

**THE DEATH PENALTY
PROTECTS NO ONE.
ABOLISH IT NOW.**



10 OCTOBER, 2024-2025

**WORLD DAY AGAINST
THE DEATH PENALTY**

www.worldcoalition.org



**WORLD
COALITION**
— AGAINST THE DEATH PENALTY —

Every **10th October**, the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty and abolitionist actors worldwide celebrate the **World Day Against the Death Penalty**. It is an occasion to highlight the progress achieved in the global campaign for the abolition of capital punishment. In 2024 and 2025, the World Day will serve as an opportunity to challenge the misconception that the death penalty can make people and communities safer.

The abolition of the death penalty has continued to gain ground around the world. Today, 144¹ States are abolitionist in law or in practice, more than two thirds of the world's countries. But certain countries continue to hand down death sentences and carry out executions, often citing security concerns as justification.

Security is commonly defined as freedom from danger or threat, but its interpretation varies considerably due to diverse opinions on what constitutes a threat. At its heart, it is a term rooted in political discourse and often used as a political tactic to influence public opinion and justify security policies. The determination of who are considered threats, and who are to be protected is often influenced by power dynamics, discrimination, and inequality. When applied to criminal justice, security offenses are in many cases broadly defined and can be open to abuse. Using the “security argument” at best politicizes a judicial procedure that is supposed to be impartial and fair, and at worst provides a context for human rights abuses in the name of State protection.

Public calls for the death penalty are often expressions of fear and despair, triggered by rising violence and crime rates that States seem unable to address, making the death penalty appear as an easy solution. **The deterrence theory** is often used as a justification to retain this cruel punishment, despite no evidence that the death penalty deters crime more effectively than other sentences. In fact, studies indicate that abolitionist States have lower crime rates than those retaining the death penalty. Moreover, in the context of armed conflicts, capital punishment fails to resolve disputes and can even perpetuate cycles of violence, as it is often used arbitrarily for military control and settling scores.

It is undeniable that the death penalty does not protect individuals and societies because it threatens human dignity and reinforces social and economic disparities by disproportionately affecting marginalized groups. To achieve effective long-term solutions, we must prioritize people's concerns and tackle the root causes of crime and violence. **The human security**

¹ Amnesty International, *Death sentences and executions in 2023* (29 May 2024).

approach broadens our understanding of security by explaining the various interrelated threats to “the right of people to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair”². It proposes preventive security measures like disarmament and inclusive governance

systems. Furthermore, other security practices redefine who serves as protection providers, promoting community accountability and mediation, as well as restorative and transformative justice.

WHAT IS THE DETERRENCE THEORY?

It asserts that people will refrain from committing murder, or other crimes punishable by death, out of fear of execution.

Please see the “Debunking the Deterrence Theory Factsheet” on our website to learn about the different research that challenges this theory.

WHAT IS HUMAN SECURITY?

An approach that recognizes that socio-economic disparities and human rights violations originate and increase the risk of instability and violence. Thus, to be protected, people need to have their basic rights and freedoms upheld.³

INTERNATIONAL NORMS: THE RIGHT TO SECURITY

— The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, article 3, states that “everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person.”

— Other human rights mechanisms also link the right to security to the right to liberty, as in:

- * International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966 (art. 9)
- * European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of 1950 (art. 5)
- * American Convention on Human Rights of 1969 (art. 7.1)
- * African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights of 1981 (art. 6)
- * Arab Charter on Human Rights of 2004 (art. 14)
- * Association of Southeast Asian Nations Declaration on Human Rights, 2012 (art. 12)

— Furthermore, the right to security is also related to the right to peace in:

- * African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights of 1981 (art. 23)
- * Association of Southeast Asian Nations Declaration on Human Rights, 2012 (art. 38)

— In 2012, the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 66/290 which stated that “human security is an approach to assist Member States in identifying and addressing widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of their people.”

² United Nations General Assembly Resolution 66/290 (10 September 2012).

³ More information on human security is available at: <https://www.un.org/humansecurity/what-is-human-security/>



Our deep thanks to the individuals who shared their stories and to the organizations which sent them. For additional, full-length testimonies, please read "Insecurity Revealed: Voices Against the Death Penalty" on our website. The following personal stories have been edited for length.



Essen Lee
is a Taiwanese lawyer and a victim's family member.

"The death penalty would obscure the pursuit of the causes of crime, leading us to mistakenly believe that the victims have been supported."

"Because my grandmother died in a robbery, suffering from a head injury and intracranial bleeding, and eventually left us due to brain death. At that time, and even now, I also had the urge to seek revenge. The desire for revenge stems from the deep hurt I experienced, which is the expression of a victim. [...] Through the process of studying law, I gradually understood the reasons and context of crimes. If we examine the life experiences of each defendant, they may have been victims to some extent or in other events. The causes of crimes, whether near or far, are often related to the repressed, frustrated, unaccepted, marginalized, discriminated, or victimized experiences of the perpetrators. Through this learning process, I have transformed my hatred towards "criminals" into sighs for the past lives of the "defendants," and I am able to take the "causes of crime" more seriously. The death penalty would obscure the pursuit of the causes of crime, leading us to mistakenly believe that the victims have been supported."

Essen Lee's story was shared by the Taiwan Alliance to End the Death Penalty

Anonymous prison guard that served in an Iranian prison for almost a decade.

"I saw some very unpleasant scenes in those years. The people who were sentenced to be executed; they would not let go of their children when visitation time was over. For example, they would cry, their kids wouldn't leave their arms ... I saw all the inmates' problems and their families and couldn't do anything for them, it was very painful for me...In one or two instances, I had to bring the corpse down myself because no one stayed to help [...] with all the sadness and pain. Because the [inmate] who I spoke to three days ago is now being executed in front of my eyes or I'm putting him inside the body bag myself to leave and never return. It was a very, very horrific scene. These executions truly affected my life, my psyche and nerves, and it affected my everything. Many times, when I came home, I could not eat [...] I was always someone who, between friends and acquaintances and family, was 100% identified as a happy person. I lost my spirits. I mean when I would come home, I was in my thoughts a lot of the time... sometimes I would not even leave the house. I mean, for up to two or three months, according to my family, I talked in my sleep, or I would shout in my sleep, and I was sad."

Anonymous story shared by Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran



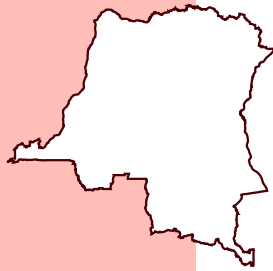
TUNISIA

Khedija Arfaoui
is a Tunisian academic, feminist and
abolitionist activist and founding member
of the National Tunisian Coalition Against
the Death Penalty (CTCPM).



"When I learned that my son, he was my youngest, Dali and his wife, had been murdered along with 37 other people, in Istanbul, on the first of January 2017, [...] I was so stunned. Several people were saying, "Ah, if I catch him, I'll kill him!" No, my concern was not to kill the one who had killed, because no one has the right to kill. Only God has the right, only God gives life and death. That's the way I see it. Will killing these criminals bring the dead back to life? No. I'm against the death penalty. I'm not going to be like [...] the father of the child who was killed, [who] went to kiss his son's murderer, I won't go that far. I can never forgive the man who killed my children, I can never forgive him. But I don't want him executed. [...] I was and remain fundamentally and consciously against the death penalty."

Khedija Arfaoui's story was shared by the National Tunisian Coalition Against the Death Penalty (CTCPM)



Sifa Wembo has been on death row in the DRC since 2022.

"I'm the mother of two children, and two years ago I was sentenced to death in a trial in which I was unable to defend myself because I had no lawyer. I was accused of a criminal conspiracy and armed robbery, and was said to be one of the 40 thieves, a group of bandits accused of being responsible for the lack of security in the town of Goma. I'm originally from Kisangani, I do not have any family here in Goma. After my conviction, I [couldn't] exhaust all avenues of appeal due to a lack of means, and my husband was making every effort to try and obtain my release. [...] When I imagine that I've been sentenced to death, my two daughters who are 15 and 12 have no peace, maybe they've already been raped or they've become prostitutes as they have nowhere to live, my in-laws can't take care of them, they're all irresponsible. This is what makes me unhappy and what will hasten my death here in prison. I'm doubly condemned to die in pain."



Josué Wallay Akuzwe is an activist in the DRC citizens' movement.

"[...] We organize public demonstrations to denounce the abuses or inaction of those in power on social life and on generalized insecurity in eastern DRC, who cause us to be confronted with arbitrary arrests. [...] Once arrested, we don't enjoy any of the rights of detained people, [...] We often find ourselves facing charges that could lead the judge to pronounce the death penalty. [...] However, they often find it difficult to give reasons for their judgments. [...] The lifting of the moratorium on executions is unconstitutional and illustrates an authoritarian drift and a worrying step backwards in the system of national protection of human rights. The death penalty is particularly dangerous in a country where the justice system is dysfunctional, and it has been described as sick by the President of the Republic himself. The lack of independence and impartiality of the judicial system is notorious, and military justice does not provide for a double level of jurisdiction, in violation of the procedural guarantees inherent in a fair trial. Finally, the death penalty is an instrument of terror for settling scores with opponents, civil society players and the poor who have no means of defending themselves. [...]"

The stories of Silfa Wembo and Josué wallay Akuzwe were shared by the Centre d'observation des droits de l'homme et de l'assistance sociale (CODHAS)



George Kain
a former police commissioner in Connecticut,
worked in law enforcement for over 40 years.

“The death penalty does not prevent future murders and is not a deterrent to murder.”

“In my experience as a law enforcement officer for almost 40 years, sworn to protect victims of violent crime, I once thought that the death penalty was a just punishment and would help murder victims’ family members, and would protect future potential victims from the horrible consequences of losing a loved one. I also thought it would bring peace to those who were victims of murder. I was wrong! As I continued my journey for answers, I learned many very important truths about the death penalty. Please allow me to share two of those realities here: 1. The death penalty creates more victims than it helps. This is because everyone involved in the death penalty process is traumatized. [...] 2. The death penalty does not prevent future murders and is not a deterrent to murder. In the United States, states that have a death penalty have higher rates of murder than states that don’t have a death penalty. Also, more police officers are murdered in states that have a death penalty than those that don’t. I had always thought that having a death penalty would help to keep me safe, because a potential murderer would think twice about killing a police officer in a state that had a death penalty. Again, it just doesn’t work that way. [...]”

George Kain's story was shared by Sant'Egidio

DEATH PENALTY OVERVIEW IN 2023



By the end of 2023,
at least
27 687
people were on death row



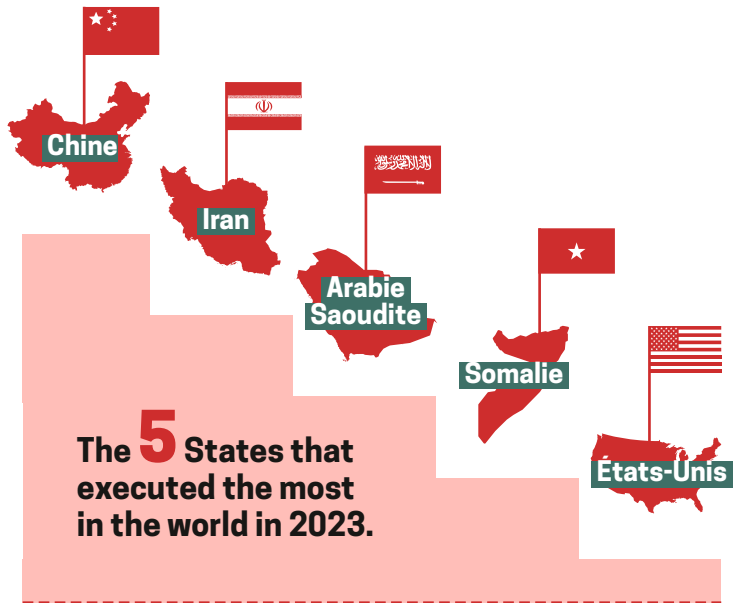
of which around
5 %
were women.⁴



**+ than
1 000**
people were
executed in
2023



including
at least
31
women.



⁴ Percentage of women sentenced to death around the world provided by the Cornell Center on the Death Penalty Worldwide.

Statistics from Amnesty International (2024)



112
states
have abolished the
death penalty for all
crimes.



9
states
have abolished the
death penalty for
common law crimes.



23
states
are abolitionists
in practice.



55
states
are retentionists.

WHAT HAS CHANGED IN ABOLITION SINCE 2023?

— Confirming the abolitionist trend:

- * The European Convention on Human Rights Protocol No. 13 for abolition in all circumstances was signed by Azerbaijan in March 2023 and ratified by Armenia in February 2024.
- * In April 2023, Malaysia's parliament has voted to remove the country's mandatory death penalty. In July of the same year, Ghana's parliament voted to abolish the death penalty.
- * In May 2024, Ivory Coast acceded to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty.

— Situations of concern:

- * 2023 marked an increase of 43% in the number of executions in Iran. At least 834 people were executed, including 22 women and 2 juveniles.⁵
- * In Saudi Arabia, two minors were sentenced to death in April 2024 and at least five other young men are at imminent risk of execution for crimes committed when they were children.
- * In March 2024, the Democratic Republic of the Congo lifted a two-decade moratorium on the death penalty, opening the door to executions. That same month, Uganda's Constitutional Court upheld the Anti-Homosexuality Act that allows the death penalty for "aggravated homosexuality".

Connect to our website for more news on the death penalty.

⁵ Iran Human Rights and Ensemble Contre la Peine de Mort (ECPM). Annual Report on the Death Penalty in Iran 2023.

10 REASONS

TO END THE USE OF THE DEATH PENALTY

1

No State should have the power to take a person's life.

2

It is irrevocable.

No justice system is safe from error and innocent people are sentenced to death and executed around the world.

3

It is unfair.

The death penalty is discriminatory and is used disproportionately against people from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, people with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, and members of racial and ethnic minority groups. In some countries, the death penalty is used to target groups on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity, political opinion, or religion.

4

It is inhuman, cruel, and degrading.

Conditions on death row and the anguish of facing execution inflict extreme psychological and physical suffering, and execution is a physical and mental assault.

5

It denies any possibility of rehabilitation.

6

It is inefficient and does not keep society safer. It has never been conclusively shown that the death penalty deters crime more effectively than life imprisonment or other prison sentences. On the contrary, studies show that the rate of the most violent crimes is higher in retentionist countries than in abolitionist countries.

7

It is applied overwhelmingly in violation of international standards.

It breaches the principles of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that everyone has the right to life and that no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. On nine occasions, the United Nations General Assembly has called for the establishment of a moratorium on the use of the death penalty (resolutions No. 62/149 in 2007, No. 63/168 in 2008, No. 65/206 in 2010, 67/176 in 2012, No. 69/186 in 2014, No. 71/187 in 2016, No. 73/175 in 2018, No. 75/183 in 2020, No. 77/222 in 2022).

8

It is counterproductive, because killing a human being as a criminal justice solution endorses murder more than fights it.

9

It creates more pain, particularly for the relatives of both victims and people sentenced to death, including children, with harsh transgenerational consequences.

10

Many murder victims' families do not want the death penalty.

A large and growing number of crime victims' families worldwide reject the death penalty and are speaking out against it, saying it does not bring back or honor their murdered family member, does not heal the pain of the murder, and violates their ethical and religious beliefs.

10 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO END THE DEATH PENALTY

1

Organize a gathering.

It can take the shape of a demonstration, a webinar, remote workshop, a debate or a movie screening, an art exhibition or theater performance.

2

Learn and engage with grassroots practices

that promote healing and accountability processes in your community, like restorative and transformative justice.

3

Build partnerships with minority group's rights organizations

(women, LGBTQIA+ people, religious minorities, ethnic minorities...) to raise awareness of the aggravating threats of discrimination.

4

Lobby politicians to abolish the death penalty and implement preventive security policies.

5

Promote a culture of peace in your community and beyond. Advocate for policies and actions that foster dialogue and nonviolent conflict resolution.

6

Join the events prepared for the abolition of the death penalty worldwide. Visit the World Coalition page for events near you!

7

Donate to a group working to end the death penalty.

8

Follow the social media campaign

on Facebook, Instagram and X and launch your own using: #nodeathpenalty

9

Mobilize the media to challenge the security narrative that supports the death penalty. Call for interviews with specialists, testimonies from victims, investigations on local cases and raising awareness campaigns that address the root causes of harm and violence.

10

Participate in Cities Against the Death Penalty/Cities for Life on November 30.



TO FIND OUT MORE...

Find out everything about the World Day Against
the Death Penalty at:

www.worldcoalition.org/fr/worldday

Including: the World Day poster; the mobilization kit; the testimonies collection; detailed factsheets on the death penalty around the world; and the last World Day report.

The World Coalition Against the Death Penalty is an alliance of more than 170 NGOs, bar associations, local authorities and unions. The aim of the World Coalition is to strengthen the international dimension of the fight against the death penalty. Its ultimate objective is to obtain the universal abolition of the death penalty. The World Coalition gives a global dimension to the sometimes-isolated actions taken by its members on the ground. It complements their initiatives, while constantly respecting their independence.



www.worldcoalition.org

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