

# THE DEATH PENALTY PROTECTS NO ONE.

## Factsheet For Parliamentarians

*in honor of World Day Against the Death Penalty*

### BACKGROUND

#### **Decades of studies have demonstrated there is no relation between the severity of criminal penalties and the reduction of violence.**

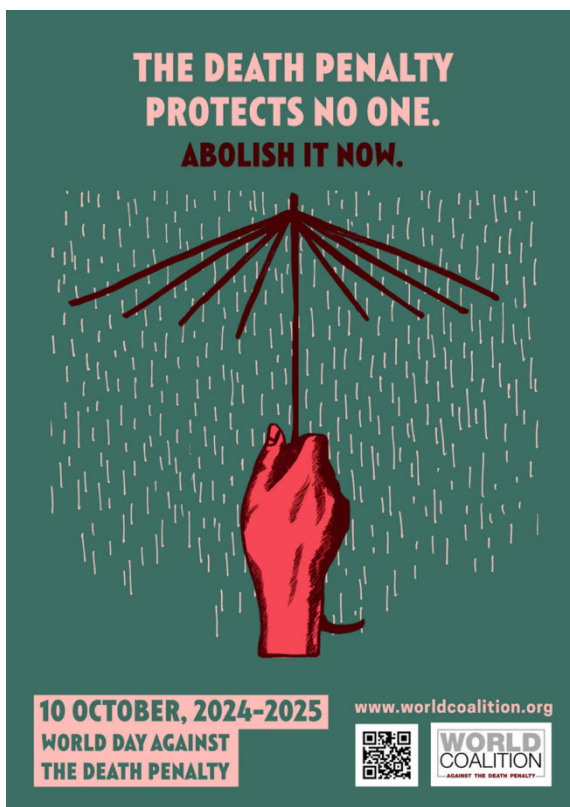
Yet, the acceleration of security concerns within our societies has led to a resurgence of public discourse calling for the reinforcement or even the reintroduction of the death penalty. These narratives often rest on the [misconception that capital punishment deters crimes](#). In reality, the death penalty is not a tool for protection, but rather an ineffective form of punishment, amounting to torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, that risks miscarriages of justice and disproportionately targets the most vulnerable communities.

[World Day Against the Death Penalty 2024/2025](#), celebrated annually on 10 October, underscores the truth that “the death penalty protects no one,” and reinforces why

parliamentarians worldwide — whether from abolitionist or retentionist countries — have a crucial responsibility to advocate for approaches to justice that truly safeguard individuals.

#### **Security, justice, and the death penalty — a false dilemma**

[Security](#) is understood not only as national security but also as human security; it encompasses the protection of individuals from threats and violations of their fundamental rights and freedoms. Ensuring security is a primary duty of governments, and it requires justice systems that are fair, accessible, effective, and tailored to local needs and realities. [When security and justice sectors are mismanaged](#), insecurity often rises because the root-causes of violence remain unaddressed and accountability is lacking.



Too often, when societies are confronted with developments portrayed as security threats, punitive measures are advanced as if they were genuine solutions to insecurity. In such contexts, public debate frequently fuels calls to strengthen or even reinstate the death penalty, exploiting citizens' fears and eroding trust in judicial systems. Yet the death penalty is never the answer. Far from delivering justice, it perpetuates the cycle of violence. Punitive responses fail to address the root causes of crime, such as socioeconomic inequality and discrimination. Resorting to the death penalty only deepens social divisions, entrenches unfairness, and replaces justice with vengeance.

Security measures must always be aligned with international human rights law. While [international law](#) encourages abolition and restricts the use of the death penalty only to the “most serious crimes”,<sup>1</sup> overwhelming evidence shows that its use — by its very nature, methods of implementation, and surrounding circumstances — amounts to [torture or cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment](#). Far from making societies safer, capital punishment undermines human rights and the dignity of individuals.

For this reason, parliamentarians should promote discourse and policies that prioritize crime prevention, tackle inequalities, ensure social cohesion, and implement [restorative forms of justice](#) that put victims and communities at the center of the process.

## How security is used as a political tool

Across the world, security arguments have been used to insidiously justify the retention or reintroduction of the death penalty. The following examples illustrate sectors in which capital punishment is being used as a political tool, failing to respond to security threats:

- **Counterterrorism:** In 2014, following the tragic terrorist attack on schoolchildren in Peshawar, Pakistan, the country ended a seven-year moratorium on executions in the name of fighting against terrorism. Yet, [data analyzed by Justice Project Pakistan](#) shows that the legislation failed to deter crimes and was misused by law enforcement to undermine fundamental rights “during arrest, investigation and trial of non-terrorism suspects.”
- **Armed conflicts:** In countries affected by conflict, such as the [Democratic Republic of the Congo](#) or [Burkina Faso](#), authorities have threatened to resume executions to “restore peace.” Conflict situations not only cause insecurity and extreme suffering to civilian populations, they may also lead to other atrocities, namely genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the crime of aggression. Even when addressing such serious crimes, international tribunals do not resort to the death penalty, because they are aligned with international human rights standards. Introducing or resuming executions will not reduce crimes. Rather, it risks aggravating impunity because of the irreversible nature of the death penalty. Sustainable peace can only be achieved through due accountability that upholds the right to justice, to truth, and the right to an effective remedy and reparation.

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<sup>1</sup> The “[most serious crimes](#)” is defined in international law as “intentional crimes with lethal or other extremely grave consequences.”

- **Political repression:** Some regimes use the death penalty as a large-scale tool of [repression](#) with the aim of annihilating political opposition and controlling the population. Civil society organizations have documented the use of capital punishment against political opponents, human rights defenders and protesters in countries such as [Belarus, Iran, or the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia](#), among others. It is also known to be used as a political repression tool in China and North Korea, but state secrecy prevents full documentation.
- **Populist “tough on crime” discourse:** In the United States of America, the President signed an [Executive Order titled “Restoring the Death Penalty and Protecting Public Safety”](#), thus reversing the moratorium on federal executions introduced by the previous administration. This order directs the U.S. Attorney General to seek the death penalty in all applicable cases and encourages state prosecutors to pursue capital charges, particularly for crimes involving the murder of a law enforcement officer or for capital crimes that would have been committed by individuals with irregular immigration status. This order also calls for challenging Supreme Court precedents limiting the application of capital punishments. Such measure falsely suggest that the death penalty increases safety, when it serves as symbolic gesture at the expense of justice and human rights.
- **Drug related crimes:** Despite international law restricting the death penalty to “the most serious crimes,” 34 countries still retain it for drug-related crimes. In 2024, [Harm Reduction International](#) monitored that over 615 individuals were executed for such offences — the highest number since 2015 — with executions carried out in Iran, Singapore, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and China. These measures not only violate international law, but they also disproportionately discriminate against ethnic minorities and exacerbate gender or socio-economic inequalities, while failing to reduce drug-related crimes.

Even in countries that have abolished the death penalty, insecurity threats or fear of violence can fuel calls for reintroducing the use of the death penalty. Parliamentarians have a key responsibility to inform the public, promote debate, and counter these narratives by exposing how security is instrumentalized to justify executions. Some of the arguments they can use against the death penalty are:

- ☞ **It does not deter crimes.** What matters in crime prevention is the existence of a sanction, not the severity of the punishment.
- ☞ **It has a discriminatory impact.** It disproportionately affects the most vulnerable populations, including already marginalized groups, exacerbating inequalities.
- ☞ **It amounts to a miscarriage of justice.** Wrongful convictions are inevitable even when due process and all judicial safeguards are duly implemented and respected, and the death penalty makes justice irreversible.
- ☞ **It perpetuates cycles of violence.** It denies any possibility of rehabilitation or reintegration.

## THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS

The leadership of parliamentarians has been instrumental in the global movement towards universal abolition. In many countries, abolition was achieved thanks to strong political will and advocacy by legislators.

Parliamentarians are at the heart of democratic systems. They uphold the rule of law, shape national legislation and contribute to decision-making at national, regional, and global levels. They also play a central role in the [ratification process of international tools](#) that strengthen the abolitionist framework, such as the [Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#).

By speaking out publicly, parliamentarians can frame the narrative. Calling for transparency on the use of the death penalty and sharing reliable information helps raise awareness among constituents and prevent the spread of misinformation. This responsibility does not end once a country abolishes the death penalty. Even in abolitionist states, insecurity narratives can resurface during crises and fuel dangerous calls for reintroduction. Parliamentarians must remain vigilant, ensuring that public opinion is guided by facts rather than fear.

In retentionist countries, legislators are essential to progress. By reminding citizens that the death penalty has no deterrent effects, they can make the case for alternatives that strengthen both justice and security. When paired with reforms that place victims and survivors at the center and emphasize restorative and reparative justice, abolition can address the root causes of violence, rebuild trust in institutions, and uphold the rule of law. In countries that are abolitionist in practice, legislators can play a crucial role in ensuring that the next step is taken and that abolition is enshrined in law.

By leading legislative reforms, parliamentarians can demonstrate that abolition paves the way for justice that protects both human rights and safety.



“Even in the most difficult contexts of insecurity and conflict, we have chosen the path of abolition – proof that strong political will can pave the way for positive change. We know that executions bring neither peace nor justice. Only truth, accountability and reparations can do that. Abolishing the death penalty means investing in human rights. I call on my fellow parliamentarians around the world to work together to ensure that the death penalty becomes a thing of the past.”

~ Hon. Émilie Béatrice Epaye, MP (Central African Republic),  
member of Parliamentarians for Global Action

## Practical actions for parliamentarians

### If your country retains the death penalty:

- Support or initiate legislative efforts that lead to abolition.
- Collaborate with like-minded parliamentarians across party lines to identify legislative strategies for abolition.
- In parliamentary debates and public discourse, highlight the risks of wrongful convictions, the proven lack of deterrence, and the discriminatory nature of capital punishment. Advocate for the need to dedicate resources to crime prevention that address root causes of violence, rather than punitive measures.
- Promote dialogue about justice, security, and human rights with citizens, victims' associations, civil society organizations, and other relevant stakeholders.
- Work hand-in-hand with civil society, including victims' groups, to build a path towards abolition.
- Request transparency from the government on the use of the death penalty, including statistics and trial procedures.
- Ask a parliamentary question that links justice, human rights, and security.

The following is a model of a parliamentary question that can be adapted to your national context:

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#### **To the Minister of Justice:**

*Evidence shows that the death penalty does not deter crime and that it disproportionately affects marginalized groups. Furthermore, it is recognized as a form of punishment amounting to torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, the prohibition of which constitutes a peremptory norm under international law. In this context, what concrete steps is the government taking to prioritize effective crime prevention, tackling root-causes of violence and protection of victims, rather than relying on the death penalty?*

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### If your country is abolitionist in practice:

- Support or initiate legislative efforts that lead to fully abolish the death penalty, including for serious crimes.
- Collaborate with like-minded parliamentarians across party lines to identify legislative strategies to fully abolish the death penalty.
- Engage in the process of ratification or accession to relevant regional or international instruments, such as the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to ensure that, once the death penalty has been fully abolished, any return to its use is permanently prevented.
- Remain vigilant against any attempt to resume executions and actively challenge pro-death penalty discourses, including by publicly committing not to call for its use, even in contexts of insecurity, and promoting stronger accountability systems and policies that address the root causes of violence.
- Promote dialogue about justice, security, and human rights with citizens, victims' associations, civil society organizations, and other relevant stakeholders.
- Ensure monitoring of government security policies to guarantee that they are based on a human rights approach.
- Ask a parliamentary question that links justice, human rights, and security.  
The following is a model of a parliamentary question that can be adapted to your national context:

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#### ***To the Minister of Justice:***

*Our country has not carried out executions for years, yet the death penalty remains law. Evidence shows that the death penalty does not deter crime and that it disproportionately affects marginalized groups. Furthermore, it is recognized as a form of punishment amounting to torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, the prohibition of which constitutes a peremptory norm under international law. In this context, what concrete steps is the government taking to move from a moratorium to full abolition?*

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### If your country is abolitionist for all crimes:

- Support regional and international initiatives against the death penalty, including by promoting the ratification of regional or international instruments, such as the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
- Engage in peer-to-peer dialogue with parliamentarians from retentionist countries, sharing your country's path to abolition and good practices in addressing root causes of insecurity.
- Challenge any revival of pro-death penalty discourse, especially during moments of political or security crises.
- Engage in dialogue with citizens, victims' associations, civil society organizations, and other relevant stakeholders about justice, security, and human rights.
- Ensure monitoring of government security policies to guarantee that they are based on a human rights approach.

## ABOUT THE WORLD DAY AGAINST THE DEATH PENALTY

Observed every 10 October, the [World Day Against the Death Penalty](#) unifies the global abolitionist movement and mobilizes civil society, political leaders, lawyers, public opinion and more to support the call for the universal abolition of capital punishment. The day encourages and consolidates the political and general awareness of the worldwide movement against the death penalty.

The theme for 2024 and 2025 is “The death penalty protects no one.” This is an opportunity for parliamentarians worldwide to reaffirm that security and justice are best guaranteed through human rights, fairness, and dignity — not via the application of capital punishment.

The World Day Against the Death Penalty has focused on other themes in the past. If you are interested in learning more about how capital punishment impacts your constituents and broader country-context, you can find more resources for parliamentarians on a diverse range of topics.

### Resources to learn more:

- [Debunking the deterrence theory](#) – a detailed factsheet providing with information about security, the death penalty and the deterrence theory.
- [Insecurity revealed: voices against the death penalty](#) – series of testimonies of victims’ families, law enforcement officials, people on the death row and their families, and other stakeholders.
- [Security Myth and the Death Penalty – What’s new since 2024?](#) – a factsheet that provides with numbers and updates about the death penalty.
- [Parliamentarians and the Abolition of the Death Penalty- A Resource](#)- A comprehensive guide for parliamentarians to understand the impact of the death penalty and steps to take to secure its abolition.
- [Ratification Kit for Parliamentarians – Campaign for the Ratification of International and Regional Protocols Aimed at Abolition of the Death Penalty](#)
- [Mental Health and the Death Penalty: A Factsheet for Parliamentarians](#)
- [Terrorism and the Death Penalty: A Factsheet for Parliamentarians](#)
- [Children whose parents have been sentenced to death or executed](#)
- [Addressing the Gender Dimension of the Death Penalty: Coaction between Parliamentarians and Civil Society](#)