

# **59<sup>th</sup> SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL: DRUG POLICY OPPORTUNITIES**

**June 2025**

**The upcoming [59th Session of the Human Rights Council](#), to be held between 16 June and 11 July 2025, presents critical opportunities for reflecting on the impacts of drug control policies on human rights worldwide and on States' obligations to promote and protect people's rights, while discussing pathways for reform.**

Below are some key moments where drug policy will or can be addressed, and suggestions for mainstreaming drug policy in the session.

More information on how civil society can engage during the session can be found [here](#).

## **ID WITH THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON EXTRAJUDICIAL, SUMMARY OR ARBITRARY EXECUTIONS.**

### **Item 3, 18 June 3pm GVA**

The Special Rapporteur, Morris Tidball-Binz, will present his report ([A/HRC/59/54](#)) to the Council, focusing on the rights of families of victims of unlawful killings. The report examines the profound impact of such executions on families and analyses their rights to truth, justice, and reparations, including the right to mourn their loved ones with dignity. It also highlights how certain circumstances, such as deaths in custody and the imposition of the death penalty, can intensify families' suffering.

In his report, Mr. Tidball-Binz raises concerns about retentionist countries that deny families visitation rights, or - where visits are allowed - impose conditions that prevent physical contact from trial to execution. In some States, there are no regulations requiring authorities to notify families or legal representatives before an execution, or notifications are given with very little notice. He further notes that secrecy surrounding the death penalty often leaves families uninformed about the impending execution of their relatives, depriving them of the chance to prepare. He expresses his concern about frequent reports of families only learning about executions days later, sometimes through the media or from other detainees. The Special Rapporteur concludes, that "the suffering endured by families is often described by them as insurmountable, and would amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, under international law according to international law" The report thus calls on States to do more to recognize, protect, and fulfil the rights of families affected by unlawful killings.

The death penalty for drug offences is -by definition- arbitrary as it does not meet the international legal threshold of 'most serious crimes' under which the death penalty is limited to in retentionist countries. Last year [Harm Reduction International \(HRI\)](#) recorded

a record 615 known drug-related executions, and in many cases, executions were not officially reported, and families were given no advance notice of the execution or were denied a final visit to their loved ones.

Member States and civil society can use the interactive dialogue to condemn these worrying developments and urge retentionist countries to abide by international human rights law and standards; protect the rights of families affected by unlawful killings; call for transparency on the use of capital punishment; and review the domestic anti-narcotics laws to bring them further in line with international obligations.

## **ID WITH SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON HEALTH**

### **Item 2, 20 June at 3pm GVA**

The Special Rapporteur on Health, Dr Tlaleng Mofokeng, will present her report ([A/HRC/59/29](#)) on access to medicines, vaccines, and other health products. The report highlights good practices and challenges in ensuring universal access to these essential health products, including essential medicines for 'drug use disorder treatment'. The Special Rapporteur concludes, among other things, that barriers to access to medicines, vaccines, and other health products are complex and multifaceted. These challenges stem from factors such as under-resourced and poorly functioning health systems, limited manufacturing capabilities, weak governance throughout the pharmaceutical supply chain, discriminatory policies and practices, and international frameworks that do not align with States' human rights obligations to guarantee access to these essential health products. She further notes that these barriers disproportionately affect vulnerable or marginalised groups, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.

While the report does not specifically address access to harm reduction, this session offers an important opportunity for Member States and civil society to underscore the critical need for universal and equitable access to harm reduction services (as well as palliative care), including essential medicines such as morphine, methadone, and buprenorphine, as a core element of the right to health for people who use drugs, including those who are incarcerated. Additionally, stakeholders can urge the international community to respond to the funding crisis that is jeopardising the availability of essential medicines, including antiretroviral drugs for the treatment of HIV, HCV, and TB.

## **ID WITH THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON EXTREME POVERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

### **Item 3, 25 June at 1 pm GVA**

During the interactive dialogue, the Special Rapporteur, Mr. Olivier De Shutter, will present to the Council his report on poverty, climate change and social protection as well as his findings from the visit to Colombia ([A/HRC/59/51/Add.1](#)) conducted between 26 August and 4 September 2024. In the latter report, the Special Rapporteur commends Colombia's effort to tackle poverty, but notes that regional disparities persist, with some segments of the population being significantly impacted by poverty or at risk, including

indigenous populations. He identifies coca growers as a group particularly vulnerable in the context of armed conflict, raising concerns about the social and environmental costs of policies that seek to eradicate illicit crop production only through punitive approaches, which leads to the militarisation while providing considerable revenues to armed groups, fuelling the circle of violence. Mr. De Schutter emphasises that crop substitution initiatives will only succeed if farmers receive adequate support to transition to agroecological practices and are offered genuinely viable alternatives. This includes access to markets and fair prices for their products, improved local infrastructure for processing agricultural goods, and access to necessary inputs—all of which are essential for comprehensive agrarian reform and food sovereignty.

He further highlights that long-term objectives should look for international cooperation among countries involved in the production, transit and consumption of drugs, to explore alternatives to punitive approaches to drug policy that are grounded in human rights.

This interactive dialogue comes at a crucial moment when the WHO is currently conducting a critical review of the coca leaf, following a formal request from Bolivia. It is expected that the revision process will finalise at the end of the year, with the presentation of the 48<sup>th</sup> Expert Committee on Drug Dependence (ECDD) outcomes to the 68<sup>th</sup> CND reconvened session in December, with voted planned for the 69<sup>th</sup> regular CND session in March 2026.

Member States can use this platform to underscore the interlinkages between punitive drug policies and extreme poverty, and to renew their commitment towards an international and national drug policy reform that is human rights- and evidence-based. Such reforms should offer sustainable, ecologically, and economically viable alternatives for growers and others most affected by the war on drugs. Colombia, in particular, is well placed to share its experiences, including both best practices and ongoing challenges. Local and international organisations can draw attention to how the war on drugs is further impoverishing the most marginalized and vulnerable groups and urge States to uphold international human rights laws and standards.

## **ID WITH SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON RACISM**

### **Item 9, 3 July at 10am GVA**

During the interactive dialogue, the Special Rapporteur, Ashwini K.P, will present her report to the Council on her visit to Brazil ([A/HRC/59/62/Add.1](#)). In the report, she voices serious concerns over newly proposed legislations such as Constitutional Amendment No. 45/2023, which seeks to criminalise the possession of all illegal drugs— which could disproportionately affect racial and ethnic groups. The Special Rapporteur also highlights the persistent and excessive use of lethal force by Brazilian law enforcement, particularly during police operations in the favelas aimed at curtailing the activities of drug cartels. These raids frequently result in the death and injury of residents —most of whom are Afro-Brazilian civilians, including pregnant women and children— and are often accompanied by incidents of sexual violence and assault. Furthermore, the report highlights the impacts of mass incarceration of people of African descents, including

increasing and disproportionate numbers of women, with drug policies and systemic racism identified as key drivers of overincarceration.

This session offers an important platform for Member States to reaffirm their commitment to and advocate for drug policy reforms that are in line with international human rights law and standards. Similarly, civil society is encouraged to use this opportunity to draw attention to the additional challenges faced by racialised populations in Brazil under current drug policies, and to urge both the concerned State and the international community to shift away from punitive measures that disproportionately affect people of African descents and other racial and ethnic groups.

## **ID ON HIGH COMMISSIONER'S REPORT ON TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND CAPACITY-BUILDING IN COLOMBIA**

### **Item 10, 3 July at 3 pm GVA**

Pursuant resolution [53/22](#), the High Commissioner on Human Rights will present to the Council his second report on technical assistance and capacity building in the field of human rights in Colombia to implement recommendations of the Commission for Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-repetition (soon to be available [here](#)). Following up on previous recommendations ([A/HRC/56/71](#)), it is expected that the High Commissioner will address how new drug policies implemented by Colombia, including the National Drug Policy 2023-2033, are addressing the structural causes of violence, strengthening the rule of law, and ensuring the full enjoyment of human rights for all people in the country.

The interactive dialogue will provide Member States with a key opportunity to reaffirm their support for the OHCHR and Colombia's new draft resolution on the topic (more details below), thereby reinforcing cooperation and technical assistance to advance the recommendations of the Truth Commission and fulfil key aspects of the 2016 Peace Agreement. Moreover, civil society is encouraged to use this platform to highlight progress, identify areas for improvement in technical assistance, and address ongoing challenges related to the peace process and drug policy reform.

## **UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEWS**

### **Item 6, 2 –4 July**

During the Human Rights Council, the outcomes of reviews carried out at the 48th UPR held between 20 and 31 January 2025 will be adopted. For the countries under review, it will be an opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights. [Iran](#), [Iraq](#) and [Egypt](#) -all retentionist countries- received relevant recommendations regarding abolishing the death penalty for minor crimes, including drug offences, and to establish a moratorium on its use as a first step towards total abolition. Iraq and Egypt also received recommendations calling to adopt the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death. Similarly, [Fiji](#), a country in

which some actors have been advocating for the reintroduction of the death penalty (including for drug offences specifically), received key recommendations to ratify the Optional Protocol, which could prevent any future efforts to reintroduce capital punishment in the country.

## OTHER RELEVANT OPPORTUNITIES

- **Presentation of the High Commissioner's annual report. (Item 2, 16 June at 10am GVA).** The Human Rights Council will consider the annual report of the High Commissioner of Human Rights ([soon to be published here](#)) followed by an interactive dialogue.
- **Resolution on access to medicines and vaccines and other health products.** The resolution will be presented by Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Senegal, South Africa and Thailand. The resolution builds upon previous long-standing commitments to achieve the highest standards of physical and mental health and address persistent inequalities in access to essential technologies particularly in developing countries and among populations involved in vulnerable situations. Sponsor delegations have expressed that the resolution will underscore the need to overcome structural barriers to equitable, timely and affordable access to medicines, vaccines and other health products, which is indispensable for the full realisation of economic, social and cultural rights; and will seek to reflect recent developments in public health governance, in particular, the adoption of the pandemic treaty. More information about the draft will be soon available [here](#).
- **Resolution on enhancement of technical cooperation and capacity building in human rights in Colombia.** The resolution aims to renew commitments adopted in 2023 and 2024 and to support national efforts to implement the recommendations of the Truth Commission and other key aspects related to the fulfilment of the Peace Agreement of 2016. First consultations will be held on 21 June, from 9 to noon at room XXI. More information about the draft will be soon available [here](#).
- **Resolution on civil society space.** The draft resolution will be presented by Chile, Japan, Ireland, Sierra Leone and Tunisia. It will underscore the critical role of civil society in achieving collective efforts to fulfil and protect human rights. The draft will seek to highlight the need for global efforts to ensure the preservation and creation of a safe and enabling environment where civil society can operate freely and actively participate in decision-making process at all levels and will acknowledge some challenges faced by them in this regard. More information about the draft will be soon available [here](#).

## **SIDE EVENTS**

### **Side event on drug policy and the right to health**

27 June, 1-2pm – Room TBC

On the occasion of the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking – or World Drug Day- marked each 26 June this event, organised by the Permanent Mission of Colombia, Mexico and Switzerland, will analyse recent developments and challenges in addressing the impact of drug policy on the fulfilment of the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health. More details on the event will be published [here](#).

### **Advancing Death Penalty Abolition through an Intersectional Gender Lens: Insights and Outcomes**

18 June, 3-4pm – Room XXV

A panel of experts and activists will share results from a World Coalition Against the Death Penalty project which exposes and addresses intersectional gender discrimination within capital punishment. The session will include an overview of the situation of women on death row, experience and expertise sharing, and the launch of a new guide on integrating gender into international abolitionist advocacy. More details on the event will be published [here](#).