

## [1] ABOLITIONIST AND RETENTIONIST COUNTRIES

More than two thirds of countries in the world have abolished the death penalty in law or in practice:<sup>1</sup>

- **109** countries<sup>2</sup> abolished the death penalty for all crimes.
- **8** countries<sup>3</sup> abolished the death penalty for ordinary crimes only, with exceptions placed on crimes committed in times of war.
- **28** countries<sup>4</sup> can be considered abolitionist in practice as they have not held an execution for the last 10 years and are believed to have a policy or established practice of not carrying out executions.
- In total **144** countries have abolished the death penalty in law or in practice.
- **55** countries and territories still uphold and use the death penalty.
- **18** countries<sup>5</sup> carried out executions in 2020.
- In 2020, the top five executioners were **China**, **Iran**, **Egypt**, **Iraq**, and **Saudi Arabia**.

## [2] PROGRESS MADE TOWARDS GLOBAL ABOLITION OF THE DEATH PENALTY

In 2020, executions recorded by Amnesty International continued to decrease reaching a new low level in the past 10 years, with the COVID-19 pandemic contributing to the decline. Even countries that are strong adherents to the death penalty such as **Iran** – the second largest executioner in the world – saw a continued decline in executions.<sup>6</sup>

Positive and negative outcomes occurred in the United States when **Colorado** became the 22<sup>nd</sup> abolitionist

State but federal executions resumed after a 17-year moratorium in July 2020. The State of **Virginia** also abolished in March 2021, making it the 23<sup>rd</sup> State to abolish.

**Chad** made headlines abolishing the death penalty for terrorism in May 2020. **Malawi** also abolished the death penalty in May 2021.

**Kazakhstan** signed the Second Optional protocol to the ICCPR in September 2020, with **Armenia** ratifying the same treaty in March 2021.

In the world, 175 United Nation (UN) Member States out of 193 did not carry out any executions in 2020. In December 2020, the **UN General Assembly** voted overwhelmingly in favor of its biennial resolution calling for a moratorium on executions with **123 countries supporting its adoption**, **38 against** and **24 abstained**.

## [3] DEATH SENTENCES AND EXECUTIONS

In 2020, the number of executions its lowest level in at least 10 years; at least **483** executions were recorded while **1,477** death sentences were handed down in **54 countries** (compared to approx. 2,307 in 56 countries in 2019). Because of a lack of information and/or transparency from many retentionist governments, such as **China** whose figures could not be incorporated in the above number, those figures are the lowest ones that could be determined. As such, the number of executions and death sentences are likely to be underestimated. At the end of 2020, **28,567** people were known to be under a sentence of death.

### [Asia]

Human rights organizations working in and on **China** estimate the number of its executions in 2020 was in the thousands; figures pertaining to the death penalty

<sup>1</sup> For all 2020 figures shown in this document, see: Amnesty International, Global Report Death sentences and executions. 2020 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act50/3760/2021/en/>

<sup>2</sup> Albania, Andorra, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Benin, Bhutan, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Canada, Chad, Colombia, Congo (Republic of the), Cook Islands, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Estonia, Fiji, Finland, France, Gabon, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kiribati, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malawi, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mauritius, Mexico, Micronesia, Moldova, Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, Mozambique, Namibia, Nauru, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niue, North Macedonia, Norway, Palau, Panama, Paraguay, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Rwanda, Samoa, San Marino, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Serbia, Seychelles, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Spain, Suriname, Sweden, Switzerland, Timor-Leste, Togo, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu, UK, Ukraine, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Vatican City, Venezuela.

<sup>3</sup> Brazil, Burkina Faso, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, Israel, Kazakhstan, Peru.

<sup>4</sup> Algeria, Brunei Darussalam, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Eritrea, Eswatini (former Swaziland), Ghana, Grenada, Kenya, Laos, Liberia, Malawi, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco/Western Sahara, Myanmar, Niger, Papua New Guinea, Russian Federation, Sierra Leone, South Korea (Republic of Korea), Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Tonga, Tunisia, Zambia.

<sup>5</sup> A figure followed with a "+" indicates the lowest reliable number of people executed although it is believed by Amnesty International that more people have been executed in reality; a "+" without any figure means Amnesty International have corroborated more than one executions but had no sufficient information to provide a credible: Bangladesh (2), Botswana (3), China (+), Egypt (107+), India (4), Iran (246+), Iraq (45+), North Korea (+), Oman (4), Qatar (1), Saudi Arabia (27), Somalia (11+), South Sudan (2+), Syria (+), Taiwan (1), USA (17), Viet Nam (+), Yemen (5+).

<sup>6</sup> According to the annual reports on the death penalty in Iran by Iran Human Rights and ECPM, Iranian authorities executed 267 in 2020, as compared to 280+ in 2019. It also remains the only country to have executed juvenile offenders in 2020. <https://iranhr.net/en/articles/4677/>

remain a state secret in China, as in **North Korea** and **Vietnam**. **India** and **Taiwan** both resumed executions after unofficial moratoriums: 4 years for India, 1 year for Taiwan. No executions were carried out in **Japan**, **Pakistan**, and **Singapore**. Overall, the region saw a large dip in the number of new death sentences- **517** recorded in 2020, as compared to 1,227 in 2019. The death sentences that were handed down were, in many cases, seen **as a violation to international human rights standards** given that they were applied in the context of crimes that do not meet the “most serious crime” definition (for instance, the application of capital punishment for drug offences, and economic crime). According to Amnesty International, **people who were under 18 years of age at the time of the offense have been sentenced to death** in Maldives.

#### [Middle East & North Africa]

Unlike 2019, where executions increased, the Middle East and North Africa saw an overall **25% decrease** in executions, with only **8 countries** carrying out **437** recorded executions; this is largely due to a decrease in executions in states like **Saudi Arabia** and **Iraq**. **Egypt** was the outlier, whose executions increased while **Oman** and **Qatar** resumed executions as well in 2020. Amongst the uptick of individuals executed in Egypt, it is believed that “confessions” were **extracted through torture** and that death sentences were handed down despite proceedings that **did not meet international fair trial standards**. At least **1 public execution was carried out** in **Iran**, while 3 people were executed for crimes committed **below 18 years of age**. In 2020, **Saudi Arabia** abolished the death penalty for minors. In **Tunisia**, under a moratorium since 1991, President Kais Saied declared that he was in favor of resuming executions.

#### [America]

For the 12<sup>th</sup> consecutive year, the **United States** was the only nation to carry out executions in the Americas. In the United States, in 2020, **18** death sentences were handed **down in 7 States** (35 sentences in 2019). The Federal government reversed a 17-year moratorium starting in July 2020. Military authorities have not carried out executions since 1961. Despite these worrying setbacks, the region recorded historically low figures regarding executions- **17 executions** in 2020 (as compared to 22 in 2019), of which 10 were Federal executions. The death penalty is still used against people with mental or intellectual disabilities. Outside the United States, only **Trinidad and Tobago** handed down 1 new death sentence in 2020.

#### [Sub Saharan Africa]

In 2020, the only countries to carry out executions in Sub-Saharan Africa were **Botswana**, **Somalia**, and **South Sudan**. Overall, there was a significant decrease in executions and in handing down of death sentences. In 2019, 385 death sentences have been handed down and 25 individuals executed- compared to 305 and 16, respectively in 2020. Additionally, **Tanzania** saw a wave of mass commutations of the death penalty, with **309 death sentences being commuted**. On 15 April 2020, **Cameroon** President Paul Biya signed a presidential decree to commute and remit sentences, however its limited scope questions the effectiveness of this measure.

#### [4] EXECUTION METHODS

Executions in 2020 were carried out primarily through **beheading** (Saudi Arabia), **electrocution** (United States), **hanging** (Bangladesh, Botswana, Japan, Syria etc), **lethal injection** (China, United States, Vietnam, etc) and **shooting** (North Korea, Qatar, etc).

#### [5] INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS SUPPORTING ABOLITION

Progress towards abolition has been made through the adoption of international treaties, whereby States pledge not to use capital punishment:

- **Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty** has been ratified by **90** States as of June 2021.
- **Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights on the abolition of the death penalty**, has been ratified by **13** States in the Americas.
- **Protocol No. 6 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms** has now been ratified by **46** European States and signed, but not ratified by 1 other.
- **Protocol No. 13 to the European Human Rights Convention concerning the abolition of the death penalty in all circumstances** has been ratified by **44** European States and signed, but not ratified by 1 other.

Protocol No. 6 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms provides for the abolition of the death penalty in times of peace, whereas Protocol No. 13 provides for its total abolition. The Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as well the Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights also provide for the total abolition of the death penalty but give the party States the possibility to make an exception during times of war.