

How to prevent a return to the Death Penalty ?

**Guidance and Strategies for preventing
a return to the legalized death penalty
and/ or executions after a moratorium**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY	4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	5
ABBREVIATIONS, ACRONYMS AND DEFINITIONS	6
Introduction	7
1. Monitoring	8
Shifts in Death Penalty discourse	8
Monitoring broader human rights indicators beyond the death penalty	9
2. Assessing the risk – What constitutes a real risk of a return to the death penalty and when should you react?	11
3. Developing an action plan based on risk level	13
Where to start?	14
Developing Medium-to Long-term Strategies	21
4. Building Coalitions and Finding Allies	22
Why do you need a Coalition?	22
Why do you need Allies?	24
How to find Coalition Members and Allies?	24
5. Shaping Narratives	26
Analyze their narratives	26
Develop your counternarratives	27
Find experts and authorities to send out the message	30
Figure out the best way to send out your message	30
6. Security & Safety for Civil Society Organizations	31

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This guide by the World Coalition against the Death Penalty serves as an essential resource for civil society organizations, members of the World Coalition, and other stakeholders working to prevent the resurgence of the death penalty. In recent years, global trends toward abolition have faced setbacks, with some countries showing renewed interest in reinstating or resuming executions. Countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where an official moratorium was lifted in 2024 after decades without executions, illustrate the pressing need for vigilance and proactive measures to counteract these developments. The guide emphasizes that progress in human rights, including the abolition of capital punishment, is not always permanent. Political instability, populist agendas, and broader human rights rollbacks often accompany these resurgences, requiring a coordinated and strategic response.

The guide offers a practical framework for monitoring, assessing, and countering the risk of a return to the death penalty. It highlights the importance of tracking early warning signs, such as legislative proposals, political rhetoric advocating executions, or changes in execution protocols. It also underscores the necessity of situating the death penalty within broader human rights challenges, such as shrinking civic space, erosion of judicial independence, and the targeting of activists.

Grounded in international law, the guide also equips advocates with tools to leverage legal instruments that protect against the reinstatement of the death penalty. These instruments not only prohibit the death penalty under specific conditions but also create long-term frameworks that resist political regression.

Recognizing the diverse contexts in which threats of resuming the death penalty arise, the guide introduces a risk assessment framework to help

advocates tailor their strategies. From countries at low risk to those facing imminent reintroduction or execution orders, this guide provides actionable steps for varying threat levels. In situations of moderate risk, for example, public education and coalition-building are emphasized to prevent public support for capital punishment from gaining traction. In high-risk contexts, such as where bills are tabled in parliament or execution warrants are signed, the guide advises urgent legislative lobbying, international advocacy, and the mobilization of public opinion.

Additionally, the guide highlights the critical role of coalitions and alliances in responding to threats. Bringing together diverse actors — including legal experts, faith leaders, and human rights defenders — ensures a coordinated and multifaceted response. Case studies from the Philippines and Türkiye demonstrate how such coalitions have effectively countered attempts to reinstate the death penalty through public awareness campaigns, legislative advocacy, and international engagement. This guide also serves as a reminder that working against the death penalty can be fraught with risks, particularly in countries where civic space is restricted or advocates face threats from state or non-state actors. By offering tools and resources for managing security risks, it underscores the need for both strategic planning and personal safety in this work.

As a first step, this guide provides invaluable insights and strategies for navigating the complex and often politically charged landscape surrounding the death penalty. It equips advocates with knowledge, tools, and case studies to mount an effective response to emerging threats and to sustain progress toward universal abolition.

By the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The objective of this guide is to provide a tool that will enable members of the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty (World Coalition), partners to the Countries at Risk campaign, and other abolitionist civil society organizations (CSOs) to effectively advocate against a possible return to the death penalty within their countries.

From 2018-2024, the World Coalition launched a campaign to secure or maintain the abolition of the death penalty in countries that are abolitionist in law and practice and where there were known risks of a resurgence of the death penalty. The countries included in the campaign were the Maldives, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Türkiye.

During the six years the campaign was in place, many strategies and lessons were learned about what it takes to prevent a return to capital punishment. These lessons were highlighted and explored by the External Evaluation for Phase 1 in 2021.

During a meeting in Malaysia in July 2023 with representatives from CSOs, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), and other stakeholders from the 4 target countries, the strategies previously identified were shared, debated and built upon. The purpose was to identify strategies that were effective nationally and that can serve as models or inspiration in other national and regional contexts where the death penalty may return. Those lessons have been compiled to create this guide.

In addition to these consultative measures, a survey was conducted with all project partners asking specific questions on how they constitute a risk of a return to the death penalty and what practices worked and did not work for their situations. Their responses constitute the majority of this guide.

Members of the World Coalition associated with the Countries at Risk campaign, as well as local partners hailing from the aforementioned target countries were all consulted for the drafting of this guide. Examples of case studies were written by the organizations and individuals who lived through the experience. This collaborative method allows those who have firsthand experience to contribute to the guide and to avoid any bias included by the principal author.

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Organizations composing the **World Coalition's Working Group on the Maldives**

Organizations composing the **World Coalition's Working Group on the Philippines**

Organizations composing the **World Coalition's Working Group on Sri Lanka**

Organizations composing the **World Coalition's Working Group on Turkey**

ABBREVIATIONS, ACRONYMS AND DEFINITIONS

ACHPR- African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

AICHR- Association of Southeast Asian Nations Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights

ASEAN- Association of Southeast Asian Nations

CSO- Civil Society Organization

EU- European Union

GSP+- Generalized Scheme of Preferences Plus

IACHR- Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

ICCPR- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

NGO - Non-governmental organization

NHRI - National Human Rights Institution

OP2-ICCPR- Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

UNGA - United Nations General Assembly

World Coalition - World Coalition Against the Death Penalty

Moratorium : A temporary suspension of executions and, more rarely, of death sentences. Every few years, the UN Member States vote on a formal moratorium on the death penalty.

Extrajudicial Killings¹ : Extrajudicial killings, or extrajudicial executions, happen when someone in an official position deliberately kills a person without any legal process. Such arbitrary deprivations of life, which can also be carried out by militias, death squads or other non-State actors, often target political opponents, activists, or marginalized groups.

Abolitionist in law : A country whose laws do not provide for the death penalty for any crime.

Abolitionist in practice² : A country that retains the use of the death penalty in law but has not carried out any executions for the past 10 years or more and is believed to have a policy or established practice of not carrying out executions.

Retentionist : A person, group, country or movement that believes in the death penalty and continues to hand down death sentences and carry out executions.

Generalized Scheme of Preferences Plus : GSP+ is a trade incentive program granted by the European Union to developing countries, which provides them with additional preferential access to the EU market. It aims to encourage sustainable development and good governance by offering duty-free or reduced-tariff access to the EU for exports from countries that meet specific requirements.

¹ World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT). (n.d.). Extrajudicial killings. Retrieved from: <https://www.omct.org/en/what-we-do/extrajudicial-killings>

² Amnesty International. (2024). Death sentences and executions in 2023. Retrieved from: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act50/7952/2024/en/>

Introduction

The gains made in the development and application of universal human rights are not always permanent. Respect for and application of human rights are often called into question, not least in the name of populist politics and political volatility. Simply put, what is gained is not always maintained in the long term. The same can be said about the movement for the universal abolition of the death penalty.

In the case of abolitionist countries who have eradicated the death penalty from their penal codes and legal frameworks, legislation can be passed to reintroduce the death penalty as a punishment for certain crimes.

Countries that have not formally abolished the death penalty but cease to carry out executions may abruptly return to executions, reversing the positive steps the country had taken in the direction of abolition.

A return to a codified death penalty or resumption of executions is always a political decision. In turn, that decision can only be understood in a cultural and political context that is often dynamic, and country or region specific. In States that consider a return to the death penalty, there are usually other human rights that are also under threat. Often the space for civil society has shrunk or is under severe scrutiny, and capacity to work on human rights issues may be reduced. In this precarious context, there may be other more urgent priorities to manage that take attention and resources away from fighting a return to the death penalty.

Prior to even starting an effective monitoring or preventative strategy, the first step has to be assessing the security risks in working on death penalty issues and realistically accounting for resources. Only once that step is completed, can meaningful action be taken.

The guidance and suggestions made in this document serve as a starting point to provide ideas and solidarity, particularly if your country is taking concrete steps to return, in some form, to capital punishment. This guide is by no means a comprehensive outline for what should be done in the urgent case that a return to the death penalty is imminent. Instead, it provides suggestions, common practices, case studies and, if necessary, access to a broader abolitionist network.

This guide speaks specifically to a return to the death penalty. As such, this guide does not provide strategies regarding other forms of State killing such as extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary killings, which are always illegal and thus require different strategies.

1

Monitoring

To accurately assess the risk of a return to the death penalty or executions, it is necessary to regularly **monitor** the situation in order to determine if the threat is legitimate or not. Once the threat level is determined and the urgency of the situation established, an **action plan** can be developed.

A founding principle of human rights work is monitoring a State regarding its responsibility to respect and uphold the application of human rights. When it comes to monitoring to prevent a return to

the death penalty, there are numerous angles that should be considered, namely shifts in discourse around the death penalty. However, in most cases a return to the death penalty happens in a broader context of numerous human rights violations, the shrinking of civic space, and disregard for judicial independence and international commitments. All these elements should also be monitored as they implicate the barriers that can bolster resistance against a return to capital punishment.

SHIFTS IN DEATH PENALTY DISCOURSE

Monitoring a shift of death penalty discourse will heavily depend on whether your country is considering a legislative return to the death penalty, or whether your country still retains the death penalty and is considering executions. Additionally, monitoring changes in death penalty discourse means you will need to know what your country's current status is regarding application of the death penalty. If you do not know if your country retains or applies the death penalty, check out the World Coalition webpage³ displaying the legal status of the death penalty in each country and try to answer the following questions:

- Is your country abolitionist, retentionist or somewhere in between?
- If abolitionist: In what year did your country abolish the death penalty? For which crimes was the death penalty abolished- all crimes, or only ordinary

(non-military) crimes? Has your country signed onto international or regional instruments prohibiting the use of the death penalty?

- If retentionist (but no longer executing): When did the last execution in your country take place? For what crimes is the death penalty applicable? How many people are currently sentenced to death? What existing research has been developed around the death penalty in your country? How often do courts hand down death sentences?

In the case your country still retains the death penalty in law, you may already engage in abolitionist work that allows you to monitor changes in the status of the death penalty.

If your country does not have the death penalty in law, and anti-death penalty work is not part of what

³ <https://worldcoalition.org/resources/the-death-penalty-worldwide/>

your organization already does, this monitoring portion may need to be integrated into your existing work.

Monitoring the shift in death penalty discourse can come in many forms, particularly when investigating a State's interest in returning to capital punishment:

- Following politicians (particularly if they have a pro-death penalty stance) on social media, in public speeches, and general trends in discourse to identify worrying signs that they may take action;
- Identifying State with regards to the death penalty at the national and international level;
- Following death penalty court cases;
- Tracking pending bills in parliament, to look for a bill or a subtle clause that could reintroduce the death penalty and change legislation;
- Looking out for changes or shifts in execution protocol (ex. hiring an executioner, preparing execution chambers, securing execution drugs, signing a death warrant, etc)
- Monitoring influential political groups, religious bodies and leaders, or others that have expressed vocal support for the death penalty;
- Tracking votes for the most recent United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution on a Moratorium on the use of the death penalty: has the country voted in favor, against or abstained?



Counter-Narratives and Early Action Plan Development

The development of counter-narratives to the death penalty may not seem like one of the first steps to consider. But often, when a push for the death penalty emerges in the political arena, it is accompanied by arguments touting the benefits of the death penalty, presenting it as a solution to socio-political problems and claiming that it can protect the general public's interest (ex. the death penalty will deter crime; the death penalty provides justice for victims; the death penalty is a more cost-effective approach to criminal justice; etc). Already having counter-narratives at your disposal to quickly react and deflect arguments that simplify justifications for the death penalty, you may have a positive effect by reducing the impact of pro-death-penalty discourse.

*To learn about arguments against the death penalty, please contact the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty:
worldcoalition.org/who-we-are/contact-us/*

MONITORING BROADER HUMAN RIGHTS INDICATORS BEYOND THE DEATH PENALTY

In most case studies of a return to the death penalty, **the degrading human rights situation** of the country in question extends far beyond the death penalty. The death penalty is often one of many pressing issues and can be symptomatic of a general back sliding on other human rights issues such as violent anti-drug policies, oppression of minorities, violence in the face of external or internal conflict, targeting of CSOs in an effort to silence them, reducing freedom of expression, dismantling the independence of the judiciary, and

increasing disregard of international commitments. Given these crucial foundations for the protection of any human rights advancements, it is worth asking yourself questions like:

- Are civil society groups that oppose reinstatement (or support abolition) of the death penalty able to operate in the country without risk to their security?
- Are civil society groups, in general, subjected to harassment, arrest and arbitrary shutdown?

- Does the government respect existing national laws?
- Is the Supreme or Constitutional Court independent from the executive?
- Has the country recently withdrawn from an international treaty it was previously party to?
- Has the government displayed a willingness to resist international pressure in the recent past?
- Has a populist or authoritarian leader recently acceded to power?
- Have the fight against drug trade and penalties for drug-related offences become more repressive?

CASE STUDY: MONITORING IN THE PHILIPPINES

In the Philippines, when Presidential candidate Rodrigo Duterte launched his campaign to eradicate the proliferation of drugs in the country, his tough-on-crime stance resonated with the public. After winning the election, his drug war narrative was accompanied by disinformation on figures of the drug war and crime and demonization of human rights advocates as criminal coddlers. The solution he offered to eradicate crime was to restore the death penalty. He incentivized those who would deliver on the drug war initiative and identified his top 3 legislative agenda items, including lowering of the age of criminal responsibility and returning to the death penalty. This prompted civil society (a broad coalition that includes legal groups, faith-based organizations, mainstream international NGOs, academe, media, migrant worker groups, families of persons in death row, criminologists, market research experts, and others), anti-death penalty champions in Congress and the national human rights institution in the Philippines to mobilize action to push back on the legislative proposals. There was also a backdoor effort to study the withdrawal from international human rights treaties, particularly the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its 2nd Optional Protocol aiming at the Abolition of the Death Penalty.

This coalition of like-minded groups worked in unison and came up with various position papers and well-researched studies on a range of themes on the death penalty that included human rights treaty obligations as well as trade agreements that expanded the support base of civil society. The coalition convened dialogues on the death penalty in various venues, showing up as a solid network to

show force against the measure. They also monitored hearings, participated in the debates on the issue in public forums as well as in Congress. Further, the Philippines coalition conducted political mapping exercises to check the support for the death penalty bills and sought out legislators who were marked undecided to move against a return to the death penalty. The Commission on Human Rights in the Philippines also conducted the most comprehensive national opinion survey on the death penalty to date that shed light on the attitudes towards death penalty and reversed the long-accepted notion that the majority of the Filipino public favoured the death penalty. The survey demonstrated that the notion fell apart when respondents were presented with alternatives to capital punishment. The results of these activities were topics that coalition members discussed with like-minded countries through regular and dedicated diplomatic briefings and information sessions. This work was carried out with the solidarity action of regional partners with the Anti-Death Penalty Asian Network and international partners with the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, whose support was indispensable in all the activities to push back against the calls for return of the death penalty fuelled by the highest leadership in government as part of the country's drug war. At the end of the Duterte Administration efforts were successful, the concerted efforts in the country and the material support of the alliance in the region and the global level prevented the return of the death penalty. As lawmakers continue to file proposals on the death penalty in Congress, constant vigilance is required to timely respond and push back against any backsliding from the respect for dignity and the right to life.

Case study shared by the Coalition Against the Death Penalty, Philippines

2

Assessing the risk: What constitutes a real risk of a return to the death penalty and when should you react?

Once monitoring is in place, you can start **assessing the level of risk** of return to the death penalty and evaluating how legitimate the threat is. You can use the following classification to help guide you:



You can take an online quiz to help make a risk assessment for your country:

What is the Risk that the Death Penalty Will Return in Your Country?

<https://worldcoalition.org/threat-levels-of-the-resurgence-of-the-death-penalty-based-on-key-indicators-drawn-from-the-project-experience/>



No Risk

There is nothing in the public sphere to indicate the death penalty will return.

Moderate Risk

The death penalty has entered into public discourse, but so far no concrete actions have been taken to restore it or start executions.

High Risk

The death penalty has entered into public discourse, and concrete action is being taken to restore it (bills are being drafted, executioners are being hired, execution chambers prepared, etc).

Very High (Imminent) Risk

The death penalty is on the verge of returning—typically this looks like the adoption of a bill in a house of parliament with political support to pass the second house/ presidential support to adopt; or an execution warrant has been signed, or a government officially announced it has ended its moratorium.

Any of these risks, accompanied by threats to democracy, the rise of authoritarian governments, and the limitation of judicial independence should all be taken into account when determining the credibility of a return to the death penalty.

The purpose of the exercise is to assess the gravity of the risk to help you narrow down effective strategies. There is a difference between a boastful politician calling for the death penalty on social media, versus a bill being tabled in parliament with the endorsement of the President.

High risk may include the following markers: support from the highest office of government, inclusion in the formal legislative agenda of the executive and / or the common legislative agenda of the executive and legislative, public hearings are set. Efforts to study withdrawal from treaties including those that are related to human rights commitments like trade agreements - small arms, GSP+ and others.

"There is a difference between a boastful politician calling for the death penalty on social media, versus a bill being tabled in parliament with the endorsement of the President."

Moderate risk may include bills that have been filed in the legislature or a situation where a violent crime is committed and widely covered by media that evokes public calls to restore the death penalty as a solution. Rhetoric on crime prevention may include disinformation about the efficacy of the death penalty, as well as efforts to discredit human rights defenders and human rights organizations calling for reform in the justice system, including protecting the rights of persons deprived of liberty, and support for the rights of the accused, the right to due process, and the rule of law, among others.

3

Developing an action plan based on risk level

Any organized response should be **based on your assessment of the risk level** of a return to the death penalty, as well as your knowledge of the national or regional context. What may be a priority if the risk is low may no longer be relevant if the risk of a return to the death penalty is high or imminent. The following chart demonstrates what can be prioritized depending on the risk level you identify.

While your priorities may change depending on the risk level, responding to a possible return to the death penalty requires long-term advocacy work

with the participation of broad multisectoral coalitions, to be as effective as possible.

For example, community-based education may be a priority when the risk is low to ensure there is not enough public support to introduce measures to resume executions. However, when faced with a higher risk, strong public opposition becomes critical and efforts may need to shift towards mobilizing the public for urgent campaigns. Therefore, CSOs must coordinate a medium to long-term response to the potential reimposition of the death penalty until the risk is effectively eliminated.

No risk to moderate risk PRIORITIES

- **Build and sustain coalitions** to prepare a broad multisectoral response to the risk. The more support can be mounted against the death penalty, the higher the chance exists to prevent its return.
- **Ensure that the risk remains low** or there is no serious legislative or administrative attempt to return to the death penalty.
- **Influence public opinion** and spread counter-narratives through community education and advocacy work.
- **Ensure the failure of future attempts** by obtaining an official moratorium or enshrining abolition in law (ex. ratifying OP2-ICCPR).

High risk to very high risk PRIORITIES

- **Block the return to the death penalty** by mobilizing legislators, the general public, faith leaders, and other stakeholders.
- **Leverage national, regional and international mechanisms** to assert a strong legal foundation against a return to the death penalty.

WHERE TO START?

Depending on your country's risk level and the priority identified, there are **best practices** that can provide ideas in mobilizing an initial response. Some of these practices are further detailed in later chapters.

CONVENING NETWORKS

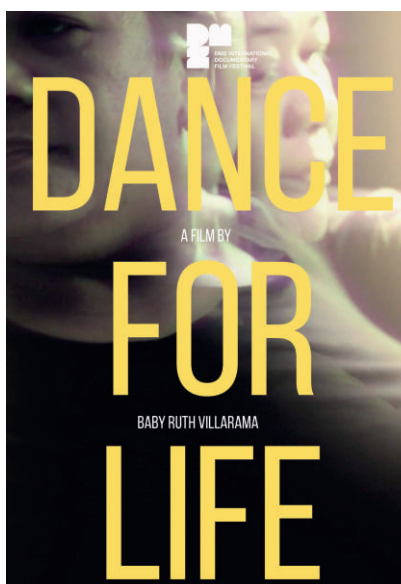
The first step suggested is **to convene and mobilize your network** to plan your national response. While relevant regional and international actors may be included, local experts must lead the strategy. Local experts and stakeholders can include but are not limited to other NGOs, parliamentarians, religious leaders, traditional leaders, NHRIs, lawyers/ bar associations, contacts within Ministries that could mount an effective pushback against the death penalty, families of people sentenced to death, etc. Working in a coalition can also provide better access to human and financial resources as the work can be divided for maximum impact while avoiding repeating work that has already been done. Sharing information within a network also allows organizations to build upon what already exists to fight against the death penalty.

See Chapter IV "Building Coalitions & Finding Allies" for a deeper dive into this subject.

EDUCATING THE PUBLIC

To set the stage for the return to the death penalty, governments do what they can to sway **public opinion** towards their favor by using a variety of arguments that show the death penalty as a simple solution to larger socially complex problems. Their narratives need to be countered by starting dialogues with communities, spreading alternative narratives on various media, including social media, and engaging influential leaders from various faith-based, cultural and other groups. Publicizing the growing number of abolitionist countries and countries observing a moratorium can also help to counter the government's national narrative with a wider narrative showing an international trend towards abolition.

See Chapter V "Shaping Narratives" for a deeper understanding on how to provide counter narratives surrounding death penalty and how to develop arguments that highlight the death penalty as an ineffective and inhumane punishment.



The Philippines: Creative Communications

In 2021, amidst President Duterte's bloody drug war and his allies' attempt to revive the death penalty, the national Coalition Against the Death Penalty launched Panibagong Pagkakataon (Another Chance), a series of films directed by acclaimed directors on the human toll of the death penalty. The first entry, **Dance for Life**, is a "documentary portrait of a former death row inmate who uses her art to uplift the lives of her fellow prisoners." Angel Salazar the dancer featured in Dance for Life, remains incarcerated. Despite her circumstances, she continues to teach dance and strive to live her purpose.

Dance for life : <https://www.rappler.com/video/act-one/dance-for-life-short-documentary-baby-ruth-villarama/>

Dance For Life" Film Poster, a film by Baby Ruth Villarama. This film was made possible through the support of the Coalition Against the Death Penalty and the Commission on Human Rights, Philippines.



SOHRAM CASRA's logo

Türkiye : Education is Key

Sohram Casra, a Turkish NGO, prioritizes education as the most effective means to prevent the death penalty, implementing programs that target adults, minors, and NGOs. For adults, the organization holds biannual meetings to discuss the historical trauma of the death penalty, its illegality, and associated human rights violations, aiming to sustain social sensitivity and encourage participants to spread awareness. Sohram Casra supports children affected by torture and war, alongside their communities, through weekend classes and monthly awareness-raising activities like art workshops, music recitals, and park excursions. These efforts are led by volunteer teachers who emphasize the societal harms of the death penalty and its incompatibility with human rights. Additionally, the organization collaborates with NGOs in periodic meetings to share insights, evaluate the current situation, and promote collective advocacy. By integrating these efforts, Sohram Casra extends the discourse beyond specific groups, fostering a broad societal sensitivity that seeks to prevent a return to capital punishment and ensure its rejection by future generations through educational activities.



Children raise their hands during a death penalty awareness raising event lead by SOHRAM CASRA in Türkiye. Copyright SOHRAM CASRA.
Photo edited to protect the identity of the children.

MAKE YOUR STANCE CLEAR

Civil society must **make it clear** that they oppose the return to the death penalty by releasing statements, press releases or legal advisories supported by experts and thought leaders from various sectors and areas of expertise. These statements must not only express your position but also have a legal, political or even medical basis.

Note that this vocal stance is only advised when there are low threats against civil society; any visible and vocal public advocacy against the death penalty needs to be weighed against security concerns.



The Philippines: Understanding a Breach of International Obligations

In collaboration with international law experts, abolitionists in the Philippines conducted a study with the support of the Australia National University on the impact of a return to the death penalty. The study demonstrated how reimposing the death penalty “would breach the Philippines’ obligations under international and domestic laws,” specifically the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and its Second Optional Protocol (OP2-ICCPR) aiming to abolish the death penalty.⁴

ENGAGE POLITICAL LEADERS

To achieve any political goal, **allies in parliament** are necessary to block measures to revive the death penalty. Legislators⁵ should be engaged by briefing them with evidence-based arguments, participating in congressional hearings and sharing stories of directly impacted people, such as those who were wrongly convicted of capital crimes and their families. Create position papers or leaflets to spread this information more effectively.



What does not always work

Asking politicians and lawmakers to speak publicly against the death penalty has not always been effective. Depending on the political context, politicians can be afraid of losing popularity on religious grounds or with the general public if they speak against. In this case, building a legislative network to internally push back against the death penalty is important, but it may be even more useful to lobby influential external actors. Such external actors may be more available to be vocal against the death penalty and play an important leveraging role. For example, regional bodies or diplomatic missions of countries providing official development assistance (see Point 5 “Leverage National, Regional and International Mechanisms”).

However, these external actors can also become counterproductive when their interactions with politicians, including champions for the abolition, start interfering the work of the people on the ground.

⁴ Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines & Labucay, I. D. (2021). *In defense of the right to life: Analyzing factors affecting Filipino attitudes toward the death penalty*. Australia National University.

Retrieved from: https://chr2bucket.storage.googleapis.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/08144807/in_defense_of_the_right_to_life_analyzing_factors_affecting_filipino-compressed.pdf

⁵ To learn more about how to work with parliamentarians to abolish the death penalty, consult the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty and Parliamentarians for Global Action guide on the subject here: <https://worldcoalition.org/2021/10/10/publication-of-a-new-guide-on-working-with-parliamentarians-to-abolish-the-death-penalty/>



Türkiye : European Union Membership Bid

Abolitionists penned and supported articles highlighting the diplomatic and legal ramifications of the reimposition of the death penalty, warning that would violate the Türkiye's obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights and “spell the end of [its] European Union (EU) membership bid.”⁶ They also mapped the countries holding the EU presidency and their economic relationship with Türkiye, and used this information to remind the government not to regress on human rights obligations.



The Philippines : Mobilize Allied Lawmakers

Beyond blocking the return to the death penalty by mobilizing legislators, civil society in the Philippines also delayed moves in the legislature during the Duterte Administration from 2016-2022. Further, abolitionist civil society also prepared speaker friendly cue cards that lawmakers could use easily, to make sure they had the counterarguments readily available.

LEVERAGING NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL MECHANISMS

Beyond parliamentarians, there are numerous economic and human rights institutions that can be leveraged to exert pressure on governments.

NHRIs⁷ are natural allies in the fight for human rights because of the crucial and unique space they occupy. It is a space that both commands government attention and directs it to human rights violations, but also separates it from the usual sphere of government influence. This can mean that they have the ears of political leaders and decision

makers, without being directly influenced by those political entities.

There are **numerous regional institutions** that can play a role in monitoring the human rights situation of a country and exert geo-political influence- the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR)⁸, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) are all examples of institutions that can push back against capital punishment.

⁶ <https://www.france24.com/en/20160719-turkey-death-penalty-coup-erdogan-eu-membership>

⁷ To learn more about how to work with NHRIs to abolish the death penalty, consult the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty on the subject here: <https://worldcoalition.org/2022/11/17/publication-of-a-new-guide-on-working-with-national-human-rights-institutions-to-abolish-the-death-penalty/>

⁸ To learn more about how to work with the ACHPR to abolish the death penalty, consult the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty and FIACAT guide here: <https://worldcoalition.org/2020/03/26/the-world-coalition-has-published-a-new-guide-on-working-with-the-african-commission-on-human-and-peoples-rights/>

At the level of **the United Nations**, statement and reports can be submitted to the different treaty bodies, as well as to special procedures or the Human Rights Council (during the Universal Periodic Review Cycle of a country). Furthermore, the different United Nations procedures and agencies

can also be allies in advocating with the government in-country. These include the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office of the Secretary General, as well as country specific mechanisms such as the Resident Coordinator or any Special Rapporteurs with localized mandates.



Palais Wilson, Geneva, Switzerland, where the Human Rights Committee often meets. Copyright, Flickr

The Maldives: Leveraging UN Mechanisms

The Maldives has ratified the First Optional Protocol to the ICCPR, which empowers the UN Human Rights Committee, the body tasked with monitoring the implementation of the ICCPR, with the power to receive and consider individual complaints.

On 11 July 2016, with the support of civil society, Hussain Humaam Ahmed's father submitted an urgent request to the UN Human Rights Committee to halt his son's imminent execution. In response, the Committee intervened, requesting the government of the Maldives stay the execution pending an appeal. Several UN human rights experts also issued statements to that effect. It worked.

MAKE REIMPOSITION IMPOSSIBLE THROUGH INTERNATIONAL TREATIES

One of the strategies that can be mobilized when preventing the return of the death penalty is to block future attempts to reinstate it by organizing campaigns urging your country to **ratify treaties abolishing the death penalty**, for example the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR or Protocol No. 13 to the European Convention on Human Rights.

International and regional standards provide robust legal frameworks to prevent the reinstatement of the death penalty by establishing binding obligations,

guiding interpretations, and promoting principles that render capital punishment incompatible with modern human rights norms. These instruments not only enshrine legal obligations but also shape jurisprudential interpretations and policymaking, ensuring that the right to life remains paramount. They can be mobilized to prevent the legal reintroduction of death penalty in your country. It is therefore essential to be up to date on which international and regional instruments your country has ratified, and to be familiar with the clauses of such instruments. An official moratorium on death sentences and/or executions can also be an effective legal roadblock.



International and regional standards on the use of the death penalty

• International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

The ICCPR entered into force on 23 March 1976 and has been ratified by 174 states to date. In Article 6(2), it restricts the death penalty to “the most serious crimes,” which international jurisprudence defines as intentional killings. This limitation excludes offenses such as drug-related crimes, blasphemy, or consensual same-sex sexual conduct. Article 6(5) also prohibits the death penalty for individuals under 18 and pregnant women.⁹

• Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR (OP2-ICCPR)

The Second Optional Protocol entered into force on 11 July 1991. Article 1 obligates ratifying states to abolish the death penalty and ensures that those states cannot reintroduce it under any circumstances. There is no exit clause; states cannot withdraw from this Protocol, reinforcing its permanence, but it does provide for states to make reservations at the time of accession or ratification with regard to use of death penalty in time of war.¹⁰

• UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

The CRC came into force in 1990 and Article 37(a) prohibits imposing the death penalty on individuals who were under the age of 18 at the time of the offense.¹¹

• European Convention on Human Rights and its Protocols (ECHR)

Protocol No. 6 to the European Convention on Human Rights, concerning the abolition of the death penalty, was adopted by the Council of Europe in 1983 and mandates the abolition of the death penalty in peacetime; however, it provides exceptions for crimes committed “in time of war or of imminent threat of war.”¹² Protocol No. 13, adopted in 2002, goes further, prohibiting the death penalty in all circumstances, including wartime, and preventing its reinstatement under any conditions.¹³

• Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union

The Charter, adopted in 2000, explicitly bans the death penalty in Article 2(2), embedding abolition into the EU’s legal framework.¹⁴

• American Convention on Human Rights and its Protocol (ACHR)

The ACHR, adopted by the Organization of American States, came into force in 1978. It recognizes the right to life and Article 4(2) restricts the use of the death penalty, including by limiting it to the “most serious crimes.” Article 4(5) forbids its application for individuals who commit the relevant offense when under the age of 18 or over the age of 70, and prohibits application of capital punishment to pregnant women, stating: “Capital punishment shall not be imposed upon persons who, at the time the crime was committed, were under 18 years of age or over 70 years of age; nor shall it be applied to pregnant

⁹ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted December 16, 1966, United Nations General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI), art. 2 and 26, UN Doc. A/6316, 1976, accessible at:

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/ccpr.pdf>

¹⁰ United Nations, Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (OP2-ICCPR), aiming at the abolition of the death penalty, 1989, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/second-optional-protocol-international-covenant-civil-and>

¹¹ United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 1989, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

¹² Council of Europe, Protocol No. 6 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms concerning the abolition of the death penalty, 1983, available at: https://70.coe.int/pdf/library_collection_p6_ets114e-eng.pdf

¹³ Council of Europe, Protocol No. 13 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms concerning the abolition of the death penalty, 2002, available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/-/council-of-europe-protocol-no-13-to-the-convention-for-the-protection-of-human-rights-and-fundamental-freedoms-concerning-the-abolition-of-the-death-1>

¹⁴ European Union, Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, 2000, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12012P%2FTXT>

women."¹⁵ The Protocol to the Convention to Abolish the Death Penalty, adopted in 1990, aims to promote the abolition of the death penalty in the Americas, allowing its use only in times of war under strictly limited circumstances.¹⁶

• African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)

The ACHPR was adopted by the African Union and came into force on 21 October 1986. Article 4 protects the right to life, stating that no one may be arbitrarily deprived of their life. There is no explicit prohibition of the death penalty, but regional interpretations increasingly favour abolition. The African Union is currently examining a draft optional Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Abolition of the Death Penalty and could adopt it in coming years.¹⁷

• African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

The Charter entered into force in 1999 and Article 5(3) states that "the death sentence shall not be pronounced for crimes committed by children."¹⁸

• Arab Charter on Human Rights

The Arab Charter, which came into force in 2008, limits the application of the death penalty to the most serious crimes and provides for the right to seek pardon or commutation of the sentence in Article 6. Article 7 prohibits the death penalty for pregnant women, nursing mothers, and individuals under 18 at the time the crime was committed.¹⁹

• ASEAN Human Rights Declaration

The ASEAN Human Rights Declaration is a non-binding document adopted in 2012 by the ASEAN that outlines the commitment of Member States to uphold human rights and fundamental freedoms. While it does not explicitly mention the death penalty, it upholds the right to life in Article 11.²⁰

¹⁵ Organization of American States (OAS), American Convention on Human Rights ("Pact of San José, Costa Rica"), 1969, available at: https://www.oas.org/dil/treaties_b-32_american_convention_on_human_rights.pdf

¹⁶ Organization of American States, Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights to Abolish the Death Penalty, 1990, available at: <https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/mandate/Basics/american-convention-abolish-death-penalty.pdf>

¹⁷ African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Adopted June 27, 1981, entered into force October 21, 1986. OAU Doc CAB/LEG/67/3 rev. 5, 21 I.L.M. 58 (1982), available at: <https://au.int/en/treaties/african-charter-human-and-peoples-rights>

¹⁸ African Union, African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, 1990, available at: <https://au.int/en/treaties/african-charter-rights-and-welfare-child>

¹⁹ League of Arab States, Arab Charter on Human Rights, 2004, available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/551368?ln=fr&v=pdf>

²⁰ Association of Southeast Asian Nations, ASEAN Human Rights Declaration, 2012, available at: <https://asean.org/asean-human-rights-declaration/>



WHAT TO CONSIDER: THE MALDIVES

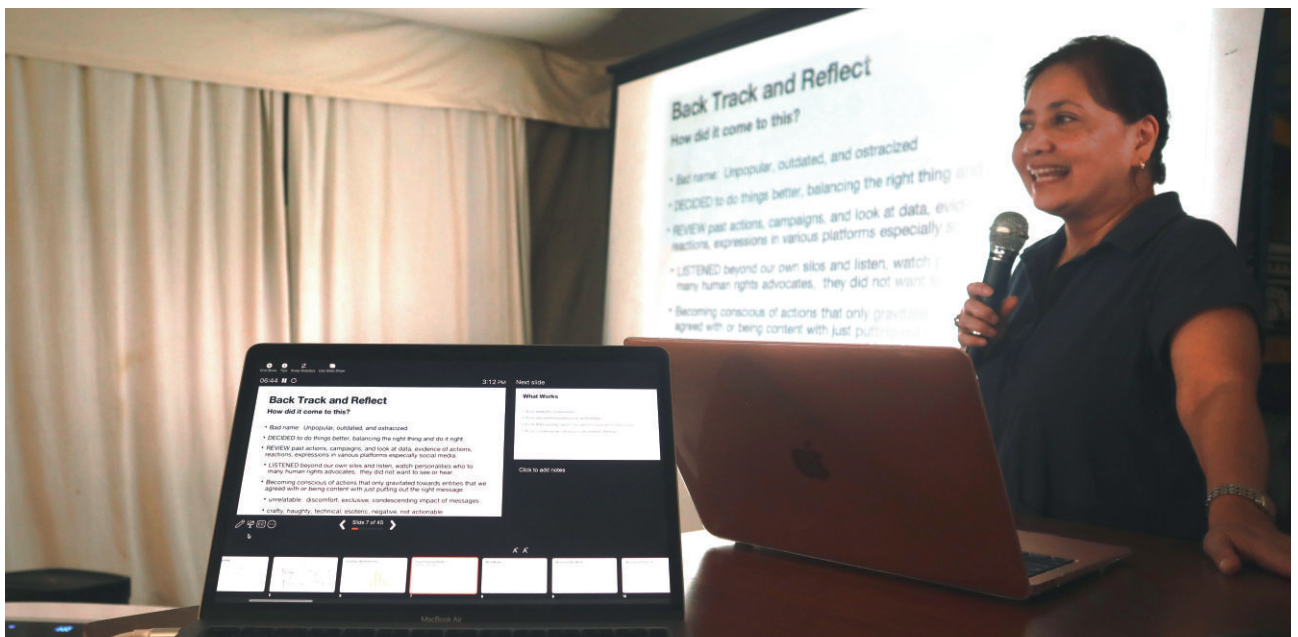
When abolition in all circumstances is not yet possible, an official moratorium can be a more achievable goal in the medium term. “Unofficial” moratoria are based on traditions or long-standing practices not to hand out death sentences or execute people. However, they are not enshrined in any law or decree, making them effectively toothless when government officials do want to reverse practice. By keeping the death penalty on the books, politicians can capitalize on their appeal to the public while the country enjoys the status of “abolitionist in practice.”

To learn more, consult the following think piece co-authored with the Maldivian Democracy Network: <https://worldcoalition.org/2023/11/06/importance-of-understanding-phases-of-abolition-the-danger-of-abolitionist-in-practice/>

DEVELOPING MEDIUM- TO LONG-TERM STRATEGIES

Often preventative strategies, like reactive strategies, involve a medium- to long-term focus. Mobilizing coalitions or engaging with international and regional actors for support can require a commitment over a period of time to create reliable dynamics in the case of an attempted return to the death penalty.

In mounting an effective push back against a return to capital punishment, and depending on the risk level in your country, resources may need to be mobilized not only for a quick reaction but for a longer strategy.



Karen Gomez Dumpit, President of the Coalition Against the Death Penalty, Philippines and Vice President of the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, presents a thoughtful exercise on preventative strategies for CSOs. Copyright World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, 2023.

4

Building Coalitions and Finding Allies

As indicated in the previous chapter, blocking the reimposition of the death penalty will be difficult without broad multi-sectoral support from civil

society, religious groups and other communities, in partnership with local, regional and international allies.

WHY DO YOU NEED A COALITION?

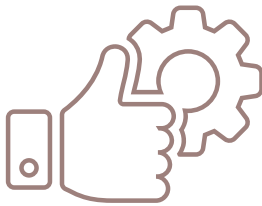
- ➔ **It allows you to engage and involve other stakeholders** not traditionally involved in abolitionist work, such as medical associations and universities, and thus reach a wider audience with potentially greater credibility.
- ➔ **It broadens the anti-death penalty message** that can show just how detrimental capital punishment is to a society- for those who are sentenced to death, their families, their communities, how it impacts spirituality, access to justice, etc.
- ➔ **It eases the burden** of advocacy and organizing by pooling human and financial resources, as well as access to networks.
- ➔ **It can help diffuse security concerns.** When only one or two organizations speak out, they are more vulnerable to reprisals, as compared to a broad-based coalition that may be more difficult to individually target.
- ➔ **It forges sustainable and impactful partnerships and collaborations** with other civil society actors and social movements working on broader issues of democracy, human rights and social justice.



Coalition Against the Death Penalty's logo, Philippines

The Philippines : Broad and Diverse Coalition

The Coalition Against the Death Penalty (CADP) is a broad coalition composed of faith-based organizations, legal assistance groups, universities and human rights NGOs. It has the support of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, which is crucial considering almost 80% of the population is Roman Catholic.



Türkiye : A Widespread Network

The Human Rights Association (İnsan Hakları Derneği) is a widespread human rights network in Türkiye that is composed of a variety of members throughout the nation, representing various interests and contributing various skill sets to human rights in general in Türkiye.

SOHRAM-CASRA (Sosyal Yardımlaşma Rehabilitasyon ve Adaptasyon Merkezi), a member of the Human Rights Association, has also grown its coalition-building approach by encouraging religious diversity and dialogues to engage on human rights issues.

Allies are actors that are not formally part of the coalition but can make significant contributions to the coalition's work. A core component of human rights work is reaching out to and convincing people to become allies.

- In abolitionist work, **potential allies** include undecided legislators, victims of crime and their families, those previously sentenced to death and exonerees, as well as their lawyers and families.
- You can also find allies in **human rights defenders, community organizers, religious workers, religious leaders, academics, lawyers and paralegals, media workers, local government officials, prison workers and detention authorities, foreign diplomats and international solidarity groups.**



WHY DO YOU NEED ALLIES?

- ➔ In cases where coalition-building is difficult or impossible, the **starting point** may be to find and organize allies.
- ➔ **They can be perceived as more objective actors** who can then reach out and convince other neutral or undecided members of their sectors and communities.
- ➔ **They represent diverse constituencies** and can share alternative perspectives on the death penalty, strengthening the idea that resistance to reimposition is broad and multisectoral.
- ➔ **They can help you shape your advocacy messages and narratives** in a way that appeals to the general public or targeted communities.
- ➔ **They automatically become your first campaign partners.** They are often the first to sign petitions, participate in protests or attend educational sessions.



The Maldives : Working With Religious Allies

Support for the death penalty is frequently justified on religious grounds or interpretations of Islamic texts. To counter this, abolitionists have been reaching out to like-minded clerics and influential Islamic scholars in the hopes of getting them to publicly oppose the death penalty.

HOW TO FIND COALITION MEMBERS AND ALLIES?





Map National, Regional and International CSOs

- Find out who already works on the death penalty in your country and region by identifying actors that have released statements or position papers on the matter or that have initiatives dedicated to death penalty issues.
- Identify actors that do not directly work on the death penalty but have a related mandate (ex. torture, prison conditions, criminal justice reform or drug policy reform).
- Map regional and international CSOs working on death penalty issues.



Map the National Political Scene

- Analyze the public statements or voting records of legislators and government officials on the death penalty or related issues (ex. criminality, justice reform, torture, right to life, human rights, etc.).
- If possible, reach out to and engage with individual legislators and find out more about where they stand on the death penalty.
- Identify abolitionist countries providing official development assistance or other forms of support to your country, particularly countries that have been publicly opposing the death penalty or funding abolitionist work.



Engage communities

- Identify and engage specific sectors where abolitionist perspectives are lacking but critical (ex. medical, religious, academic communities and others).
- Organize awareness-raising fora and other activities in diverse communities, including universities, churches and prisons.
- Build the capacity of lawyers and paralegals, journalists and media workers and detention authorities on death penalty issues.
- Contact and maintain good relations with persons sentenced to death and exonerees, as well as their lawyers, families and supporters.

5

Shaping Narratives

Measures to reintroduce the death penalty are always **justified by narratives** from social, cultural, political, legal and religious perspectives. Often these narratives simplify the response to complex social situations (ex. by asserting that the death penalty will lower violent crime or drug crime rates; it will provide better justice for victims and their families; it will make our society safer or respond to a violent conflict more effectively, etc. Particularly in countries where the death penalty has been abolished, or that have not carried out executions in a long time, the death penalty's novelty can seem like a new, if somewhat desperate, solution to dire social issues. It can be both an attractive political platform for leaders who want to appear tough, and it can position itself as a radical solution to populations who feel like their justice system is not fully responding to needs for accountability, fairness, and due process.

The justification for a return to the death penalty is often rooted in specific socio-political and national contexts.

Civil society must understand the underlying call for a return to the death penalty, learn how to respond to these messages and shape their own counter-narratives to highlight the reality: the death penalty is not and cannot be the solution to deeper issues.

ANALYZE THEIR NARRATIVES



Motivations: How do authorities or the public justify the reimposition of the death penalty? Is it based on an interpretation of religious texts? An apparent rise in violent crime? The need to protect women and girls from sexual violence?



Diffusion: Which platforms do proponents use? Who sends out the message? Influential religious leaders? The President? Victims of violent crimes and their families?




Contents: Are their narratives based on facts (ex. rising rates of drug-related crime) or emotions (ex. the country will be safer with the death penalty)? Are they convincing? Are proponents manufacturing or exaggerating crime statistics to justify their narratives?

DEVELOP YOUR COUNTERNARRATIVES

Your narratives must directly refute the main pro-death penalty messages being circulated. The most effective and irrefutable narratives are based on hard evidence. Extensive research is required to be able to present facts and interpret them in a way

that supports your message. Aside from debunking their narratives, it is also important to offer viable solutions, or “alternatives,” to address the problems they are highlighting.

COMMON NARRATIVES FOR REIMPOSITION	COUNTER NARRATIVE
The death penalty will deter crime.	There is no evidence that the death penalty has a unique deterrent effect on crime. For example, the Philippines abolished the death penalty in 1987, reinstated it in 1993, then scrapped it again in 2006. Police records show that rape and murder grew from 1996 to 2006. Incestuous rape incidents more than doubled between 1998 and 1999, the period when authorities carried out executions. ²¹ In contrast, the overall crime rate dropped by 50% from 2010 to 2015.
BEST PRACTICE The Flag Anti-Death Penalty Task Force published this informative, publicly accessible video debunking the deterrence myth and other arguments for the death penalty in the Philippines. 	
Sharia law requires the use of the death penalty.	Sharia is based on the principle of ‘repelling harm’ by protecting the ‘five indispensables’ (al-daruriyyat al-khamsa), including life (al-nafs). The Quran also actively encourages alternatives based on forgiveness, mercy and restitution, and even prioritizes them above retribution as a mode of justice. This means Sharia law can still be upheld without executions. ²²
BEST PRACTICE To promote positive interpretations of religious texts against the death penalty, Maldivian Democracy Network released public awareness-raising materials on the application of the death penalty and Islamic teachings on Qisas, with a focus on educating families of victims on the benefits of not choosing the death sentence as a form of justice.	

²¹ Kandelia, S. (2005). Incestuous rape and the death penalty in the Philippines: Psychological and legal implications. *Phil. LJ*, 80, 697.


²² Mumisa, M., Jaber, T., & Macalesher, J. (2015). Sharia law and the death penalty: Would abolition of the death penalty be unfaithful to the message of Islam?. *Penal Reform International*.

COMMON NARRATIVES FOR REIMPOSITION	COUNTERNARRATIVE
<p>Executions of people for drug-related offenses will end the illegal drug trade.</p>	<p>The death penalty does not deter drug use or drug trafficking. The illegal drug trade still thrives in some of the world's most prolific executioners like Saudi Arabia, Iran, China and Malaysia. In fact, retaining the death penalty for drug offences may hinder antinarcotic efforts, as abolitionist government and UN agencies cannot cooperate in antinarcotics operations that risk resulting in a death sentence being imposed. Imposing the death penalty for drug offenses also does not have its intended effect against drug use. UN data shows that retentionist countries for drug offenses like Malaysia, Vietnam and Iran have a larger population of people who inject drugs than countries that have abolished capital punishment for drug offenses.²³</p>
<p>BEST PRACTICE</p> <p>Under the Duterte administration in the Philippines, several bills were filed to reinstate the death penalty, primarily as a purported solution to the drug problem. Abolitionists allied with medical and health actors in their public awareness-raising and advocacy actions to emphasize that the drug issue is a health problem, not a criminal one.</p>	
<p>It is the solution to overcrowded prisons and is more cost-efficient than lifetime incarceration.</p>	<p>A lot of people who are in prison should not have been there in the first place. Prisons are overcrowded due to unequal criminal justice systems that disproportionately and unjustly incarcerates the poor and other marginalized sectors in society. In Sri Lanka, for example, 63% are in prison because of their inability to pay fines. As long as criminal justice systems remain unequal and unfair, prison conditions will remain horrible.</p>
<p>BEST PRACTICE</p> <p>The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka commissioned a Prison Study showing the unjust reality of death rows and prisons in the country.</p>	



²³ UNODC. (2019). UNODC Statistics. Vienna: United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime. Available from: <https://data.unodc.org/#state:1>

The 2024 and 2025 World Day Against the Death Penalty²⁴ cycle focuses on debunking the misconception that the death penalty can make people safer. You can find advocacy tools and additional arguments against narratives like the deterrence theory on the World Coalition webpage.

A stylized illustration of a hand holding a broken umbrella in the rain. The hand is rendered in a dark, textured style, and the umbrella's ribs are visible, suggesting it is damaged. The background is a dark teal color with white vertical lines representing rain.

**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—



²⁴ To find out more about the World Day Against the Death Penalty that focused on safety:

<https://worldcoalition.org/campagne/22nd-world-day-against-the-death-penalty/>

²⁵ When working with and involving people exonerated from death row and their families, it is important to adopt an approach mindful of their experiences and to try and obtain consent prior to sharing their stories with a wider audience.

FIND EXPERTS AND AUTHORITIES TO SEND OUT THE MESSAGE

Unfortunately, it is not always enough to know your message. You must find the best placed people and institutions who can persuade legislators, government officials, specific sectors or the general public against the reimposition of the death penalty.

This is where working in coalitions can help the spread of the counter-narratives and encourage the best placed people to speak out directly against certain pro-death penalty arguments.

<i>PEOPLE/ INSTITUTIONS</i>	<i>MESSAGE</i>
Medical experts and associations	The death penalty will not solve the drug problem. Execution methods are inhumane.
Religious scholars and leaders	The death penalty is against core and the sanctity of life. We need alternative methods of justice.
Victims of capital crimes and their families	The death penalty does not always ease the impact of violent crimes, and many victims and their families do not feel like the death penalty can restore what has been taken from them. Families should not bear the burden of taking a decision about someone's life.
Exonerees and their families²⁵	Innocent people can be wrongly convicted and put to death.
Legal scholars and experts	The reimposition of the death penalty violates our country's obligations under international human rights law.
Politicians	The death penalty hurts the country's legitimacy on the international stage and its reputation as a safe and democratic country.

FIGURE OUT THE BEST WAY TO SEND OUT YOUR MESSAGE

Your medium and platform will depend on your target audience. Emotionally charged human interest stories and narratives delivered through short films, feature articles or short social media posts can be

effective in targeting the general public. Position papers with extensive research can be best used to present your case to specific sectors like religious groups, legal scholars or legislators.

6

Security & Safety for Civil Society Organizations

In countries at risk of returning to the death penalty, there was a correlation of low security for human rights defenders. Advocating for abolition for the death penalty and/or against a return to the death penalty can be risky for organizations and individual activists. Threats can emanate from governments/state authorities as well as non-state actors (such as armed groups, religious groups, political parties, etc), and can include judicial

harassment or threats of legal action; cyber harassment or bullying; threats or actual acts of physical violence; and more.

As such, organizations and individuals considering working on these issues should strive to establish a Safety Risk Management System (SRMS) comprising of four steps:



The following resources can help organizations and individuals take appropriate steps to identify and mitigate risks, both online and offline:

- Frontline Defenders, Workbook on Security: Practical Steps for Human Rights Defenders at Risk
https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/workbook_eng_master.pdf
- Tactical Tech, Holistic Security Manual
<https://holistic-security.tacticaltech.org/downloads.html>
- Tactical Tech, Security in-a-box
<https://securityinabox.org/en/>
- Protection International, Protection Manuals (various, thematic)
<https://www.protectioninternational.org/tools/protection-manuals/>
- ProtectDefenders.eu
<https://protectdefenders.eu>

If you are faced with immediate risk/danger, the following resources are available:

- Access Now, Digital Security Helpline
<https://www.accessnow.org/help/?ignorelocale>
- ProtectDefenders.eu, Helpdesk
<https://protectdefenders.eu/protecting-defenders/#helpdesk>



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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 allows for a global dimension to the sometimes-isolated action taken by its members on the ground. It complements their initiatives while constantly respecting their independence.



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