

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL MEDIA BRIEFING

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Death penalty in 2020: Facts and figures

Global figures

Amnesty International recorded **483 executions** in **18 countries** in 2020, a decrease of **26% from 657** recorded in 2019. This figure represents the lowest number of executions that Amnesty International has recorded in the past decade.

Most known executions took place in **China, Iran, Egypt, Iraq and Saudi Arabia** – in that order.

China remained the world's leading executioner – but the true extent of the use of the death penalty in China is unknown as this data is classified as a state secret; the global figure of at least **483** excludes the thousands of executions believed to have been carried out in China.

Excluding China, **88%** of all recorded executions took place in just four countries – **Iran, Egypt, Iraq and Saudi Arabia**.

Amnesty International recorded that **16 women** were among the 483 people known to have been executed in 2020 (3%), in the following countries: Egypt (4), Iran (9), Oman (1), Saudi Arabia (2).

India, Oman, Qatar and Taiwan resumed executions. Amnesty International did not record any executions in **Belarus, Japan, Pakistan, Singapore and Sudan**, despite having done so in 2019 and 2018, as well as in **Bahrain**, which carried out executions in 2019 but not in 2018.

Egypt more than tripled its reported executions (from at least **32** to at least **107**).

Executions recorded in Iraq more than halved (from **100** in 2019 to **45** in 2020). Saudi Arabia decreased its tally by 85%, from **184** to **27**.

Chad abolished the death penalty for all crimes in May. **Kazakhstan** signed and in December took steps to ratify the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty. In the USA, **Colorado** became the 22nd US abolitionist state. **Barbados** concluded reforms to repeal the mandatory death penalty.

At the end of 2020, **108** countries (a majority of the world's states) had abolished the death penalty in law for all crimes and **144** countries had abolished the death penalty in law or practice.

Amnesty International recorded commutations or pardons of death sentences in **33** countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Barbados, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Guyana, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lesotho, Malaysia, Morocco/Western Sahara, Myanmar, Niger, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, USA, Yemen, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

At least **18** exonerations of prisoners under sentence of death were recorded: Cameroon (3), China (1), Singapore (1), Taiwan (1), USA (6) and Zambia (6).

Amnesty International recorded that **1,477** death sentences were imposed in **54** countries, down 36% from at least **2,307** in 2019.

At the end of 2020, at least **28,567** people were known to be under sentence of death.

The following methods of execution were used across the world in 2020: **beheading, electrocution, hanging, lethal injection and shooting.**

Three people were executed for crimes that occurred when they were **below 18 years of age** in Iran. Reports indicated that other people in this category remained on death row in Maldives and Iran.

At least **30** executions for drug-related offences were known to have been carried out in three countries (China, Iran and Saudi Arabia), a decrease of 75% from 2019 (118).

Death sentences were known to have been imposed after proceedings that did not meet international fair trial standards in several countries, including Bahrain, Bangladesh, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Malaysia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Viet Nam and Yemen.

Regional analysis

Americas

For the 12th consecutive year, the **USA** remained the only country to carry out executions in the region.

The number of executions (**17**) in 2020, decreased compared to 2019 (**22**). The number of recorded US death sentences (**18**) dropped by almost half compared to 2019 (**35**).

After 17 years, the Trump administration resumed US federal executions, eventually putting **10** men to death over five and a half months.

Only **two** countries, USA and Trinidad and Tobago, imposed death sentences in the region.

Asia-Pacific

In Asia-Pacific **Bangladesh, China, India, North Korea, Taiwan and Viet Nam** are known to have carried out executions in 2020.

The number of new death sentences recorded in 2020 (**517**) more than halved compared with 2019, when **1,227** were registered.

The number of countries imposing death sentences (**16**) remained similar to 2019 (**17**).

Japan, Pakistan and Singapore did not report any executions for the first time in several years.

Europe and Central Asia

Although Belarus continued to impose death sentences, there were no executions in 2020.

Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation and Tajikistan continued to observe moratoriums on executions.

Kazakhstan signed and moved to ratify the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty.

Middle East and North Africa

The number of recorded executions fell by 25%, from **579** in 2019 to **437** in 2020, while recorded death sentences fell by 11% from **707** in 2019 to **632** in 2020.

Amnesty International recorded executions in **eight** countries – Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen – in the region.

Oman and Qatar resumed executions, carrying out their first known executions in years.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Recorded executions in the region went down by 36%, from **25** in 2019 to **16** in 2020.

Executions were recorded in three countries – **Botswana, Somalia and South Sudan**; one fewer compared with 2019.

Recorded deaths sentences fell by 6%, from **325** in 2019 to **305** in 2020.

Death sentences were recorded in **18** countries in 2020, the same as 2019.

Chad became the 21st country in sub-Saharan Africa to abolish the death penalty for all crimes.

Recorded commutation of death sentences increased by 87%, from 165 in 2019 to 309 in 2020.

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