

60th SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL: DRUG POLICY HIGHLIGHTS

October 2025

Between 8 September and 8 October, the Human Rights Council held its [60th session](#). This briefing highlights key debates, decisions, and documents in which drug policy and its impact on human rights were analysed and addressed.

Recorded sessions of the Council can be accessed [here](#) and oral statements [here](#).

RESOLUTION ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS OF DRUG POLICY

On 8 October the Human Rights Council (HRC) adopted a landmark resolution on the human rights implication of drug policy ([A/HRC/60/L.31/Rev.1](#)), which was co-sponsored by a cross-regional group of 35 countries.¹ While the previous three resolutions on this topic were framed as contributions to processes outside Geneva, this is the first resolution of its kind to affirm a clear mandate of the Human Rights Council to address drug policy.²

The resolution builds on commitments from the 2016 General Assembly outcome document (A/RES/S-30/), the 2019 Ministerial Declaration adopted at the 62nd session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), and the high-level declaration by the CND on the 2024 midterm review. It reaffirms the central role of public health and human rights in drug policy, endorsing evidence-based approaches including harm reduction. The resolution recognises human rights as an essential part of the international legal framework guiding drug policy design and implementation. It underscores the key role of the Council to promote universal respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms without discrimination by addressing violations, and making relevant recommendations, leading to the integration of public health and human rights approaches to drug policy.

Additionally, the resolution highlights the importance of effective coordination and mainstreaming of human rights within the United Nations system, reaffirming the continued need to strengthen cooperation between the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and other UN entities in this regard. It also acknowledges and encourages the meaningful participation of civil society and affected communities at all stages of drug policy design, implementation, and evaluation, and calls for a safe and enabling environment for their involvement.

¹ Albania, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Iceland, Kyrgyzstan, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand, Ukraine and United Kingdom.

² More information can also be found here <https://idpc.net/blog/2025/10/the-human-rights-council-asserts-its-role-in-drug-policy-at-a-time-of-global-change>

The resolution calls on Member States to consider alternatives to incarceration, and to ensure that measures aimed at preventing illicit cultivation and eradicating narcotic and psychotropic plants respect human rights, acknowledge traditional licit uses, and protect the environment in accordance with international law. It also urges States to mainstream a gender perspective and guarantee women's participation at every stage of the development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of drug policies and programs

It requests the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to prepare a report on human rights challenges in addressing and countering all aspects of the world drug problem, in particular on the impact of drug policies on the rights of women and girls, and to present it to the Council at its sixty-third session. It decides to convene an intersessional panel discussion before its sixty-fourth session and to share resulting findings with the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND).

Russia tabled four amendments aimed at removing central aspects of the resolution, including references to harm reduction and people who use drugs. All amendments were rejected, and the resolution as tabled was adopted by consensus.³

RESOLUTION ON THE QUESTION OF THE DEATH PENALTY

On 7 October the Human Rights Council adopted another resolution on the question of the death penalty ([A/HRC/60/L.12](#)), which was co-sponsored by a cross regional group of countries.⁴ It achieved historic support, receiving 31 votes in favour—three more than in 2023—with eight abstentions and seven votes against.⁵

The resolution focuses on the right to a fair trial and equality of arms for people facing the death penalty. While it welcomes the progressive global trend towards abolition or moratorium on the death penalty, it notes with concern that death sentences continued to be imposed for crimes which do not meet the threshold of “most serious crimes” according to international law, including drug-related offences. The disproportionate impact of the death penalty on disadvantaged groups, minorities, women, and foreign nationals is highlighted as a major concern. The resolution highlights the need for full transparency and public access to disaggregated information on death penalty use, including statistics on death sentences, executions, and pardons. The resolution also recognises the role of civil society in contributing to local, national and regional initiatives on the question of the death penalty.

³ More details about vote can be found here:

<https://hrcmeetings.ohchr.org/HRCSessions/RegularSessions/60/Pages/resolutions.aspx>

⁴ Albania, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Benin, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Uruguay

⁵ More detailed on countries vote can be found here:

https://hrcmeetings.ohchr.org/HRCSessions/RegularSessions/60/DL_Resolution/L.12%20Voting%20Results.pdf

The resolution, among other things, urges all Member States to uphold the rights of persons facing the death penalty and other affected persons, in line with their international obligations. It further calls on States that have not yet abolished the death penalty to take concrete actions to reduce the number of offences for which it applies, restricting its use strictly to the “most serious crimes,” and to end the practice of imposing mandatory capital punishment.

It decides that the upcoming biennial high-level panel discussion to be held during the sixty-fourth (in March 2027) session of the Human Rights Council will address the latest developments, strategies, best practices and alternative approaches to reducing the scope and limiting the use of capital punishment; and requests the Secretary-General to dedicate the 2027 supplement to his quinquennial report on capital punishment to the right to non-discrimination with regard to the imposition and application of the death penalty.

The Council rejected amendments tabled by Singapore and Algeria aimed at removing central elements of the resolution, such as references to the mandatory death penalty, and at introducing language reaffirming the sovereign rights of states to determine legal penalties.

ORAL UPDATE BY THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

High Commissioner, [Volker Türk](#), gave an update on the global human rights situation, including on the use of the death penalty. He highlighted his concern about the alarming rise in executions and specifically focused on troubling developments in Iran and Saudi Arabia, with 840 and 260 executions recorded in 2025, respectively. HRI’s research regularly identified [HRI’s research Global Overview of the Death Penalty for Drug Offences](#) these countries among the highest executors for drug-related offenses, with data so far confirming this trend for 2025. The High Commissioner also regretted the lack of transparency in China which impedes providing verifiable figures on executions, and urged Member States for transparency and reform, including a moratorium and abolition of the death penalty. Positive developments were welcomed in Malaysia and Vietnam, where reforms were adopted in 2023 and 2025, respectively, which could significantly reduce the number of people on death row.

ID WITH THE WORKING GROUP ON ARBITRARY DETENTION

During the interactive dialogue, [Dr. Ganna Yudkivska](#), Chair of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD), presented its annual report ([A/HRC/60/26](#)), which analyses the issue of alternatives to pretrial detention, and recalls that alternatives to pretrial detention must be practical, proportional and non-discriminatory. Dr. Yudkivska also presented the report on the Working Group’s visit to Canada ([A/HRC/60/26/Add.1](#)). While the report welcomes the creation of drug treatment courts offering alternatives to incarceration for individuals charged with non-violent drug offences involving drug dependence, it raises concerns that individuals are required to plead guilty to access treatment and risk imprisonment in the event of relapse, recalling that the threat of

incarceration should never be used as a coercive means to compel participation in drug treatment. Although drug programmes are available in most detention facilities, the Working Group met individuals with drug dependence who had not received treatment during their incarceration, highlighting that this lack of care can result in severe suffering or even death following relapse after release. During the visit, the Working Group was also informed of increasing calls and legislative initiatives in various provinces and territories to authorise involuntary drug treatment for adults and even youth. The report underscores that drug dependence is a complex health condition requiring comprehensive, person-centred care, and stresses that the right to personal autonomy and bodily integrity must be fully respected, with any treatment based on informed and voluntary consent.

The Working Group recommended Canada to prioritise the deinstitutionalisation of individuals with drug dependence and harm-reduction measures, invest in evidence-based, voluntary drug treatment and rehabilitation programmes within the community for individuals with drug dependence, and immediately halt the adoption of and repeal existing federal, provincial and territorial laws and policies allowing for involuntary detention and treatment of individuals suffering from drug dependence.

During the interactive dialogue, the Gulf Centre for Human Rights, MENA Rights Group, and ALQST for Human Rights, in a [joint statement](#), drew attention to the continued arbitrary detention of individuals in Saudi Arabia and the alarming rise in executions. They highlighted that several individuals previously subject to Opinions by the Working Group have since been executed or remain on death row, including persons convicted of offences committed while they were minors. According to [HRI's data](#), Saudi Arabia carried out 122 executions for drug-related offences in 2024, accounting for 34% of all recorded executions that year.

ID ON SECRETARY-GENERAL'S SYNTHETIS REPORT ON CLIMATE CHANGE

During the interactive dialogue, the Director of the division of Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and the Rights to Development, Peggy Hicks, presented the Synthesis report on opportunities, best practices, actionable solutions, challenges and barriers relevant to just transition and the full realisation of human rights for all people ([A/HRC/60/52](#)), which focuses on climate-related dimensions of just transitions. It describes just transition as transitions towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies that are fair, equitable and inclusive.

Although Member States did not address drug policy issues during the interactive dialogue, the [International Network of People who Use Drugs](#) (INPUD) drew attention to the impacts of climate change on the health, well-being, safety, and security of people who use drugs. They emphasised that climate change exacerbates barriers to accessing quality health and social services, contributes to increased mobility and migration, and heightens exposure to human rights abuses, violence, harassment, policing, and punitive legal contexts. INPUD also highlighted the growing loss of housing, income, and livelihoods, alongside worsening food insecurity. The statement noted links between climate change, higher rates of HIV transmission, and declining health outcomes among

people who use drugs, underlining the risks such developments pose to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

ID WITH THE HIGH COMMISSIONER ON HIS REPORT ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

The High Commissioner presented report [A/HRC/60/46](#) which summarises a panel discussion held on 11 September 2024, at the 57th Human Rights Council, on achievements, challenges, and promising practices in promoting economic, social, and cultural rights while addressing inequalities. It explored how the OHCHR could best assist States, including strengthening its regional capacities to deliver advisory, technical, and financial support. During his presentation, the High Commissioner highlighted the importance of transitioning towards human rights economies, in which all economic policies, from taxation and public spending, focus on the advancement of human rights.

During the interactive dialogue, Colombia welcomed the High Commissioner's call to overcome structural inequality through inclusive economies and rights-based policies and explained that the Peace Agreement and the Truth Commission have guided national priorities toward reducing inequities, including by a comprehensive rural reform policy and drug policy reform, which aims at ending persecution of small-scale producers and consumers while intensifying action against major drug investors. It noted that the National Drug Policy 2023–2033 upholds the right to health and promotes equality and non-discrimination. Measures such as decriminalisation of consumption, harm reduction, gender- and diversity-sensitive approaches, and affirmative actions for incarcerated women were cited as examples of how drug policy can advance human rights. Colombia also highlighted the importance of a General Comment on drugs by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), which could provide guidance to align public policies with Covenant obligations and the High Commissioner's recommendations.

The Council also heard remarks from civil society. [INPUD](#) highlighted that punitive drug laws and policies significantly harm social, economic and cultural rights of people who use drugs, including access to essential services as well as protections of bodily autonomy and freedom from coerced treatment. They recalled that in 2022, the CESCR initiated work on a General Comment to clarify States' obligations concerning drug policy and its effects on these rights, with the aim of supporting the full implementation of the Covenant. INPUD expressed concern over the limited progress made so far and urged the Committee to take concrete action consistent with its pledge to leave no one behind.

GENERAL DEBATE ON SECRETARY-GENERAL AND HIGH COMMISSIONERS'S THEMATIC REPORTS

During the general debate, the Council heard from Peggy Hicks, Director, Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and Right to Development Division on nine thematic reports of the Secretary General and High Commissioner, including the Secretary-

General and OHCHR's report on the right to development ([A/HRC/60/40](#)), the Secretary-General's report on the question of the death penalty ([A/HRC/60/47](#)), and OHCHR's study social reintegration of persons released from detention and subjected to non-custodial measures ([A/HRC/60/55](#)). She expressed that due to the liquidity and financial crisis facing the UN, three reports were not delivered at the session as initially foreseen, including the panel report on the role of human rights in a sustainable HIV response, mandated by HRC resolution 56/20.⁶

The Secretary-General and OHCHR's report on the right to development analyses existing challenges and obstacles to the realisation of the right to development, including unilateral coercive measures and the non-repatriation of funds of illicit origin.

The study on social reintegration, underscores that social reintegration is a human right imperative. It highlights that barriers and challenges to reintegration often have a disproportionate impact on specific groups, people who use drugs who face limited access to harm reduction and drug-dependence treatment, especially post release, increasing their vulnerability to health risks and criminalisation. During the interactive dialogue, Director Hicks highlighted holistic models from Austria, Costa Rica, and India as examples of the benefits of coordinated, evidence-based approaches. Hicks stressed the importance of women-led initiatives and the participation of formerly incarcerated individuals in shaping programmes tailored to their needs, including gender-sensitive policies and interventions, highlighting examples from Colombia, Mexico and Zambia. She further called on Member States to institutionalise a human rights-based approach to social reintegration, reform punitive practices, including the use of criminal records and fines and expand other non-custodial measures.

Regarding the thematic report on the question of the death penalty, Ms Hicks highlighted positive developments at the national and international level, including the record-high support of the 2024 General Assembly resolution on the moratorium on the use of the death penalty ([A/RES/79/179](#)). However, she expressed concern about the rise in executions in a small number of countries, including for drug offences. She also underscored the systemic discrimination in the application of capital punishment and persistent violation of fair trial rights, urging Member States to “abolish the death penalty or adopt a moratorium, uphold fair trial standards, prohibit execution of juveniles and persons with disabilities and refrain it from applying to crimes that do not involve intentional killings, such as drug-related offences.”

During the interactive dialogue, delegates from [Cabo Verde](#), [Malta](#), [Romania](#), and [Switzerland](#) expressed their opposition to the death penalty in all circumstances, calling for the implementation of a moratorium and total abolition. [Mongolia](#), on behalf of the core group on the death penalty,⁷ expressed concern for the persistent trend of a surge in executions for drug-related offences, which “runs counter to the dominant movement, led by the Global South, to abolish the death penalty.” The [European Union](#), also opposed the use of the death penalty, highlighting the next World Congress to be held

⁶ For more details see resolution [A/HRC/59/L.37](#) on implementation of activities mandated by the Human Rights Council in the context of the UN liquidity and financial crisis.

⁷ Belgium, Benin, Costa Rica, France, Mexico, Moldova and Switzerland

in Paris in June 2026 as a key opportunity to move forward towards the abolition of the death penalty.

[UNODC](#) delivered a statement on social reintegration of people in prison, while it missed the opportunity to condemn the use of the death penalty for drug offences. [UNAIDS](#), speaking on behalf of UNFPA and UN Women, voiced concern over the liquidity crisis affecting OHCHR's work, including the postponed panel report on human rights in the HIV response that was supposed to be delivered at the 60th HRC session. The statement warned that funding shortfalls could lead to millions of additional HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths by 2030 while rising anti-rights and anti-gender movements, stigma, discrimination, and punitive laws continue to undermine access to HIV services. It stressed that placing gender equality and human rights at the core of the HIV response is essential to ending AIDS, achieving the SDGs, and ensuring that no one is left behind. UNAIDS emphasised that a fully funded OHCHR is crucial to sustaining a rights-based, gender-responsive, and community-led approach and to producing the evidence and recommendations necessary to guide effective global and national HIV responses.

Civil society also gave valuable insights into the issue of the death penalty for drug offences. [HRI](#), jointly with ten organisations,⁸ welcomed the report of the Secretary-General and expressed concern about the continued surge in executions for drug offences, calling on Member States to continue to publicly condemn this cruel practice, develop coherent alternatives rooted in public health and human rights, and ensure that no funding is provided for drug control efforts that risk contributing to executions. [ECPM](#), underscored that the death penalty should never be imposed for crimes that are not considered the most serious crimes under international law. In turn, [Payam Avaran Hamyari \(Chatra\)](#) raised concerns about the disruption of community-based treatment and harm reduction centres after military aggressions in Iran, urging the Council to recognise the right to health as a central element for accountability in war times.

UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEWS

The Council adopted the outcomes of Universal Periodic Reviews of several countries at its 49th session, with some specific recommendations on drug policies, most notably:

- [Lao PDR](#), which retains the death penalty for drug offences, received 24 recommendations on the death penalty, including to ratify the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to abolish capital punishment, and to establish a moratorium on executions. While most of the recommendations were noted, Lao PDR accepted a recommendation to “review current legislation to reduce the number of crimes punishable by death, in accordance with article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights”; and a recommendation to “establish a moratorium on executions and commute existing death sentences.”

⁸ The statement was co-signed by ACAT-Liberia, International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute, Dejusticia, HAYAT, Elementa, International Drug Policy Consortium, Dianova international, Parliamentarian for Global Action, Amnesty International, International Network of People who Use Drugs and EHRA

Laos – which still operates compulsory drug detention and treatment centres - also accepted a recommendation to “improve conditions of detention, including access to legal representation, medical care and food, in compliance with the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules).”

- [Kuwait](#), a country in which at least 40% of the people on death row were convicted of drug-related offences, received 17 recommendations to abolish the death penalty, declare a moratorium on executions, and limit imposition of the death penalty to the most serious crimes. None were accepted.
- [Guinea](#), [Lesotho](#), [Kenya](#), [Guinea Bissau](#), [Grenada](#) and [Guyana](#) accepted several recommendations aimed at strengthening the domestic HIV response, including by addressing stigmatisation and expanding access to testing and treatment.

OTHER RELEVANT DEVELOPMENTS

- **ID on OHCHR’s report on the human rights situation in Sri Lanka ([A/HRC/60/21](#))**. The High Commissioner presented the report on the human rights situation in Sri Lanka, outlining priority areas for advancing human rights, including ensuring accountability and justice, pursuing essential legal and institutional reforms, and addressing discrimination and societal divisions within the country. Among other recommendations, the High Commissioner called on the authorities to take immediate and sustained measures to address deaths and incidents of torture in custody, to impose an immediate moratorium on the application of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, and to undertake legislative reforms aimed at preventing arbitrary arrest and detention

Although the High Commissioner and Member States did not address drug-related human rights issues, [Ambika Satkunanathan](#) expressed concern over the government’s continued reliance on punitive drug control measures that disregard health and human rights principles, citing the involvement of the military in drug operations, compulsory drug treatment laws, deaths in custody, and the continued existence of the death penalty for drug offences, along with statements suggesting its possible reinstatement. She urged the government to reform its drug laws and policies towards a health- and human rights-based approach, developed in consultation with experts and affected communities. She further called on OHCHR to exercise due diligence to ensure that the engagement of all UN agencies and donors in Sri Lanka aligns with human rights standards and the “do no harm principle”.

- **Resolutions on issues adjacent to drug policy**. The Council adopted several resolutions relevant to drug policy issues, most notably:
 - o **Resolution on promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka ([A/HRC/60/L.1/Rev.1](#))**, decides to extend the mandate of the OHCHR, requesting the Office to present a written update at its sixty-

third session, and a comprehensive report on progress in reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka at its sixty-sixth session, to be discussed during an interactive dialogue.

- **Resolution on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health** ([A/HRC/60/L.19](#)) extends the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.
- **Resolution on promoting and protecting economic, social and cultural rights in addressing inequalities** ([A/HRC/60/L.27/Rev.1](#)) highlights the central role of economic, social and cultural rights in achieving the SDGs, especially Goal 10 on reducing inequalities and ensuring no one is left behind. It calls on OHCHR to prioritise and strengthen work in this area, deciding to hold a panel at the sixty-third Human Rights Council session to review progress, challenges, and opportunities, including the impacts of funding constraints, with broad participation from States, UN bodies, regional organisations, national institutions, and civil society. The High Commissioner is tasked with reporting its outcomes at the sixty-sixth session, conducting an interactive dialogue, expanding studies and analysis on economic, social and cultural rights, and identifying context-sensitive legal and policy measures to consolidate good practices, provide technical assistance, and build capacity through the dedicated knowledge hub.
- **Resolution on arbitrary detention** ([A/HRC/60/L.6](#)) renews the mandate of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and urges all Member States to uphold and advance the rights of all persons deprived of liberty, with particular attention to the specific needs of women—especially pregnant women and nursing mothers—as well as children, persons with disabilities, and older persons in detention. It further calls for intensified efforts to bridge the gap between international standards, including the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders (Bangkok Rules), and their practical implementation.