

JOINT PUBLIC STATEMENT

13 August 2025

THE MALDIVES: REJECT INTRODUCTION OF DEATH PENALTY FOR DRUG TRAFFICKING AND ABOLISH THIS PUNISHMENT ONCE AND FOR ALL

We, the undersigned nine organizations, are alarmed by the statement of Dr. Mohamed Muizzu, President of the Republic of the Maldives, on 30 July 2025 indicating that he had instructed legislative amendments to introduce the death penalty for drug trafficking.

We oppose the death penalty unconditionally, for all cases and under any circumstances. The Maldives is a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the expansion of the scope of the death penalty for drug trafficking would result in new violations of international law and standards, adding to the ones already documented on the use of this punishment in this country. It would also set the Maldives against regional and global trends, which have been defined by 113 countries being now fully abolitionist; and several retentionist countries specifically ending the use of the death penalty for drug trafficking. There is no conclusive evidence that the death penalty has a unique deterrent effect on crime.

We urge the Government to desist from pursuing these amendments, as well as the Members of the People's Majlis of the Maldives to reject any attempts to expand the scope of this cruel punishment. We further call on the authorities of the Maldives to take prompt steps to abolish this cruel punishment once and for all and commute all existing death sentences as a matter of urgency.

DEATH PENALTY FOR DRUG TRAFFICKING: A HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION

On 30 July 2025, Dr. Mohamed Muizzu, President of the Republic of the Maldives, announced on the social media platform X (formerly known as Twitter) that he had requested Cabinet members to review the Bill on the amendment to the Drug Act (No. 17/2011) "with a view to imposing the death penalty for those convicted of smuggling or trafficking drugs".¹ The Bill, which the Government introduced in Parliament in December 2024, has been under consideration of the Judiciary Committee since February 2025, including to gather input from the Attorney General's Office and the Maldives Police Service.² The Judiciary Committee discussed the Bill on 5 and 6 August.³

The move to introduce the death penalty for drug trafficking would violate the obligations of the Maldives under international human rights law on two grounds. The **introduction of the death penalty for a crime that was not previously punishable by death** would go against the goal of abolition set out under Article 6(6) of the ICCPR, to which the Maldives acceded in 2006. As noted by the UN Human Rights Committee in its most recent General Comment on Article 6, "States parties may not transform into a capital offence any offence that, upon ratification of the Covenant or at any time

¹ Post of Dr Mohamed Muizzu account @MMuizzu on X, 30 July 2025, <https://x.com/MMuizzu/status/1950611345952719153> (translated)

² Judiciary Committee, Judiciary Committee's 3rd Meeting of 2025 (Confidential), 24 February 2025, Number M20/M/JD/2025/03, <https://majlis.gov.mv/en/20-parliament/committee-meeting/4190>

³ People's Majlis of the Maldives, Judiciary Committee, Judiciary Committee's 34th Meeting of 2025, 6 August 2025, Number M20/M/JD/2025/34, <https://majlis.gov.mv/en/20-parliament/committee-meeting/4428>

thereafter, did not entail the death penalty”.⁴ The Committee added that “States parties that are not yet totally abolitionist should be on an irrevocable path towards complete eradication of the death penalty, de facto and de jure, in the foreseeable future. The death penalty cannot be reconciled with full respect for the right to life, and abolition of the death penalty is both desirable and necessary for the enhancement of human dignity and progressive development of human rights. It is contrary to the object and purpose of article 6 for States parties to take steps to increase de facto the rate of use of and the extent to which they resort to the death penalty, or to reduce the number of pardons and commutations they grant”.⁵

Secondly, the introduction of **the death penalty for drug-related offences** would violate international restrictions to the use of this cruel punishment. Article 6(2) of the ICCPR and Safeguard No.1 of the UN Safeguards guaranteeing protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty, adopted through UN Economic and Social Council resolution 1984/50, provide that the imposition of the death penalty must be restricted to the “most serious crimes”. The UN Human Rights Committee has stated that “[t]he term ‘the most serious crimes’ must be read restrictively and appertain only to crimes of extreme gravity, involving intentional killing. Crimes not resulting directly and intentionally in death, such as [...] drug and sexual offences, although serious in nature, can never serve as the basis, within the framework of article 6, for the imposition of the death penalty.”⁶

The three **UN Drug Conventions** do not make any reference to the death penalty.⁷ In fact, the UN Common Position on Drugs has reiterated in unequivocal terms that the application of the death penalty for drug-related offences does not respect the spirit of the UN Drug Conventions and has the potential to become an obstacle to effective cross-border and international cooperation against drug trafficking.⁸ The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) has noted that States’ actions that violate human rights in the name of drug control policy are inconsistent with the UN Drug Conventions, and has called on States that still retain this punishment for drug-related offences to consider abolishing it for such offences and commuting death sentences that have already been imposed.⁹

A PRACTICE ON THE WANE IN AN ISOLATED GROUP OF COUNTRIES

In his 30 July statement, President Muizzu appeared to justify the imposition of the death penalty as a practice “done in some other countries”. However, the death penalty is currently retained in law in a minority of countries and its practice among retentionist countries is on the wane. As of today, **113 countries have fully repealed** the death penalty from national legislation and 145 countries – more than two-thirds of the world’s countries – have abolished the death penalty in law or practice.¹⁰ When the UN General Assembly considered its most recent resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty in December 2024, **more than two thirds (130) of all UN member states** voted in its favour¹¹

The isolation of retentionist countries is even more evident when considering the death penalty for drug-related offences. Although official information on the use of the death penalty is not publicly available for many countries, this punishment is **retained in law for drug-related offences in approximately 34 countries**. Amnesty International and Harm Reduction International recorded at least 337 new death sentences known to have been **imposed for drug-related offences in at least 13 countries** in 2024;¹² and **only four countries were known to have carried out drug related executions** in 2024: China, Iran, Singapore, and Saudi Arabia. Civil society monitoring also suggests that drug-related executions were carried out in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea) and Viet Nam, but these could not be confirmed due to restrictive state practices.

Recent developments in several Asian countries suggest that, with sufficient political will, a significant decrease in the resort to the death penalty, including for drug-related offences, is possible. Among other examples, on 25 June 2025, the

⁴ UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 36 – Article 6: right to life, UN Doc.CCPR/C/GC/36, 3 September 2019, para.34.

⁵ UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 36 – Article 6: right to life, UN Doc.CCPR/C/GC/36, 3 September 2019, para.50.

⁶ UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 36 – Article 6: right to life, UN Doc.CCPR/C/GC/36, 3 September 2019, para.35.

⁷ Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961, as amended by the 1972 Protocol; the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971; and the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988.

⁸ UN Chief Executives Board, “What we have learned over the last ten years: A summary of knowledge acquired and produced by the UN system on drug-related matters”, UN Doc. E/CN.7/2019/CRP.10, p.31.

⁹ Report of the International Narcotics Control Board for 2021, UN DOC. E/ INCB/2021/1, para.904.

¹⁰ Amnesty International, “Abolitionist and retentionist countries as of December 2024”, (ACT 50/9240/2025), 7 April 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act50/9240/2025/en/>

¹¹ UN General Assembly resolution 79/179 of 17 December 2024.

¹² Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Laos, Malaysia, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Viet Nam, and Yemen. In addition to these, Harm Reduction International recorded death sentences for drug-related offences in Egypt, North Korea, Saudi Arabia and Thailand. Amnesty International, “Death sentences and executions in 2024” (ACT 50/8976/2025), April 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act50/8976/2025/en/>; Harm Reduction International, “The Death Penalty for Drug Offences: Global Overview 2024” March 2024, <https://hri.global/flagship-research/death-penalty/the-death-penalty-for-drug-offences-global-overview-2024/>

Parliament of **Viet Nam** voted to repeal the death penalty in the Penal Code for eight crimes, including drug trafficking.¹³ In July 2023, **Pakistan** repealed the death penalty for drug-related offences.¹⁴ Also in 2023, **Malaysia** repealed the mandatory death penalty, which resulted in the commutation of more than 1,000 death sentences, with none of the more than 50 sentences confirmed by the Federal Court relating to drug trafficking.¹⁵

MISINFORMATION ON DETERRENCE AND DRUG TRAFFICKING

It is further alarming that President Muizzu portrayed the death penalty as a tool “to save the society from the scourge of drugs and to build a generation free from drugs”. The promotion of highly punitive “zero tolerance” and “iron-fist on drug crime” approaches that are not rooted in evidence supports a culture of misinformation and human rights violations. Effective drug control policies must be centered around health and rights, addressing the root causes that lead people to engage in the drug market, including poverty, unemployment and marginalization.

There is no convincing evidence to support the argument that the death penalty has a unique deterrent effect. The most comprehensive survey of research findings carried out by the UN on the relationship between the death penalty and homicide rates concluded: “research has failed to provide scientific proof that executions have a greater deterrent effect than life imprisonment. Such proof is unlikely to be forthcoming. The evidence as a whole still gives no positive support to the deterrent hypothesis.”¹⁶

There is also no proof that the death penalty has a unique deterrent effect on drug use or trafficking. After decades of sustained use of the death penalty and other punitive responses to drug-related crime, the global drug market is growing steadily and shifting rapidly, as noted by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime in its 2025 World Drug Report.¹⁷ In fact, the UN system coordination Task Team on the Implementation of the UN System Common Position on drug-related matters highlighted in 2019 that the death penalty has the potential to become an obstacle to effective cross-border and international cooperation against drug trafficking.¹⁸

ONGOING VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW AND STANDARDS

The introduction of the death penalty for drug-related offences would lead to additional violations to the already alarming human rights record of the Maldives, including in connection to its use of the death penalty. In its most recent review of the Maldives, the UN Human Rights Committee expressed concern at the retention of the death penalty for crimes that do not qualify as “the most serious crimes” involving intentional killing, or acts relating to sexual conduct that should not be criminalized at all, such as sexual relations outside marriage; and the removal of the power to grant clemency and commute a death sentence from the President, now shifted on to the heirs of the victim in cases of intentional murder.¹⁹

In two individual cases from the Maldives that it recently reviewed, the UN Human Rights Committee found that the rights of the two men were violated, including by the lack of legal assistance, psychological pressure exerted during police interrogation to extract self-incriminating statements, the imposition of the mandatory death penalty and through the removal of the right to apply for pardon from the President. In both cases, the Committee requested the Maldives to provide remedy by quashing the convictions and sentences of the two men and immediately order a retrial in their cases, ensuring that the proceedings comply with all restrictions and fair trial guarantees under the ICCPR. The Committee also requested the Maldives to ensure that the personal circumstances of the defendant and those specific to the crime are

¹³ UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Viet Nam: Parliament votes to abolish death penalty for some offences”, 27 June 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/06/viet-nam-parliament-votes-abolish-death-penalty-some-offences>

¹⁴ Pakistan today, “Pakistan ends capital punishment for drug trafficking convicts”, 26 July 2023, <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2023/07/26/pakistan-ends-capital-punishment-for-drug-trafficking-convicts/>

¹⁵ Amnesty International, “Death sentences and executions in 2024” (ACT 50/8976/2025), p.25; “Malaysia: Two years since mandatory sentencing repeal, government urged to fully abolish the death penalty” (ACT 50/9557/2025), 4 July 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act50/9557/2025/en/>

¹⁶ Roger Hood, “The question of the death penalty and the new contributions of the criminal sciences to the matter: a report to the United Nations Committee on Crime Prevention and Control”, UN Doc.E/AC.57/1988/CRP.7, 1988. The survey was last reviewed and published commercially as Hood and Hoyle, “The Death Penalty- A worldwide perspective”, Fifth edition, Oxford University Press, 2016.

¹⁷ UN Office on Drugs and Crime, World Drug Report 2025 - Key findings, June 2025, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/WDR_2025/WDR25_B1_Key_findings.pdf

¹⁸ UN system coordination Task Team on the Implementation of the UN System Common Position on drug-related matters, “What we have learned over the last ten years: A summary of knowledge acquired and produced by the UN system on drug-related matters”, UN Doc.E/CN.7/2019/CRP.10.

¹⁹ UN Human Rights Committee, Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Maldives, UN Doc.CCPR/C/MDV/CO/2, 11 September 2024, paras.27-28.

taken into account at sentencing; and that those under sentence of death be able to exercise their right to seek pardon or commutation of their sentences, as guaranteed by article 6(4) of the ICCPR.²⁰

Although these views were issued in 2019 and 2024, the Government of the Maldives is yet to comply with these recommendations. The First Optional Protocol to the ICCPR, which the Maldives ratified, imposes an international legal obligation on its state parties to comply in good faith with the views of the Human Rights Committee.²¹

FULLY ABOLISH THE DEATH PENALTY AS A MATTER OF URGENCY

The Maldives is now in an optimal position to align itself with the global trend and join the majority of countries that have abandoned the death penalty in full, as well as lead the way towards abolition at the regional level. As seen with the observance of a moratorium on executions since 1954 in the Maldives,²² as well as the experience of other countries in the region that have taken steps towards abolition, human rights leadership, including through informed public debates on the human rights dimensions of the death penalty, is a critical factor in driving the process of positive human rights change.

In view of the clear goal of the abolition of the death penalty set out under international law and standards, and the violations of human rights inherently associated with the use of the death penalty, we urge the Government and Parliament of the Maldives to abandon attempts to increase the use and scope of the death penalty, abolish this cruel punishment for all crimes and commute all death sentences as a matter of urgency.

This statement is co-signed by:

The Advocates for Human Rights

Amnesty International

Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network

Capital Punishment Justice Project

Harm Reduction International

Human Rights Watch

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

Maldivian Democracy Network

World Coalition Against the Death Penalty

²⁰ UN Human Rights Committee, Views adopted by the Committee under article 5 (4) of the Optional Protocol, Communication No. 2785/2016, *Hussain Humaam Ahmed v. Maldives*, UN Doc.CCPR/C/123/D/2785/2016, 16 August 2019; Views adopted by the Committee under article 5 (4) of the Optional Protocol, concerning communication No. 3011/2017, *Mohamed Nabeel v. Maldives*, UN Doc.CCPR/C/140/D/3011/2017, 15 May 2024.

²¹ UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment No 33, The Obligations of States Parties under the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/33 5 November 2008, paras.14, 15 and 20.

²² Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, "Committee against Torture reviews the initial report of Maldives", 28 November 2018, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2018/11/committee-against-torture-reviews-initial-report-maldives?LangID=F&NewsID=23951>