

HRC 52nd Session
Oral Statement

Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of Harm Reduction International and 11 other co-signatories, we welcome the ongoing attention to the issue of the death penalty through this high-level panel. We reiterate that drug offences do not meet the definition of 'most serious crimes' to which international standards requires the death penalty be limited to, in retentionist countries. This is well established by UN mechanisms with both a human rights and a drug control mandate.

According to Harm Reduction International's Global Overview 2022, which will be launched in a few weeks, 35 countries and territories retain the death penalty for drug offences in law. As more countries have abolished the death penalty by 2022, the use of capital punishment for drug offences is going in a markedly different direction. As of December 2022, HRI recorded an over 100% increase in drug-related executions; with Iran being responsible for most known executions. The number of confirmed death sentences also increased over 25%. We estimate that one in three people executed globally has been convicted of a drug offence.

Transparency remains a key issue. Only a fraction of retentionist countries make publicly available official figures on the death penalty, and these are often not disaggregated by crime, or by gender and/or nationality. This is in itself a violation of international standards, which obstacles any evidence-based assessment of the phenomenon – including in its application as a tool of drug control.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

These recent developments show how critical it is for drug control to be acknowledged as a strategic issue to be addressed to restrict application of the death penalty in line with international standards; and that we must do more: drug-related death sentences and executions must be met by political, diplomatic, and economic action; with full cooperation with national and international drug control bodies. At the same time, death penalty abolition must be addressed in the context of broader drug policy reform, aimed at promoting health- and Rights-based approaches, rather than punitive ones; which have now proven to be ineffective and abusive.

We trust this discussion will inform a strong resolution on the death penalty at the 54th session of the Council, which clearly condemns the use of the death penalty as a tool of drug control and call for renewed, concerted action against this measure, in cooperation with UN drug control bodies.

We I thank you for the opportunity to speak.

Co-signatories:

1. The Centre on Drug Policy Evaluation,
2. Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights,
3. Eleos Justice Monash University,
4. Capital Punishment Justice Project,
5. Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network (ADPAN),
6. SSDP International,
7. International Drug Policy Consortium,
8. Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA),
9. Intercambios A.C.,
10. Instituto RIA A.C., and
11. Canadian Drug Policy Coalition,