investigation, prosecution, conviction or sentencing of individuals to death for drug-related offences.

At a time when executions for drug-related offences are reaching unprecedented levels, continued silence and inaction from UNODC and CND, the UN bodies mandated to guide the development and implementation of international drug policy, are untenable. We urge UNODC and CND to take a clear stance against this inhuman practice that contributes to the perpetuation of human rights violations in the name of drug control and to a systemic lack of transparency and accountability.

Our organisations oppose the death penalty unconditionally and continue to call on all states that retain the death penalty to fully abolish it as a matter of urgency.

THE DEATH PENALTY FOR DRUG-RELATED OFFENCES: RECORD-HIGH EXECUTIONS

The death penalty is retained for drug-related offences in at least 35 countries, and it is mostly imposed in relation to the cultivation, manufacturing, trafficking or importing/exporting of controlled substances.

Official information on the use of the death penalty is not publicly available for many countries; and only a limited number of state authorities globally respond to requests for information – often not providing disaggregated data by crime. In the absence of full transparency on the part of states, it is impossible to know the full extent of the resort to this cruel punishment, including for drug-related offences.

However, independent research by civil society shows a sharp rise in drug-related executions in recent years, with such cases accounting for over 40% of all executions worldwide and reaching 46% in 2025. Reported separately by Amnesty International and Harm Reduction International, more than 1,200 people executed in 2025 are for drug-related offences, marking a significant increase compared to 2024 and the highest number recorded to date. This finding underscores the growing role of drug control as a driver of capital punishment globally and in many countries.¹

Amnesty International and Harm Reduction International recorded drug-related executions in five countries: China, where official sources confirmed drug-related executions, but for which neither organisation was able to present a total figure due to state censorship and lack of transparency; Iran, where almost half the executions recorded during the year were for drug-related offences; Kuwait, which also expanded applicability of the death penalty for drug offences in 2025; Saudi Arabia, where 240 executions for drug-related offences were recorded, doubling the corresponding total for 2024; and Singapore, where 15 out of 17 executions were drug related, also doubling the 2024 figure. Both organisations believe that it is likely that

¹ Amnesty International (2026). Death sentences and executions 2025. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT50/0778/2026/en/>; Harm Reduction International (2026). The death penalty for drug offences: Global overview 2025. <https://hri.global/flagship-research/death-penalty/>

drug-related executions were carried out in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) and Viet Nam, but could not confirm it, again due to restrictive state practices.

Civil society independent monitoring has also documented hundreds of new death sentences imposed for drug-related offences in at least 16 countries in 2025: Bangladesh, China, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Laos, Libya, Malaysia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Viet Nam, and Yemen. In addition to these, Harm Reduction International recorded death sentences for drug-related offences in North Korea and Thailand.

At least 2,450 people are estimated to be on death row for drug offences in 22 countries at the end of 2025; though actual figures are likely to be significantly higher.²

Throughout the year, the authorities of Algeria, Kuwait, and the Maldives also drove legislative efforts to expand the scope of the death penalty for drug-related crimes. Positive steps to reduce the scope of the death penalty for these offences were taken in Viet Nam, where the death penalty was abolished for eight offences including drug transportation. In April 2026, the Ministry of Public Security proposed further amendments to the Penal Code to reduce the scope of the death penalty.³

Recent developments in other countries suggest that, with sustained political will, a significant decrease in the global resort to the death penalty for drug-related offences is possible. In Malaysia, the repeal of the mandatory death penalty in July 2023, prompted a review of existing death sentences by the Federal Court and Court of Appeal, resulting in the commutation of more than 1,000 death sentences. Official figures show a further decline in the number of death sentences imposed by High Courts during 2025, with the overall total (15) decreasing by one third compared to 2024, when 24 new death sentences were imposed. The number of drug-related offences declined by two, from nine to seven. Once, again, Malaysia's higher courts did not uphold any new death sentences for such offences during 2025.⁴ In July 2023, Pakistan repealed the death penalty for drug-related offences; the first country to do so in over a decade.

These changes not only represent significant steps towards aligning national laws with restrictions on the use of the death penalty set out under international law and standards but also reflect a shift away from highly punitive approaches to drugs, of which the death penalty has been the most extreme example.

A CLEAR VIOLATION OF INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS AND DRUG CONTROL LAW AND STANDARDS

International human rights law and standards restrict the use of the death penalty to the "most serious crimes", which do not include drug-related offences. Article 6(2) of the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights** and Safeguard No.1 of the **UN Safeguards guaranteeing protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty**, adopted through UN Economic and Social Council resolution 1984/50, provide that the imposition of the death penalty must be restricted to the "most serious crimes". The **UN Human Rights Committee** has stated that "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 [...] drug and sexual offences, although serious in nature, can never serve as the basis, within the framework of article 6, for the imposition of the death penalty. [...]".⁵ Among other UN mandates, the **UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions** has similarly stated that "The death penalty may not be imposed for drug-related offences."⁶ In its 2023 report to the UN Human Rights Council, the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights highlighted that "[d]rug-related offences can never serve as the basis for the imposition of the death penalty".⁷

The **UN Drug Conventions** – the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961), the Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971) and the Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (1988) – do not make any reference to capital punishment, while several UN human rights and drug control bodies have reiterated the total opposition to the death penalty, including for drug-related offences. The **UN task team on the implementation of the Common Position**

² Harm Reduction International (2026). The death penalty for drug offences: Global overview 2025. <https://hri.global/flagship-research/death-penalty/>

³ Viet Nam News (2026) "Public security ministry proposes reduction of capital offences", 29 April 2026. <https://vietnamnews.vn/politics-laws/1780375/public-security-ministry-proposes-reduction-of-capital-offences.html>; Viet Nam Express (2026), "Bộ Công an đề xuất còn hai tội áp dụng án tử hình" (The Ministry of Public Security proposes that the death penalty be applied to two more crimes), 18 May 2026, <https://vnexpress.net/bo-cong-an-de-xuat-con-hai-toi-ap-dung-an-tu-hinh-5075120.html>

⁴ Amnesty International (2026). Death sentences and executions 2025. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT50/0778/2026/en/>; Harm Reduction International (2026). The death penalty for drug offences: Global overview 2025. <https://hri.global/flagship-research/death-penalty/>

⁵ Human Rights Committee, General comment No. 36 (2018) on article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, on the right to life, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/36, 30 October 2018, para.35.

⁶ Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions (2012), UN Doc. A/67/275, para.122. The same position has been supported by other UN bodies and mandates, including the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, Arbitrary detention relating to drug policies – Study of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, UN Doc. A/HRC/47/40, 18 May 2021, paras.41-43, the Special Rapporteur on Torture (UN Doc. A/HRC/10/44, para. 66) and the UN Secretary-General (UN Doc. A/HRC/24/18, para. 78).

on Drugs has reiterated in unequivocal terms that the application of the death penalty for drug-related offences does not respect the spirit of the international drug control conventions and has the potential to become an obstacle to effective cross-border and international cooperation against drug trafficking.⁷ The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) has also noted that “States’ actions that violate human rights in the name of drug control policy are inconsistent with the international drug control conventions”; and has called on States that still retain this punishment for drug-related offences to consider abolishing it for such offences and commuting death sentences that have already been imposed.⁸ More broadly, the INCB has stressed that respect for human rights is a prerequisite for the implementation of the international drug control conventions, and that measures adopted with the purported aim of furthering drug policy that are inconsistent with universally recognized human rights norms are a violation of the international drug control conventions.

However, the use of the death penalty for drug-related offences remains a contentious issue at the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, preventing this body from taking a formal position on this important matter. While UNODC representatives have on occasions recalled the UN’s unconditional opposition to the death penalty, advocacy and advances towards abolition have not been included in programmatic documents of the Office.⁹ The continued and unequivocal public condemnation by UNODC of the use of the death penalty for drug-related offences would be critical, in the long term, to change the perception of this issue and foster a context for discussions that puts the protection of human rights at the core of international and national drug control policies.

WORLD DRUG DAY AND THE DEATH PENALTY

The International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, or World Drug Day, is an initiative designed to encourage international cooperation to address the risks and harms of drugs. Yet, in many countries, it has instead become an occasion to showcase and legitimise punitive drug control measures, with governments using the day to amplify “iron-fist on drug crime” stances. The authorities of Iran, for example, reaffirmed on World Drug Day their strong resolve to act as “the flag bearer of the global fight against narco-traffickers and death dealers”.¹⁰ In China, courts, including the Supreme People’s Court, use this day as a regular hook to issue judicial guidelines on how to apply the death penalty for drug related offences.¹¹

These narratives risk being reinforced by UNODC’s long-standing role in funding and providing technical support to narcotic-control programmes in countries that retain the death penalty for drug-related offences without sufficient safeguards to ensure that these operations do not risk contributing to the imposition of death sentences.

The World Drug Day – and the global mobilisation taking place as part of the Support. Don’t Punish campaign – offer a timely opportunity for UNODC to confront these harms and set the abolition of the death penalty as a key priority in its work. The launch of the annual World Drug Report on 26 June, provides a public platform for the Office to condemn the use of the death penalty as a tool of drug control, and to recommend specific measures that retentionist countries can adopt to bring domestic drug policies in line with international law and standards; and to signal UNODC’s commitment to prioritise abolition of the death penalty in all of its work.

The co-signatories reiterate their call on all international drug control mechanisms, including the CND and UNODC, to consistently incorporate human rights standards into their work, including in connection with the World Drug Day. In particular, we reiterate our call on the CND to establish a standing item in its agenda to address the human rights impacts of drug policies; and on UNODC to:

- a) ensure that human rights are part of its constant monitoring work, including through the inclusion in the World Drug Report of a specific chapter on human rights, and of updated information on use of the death penalty for drug-related offences,
- b) incorporate an explicit commitment to promote abolition of the death penalty (both generally and for drug-related offences specifically) in its forthcoming strategy; and

⁷ UN system coordination Task Team on the Implementation of the UN System Common Position on drug-related matters (2019). What we have learned over the last ten years: A summary of knowledge acquired and produced by the UN system on drug-related matters. UN Doc. E/CN.7/2019/CRP.10

⁸ International Narcotic Control Board (2021). International Narcotics Control Board Report 2021, UN DOC. E/ INCB/2021/1, para. 904

⁹ See, for example, UNODC, Statement of the UNODC Executive Director Yury Fedotov on the use of the death penalty in Indonesia, 29 April 2015, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/press/releases/2015/April/statement-of-the-unodc-executive-director-yury-fedotov-on-the-use-of-the-death-penalty-in-indonesia.html>

¹⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Foreign Ministry spokesman: Iran flag-bearer of fighting narco-traffickers, 26 June 2024, <https://en.mfa.ir/portal/newsview/748605/Foreign-Ministry-spokesman-Iran-flag-bearer-of-fighting-narco-traffickers>

¹¹ Amnesty International (2026), “Death sentences and executions in 2025” (ACT 50/0778/2026), p.21.

- c) ensure that its cooperation with retentionist countries does not risk contributing to the use of the death penalty, in line with UN policy.

This statement is co-signed by:

1. Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran
2. ACAT, Liberia
3. Africa Network of People who Use Drugs (AfricaNPUD), Africa
4. AIVL, Australia
5. Amnesty International, Global
6. Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network (ADPAN), Malaysia and Philippines, Asia Pacific
7. Capital Punishment Justice Project (CPJP), Australia
8. Center for Legal Support and Inmates' Rehabilitation (CELSIR)
9. Center of Legal and Social Studies (CELS), Argentina
10. Coalition of Somali Human Rights Defenders (CSHRD), Somalia
11. Colegio de Abogados y Abogadas de Puerto Rico, Puerto Rico
12. Cornell Center on the Death Penalty Worldwide (CCDPW), Global
13. CrimeInfo, Japan
14. Dejusticia, Colombia
15. Doctors for Drug Policy Reform (D4DPR), Global
16. Drug Policy Alliance, United States of America
17. Drug Policy Australia
18. Drug Science, United Kingdom
19. Elementa, Colombia and Mexico
20. Together against the death penalty (ECPM), Global
21. European Saudi Organization for Human Rights (ESOHR). Saudi Arabia
22. Fédération Addiction, France
23. Forum Droghe, Italy
24. Groupement romand d'études des addictions (GREA), Switzerland
25. Hands off Cain, Global
26. Harm Reduction Australia
27. Harm Reduction International, Global
28. HAYAT, Malaysia
29. Instituto RIA, AC, Mexico
30. IHRNGO (Iran Human Rights), Iran
31. International Drug Policy Consortium, Global
32. Italian Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, Italy
33. Italian Federation for Human Rights (FIDU), Italy
34. Japan Advocacy Network for Drug Policy, Japan
35. Journey of Hope...From Violence to Healing, United States of America

36. Legalize NL, Amsterdam
37. Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Masyarakat, Indonesia
38. lifespark – movement against the death penalty, Switzerland
39. My Brain My Choice, Germany
40. New York NGO Committee on Drugs (NYNGOC), Global
41. Redemption Pakistan, Pakistan
42. Schildower Kreis, Germany
43. StoptheDrugWar.org, United States of America
44. SPINN: Suar Perempuan Lingkar Napza Nusantara, Indonesia
45. The French Collective for the Liberation of Mumia Abu Jamal
46. The Rights Practice, United Kingdom
47. Transform Drug Policy Foundation, UK
48. Youth RISE International, Global
49. Correlation-European Harm Reduction Network, Europe
50. Safer Youth Norway
51. Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA), Global
52. German Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (GCADP), Germany
53. Scottish Drugs Forum, Scotland
54. Recovering Nepal
55. Richmond Fellowship Nepal
56. Reset – Drug Policy and Human Rights, Argentina
57. Humaania päihdepolitiikka ry, Finland
58. LDH (Ligue des droits de l'Homme/droits humains), France
59. Akzept e.V. Bundesverband für akzeptierende Drogenarbeit und humane Drogenpolitik, Germany
60. HIV Legal Network/Réseau juridique VIH, Canada
61. Death Penalty Focus (DPF), United States of America
62. Róttin (The Root), Iceland
63. World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, Global