

ENGAGING WITH THE UNCND ON THE DEATH PENALTY: GUIDE FOR NGOS

The United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs (UNCND) is where UN member states set policy on all issues related to drugs. It sets global standards and oversees the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). 53 Member States from all regions of the world are elected to serve four-year terms.

Why engage with the CND?

The death penalty for drug offenses is a key concern:

- 34 countries retain it.
- In 2023, 42% of known executions were drug-related (highest since 2016).
- Drug offenses account for large percentages of death row populations in many countries: 52% (Indonesia), 55% (Malaysia), 95% (Singapore); often higher for women.

Why does it matter for NGOs?

- The death penalty contradicts international human rights law and drug control principles.
- UNODC has a mandate to advocate abolition but lacks a strong public stance.
- CND offers a rare platform to raise these issues internationally.
- Many retentionist countries have closed civic spaces, limiting domestic advocacy.

Challenges in engaging the CND

- The CND is not a “friendly” space for civil society or human rights discourse.
- Death penalty remains a taboo topic, with no resolutions explicitly mentioning it.
- There is constant pushback against civil society participation.

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NGO ENGAGEMENT TACTICS

- Engaging with national delegations before and during the CND session to provide input and advocate for priorities.
- Submitting written statements to the CND.
- Attending the CND sessions, either in-person or virtually, to follow the proceedings.
- Delivering oral statements in the CND plenary.
- Participating in or hosting side events focused on the death penalty or human rights.
- Networking and meeting with UN agencies, member state delegations, and other civil society groups.
- Attend plenary sessions and Committee of the Whole (COW) negotiations.

ADVOCACY MESSAGING TIPS

- Refer to existing UN and CND documents to define harm reduction and human rights.
- Respond to sovereignty arguments by referencing International human rights law and the transnational nature of drug control, requiring cooperation.
- Emphasize countries with diverse contexts have abolished death penalty.

The CND is a difficult but crucial arena for raising the issue of the death penalty for drug offenses.

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for guidance, resources, and best practices.