

Thank you to the Chair for the opportunity to make this intervention on behalf of Harm Reduction International and LBH Masyarakat.

We take this opportunity to, once again, condemn the massive damage caused by ongoing use of the death penalty for drug offences on our shared efforts towards progressive, rights-based drug policy.

Drug offences do not meet the definition of ‘most serious crimes’ to which international standards require the death penalty be limited to, in countries that retains its application. Yet, Harm Reduction International’s Global Overview 2023 shows that 34 countries and territories still retain this form of punishment.

Drug-related executions were confirmed in five countries, and are assumed to have been carried out in two more, where state secrecy and repression of civil society prevents us from confirming a minimum figure.

At least 467 people were executed in the name of drug control in 2023, a marked increase from the previous year. Despite being a gross underestimation of real figures, drug executions accounted for 44% of known global executions. In other words, roughly 1 every 2 people executed lost their lives in the name of drug control. We also documented a 20% increase in reported death sentences for drug offences from 2022.

Against this backdrop is an appalling failure of the international community to take meaningful action against such blatant violations of international standards. While we welcome condemnation by some UN agencies and States, the silence of many more, including UNODC, the UN body responsible of drug policy issue, risks being misconstrued as tolerance – if not complicity, and jeopardises the fragile progress towards rights-based drug policy.

Harm Reduction International’s Aid for War on Drugs report found that, while silent on executions and other extreme violations, UN agencies and states waste billions of dollars funding punitive responses to drugs, with little transparency or accountability and sometimes masqueraded as development aid. In countries that retains the death penalty for drug offences, this contribute to the sentence and execution of people for drug offences.

We call on states, UN agencies and other relevant actors to divest from this ineffective and unjust response to drugs. Because only when we do so, we free up essential funds to invest in programmes that prioritise community, health and justice. This includes harm reduction as well as other social and community programmes that benefit marginalised people and lead to healthier, safer societies.

We thank you.