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AIDING EXECUTIONS?

How Aid Donors and
the United Nations
Enable the Death Penalty
for Drug Offences



HARM REDUCTION
INTERNATIONAL

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The Divest/Invest campaign calls on governments and donors to divest from the unjust drug war and invest in programmes that prioritise community, health and justice. It calls on donor countries to stop using money from their limited development aid budgets for narcotics control, which often violates human rights and undermines health and development goals. It demands that donors and governments to be transparent about their national and international spending on drug policy.

Learn more at <https://www.investinjustice.net/>



European
Union



ACRONYMS & DEFINITIONS

ODA	Official Development Assistance is government-funded aid provided to promote economic development and welfare in low and middle income countries, typically delivered as grants or loans.
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development is an intergovernmental organisation, consisting of 38 member countries, that shapes global economic policies. It defines and classifies what counts as Official Development Assistance and collects, verifies, and publishes donor spending through its data portal.
IATI	The International Aid Transparency Initiative is an open-data platform through which aid donors voluntarily publish information about their development activities, with the goal of improving transparency across the sector.
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime is a UN agency that says it works to combat illicit drugs, transnational organised crime, corruption, and terrorism, while improving criminal justice.
'Narcotics control'	Narcotics control is an ODA 'sector code' that covers support for customs and border enforcement, such as police training, as well as prevention and public awareness to tackle trafficking and distribution, provided these activities are primarily aimed at promoting economic development and social welfare.
Sector code	In the ODA architecture, a sector code is a classification given to aid projects to identify the specific economic or social purpose of development aid, for the purpose of tracking development spending. Sector codes are defined by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC).
Harm reduction	Harm reduction refers to policies, programmes and practices that aim to minimise the negative health, social and legal impacts associated with drug use, drug policies and drug laws. Grounded in justice and human rights, it focuses on positive change and on working with people without judgement, coercion, discrimination, or requiring that people stop using drugs as a precondition of support.
'Retentionist countries'	Countries that retain the death penalty for drug-related offenses are sometimes referred to in this report as 'retentionist countries'. These include countries that currently sentence people to death and/or execute for drug-related offenses, as well as those that have the death penalty in domestic legislation but don't (presently) apply it.

SUMMARY

What do water and sanitation, women's rights movements, and the war on drugs have in common? They share some surprising funding sources: international aid budgets that are supposed to support global development goals – and 'do no harm' in the process.

This report builds on previous research published by Harm Reduction International, revealing the scale of international aid funding for the war on drugs.¹ It focuses, in particular, on such funding in countries that retain the death penalty for drug-related offences. This is the sharpest edge of these controversial financial flows: connecting international taxpayers to executions around the world. Those killed include many members of poor and marginalised communities – people these taxpayers expect their aid money to be supporting instead. This has been happening largely in secrecy.

There have been significant improvements in aid transparency – however, there has been relatively little scrutiny of money spent under the 'narcotics control' sector code. This is an official category of eligible spending for Official Development Assistance (ODA), more popularly known as international aid, which enables donors to spend some of this money on anti-drug activities around the world. This report shines a light on this spending specifically in countries that have the death penalty for drug-related offences. Over the decade from 2015-2024, it tracks a total of about \$60 million spent by aid donors on 'narcotics control' projects in 14 countries that retain the death penalty – including Iran, one of the leading executors of people for drug related offences.²

After the US, Japan emerges as the top spender of aid money on 'narcotics control' projects in countries which retain the death penalty for drug-related offences. However even in these cases, international institutions headquartered in Europe are involved in sanctioning and enabling this spending. In total, about two-thirds of the funding tracked flowed through multilateral institutions – in particular, the UN Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC), headquartered in Vienna. Meanwhile, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), headquartered in Paris, is ultimately involved in all of this spending. It is responsible for monitoring all aid spending and ensuring that donors are following the rules on what spending they can count as aid.

Donor policies, as well as the UN's position on the death penalty, appear jeopardised by these funding flows. The United Nations system opposes the use of the death penalty in all circumstances.³ "The fundamental nature of the right to life, the unacceptable risk of executing innocent people, and the absence of proof that the death penalty deters crime," are among the reasons it supports the universal abolition of the death penalty, in the words of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).⁴ International aid is supposed to support poor and marginalised communities in developing countries – not kill them.

The contradictions documented in this report must be addressed to maintain the integrity of policy on the death penalty as well as the integrity of international aid.

1. Provost, C., Daniels, C., Gurung, G. and Cook, C. (2023) 'Aid for the War on Drugs'. Harm Reduction International

2. In 2023, the 'Aid for the War on Drugs' report identified at least \$70 million spent by aid donors in countries that retain the death penalty for drug-related offenses, over the ten years from 2012-2021. The difference in total figures with this report is because of the different time period, and particularly high spending on 'narcotics control' in Iraq in 2012 (more than \$22.6 million, all from the US).

3. (2017) 'DEATH PENALTY: Excerpt from the UNDG Guidance Note on Human Rights for Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams'. United Nations Development Group

4. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. 'Death Penalty'. United Nations

KEY FINDINGS



Aid donors reported spending about \$60 million over the last decade (2015-2024, the latest year for which this data is publicly available) on 'narcotics control' projects in countries that retain the death penalty for drug-related offences.

- About half of this total was provided by the US; the other half came from Asian and European aid donors including Japan, Korea and Germany.
- About two-thirds of this total was spent via multilateral organisations – in particular, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC); the rest went through recipient or donor government agencies, private companies and NGOs.
- This funding has, as examples, been used to support 'Iranian Law Enforcement capacities'; purchase 'illegal drug control equipment' (in Sri Lanka); and pay for 'narcotics control training' (in Sudan).
- Ongoing projects include those delivered by UN agencies for 'improved training facilities' for police in Pakistan,⁵ and 'improving border control' in Lao.
- These sums and projects are likely to be the tip of the iceberg in terms of international aid supporting the infrastructure for drug-related executions; there are significant transparency gaps in such international spending.
- Aid isn't the only international funding flow supporting this infrastructure either; however, it is one that is specifically supposed to support poor and marginalised communities in developing countries – not kill them.



Top recipients of this funding include **Iran** – one of the leading executors of people for drug related offences. According to the analysis of official aid data presented in this report, donors spent about \$10 million on 'narcotics control' projects in Iran, over the decade examined – with almost all of this money from Japan (\$9.8 million).

- In 2025, 79% of the world's confirmed drug-related executions happened in Iran. There were at least 955 such executions that year, according to civil society monitoring. Around a third of those executed in Iran in 2025 have been ethnic minorities (Baluch, Kurds, Arabs), often without adequate defense.

5. Pakistan removed the death penalty as a possible punishment for drug offences in 2023. However, at least three individuals were sentenced to death for drug offences in 2024, and seven people remained on death for drug offences as of 2025. Sources: (2023) 'Death Penalty in Pakistan: Data Mapping Capital Punishments 2023'. Justice Project Pakistan; (2026) 'The Death Penalty for Drug Offences: Global Overview 2025'. Harm Reduction International



After the US, **Japan** has been the top donor of this funding overall – despite Japanese policy not to use the death penalty, domestically, for non-violent offences including drug-related ones (only for multiple murders). In total, it spent more than \$18 million of its international aid, over the decade examined, on ‘narcotics control’ projects in six countries that retain the death penalty for drug-related offences.⁶

- In Iran, Japan strikingly spent more of its aid on ‘narcotics control’ than on key development goals like basic education and water and sanitation.
- Japanese aid-funded projects have, for example, supplied X-ray scanners, drug detectors, and sniffer dogs to Iranian law enforcement – tools that could be used in arrests of people who may later be executed.



Over the last decade, independent evaluations commissioned by **UNODC** have repeatedly raised concerns about human rights. Rights violations by the agency’s partners have been considered only a “reputational risk” and due diligence only a “procedural formality.” Despite this, money has continued to flow to programmes in countries, from Iran to Indonesia, retaining the death penalty for drug-related offenses.

- “I had no rights, no authority, no courage, and no experience to assess the situation,” said 24-year-old Fandi Ramadhan, in Indonesia. He is among the individuals arrested and imprisoned by countries receiving UNODC support that retain and use the death penalty. He was arrested in a 2025 Indonesian raid on a ship at sea (which received congratulations from the UN agency).



6. Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Iran, Myanmar and Pakistan

1 | INTRODUCTION

Ten years ago, one in every three executions carried out anywhere in the world was for a drug-related offence.⁷ By 2025, that proportion had surged: over 46% of all recorded executions that year were linked to drugs. This means that anyone who cares about abolishing the death penalty must care about challenging the war on drugs (and vice versa). These threats to human rights and lives are deeply interlinked.

Today, more than 2,500 people are known to be sitting on death row for drug-related offences; but the real figure will be much higher due to transparency gaps.⁸ They overwhelmingly come from poor and marginalised communities. Like Parvin Mousavi, a 53-year-old mother of two from Iran, living with cancer, who was arrested for unknowingly transporting medicine that turned out to be morphine. Even Iran's own rules forbid executing people who are ill or injured. Parvin was still taken to the gallows.⁹

“

Money intended to support poor and vulnerable communities around the world has, in some cases, bankrolled the machinery that has led some of them to their deaths instead.

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This report confronts follow-the-money analysis of aid spending for ‘narcotics control’ in countries that retain the death penalty for drug-related offences, the human consequences of such spending and the contradictions with donor policies.

Money intended to support poor and vulnerable communities around the world has, in some cases, bankrolled the machinery that has led some of them to their deaths instead. Technical assistance, equipment, and capacity-building efforts have empowered security agencies that rely on coercive policing, unfair trials, and laws that impose death sentences for non-violent crimes. Donors who do not intend to support capital punishment must have the will and the practical safeguards to ensure their assistance does not contribute to it. Action can and should be taken to prevent international aid funding from supporting the infrastructure for executions. Action can and should also be taken to repair the harm caused by the money already spent.

There are growing calls not only to end harmful anti-drug policies, but also to repair the damage they have done. In the United States, a key donor examined in this report, lawmakers have introduced a Congressional resolution recognising the war on

drugs as a driver of enduring racial and economic disparities and calling for reparative justice.¹⁰ At the state level, the California Reparations Task Force has recommended post-prohibition reparations, explicitly acknowledging the discriminatory harms inflicted by drug enforcement policies.¹¹ These initiatives reflect a broader recognition that the ‘war on drugs’ has left a legacy of harm that demands remedy.

7. Larasati, A. and Jofré, M. (2024) ‘A decade-long review on the death penalty for drug offences’. Harm Reduction International

8. (2026) ‘The Death Penalty for Drug Offences: Global Overview 2025’. Harm Reduction International

9. See more in Case Study: Aiding Executions in Iran

10. United States Congress. (2025) ‘House Resolution 414’. 119th Congress, sponsor Rep. Lee, Summer

11. California Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General. (2023). ‘California Reparations Task Force Final Report: Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans’. State of California.

International aid donors and institutions can and should continue spending money on drugs – but in line with public health and human rights-based approaches instead.

A recent report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights highlighted the “lack of, and unequal access to, treatment and harm reduction,” noting that decades of punitive drug policies have failed.¹² Harm reduction and treatment services remain heavily underfunded worldwide, while funds currently channelled into 'narcotics control' assistance in death penalty states could instead expand access to harm reduction programmes that strengthen communities, rather than embolden systems that risk lives.

Background

Around the world, thirty-six countries retain the death penalty for drug-related offences.¹³ Over the last decade, at least 3,700 people have been executed for drug offences – roughly one person every single day – and thousands of others are currently waiting on death row, counting down the days to the same fate.¹⁴

In some places, drug charges make up the bulk of capital convictions. Nowhere is this more stark than in Iran, one of the leading executors for drug-related offences, where more than half of known executions were related to drugs in 2024.¹⁵

A small cluster of high-application countries continues to use the death penalty for drug offences systematically and aggressively, even though international law and standards are clear: people should not be sentenced to death for drug crimes. Human rights monitors have warned since 2007 that these countries show no sign of reversing course.¹⁶ Instead, executions for drug-related offences are accelerating and are now a major driver of global execution rates overall. This crisis is not only global in scale, but it is global in implications – meanwhile, the money supporting it is also transnational. Key international institutions based in Europe are central to the international aid system and its involvement in 'counter-narcotics' projects, including in countries with the death penalty for drug-related offences.

12. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2023). 'Human rights challenges in addressing and countering all aspects of the world drug problem'. United Nations

13. (2026) 'The Death Penalty for Drug Offences: Global Overview 2025'. Harm Reduction International

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights. (2026). 'Alarming trends: executions in 2025 raise serious human rights concerns'. United Nations

2 | FOLLOW THE MONEY

This report focuses on funding from Official Development Assistance (ODA) budgets, in particular that which is explicitly labelled as 'narcotics control' funding, spent in countries that retain the death penalty for drug related offences.

It does not capture all international funding supporting the death penalty in these places; it focuses on funding from ODA budgets that are supposed to help end poverty and advance other global development goals, including improvements in health and education.

ODA is defined by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Cooperation and Development (OECD) in Paris as “government aid designed to promote the economic development and welfare of developing countries”.¹⁷ Importantly, it should be spent while ‘doing no harm’. A paper from the OECD on applying this principle in situations of fragility and conflict explained that donors must “consider both the intended and unintended consequences of their interventions.” It even looked at aid donors’ activities against illicit drugs as an example, saying they should consider supporting “measures to legalise and regulate” some of them instead.¹⁸

This is in line with international health and human rights obligations. However, at the same time, ‘narcotics control’ is an official ‘sector’ of ODA. It is one of more than 200 sectors that donors have to choose from when reporting their aid spending to the OECD, along with others such as ‘basic healthcare’. It is described as:

In-country and customs controls including training of the police; educational programmes and awareness campaigns to restrict narcotics traffic and in-country distribution. ODA recording of narcotics control expenditures is limited to activities that focus on economic development and welfare including alternative development programmes and crop substitution. Activities by the donor country to interdict drug supplies, destroy crops or train or finance military personnel in anti-narcotics activities are not reportable.¹⁹

This report uses two main data sources to follow this money:

1

The OECD’s Creditor Reporting System (CRS) database.²⁰

2

International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) data.²¹

In both cases, data comes from aid donors themselves (and, in the case of IATI data, some data also comes from intermediary organisations that spend aid money).²²

17. ‘Net ODA’. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

18. (2025) ‘Do No Harm: International Support for Statebuilding’. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

19. “List of CRS Purpose Codes and Voluntary Budget Identifier Codes” OECD DAC (2019) <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/DAC-CRS-PPC-2019.xls>

20. ‘Creditor Reporting System’. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

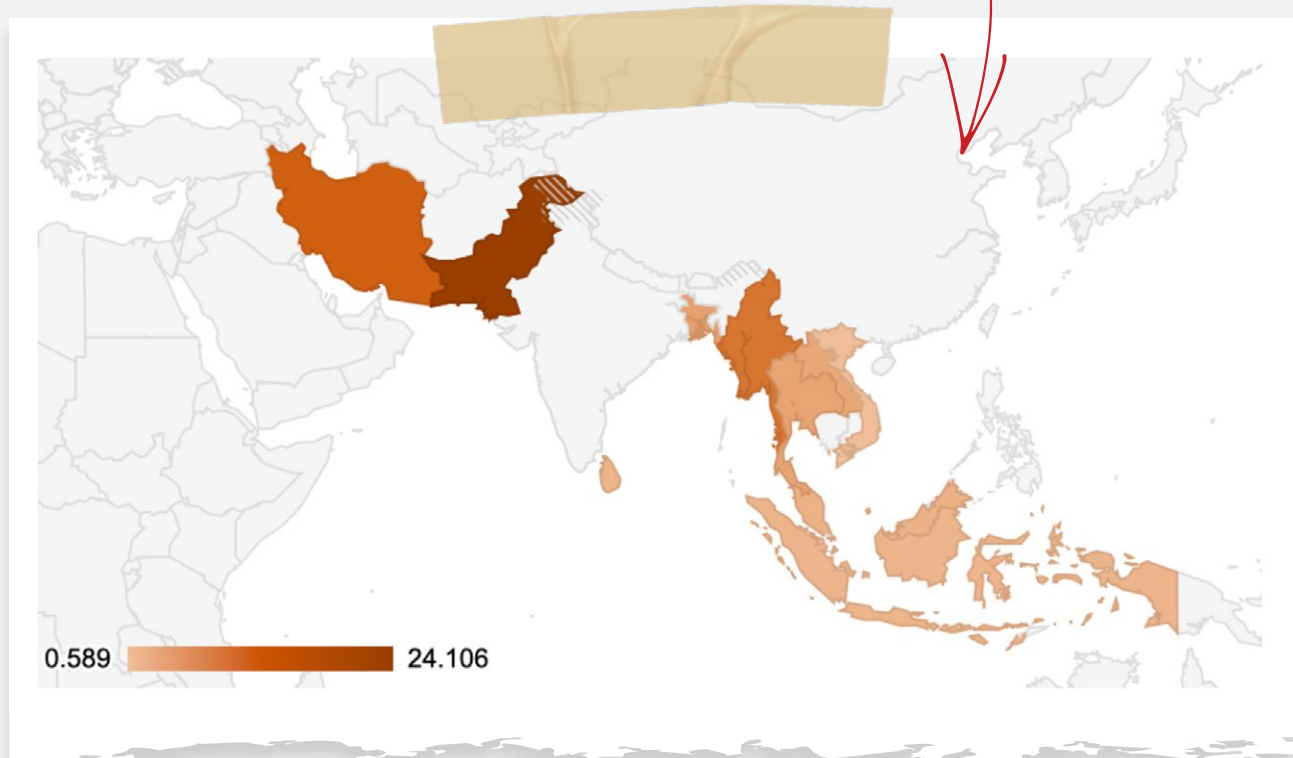
21. ‘Datastore Search’. International Aid Transparency Initiative

22. ‘Who is IATI for?’. International Aid Transparency Initiative

Analysing OECD aid data over the 10 years 2015-2024:

- Aid donors reported spending a total of about \$60 million on “narcotics control” projects in 14 countries that retain the death penalty for drug-related offences.²³
- The top recipients of this spending were all in Asia, led by Pakistan (\$24.2 million), Iran (\$10 million), Myanmar (\$8.7 million) and Bangladesh (\$3.8 million), followed by Lao PDR (\$3.3 million), Thailand (\$3.2 million), Malaysia (\$1.9 million), Indonesia (\$1.7 million) and Sri Lanka (\$1.6 million).

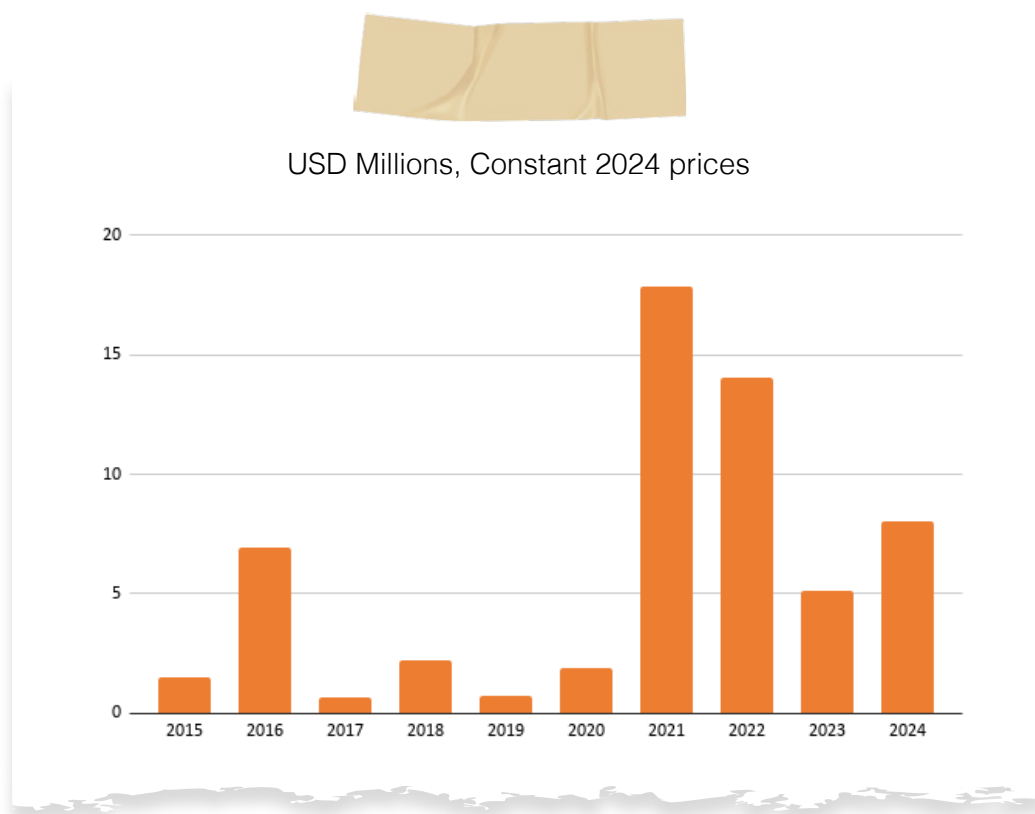
Map: Top recipients of 'narcotics control' aid, retaining the death penalty



- More than half of this decade total (\$31.9 million) was spent over 2021 and 2022. Over two-thirds (about \$45 million) was spent between 2021-2024.

23. The figures in this section, from the OECD's aid database, are in USD 2024 Constant Prices (inflation adjusted, for comparisons and calculations over time). OECD DAC CRS data last extracted 27 May 2026.

Chart: 'Narcotics control' aid to countries retaining the death penalty



- The US was the largest overall contributor of international aid across the decade examined – and it was the largest spender of aid on ‘narcotics control’ in countries retaining the death penalty for drug-related offences. It contributed over half of the about \$60 million identified in total (about \$35 million).
- The remainder of the ten-year total was contributed by other aid donors led by Japan (about \$18.5 million) and Korea (\$4.3 million), followed by smaller amounts from Germany, Thailand (also an aid recipient), Norway, Czechia (also known as the Czech Republic), France, Portugal, Australia, and Turkey.
- Focusing on recipient countries that not only retain, but also routinely apply, the death penalty for drug-related offences, Japan emerges as the top donor.

Chart: 'Narcotics control' aid to countries with 'high application' of the death penalty for drug-related offences²⁴

Totals spent 2015-2024; USD Millions, Constant 2024 prices



Credit: Chiara Macciachini. Created with SankeyDiagram

- Examples of the limited text provided in the underlying OECD project-level 'microdata', coded with the 'narcotics control' sector, include:
 - "Enhanced Iranian Law Enforcement capacities on border management, drugs and precursors control, interdiction, and seizures"
 - "Strengthening the capacity of national drug control coordinating institutions in Bangladesh"
 - "Grant aid to provide illegal drug control equipment" [in Sri Lanka]
 - "Project to Strengthen Drug Control Capability in Lao PDR"
 - "Narcotics control training" [in Sudan]
- UNODC is listed as the 'channel of delivery' for most of these aid-funded projects, but not all of them. In some cases, the channel of delivery is listed as the recipient country's 'Central Government' or 'Other Public Entities'.

International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) data offers specific advantages for follow-the-money research: it can be more timely, detailed, and even forward-looking. Many donors and development partners now routinely publish IATI data – however there are notable exceptions, including UNODC, which does not. While we can only get a partial picture of present and future spending, this data shows donors including Canada, Korea and the US have current or recent projects in countries such as Iraq and Malaysia that prompt serious concerns about human rights (see below).

These examples also illustrate how relevant spending may not always be coded to the 'narcotics control' sector, and how these concerns could cross sectors.

24. At the time of publication, Malaysia is no longer classified as a high application state. However, it was classified as such until recently, and the death penalty remains available and imposed for drug-related offences.

CONCERNING PROJECTS IN IRAQ AND MALAYSIA

Project: Supporting the Iraqi authorities in the fight against drug production and trafficking²⁵

Funder: Canada
Implementing Partner: UNODC
Sector: Public sector policy and administrative management
Total budget: CAD 5.49 million (almost \$4 million USD)
Project period: March 2024 - March 2027 – ONGOING

This project's stated objective is to “enhance the strategic planning, coordination, and operational efficiency capabilities of the Iraqi Ministry of Interior and the Anti-Narcotics Directorate in fighting against drug trafficking”.

Its IATI record describes activities including “strengthening national database systems by providing necessary equipment and training to counternarcotic units.” While clearly focused on ‘narcotics control’, this project was coded instead to a different sector: Public sector policy and administrative management. It also has a ‘policy marker’ stating gender equality to be a ‘significant (secondary)’ objective of the project. This ongoing, multi-million dollar Canadian aid-funded initiative raises significant human rights concerns given Iraq’s retention of the death penalty for drug-related offences; the severe increase in drug-related death sentences in recent years;²⁶ and documented patterns of arbitrary detention, coerced confessions and unfair trials – compounded by a systemic lack of transparency and accountability.²⁷ The project’s public record does not clarify whether human rights protections, accountability mechanisms or coordination with health and civil society actors are embedded in it.



25. IATI ID: [CA-3-P013643001](#)

26. (2026) ‘Executions for Drug-related Charges in 2025’. Iran Human Rights

27. (2026) ‘Iran: Tsunami of Arbitrary Arrests, Enforced Disappearances’. Human Rights Watch

Project: Capacity Building of Drug Enforcement against Drug Smuggling for Royal Malaysia Customs Department²⁸

Funder: South Korea
Sector: Narcotics control
Total spent: 44,786,250 KRW (about \$30,000 USD)
Project period: September - October 2025

This project's IATI record says its purpose was to "conduct joint crackdowns on drug smuggling" with activities including "joint inspections of cargo and passengers using digital-based enforcement techniques."

Korea Customs Service was specifically listed as the provider of this funding. Malaysia is listed as the country of spending but the 'Receiver' field in the IATI record is blank. This South Korean-funded project also raises serious human rights concerns as Malaysia continues to sentence people to death for drug offences (a moratorium on executions has been in place since 2018, although capital punishment remains legally available and death sentences are still imposed). Human rights organisations have criticized Malaysia's drug trial procedures as inconsistent with international fair trial standards.²⁹ It is again unclear from the project's published record to what extent, and how, these concerns were acknowledged or addressed, or what human rights safeguards were put in place.



OUTGOING COMMITMENT (1)				
DATE	DESCRIPTION	PROVIDER	RECEIVER	VALUE
2025-01-01	Capacity Building of Drug Enforcement against Drug Smuggling for Royal Malaysia Customs Department REF KR-GOV-210 SECTOR DAC Government administration 15140 SECTOR DAC Narcotics control 16063 COUNTRY Malaysia MY FLOW ODA 10 AID Scholarships/training in donor country E01 FINANCE Standard grant 110 STATUS Tied 4	Korea Customs Service REF KR-GOV-210 ID KR-GOV-210-1220000_2025_011 Government		44,786,250 KRW

28. IATI ID: [KR-GOV-210-1220000_2025_011](#). Note: This project was identified in Korea's IATI data in late 2025. In early 2026, the IATI record for this project was still available via the link embedded in this footnote. By publication in June 2026, the record was no longer accessible.

29. (2019) 'Malaysia: Unfair trials, secretive hangings and petty drug convictions reveal 'cruel injustice' of the death penalty'. Amnesty International

Limitations and Transparency Gaps

Aid donors have hundreds of 'sector codes' to choose from, when reporting their aid spending, along with 'narcotics control'. It is possible that they miscategorise records, or that projects that cross sectors are harder to categorise and thus identify. Overall, the figures in this report are expected to be under-estimates for several reasons.

1

Donors additionally reported spending millions of dollars over this 10-year period on 'narcotics control' projects in 'unspecified countries'. This includes about \$3.5 million in 'Asia unspecified' plus more than \$330 million in 'Developing countries unspecified'. It is often unclear where and how this money was ultimately spent – and whether any of it was also involved in projects in countries retaining the death penalty for drug-related offences. The limited text in the project-level data in these cases include:

- 'To strengthen border control capabilities through providing seminars, equipment etc' and 'Enhanced readiness of governments and relevant industries for effective prevention of and response to the trafficking of dangerous substances' [*under "Asia unspecified"*]
- 'Global program "Strengthening Criminal Investigation and Criminal Justice Cooperation along Drug Trafficking Routes"' and 'Establish a vibrant network of anti-drug coalitions in target countries... to fight illegal drugs and associated crime' [*under "Developing countries unspecified"*]

2

Anti-drug projects of interest could also be coded to other sectors including 'Legal and Judicial Development'. Identified examples of this include:

- 'Addressing the emerging threat of Methamphetamine originated from Afghanistan' with money 'To provide equipment for detecting illicit drug[s] etc.' [*the title and limited text of a project in Iran, funded by Japan in 2024*]
- 'Drug Control Capacity-Building in Indonesia' with money 'To strengthen the drug control capability of the National Narcotics Board.' [*the title and limited text of a project in Indonesia, funded by South Korea in 2024*]

3

The UNODC, which was the 'channel' for much of the identified 'narcotics control' spending over the decade examined, does not participate in the International Aid Transparency Initiative. It is not a registered IATI publisher, and this means that current, ongoing and future spending via this agency is much harder to track.

Additionally, it should be stressed that the limited text included in OECD records, and the limited relevant publishing to IATI, means that there are often very few details provided about the funded projects. OECD records for 'narcotics control' projects, for instance, often include vague terms like 'capacity building', 'interdiction', and 'equipment delivery', terms which can obscure their downstream effects.

3 | CASE STUDY: AIDING EXECUTIONS IN IRAN³⁰

On an August morning in 2023, **Yaghoub Ejbari**, a father of eight from the Baluchi village of Gharghouk, was led from the general ward of Zahedan Central Prison to solitary confinement. Hours later he was dead, one of four Baluch men executed for drug-related offences that day.³¹

He had been arrested four years earlier and condemned to death by a Revolutionary Court in a trial that lasted only minutes. No public statement was ever issued about his case; news of his execution came only from local human rights monitors. For his family, there was no last visit, no chance to say goodbye, only the sudden absence of a father whose life had already been taken away.³²



Two months later, the same prison claimed another Baluchi man. **Zaher Narouyi** (also known as Shirzehi) was 32 when he was executed with seven others in October 2023, three years after his arrest at home on drug-related charges.

Like Ejbari, it is not known what exactly he was arrested for. He faced the Revolutionary Court without access to a fair defense, and his death also went unacknowledged by government media. His family learned the news through rights groups abroad.³³

For the Baluch – who are one of Iran's poorest and most marginalised ethnic groups, and live primarily in south-east Iran, near the country's borders with Pakistan and Afghanistan – these scenes have become grimly familiar: group executions framed as drug control but experienced as collective punishment.³⁴

Iran's death penalty is not an exceptional punishment but an ordinary tool of governance. Iran's drug laws are among the harshest in the world. Until 2017, the death penalty was mandatory for possession of just 30 grams of heroin, cocaine, or methamphetamines. That year, the threshold was raised under legal reforms to 500 grams,³⁵ but reports show an increase in people being sentenced to death for non-violent drug offences.

30. Image of Yaghoub: (2023) '4 Baluch Men Executed for Drug Charges in Zahedan'. Iran Human Rights.

31. It is unclear what specific drug-related charges he faced.

32. (2023). '4 Baluch Men Executed for Drug Charges in Zahedan'. Iran Human Rights

33. Secretariat of the National Council of Resistance of Iran. (2023) 'Execution of 8 Prisoners on October 19 and 21 in Iran'. National Council of Resistance of Iran

34. For more information on disproportionate impact on Baluchis: (2025) 'A Village of Graves: Widespread and Systematic Drug Executions in Iran'. Iran Human Rights; (2026) 'Annual Report on the Death Penalty in Iran 2025'. Iran Human Rights; (2026) 'A/HRC/61/59: Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran in 2025 and the nationwide protests - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran (advance edited version)'. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

35. (2017) 'Iranian Lawmakers Raise Thresholds Triggering Death Penalty For Some Drug Offenses'. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

In 2025, Harm Reduction International recorded 955 executions for drug offences – a 3,700% increase from 2020³⁶ – prompting the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to call the situation “deeply disturbing.”³⁷ In total, 79% of all confirmed drug-related executions worldwide in 2025 took place in Iran.³⁸ Over the 2020-2025 period, almost half of those executed were from minority groups – Baluch, Kurds, and Arabs – populations already under political and economic pressure.³⁹

But Iran’s execution machine also runs behind a wall of secrecy. Even as drug-related killings surged, officials announced almost none of them. Iran Human Rights, an NGO based in Oslo with members inside and outside Iran, counted at least 503 people executed for drug offences in 2024, but says only 15 were officially reported; executions spanned 27 provinces, showing how routine the punishment has become.⁴⁰

On the ground, specific prisons have become execution hubs, including Zahedan Central Prison where Yaghoub Ejbari and Zaher Narouyi died. In the prison Ghezel Hesar in Karaj, Iranian rights groups documented a mass execution of 29 men in August 2024, which included people involved in drug-related cases; Birjand prison in the province South Khorasan has seen such volume that in 2024 the US Treasury sanctioned the province’s prisons director, noting “numerous” drug-offence executions that didn’t even meet Iran’s own legal standard for death.⁴¹

Those arrested on drug charges in Iran are routinely tried in Revolutionary Courts without access to independent legal representation. Many are convicted in hearings that last only a few minutes. Sentences are issued without transparency, and executions are carried out without public notice. Many of the people executed come from communities already under pressure; economically, politically, and ethnically.

According to the research presented in this report, the international community has also enabled these executions – with public money, under the public radar, and through official aid budgets. Japan emerges as the leading donor of aid for ‘narcotics control’ in Iran – contributing \$9.8 million of the total around \$10 million identified. This is more than Japan spent on water or education projects in the country over that period.

The bulk of this total aid spend on narcotics control was disbursed in one year (2022), when Japan spent \$8.3 million, including funds for a project providing cargo inspection equipment to Chabahar port. Other project-level data includes language describing objectives, such as ‘to enhance Iranian law enforcement capacities on border management, drugs and precursors control, interdiction and seizures.’

36. G. Girelli, M. Jofré, & A. Larasati. (2026) ‘The Death Penalty for Drug Offences: Global Overview 2025’. Harm Reduction International.

37. (2025) ‘Türk calls on Iran to halt use of death penalty amid worrying surge in executions’. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

38. UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs. (2025) ‘Conference room paper submitted by Czechia, Switzerland...’. United Nations

39. G. Girelli, M. Jofré, & A. Larasati. (2024) ‘The Death Penalty for Drug Offences: Global Overview 2023’. Harm Reduction International

40. (2025) ‘Executions for Drug-related Charges in 2024’. Iran Human Rights

41. (2024) ‘Press Release: Treasury Sanctions Iranian Officials Connected to Human Rights Violations’. US Department of the Treasury

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In June 2024, the Japanese Ambassador to Tehran, Tamaki Tsukada, was quoted in Iranian media as saying:

Japan recognises Iran's effort and significant role in the fight against narcotics, and is therefore ready to expand ties in this area.⁴²

”

Japanese aid for narcotics control in Iran has gone through UN agencies including UNOPS (a UN agency focused on aid infrastructure, procurement and project management) and UNODC. Also in 2024 – after three years of consistent increases in drug-related executions in Iran – UNODC provided Iran with new ‘drug identification devices’ as well as ‘10 fully trained drug-detecting dogs, specially modified canine trailers, and ancillary supplies’ all procured with ‘generous support’ from Japan.⁴³ UNODC described its ‘significant role’ in Iranian drug control and border management and celebrated its ongoing efforts ‘to support, both technically and financially, the national drug control efforts’ of Iran.⁴⁴

In February 2025, UNODC reported that another four drug identification devices had been delivered to Customs and Anti-Narcotics Police, again with Japan's funding and with the Japanese Ambassador present at an ‘official handover ceremony’.⁴⁵

Drug detection device



Image from UNODC's website, of a drug detection device along with the flags of Iran, Japan and the UN, and a sign saying: "From the People of Japan".⁴⁶

42. (2024) 'Iran, Japan set to bolster ties in fight against narcotics', Tehran Times

43. Under sub-program 1 of the UNODC Country Partnership Program (CPP) 2023-2026.

44. (2024) 'Official Handover Ceremony At The Imam Khomeini International Airport'. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.

On the ground, such hardware and other narcotics control support sustains the infrastructure that leads to arrests and executions for drug-related offences. These executions have included hangings that appear to contradict Iran's own rules.

Marjan Hajizadeh was nineteen when the state killed her in Zanjan Central Prison in April 2024.

She had been only sixteen when she was married off, and was arrested on a motorway with her husband, accused in a joint drug case. Her father was a labourer and the family was extremely poor. "Marjan didn't know her husband was carrying drugs and was innocent. But they executed both of them," one source told rights monitors.

Marjan's story is that of a girl stripped of choice at every turn: forced into marriage, silenced in court, and condemned for something her husband allegedly did. Under Iran's own laws, juveniles should not face execution for drug offences, yet she was hanged.⁴⁷

Parvin Mousavi, a mother of two with cancer, was fifty-three years old when guards came for her in Urmia Central Prison.

She had open wounds and was often too weak to move. Other women in her ward protested when she was taken to solitary in the days before her execution. They begged the guards not to take her.

Parvin had been arrested in 2020 with her husband and son on drug charges and sentenced to death. "Parvin [...] was paid 1 million tomans [approx €15] and told they were carrying medicine but it turned out to be 5 kilograms of morphine. She received the death penalty for 1 million tomans..." an unnamed source told Iran Human Rights.⁴⁸

Even under Iran's own rules, prisoners who are sick or injured should not be executed. Yet in May 2024, despite her condition, she was hanged alongside five men.



47. (2024) 'Child Bride Marjan Hajizadeh and Esmail Hassaniani Executed for Drug Charges- UPDATED'. Iran Human Rights

48. (2024) 'Parvin Mousavi to be Hanged in Hours; IHRNGO Calls for Urgent Action to Halt Execution'. Iran Human Rights

4 | CASE STUDY: JAPANESE AID FOR THE DEATH PENALTY

The frail and slightly trembling elderly man looked nothing like the strong young boxer he once was, sitting in court on 26 September 2024. Iwao Hakamata held the Guinness World Record for being the person on death row for the longest time, having been convicted in 1966 of the murder of his employer and his employer's family.⁴⁹

"Sometimes he smiles happily, but that's when he's in his delusion," his sister Hideko told CNN at his long-awaited retrial, almost five decades after his conviction. "We have not even discussed the trial with Iwao because of his inability to recognise reality."⁵⁰

Japan's government has often cited public support for the death penalty as the basis for its continued application.⁵¹ But that support has fractured since that September day in 2024, when the court declared Hakamata innocent and apologised for his wrongful conviction. The acquittal of the boxer, once a symbol of the state's determination to uphold death sentences, created space for new debate about capital punishment.⁵²

"This was the first time that Japan's judicial system, police, and then prosecutors and judges apologized," said Toshi Kazama, a New York-based Japanese photographer whose work has focused on the death penalty globally, in an interview for this report. "There is, finally, a public debate [about executions] and finally parliament has organised a study group on the death penalty and the appeal process."

Japan is one of the few developed countries that has retained the death penalty and still uses it. Since 2000, 98 people have been executed; as of June 2025, 105 others were on death row, all convicted of multiple homicides.⁵³ The death penalty is not applied in cases of non-violent drug offences – although Japanese taxpayer money, including aid (intended to support development goals such as poverty reduction and access to health and education), has been used to support the infrastructure for executions abroad.

Inside Japan, as in many donor countries, there is little awareness of how aid budgets are actually used. "Most Japanese citizens don't know where aid money goes," said Kazama. "They assume it's for humanitarian work. If you told them their taxes help execute someone for carrying heroin or alcohol, they would be shocked."

49. 'Longest time on death row'. Guinness World Records

50. L. Harvey, Y. Asada & H. Montgomery. (2024) 'He's the world's longest-serving death row inmate. A court just exonerated him'. CNN

51. Y. Morishita. (2025) 'Survey: 83% of Japanese still support death penalty'. The Asahi Shimbun

52. S. Daisuke. (2025) 'Growing Opposition to Japan's Death Penalty'. Nippon.com

53. (2022) 'Capital Punishment in Japan'. Nippon.com

Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs celebrates its record as a major global aid donor, describing how its aid has built hospitals in Africa, introduced maternal health handbooks used in over 40 countries, and funded bridges and schools across Asia.⁵⁴ A 2021 Cabinet Office survey found that nearly nine out of ten Japanese lawmakers believe that the country's development cooperation should be actively promoted or at least continued at current levels.⁵⁵ In 2023, a poll suggested that the public views this spending through a humanitarian lens and as a contributor to global peace.⁵⁶ In the context of increasing pressure and cuts to aid budgets, this is very positive.

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Most Japanese citizens don't know where aid money goes.

- Toshi Kazama

”

But, buried in the details of Japanese aid spending data, are projects that threaten rather than support the rights and lives of people in developing countries. According to research for this report, and based on data submitted by the Japanese government to the OECD, the country spent more than \$64 million (¥10 billion) of its aid, between 2015-2024, on 'narcotics control' activities – including in countries with the death penalty for drug offences. Iran was one of the top recipients of this spending.

Japan spent \$9.8 million (¥1.5 billion) of its aid on narcotics control activities in Iran over this period – more than it spent on either basic education or water supply and sanitation projects. The bulk of this was spent in 2022 alone, when Japan spent about \$8 million through UNODC to provide inspection technology at Chabahar port.

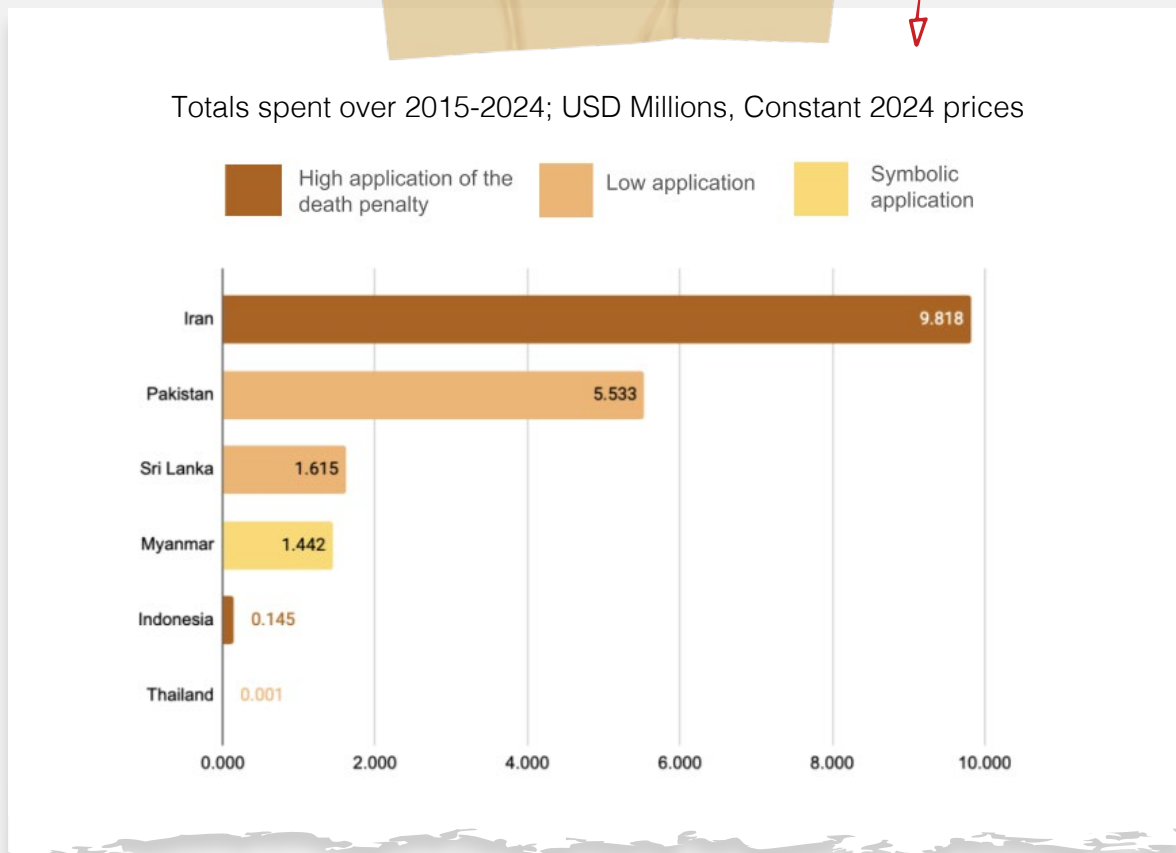
Some of the specific things Japanese aid has paid for, according to project-level records, include body scanners, drug identification devices, and drug-detecting dogs – which help authorities arrest people for carrying even small amounts of drugs, feeding directly into a punitive judicial system that frequently responds with death sentences.

54. Ministry of Foreign Affairs International Cooperation Bureau. (2018) '[Japan's ODA for the world](#)'. Ministry of Foreign Affairs

55. (2020) '[Survey of Japanese Legislators: Attitudes on ODA and Global Health](#)'. Japan Centre for International Exchange

56. J. Sato. (2025) '[The Future of Development Cooperation: Preventing Problems Rather than Solving Them](#)'. Japan Foreign Policy Forum

Chart: Japanese aid for 'narcotics control' aid to countries with the death penalty for drug offences



Credit: Grace Alice Eaves.

Under Iran's penal code, repeat convictions for alcohol consumption can also trigger death sentences. Moraza Jamali was a fifty-five year old father of two when prison guards in Mashhad led him to the gallows on 8 July 2020, and he was executed for this crime.⁵⁷ That same day, in Tokyo, men just like Jamali were probably enjoying (not their first glass of) sake, gathered around tables.

"Japan has long maintained that it reserves the death penalty for only the most serious crimes under international standards. In judicial practice, this has typically meant multiple murders," said Professor Mai Sato, a death penalty expert and current UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. "But serious questions arise when Japanese funding reaches Iran, a country that executes people for drug-related offences. Few in Japan may be aware of this disconnect – but it is one that warrants serious reflection."

Hakamata's acquittal has sparked new debate about the death penalty within Japan. For the first time, officials apologised for a death sentence, and parliament is now weighing what capital punishment really means in a democracy. Human rights defenders say that debate should not stop at Japan's borders, if Japanese taxpayer funding is involved in executions abroad – especially for drug-related offences.

"Japan does not execute people for drug-related offences," Sato said. "Yet its funding of initiatives that contribute to such executions abroad raises serious questions about its responsibility."

57. (2020) 'هیک جنایت: اطلاعیه دادگستری مشهد در مورد اعدام مرتضی جمالی' [Justification of a Crime: Mashhad Judiciary's Announcement on the Execution of Morteza Jamali]. Radio Zamaneh

5 | CASE STUDY: UN OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME (UNODC)

On 26 May 2025, Indonesian authorities announced they had seized almost two tonnes of methamphetamine from a ship named the Sea Dragon.⁵⁸ All six members of its crew were arrested and later charged with drug trafficking. The operation, which was hailed as the country's largest ever drug bust by its narcotics agency, received praise from a somewhat unexpected quarter – the United Nations.

The UN is mostly seen as a promoter of human rights, peace and economic development.⁵⁹ Less widely-known is the significant influence it exerts on international drug policy. But among the dozens of agencies and departments that sit under its structure, is an entity that has supported the spread of punitive drug control regimes responsible for massive human rights abuses around the world.

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We commend BNN [Indonesia's National Drug Agency] and its partners for this successful operation. We may continue seeing big seizures like this in the future.

**- Erik van der Veen,
Head of Office of UNODC
Indonesia**

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This is the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Unlike some more autonomous, specialised agencies, UNODC reports to the Secretary-General, implementing directions given by UN policy-making bodies, such as the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice.⁶⁰ It was founded in 1997 as a merger of other UN programmes, with the intention to “enable the Organization to focus and enhance its capacity to address the interrelated issues of drug control, crime and international terrorism in all its forms”.⁶¹

It was UNODC that not only congratulated Indonesia's National Drug Agency (BNN) for the Sea Dragon bust, but appeared to take some credit for the operation. “We commend BNN and its partners for this successful operation. We may continue seeing big seizures like this in the future,” said Erik van der Veen, Head of Office of UNODC Indonesia, in a press release including a photo of UNODC training Indonesian maritime officers on Visit, Board, Search and Seizure.⁶²

For UNODC, the bust represented the culmination of years of investment, with millions of dollars spent training⁶³ and equipping⁶⁴ Indonesian law enforcement agencies. The statement made no mention of what might happen to those detained. The next year, the news came out that prosecutors had sought the death penalty for all six Sea Dragon crew members at a hearing in February 2026.

58. (2025) ‘Indonesia seizes two tons of methamphetamine in its biggest ever bust’. Reuters

59. Office of the Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Preparations for the Commemoration of the UN's 75th Anniversary. (2021) ‘UN75: Shaping Our Future Together’. United Nations

60. ‘Secretariat’. United Nations

61. ‘The United Nations System’. United Nations

62. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. ‘About Us’

63. (2023) ‘Indonesia Is Becoming a Center of Excellence in the Fight Against Maritime Crime’. United Nations Indonesia

64. ‘UNODC Hands Over Hazardous Identification Equipment to Indonesian Customs’. United Nations Indonesia

Among them was Fandi Ramadhan, a 24 year-old who had graduated from maritime college just two years earlier. His parents, who made their living from fishing, had mortgaged their modest wooden home to fund his studies. He was eager to start paying them back.⁶⁵ In April 2025, it seemed his moment had come. He secured a job on a Thai cargo ship, but when he arrived in Thailand he was transferred to work on another vessel, the Sea Dragon, supposedly carrying oil to the Philippines.⁶⁶

After several days at sea, a fishing boat pulled alongside the Sea Dragon in the dead of the night. Ramadhan said he was ordered by the captain to help move dozens of boxes from the smaller boat onto the Sea Dragon. He felt he had no choice but to obey. “I was only a newly joined crew member,” Ramadhan said. “I had no rights, no authority, no courage, and no experience to assess the situation at that time.”⁶⁷

Indonesian authorities, who had been tracking the vessel, intercepted the Sea Dragon as it passed through the Malacca strait. After searching the boat, they found almost two tonnes of methamphetamine hidden in green tea packets. Law enforcement officials later said the sailors had been recruited by an international narcotics syndicate and “exploited to smuggle these illegal goods” by the promise of higher wages. The suspected mastermind, however, remained at large.⁶⁸

During his trial, Ramadhan’s lawyer said he had not known the vessel was being used to traffic drugs, and took the job as he was desperate for work. Prosecutors argued that he had not been coerced and should have acted on the suspicious circumstances. Ramadhan’s mother later appealed to members of the Indonesian parliament to help her son, arguing that it was unreasonable to seek the death penalty for a young crew member who had unwittingly helped transport the drugs.⁶⁹

His case received significant public attention – the judgment hearing was even livestreamed. In March 2026, judges spared him the death penalty, sentencing him to five years in prison. Among the factors that were reportedly considered by judges included his good behaviour throughout the trial, his young age, and his lack of any criminal history. Two crew members were sentenced to life imprisonment while two others received sentences of 15 and 17 years.⁷⁰

I was only a newly joined crew member... I had no rights, no authority, no courage, and no experience to assess the situation at that time.

- 24-year-old Fandi Ramadhan, among those arrested

65. (2026) ‘ABK Fandi Ramadhan Divonis 5 Tahun Penjara, Lolos dari Hukuman Mati’ Kumparan News

66. Hajid, S. (2026) ‘ABK Fandi Ramadhan lolos dari hukuman mati – Bagaimana perjalanan kasusnya?’. BBC News Indonesia

67. (2026) ‘ABK Fandi Ramadhan Divonis 5 Tahun Penjara, Lolos dari Hukuman Mati’ Kumparan News

68. (2025) ‘Tempted by High Wages, 11 SEA Sailors Tied to Global Drug Syndicate Arrested in Kepri’. Tempo

69. Wachid, N. (2026) ‘Ibu ABK Fandi Ramadhan Bersujud di DPR Minta Keadilan, Anak Dituntut Hukuman Mati Kasus Sabu 2 Ton’. Radar Lawu

70. Gunawan, C. (2026) ‘Penjelasan PN Batam soal Vonis Berbeda dalam Kasus 1,9 Ton Sabu’. Gokepri.com

UNODC in Indonesia

Since 2022, more than 450 people have been sentenced to death for drug offences in the country. Last year, Indonesia ranked among the top five countries for the highest application of the death penalty for drug offences.⁷¹

UNODC has maintained an office in Indonesia since 2008 and has run several programmes funded by UN member states in the country. Most recently, it has been spending money under a \$87 million, four-year regional programme covering Indonesia and several other Southeast Asian and Pacific countries, running until the end of 2026. The largest funders are the US (about 41%) and Japan (21%). Others include Finland (7%), South Korea (6%) and Australia (5%).⁷² Overall, more than two-thirds of this funding has gone towards programmes aimed at “combating non-medical drug use and transnational organised crime”, according to a mid-term evaluation report.⁷³

Details on specific projects that UNODC are running in Indonesia related to drug policy are scarce – however, we were able to identify a \$1 million project, funded by the US, which directly supports anti-narcotics authorities. That project, called ‘Strengthening Integrated Border Management to Counter Illicit Trafficking Flows in Indonesia’, provided “technical assistance at both the policy and operational levels” to border police “to combat the trafficking of narcotics”.⁷⁴ As part of it, UNODC “facilitated engagement” between government and law enforcement agencies “to enhance their respective capacity to prevent cross-border crimes.”

“

A risk management table... flagged ‘human rights violations by counterparts of UNODC’ as more of a ‘reputational risk’, with a low likelihood and low impact on its work.

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A 2025 independent evaluation report commissioned by UNODC concluded that, despite progress “in integrating human rights into its programming,” it remained “uneven across sectors, and human rights due diligence is often viewed as a procedural formality rather than an effective risk management”. In particular, that report highlighted: “the promotion of human rights in national policies, particularly in sensitive areas like the death penalty, remains a challenge.”⁷⁵

A previous, 2020 report said human rights “are a critical issue in Indonesia, especially with regards to fair trial rights, prison conditions, police violence and the death penalty. Overall, the CP [country programme] is considered to have not sufficiently emphasized HR [human rights].”⁷⁶ Similar concerns were flagged in earlier evaluation reports too; we found them stretching back as far as 2012. Despite these issues, however, programmes continued and money still flowed.

71. (2026) ‘The Death Penalty for Drug Offences: Global Overview 2025’. Harm Reduction International

72. (2025) ‘Regional Programme for Southeast Asia and the Pacific 2022–2026’. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

73. Ibid.

74. Widyawati, S. (2024) ‘United States and Indonesia Highlight Shared Commitment to Strengthen Border Law Enforcement Cooperation’. United Nations Indonesia

75. (2025) ‘Regional Programme for Southeast Asia and the Pacific 2022–2026’. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

76. (2025) ‘Regional Programme for Southeast Asia and the Pacific 2022–2026 – Annex VI: Country Programme in Indonesia’. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

A 2016 document, outlining UNODC's 2017-2021 Indonesia country programme, noted that evaluators had previously recommended more work to advance its human rights obligations. However, a risk management table included in the same file flagged 'human rights violations by counterparts of UNODC' as more of a 'reputational risk', with a low likelihood and low impact on its work.⁷⁷ The same year the report was published, Indonesia executed four people for drug offences.⁷⁸

The next year, in 2017, Indonesian President Joko 'Jokowi' Widodo, having secured his re-election, vowed a hardline approach to drug control, ordering police to "give no mercy" to foreign drug dealers who resist arrest and "gun them down".⁷⁹ That year, more than 68 people were killed in police shootings linked to potential drug offences.⁸⁰

Stalled Reform

Along with Indonesia, UNODC works in other countries that retain the death penalty for drug-related offences. It also has offices in Iran, which executed more than 955 people for drug offences in 2025, as well as Vietnam, Bangladesh, Egypt, Lao, Libya, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Thailand, and Yemen.⁸¹ More than 2,000 people were on death row for drug offences in those countries in 2025.⁸²

In total, we identified more than \$85 million spent by UNODC on programmes supporting drug control enforcement in countries that retain the death penalty since 2010, or on regional South East Asia programmes that include these countries.⁸³ The UN agency's lack of transparency around funding means this figure is likely an underestimate. While UNODC provides a partial breakdown of programme funding by donor and recipient on its website, it only includes data up to 2023; as of writing, only a summary has been published for 2024, and no data is available for 2025.⁸⁴

These funding flows raise sharp questions for an international institution that officially opposes the death penalty. The UN advocates for universal abolition, saying countries that retain it should only rarely use it, for 'most serious crimes', as required by international human rights law and standards.⁸⁵

77. 'Country Programme Indonesia 2017–2020'. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

78. Lamb, K. (2016) 'Indonesia kills four prisoners in first executions in a year'. The Guardian

79. (2017) 'Duterte's 'Drug War' Migrates to Indonesia'. Human Rights Watch

80. Harry, L. and Hoyle, C. (2026) 'Necropolitics and state-sponsored drug violence: the death penalty for drug offences in Indonesia'. International Journal of Drug Policy

81. 'UNODC around the world'. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

82. Girelli, G., Jofré, M. and Larasati, A. (2026) 'The Death Penalty for Drug Offences: Global Overview 2025'. Harm Reduction International

83. Based on data published on UNODC's website, IJSC was able to identify 30 UNODC sub-programmes since 2010 which specifically provided funding for law enforcement authorities in countries that retain the death penalty to support their drug control activities.

84. 'UNODC Open Data for Partnerships and Funding'. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

85. Potential sources: (2017) 'DEATH PENALTY: Excerpt from the UNGDG Guidance Note on Human Rights for Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams'. United Nations Development Group; 'Moving Away from the Death Penalty: Lessons from National Experiences'. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; (2023) 'HC: Death penalty should be abolished in the 21st century'. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; United Nations Human Rights Council. (2025) 'A/HRC/60/47/Add.1: Advance Edited Version'. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

They also raise questions of compatibility with the UN's own human rights due diligence policy on support to security forces.⁸⁶ This policy requires UN agencies supporting law enforcement activities to assess risks of recipients “committing grave violations of international humanitarian law, human rights law or refugee law”. Measures to mitigate any real risks identified should be put in place. If violations are not adequately addressed after UN engagement, support should be paused or ended.

The guidance note complementing the policy is clear that, in evaluating risks, “such ‘grave violations’ do not need to be committed as a result of the support provided.” In other words, it is not necessary to assess whether UN support may facilitate the commitment of ‘grave violations’. The important factor is that such ‘grave violations’ may be committed by the recipients of UN support in the context or the period of support.” The guidance note is also clear regarding the factors that should be taken into consideration, including the country’s human rights record.

In recent years, the UN has also moved away from punitive approaches to drug policy. In 2018, it agreed a common position endorsing harm reduction, decriminalisation and civil society engagement.⁸⁷ As the UN's lead on drug policy, UNODC should follow this position as well as fully align with the UN's principled position against the death penalty in all circumstances, however its four-year strategy published in 2021 did not seem to make even a single mention of it.⁸⁸

In interviews for this report, former UNODC staff members and human rights experts said that progress in implementing rights obligations across the agency’s programmes seemed to have stalled. They suggested different reasons for this, including how prohibitionist approaches had been hardwired into the agency.

I think it's a cultural issue. I think UNODC senior management is very attached to the status quo,” said Adrià Cots Fernández, a senior advocacy and research associate at the International Drug Policy Consortium. “They just don’t want things to change too much, and are worried that human rights will be used to challenge the mandate of UNODC.”⁸⁹ Brendan Kahn, who previously worked for UNODC’s HIV and AIDS prevention team, said the agency’s reluctance to adopt a more progressive approach was partly a reflection of internal division between staff from different professional backgrounds.

“Within UNODC as well, and actually within a lot of UN organisations, they kind of take the shape of the training that people have before they go into it,” he said.⁹⁰

86. United Nations (2015), Human Rights Due Diligence Policy on United Nations Support to Non-United Nations Security Forces: Guidance Note and text of the Policy, <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/Inter-Agency-HRDDP-Guidance-Note-2015.pdf>.

87. ‘United Nations system common position’. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

88. Fordham, A. and Bridge, J. (2025) ‘A lost five years? New leadership on the horizon as Ghada Waly departs UNODC’. International Drug Policy Consortium

89. In an interview for this report

90. In an interview for this report

In UNODC's case, Kahn said that those in leadership positions and many of those responsible for its drug programmes often had backgrounds in interior or justice ministries in their respective countries or in law enforcement agencies. He said:

“

They look at things first kind of through the security response, just because that's how they've been trained. There was only a minority, within the health branch, where you'd have people who had a medical background and saw the drug issue first through the health perspective because of that.

”

Kahn said he witnessed the effects of this divide first-hand, including health-based policy recommendations being quietly ignored as they moved up the leadership chain. At the same time, he said, many country offices were not large enough to have staff who specialised in human rights law, or focused on its implementation.

UNODC's funding model may also be an obstacle to change. Unlike many other UN agencies, most of its funding comes from what are called 'special-purpose voluntary contributions': funding from member states for specific projects. In 2025, core funding through 'general-purpose' contributions (funding UNODC can freely allocate to activities based on its priorities) accounted for just 1% of its budget.⁹¹

The agency has itself acknowledged that “the continuing imbalance between earmarked and unearmarked resources poses significant challenges for UNODC, affecting its ability to respond to rapidly changing global priorities, to deliver on global mandates and to strengthen enablers of development.”⁹²

Despite this, UNODC's resources rose for three consecutive years to a total budget of \$923 million in 2025, after securing its highest ever level of pledges to date. It is expecting a significant drop in funding for 2026-27, to \$783 million “in the context of continuing multiple crises and a highly unstable global financial environment”.⁹³ This overall fall in funding is, however, not expected to affect UNODC's drug programmes – for which spending is instead expected to increase (by about 4.5%).⁹⁴

Some observers have suggested that the UNODC is too overreliant on special-purpose voluntary contributions from countries advocating hardline drug control policies to be able to move towards a more reformist agenda. Research published in 2012 found that UNODC's funding was effectively split between countries that supported and those that opposed progressive approaches to drug policy, concluding that the organisation was caught in a stalemate.⁹⁵

91. (2025) 'Consolidated budget for the biennium 2026–2027 for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime'. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

92. Ibid.

93. Table 1: (2025) 'Consolidated budget for the biennium 2026–2027 for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime'. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

94. In Table 2 of its Consolidated budget for the biennium 2026–2027, it projects that the budget for its special purpose drug programmes will rise from \$225m in 2024–2025 to \$235m in 2026–2027.

(2025) 'Consolidated budget for the biennium 2026–2027 for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime'. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

95. Schneider, C. (2012) 'The Role of Dysfunctional International Organizations in World Politics: The Case of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime'. The University of Zurich

According to that report, “The core problem of the UNODC is not that there are some states which have an interest in determining what the organization does. To the contrary, at the core of the UNODC’s marginal role lays the fact that no state has a real interest in a strong normative actor in international drug control.”⁹⁶ Our analysis of UNODC special-purpose funding in 2025 found that this ‘stalemate’ seems to persist, with contributions almost evenly split between progressive and conservative blocs.

UNODC in Iran

While UNODC has published statements in the past affirming its opposition to the death penalty for drug-related offences, it has continued providing support to several countries that retain it. Human right experts who have worked with the agency said in interviews that it would likely justify its presence in such countries on the grounds that it has more influence to advocate for reform than if it withdrew completely.⁹⁷

UNODC’s work in Iran suggests this strategy has not succeeded. After more than two decades of support from the agency, Iran has not only retained the death penalty for drug offences but brought executions up to record levels.⁹⁸

The UNODC first established a country office in Iran in 1999. During its first six years, it offered ‘technical assistance’ to the Iranian government to support ‘supply reduction’. Subsequently, between 2005 to 2010, UNODC ran a country programme that received funding from a number of EU states, including the UK, France, Italy and Germany.⁹⁹ Its work included the provision of legal support to the Iranian government, and assisting it with drafting a new anti-narcotics law.¹⁰⁰

A 2008 evaluation report of that support noted that “illicit drug categorization, as a pre-requisite for specifying appropriate penalties, was updated with UNODC assistance” in a draft of the bill.¹⁰¹ The report suggested the agency believed its involvement could encourage less punitive sentencing for people convicted of drug offences. However, Iran’s ensuing 2011 amendment to its anti-narcotics law in fact broadened both the number and the types of drug-related crimes punishable by death.¹⁰² No mention of this was included in UNODC’s timeline or list of achievements from its legal support.¹⁰³ Notably, the amendments also extended the scope of the death penalty to cover new categories of drugs, including synthetic substances such as methamphetamine, which appears to relate to UNODC’s input.¹⁰⁴

96. Ibid.

97. Most recent from ED/HQ is 2019 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. ‘Statement attributable to the UNODC spokesperson on the use of the death penalty’. There are more recent ones from national/regional offices (eg Nigeria): Abeku, T. (2024) ‘Death penalty for drug traffickers not proven effective, says UNODC’. The Guardian

98. Iran Human Rights. (2025) ‘A Village of Graves: Widespread and Systematic Drug Executions in Iran’

99. ‘UNODC in Islamic Republic of Iran: History’. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

100. Aielli, P. and Hawkins Asiedu, J. (2010) ‘Independent Evaluation Report: Cluster Evaluation of the UNODC Iran Drug Supply Reduction Projects’. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

101. Salvi, G. and Tewolde-Berhan. T. (2008) ‘Independent Evaluation Report: Cluster Evaluation of the UNODC Iran Rule of Law Projects’. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

102. Hlinomaz, O. Sheeran, S. and Bevilacqua, C. (2014) ‘The Death Penalty for Drug Crimes in Iran: Analysis of Iran’s International Human Rights Obligations’. Human Rights in Iran Unit: University of Essex

103. ‘UNODC in Islamic Republic of Iran: Key Results Of UNODC Cooperation On Rule Of Law In The Islamic Republic Of Iran (2005-2010)’. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

104. These two sources state that UNODC provided advice and research on drug categorisation: Salvi, G. and Tewolde-Berhan. T. (2008) ‘Independent Evaluation Report: Cluster Evaluation of the UNODC Iran Rule of Law Projects’. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Melillo, G. P. (2004) ‘Evaluation of Legal Assistance Project LAS AD/IRA/99/E53’. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

And the Human Rights In Iran unit at Essex University notes that categorisation was one area the law was expanded: Hlinomaz, O., Sheeran, S. and Bevilacqua, C. (2014). ‘The Death Penalty for Drug Crimes in Iran: Analysis of Iran’s International Human Rights Obligations’. Human Rights in Iran Unit: University of Essex

Since 2010, UNODC has run three other country programmes in cooperation with the government, providing funding and training to Iran's anti-narcotics police, often framing expected outcomes in terms of seizures and arrests. Outcomes for a 2011 programme included "increased number of seizures... and cases of illegal trafficking identified and acted upon."¹⁰⁵

As part of its 2011-2014 country programme in Iran, UNODC also "supported the purchase and training of 28 drug-detecting dogs and has also provided training for dog handlers and special vehicles for the transportation of the dogs". Iranian authorities attributed this support to their seizure of "more than 42 tons of narcotics", according to a subsequent mid-term evaluation report.¹⁰⁶ Other UNODC support included provision of office equipment and training for customs officers.

In 2011, an Amnesty International report found that more than 400 people had been executed in Iran for drug offences that year.¹⁰⁷ It said UNODC had provided up to £14 million since 2005 to support training projects for Iran's counter-narcotics forces. Norway, Denmark and Germany were among the donors named.

Denmark later pulled its funding for such projects in 2013, with its development minister saying that the move was "a signal to Iran that the implementation of the death penalty is unacceptable and not something we can be involved with."¹⁰⁸

Pressure from civil rights organisations and funders also led the agency to develop and publish human rights guidance in 2011.¹⁰⁹ That guidance states that UNODC should actively encourage reform of the death penalty. It said:

“

If... a country actively continues to apply the death penalty for drug offences, UNODC places itself in a very vulnerable position vis-à-vis its responsibility to respect human rights if it maintains support to law enforcement units, prosecutors or courts within the criminal justice system.

”

UNODC's 2011 guidance detailed how "even training of border guards who are responsible for arrest of drug traffickers ultimately sentenced to death may be considered sufficiently proximate to the violation to engage international responsibility." It concluded that "if, following requests for guarantees and high-level political intervention, executions for drug-related offences continue, UNODC may have no choice but to employ a temporary freeze or withdrawal of support."

¹⁰⁵ 'UNODC in Islamic Republic of Iran: Key Results Of UNODC Cooperation On Rule Of Law In The Islamic Republic Of Iran (2005-2010)'. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

¹⁰⁶ Janssen, P., Mojtahed, A., Noosavi, N. and Bajwa, M. (2013) 'Independent mid-term In-depth Evaluation of the UNODC Country Programme for the Islamic Republic of Iran (2011-2014)'. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

¹⁰⁷. (2011) 'Iran: New report reveals surge in secret executions for drugs offences'. Amnesty International

¹⁰⁸. The Copenhagen Post. (2013) 'Denmark ends Iranian drug crime support'. Transnational Institute

¹⁰⁹. (2011) 'Guidance Note for UNODC Staff: Promotion and Protection of Human Rights'. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Since then, however, the level of support UNODC provides to Iran has continued to rise despite the country carrying out at least 5,292 executions for drug offences.¹¹⁰

In 2014 – just three years after UNODC published its human rights guidance – an independent evaluation of its Iran programme raised human rights as the most critical issue for the organisation.¹¹¹ It recommended that the agency’s Iran country office develop a programme on criminal justice for drug offenders and “urgently engage with the UN Resident Coordinator and Office of the High Commission on Human Rights (OHCHR) to address human rights concerns.”

Human rights expert Paul Janssen, who led the evaluation, said in an interview that flagging human rights issues caused a storm within the organisation. He said:

“

The head of the UNODC country mission at the time, almost explicitly forbade me to say anything about that in the report. I got an enormous amount of pushback for even raising the issue. And we essentially agreed to disagree. We were explicitly told that our conclusions were wrong and that this was not an issue, and that everything was hunky dory.

”

The Iranian government dismissed ‘the human rights subject’ as ‘questionable’, a response included in an annex to the evaluation reveals.

A later evaluation report for the next Iran country programme (2015-2021) noted that human rights considerations were “less visible in programme activities than they are within design documents” and that “human rights in particular is a sensitive point of discussion with GC [government counterparts] working in law enforcement.”¹¹²

In 2017, after growing domestic and international pressure, Iran again revised its anti-narcotics law. This time, the amendment significantly raised the threshold for the application of the death penalty for drug offences and allowed past death sentences to be reviewed. The changes followed sustained advocacy that led countries including the UK, Ireland and Denmark to withdraw funding from UNODC anti-narcotics programmes in Iran.¹¹³

110. Based on HRI monitoring. See also (2025) ‘*Forgotten Behind Closed Doors: Iran Must be Held to Account for the Mass Execution of Alleged Drug Offenders*’. Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran.

111. Janssen, P., Mojtaba, A., Noosavi, N. and Bajwa, M. (2013) ‘*Independent mid-term In-depth Evaluation of the UNODC Country Programme for the Islamic Republic of Iran (2011-2014)*’. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

112. (2021) ‘*Country Partnership Programme in the Islamic Republic of Iran*’. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

113. (2025) ‘*Gaining Ground*’. Harm Reduction International.

The reforms proved short-lived. While executions for drug offences dropped in the following years, by 2021 they had started to climb again, spiking in 2025.¹¹⁴ UNODC's public messaging, however, showed little shift in narrative. An organisation-wide annual report for 2018 suggested that seizures and arrests of people suspected of drug offences were still being used as measures of success, despite repeatedly-raised human rights concerns. The report said "UNODC helped enhance Iranian... drug interdiction and seizures" with "236,000 drug offenders and traffickers arrested."¹¹⁵

Despite on-going concerns about human rights and a lack of substantive engagement from Iran on reforming its approach to drugs, UNODC launched a third country programme in 2023, which runs until 2026.¹¹⁶ Its total budget of \$22 million represents an almost \$9 million increase from the previous programme.

Details remain scant, but some funding appears to have come from Russia, which has organised several training courses on 'combatting drug trafficking' for senior officers of Iran's anti-narcotics police.¹¹⁷ The last session was held on 17 November 2025, just weeks before the country was engulfed in civil rights protests. Japan has also provided drug identification devices to Iran as part of the programme.¹¹⁸

Not all UNODC work in Iran has involved supporting anti-narcotics law enforcement in efforts to detain drug offenders. A separate strand of its country programme has focused on harm reduction and HIV prevention, which researchers have credited with helping establish the country's first opioid agonist therapy centres dispensing methadone.¹¹⁹ However, funding for this strand of work has remained significantly smaller than sub-programmes aimed at supporting law enforcement. In its 2015-2021 programme, the UNODC spent three times as much on its work aimed at reducing drug supply than it did on its harm reduction sub-programme.¹²⁰ Its current three-year programme, which runs until the end of 2026, proposes equal budgets for its anti-narcotics law enforcement sub-programme and for drug treatment and rehabilitation, however data on actual spending is not yet available.

114. Girelli, G., Jofré, M. and Larasati, A. (2026) 'The Death Penalty for Drug Offences: Global Overview 2025'. Harm Reduction International

115. 'Annual Report: Covering activities during 2018'. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

116. 'UNODC Country Partnership Programme in the Islamic Republic of Iran 2023-2026'. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

117. (2025) 'UNODC Iran Strengthens Anti-Narcotics Capacities through Advanced Training Conducted by Russian Experts'. United Nations Islamic Republic of Iran

118. 'UNODC in Islamic Republic of Iran: Official Handover Ceremony At The Drug Control Headquarters'. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

119. Ghiabi, M. (2019) 'Reformism and Drugs: Formal and Informal Politics of Harm Reduction'. Cambridge University Press

120. Newkirk, J. et al (2021) 'Independent In-Depth Evaluation of: Country Partnership Programme in the Islamic Republic of Iran'. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

6 | CONCLUSIONS

The numbers presented in this report tell a stark and alarming story: international aid has been helping to prop up the very drug-enforcement systems that lead to death sentences and executions. Between 2015 and 2024, aid donors spent about \$60 million on 'narcotics control' activities in countries that retain the death penalty for drug offences. Just over half of that money came from the United States; the rest from a mix of Asian and European governments, led by Japan and South Korea. Overall, about two-thirds of this funding went through the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Transparency gaps mean the true scale of support is likely much larger.

Training police, reinforcing borders, bolstering drug-detection operations – these are not the kind of activities that international taxpayers expect aid budgets to be supporting. Aid is a precious resource intended to support poverty reduction and other global development goals. It should support people in poor and marginalised communities – not kill them, or threaten them with death. These threats also discourage people from seeking healthcare and harm reduction services. They must be lifted, not enabled.

If donors genuinely care about human rights, the path forward is obvious. International aid should be saving lives – not helping to take them. 'Narcotics control' should not be an eligible category of aid spending – especially in countries retaining the death penalty.

RECOMMENDATIONS



International donors should:

- Stop using money from limited aid budgets for 'narcotics control' activities, and invest in health- and human rights-based responses to drugs instead
 - Conduct immediate investigations into narcotics control aid funding that has gone to countries retaining the death penalty for drug related offences, as well as what actions should be taken to remedy the harms of this support
 - Publish detailed and updated information on all aid spending in retentionist countries, regardless of the sector code, including implementing partners, equipment supplied, and human rights safeguards.
 - Fund rights organisations documenting executions, supporting defendants, and advocating for reforms in retentionist states.
-



Civil Society Organisations should:

- Continue to strengthen independent monitoring of executions and due process violations by documenting cases, tracking trends, exposing opaque systems, and generating publicly accessible data.
 - Advocate for greater transparency in drug-related funding streams, including disclosure of safeguards and human rights due diligence processes, as well as disclosure of 'narcotics control' spending and human rights impact assessments by donor governments and UN agencies.
 - Provide legal aid, psychosocial support, and community-based interventions for marginalized groups disproportionately targeted by drug laws.
 - Coordinate campaigns across states that undertake executions as well as donor countries to amplify pressure for change and share best practices.
-



Journalists should:

- Investigate opaque aid flows to uncover how donor-funded purchases, including scanners, drug detectors, training programs, and rule-of-law projects, may reinforce systems that execute people for drug offences.
- Highlight stories of individuals on death row, the impact these sentences have on families, and disproportionate targeting of ethnic minorities.
- Scrutinise data inconsistencies between state, UN, and civil society sources; expose secret executions and unacknowledged trials.

- Show how taxpayers in donor countries are tied to human rights violations abroad through 'narcotics control' funding.
 - Press governments, UN agencies, and implementing partners to respond to findings and explain risk mitigation measures.
-

Receiving countries should:

- Remove the death penalty for drug offences as a first step towards total abolition, and ensure proportional sentencing and due process protections.
 - Publish official data on death row populations, trials, and executions; allow independent monitoring of detention facilities.
-

The OECD should:

- Remove 'narcotics control' as a sector for allowable ODA spending.
 - Issue explicit directives that ODA (under any sector code) must not support drug-enforcement activities, directly or indirectly such as through infrastructure, in countries retaining the death penalty for drug-related offences.
 - Mandate more detailed reporting of security-sector support, equipment transfers, and law-enforcement training in aid datasets.
 - Monitor whether member states are adhering to human rights safeguards and hold them accountable for violations.
 - Increase transparency of all current and previous aid spending, making data and details of projects easier to access, thereby facilitating accountability.
-

The UN should:

- Suspend financial, technical, or equipment support for 'narcotics control' activities in countries that retain the death penalty for drug offences.
- Make human rights due diligence assessments as well as updated data on funding flows publicly available as part of transparency and accountability obligations.
- Continue calling for the divestment of punitive drug policies and investment in health- and rights-based approaches to drugs in all relevant fora.
- Ensure that all aid money received and spent by its agencies is published to the International Aid Transparency Initiative

ANNEXES

Table: 'Narcotics control' aid by donor and recipient (totals 2015-2024)

USD Millions, 2024 Constant Prices

		DONORS										
RECIPIENTS	GRAND TOTAL	UNITED STATES	JAPAN	SOUTH KOREA	GERMANY	THAILAND	NORWAY	CZECHIA	FRANCE	PORTUGAL	AUSTRALIA	TURKEY
Pakistan	24.189506	18.656881	5.532625									
Iran	10.022		9.818		0.185069			0.019				
Myanmar	8.707035	6.896304	1.442	0.028436		0.064601	0.258				0.018013	
Bangladesh	3.771935			3.771935								
Lao PDR	3.269421	2.613462		0.428265		0.227694						
Thailand	3.242803	3.227	0.000759	0.014933								
Malaysia	1.943956	1.936268		0.007688								
Indonesia	1.652517	1.476038	0.144606	0.031873								
Sri Lanka	1.631093		1.614674	0.016419								
Viet Nam	0.601508	0.5		0.030658		0.0629		0.00795				
India	0.065981				0.031645					0.034336		
Jordan	0.007654			0.006					0.001801			
Sudan	0.002983											0.002983
Iraq	0.002812	0.002812										
GRAND TOTAL	59.111226	35.308876	18.552305	4.33606	0.216714	0.355195	0.258	0.02681	0.001801	0.034336	0.018013	0.002983

Death Penalty Positions in Donor Countries

Australia	Against the death penalty in all cases. Formally abolished in 1985, and federal legislation adopted in 2010 prohibits the reintroduction of the death penalty. Australia has a dedicated strategy for abolition of the death penalty, through which it commits to pursue global abolition (including for drug offences) through bilateral diplomacy, multilateral advocacy, and civil society engagement, while working to reduce executions, narrow the range of capital offences, and end mandatory death sentences, and achieve universal adherence to the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR. ¹²¹
Czechia	Against the death penalty in all cases. Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms (1992); Article 6, dealing with the right to life, states: "... (3) There shall be no death penalty." ¹²²
France	Against the death penalty in all cases. Formally abolished on 9 October 1981, introduced by Justice Minister Robert Badinter. Codified through Law No. 81-908 of 9 October 1981. ¹²³ Enshrining in the French Constitution in 2007 via Constitutional Law No. 2007-239 of 23 February 2007, which added Article 66-1: "No one shall be sentenced to death." ¹²⁴
Germany	Against the death penalty in all cases. Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany (1949). Article 102 states: "The death penalty is abolished." ¹²⁵
Japan	Uses the death penalty in some cases (not for drug offences). Under the Penal Code of Japan (Act No. 45 of 1907, last amended by Act No. 72 of 2017), Article 11 states that "the death penalty is executed by hanging at a penal institution." In practice, although the code lists 14 capital crimes, the death sentence is applied only for aggravated murder and related offences; the only crime carrying a mandatory death sentence is instigation of foreign aggression (Article 81). ¹²⁶
Norway	Against the death penalty in all cases. ¹²⁷ Formally abolished in 1979. Art.93 of the Norwegian Constitution, amended in 2014, states "Every human being has the right to life. No one may be sentenced to death." Norway's foreign service should actively promote global abolition of the death penalty through bilateral diplomacy, multilateral advocacy, and individual case interventions.

121. (2024) 'Inquiry into Australia's efforts to advocate for the worldwide abolition of the death penalty'. Parliament of Australia

122. B. Rowse. 'Constitutional Prohibitions of the Death Penalty'. Amnesty International

123. (2020) 'Loi n° 81-908 du 9 octobre 1981 portant abolition de la peine de mort (1)'. [Law No. 81-908 of October 9, 1981 abolishing the death penalty (1)]. Legifrance

124. (2007) 'LOI constitutionnelle n° 2007-239 du 23 février 2007 relative à l'interdiction de la peine de mort (1)'. [Constitutional Law No. 2007-239 of 23 February 2007 relating to the prohibition of the death penalty (1)]. Official Journal No. 47, February 24. Legifrance

125. B. Rowse. 'Constitutional Prohibitions of the Death Penalty'. Amnesty International

126. 'Penal Code: Act No. 45 of April 24, 1907'. Japanese Law Translation

127. Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2012) 'Promoting abolition of the death penalty: Guidelines for the Norwegian Foreign Service'. Government of Norway.

South Korea	Uses the death penalty in some cases, including for drug offences. South Korean Criminal Code allows the death penalty for crimes including rebellion (Art. 87), conspiracy with foreign powers (Art. 92), murder (Art. 250), and robbery-homicide (Art. 338). Despite the moratorium, public support for the death penalty remains high: a 2021 Ipsos poll showed 74% support among South Koreans, one of the highest rates globally. ¹²⁸ In 2025, 57 people were on death row in South Korea; none for drug offences. ¹²⁹
Portugal	Against the death penalty in all cases. Constitution of the Portuguese Republic (1976). Article 24 states: "1. Human life is inviolable. 2. In no case shall the death penalty be applied." ¹³⁰
Turkey	Against the death penalty in all cases, although with political challenges. Formally abolished for all crimes with Law No. 5218 of 14 July 2004. ¹³¹ In 2006, Turkey ratified Protocol No. 13 to the European Convention on Human Rights, which prohibits the death penalty in all circumstances. ¹³² While capital punishment is no longer legal, political leaders, including President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, have periodically called for its reinstatement, particularly in cases involving terrorism or femicide. ¹³³ Turkey removed the death penalty as a drug control tool in 1990.
United States	Uses the death penalty in some cases, depending on state-level laws. The death penalty remains legal under federal and state law. While 27 states retain capital punishment, 23 have abolished it, and several have moratoriums in place. U.S. courts have limited its use through rulings such as <i>Furman v. Georgia</i> (1972) and <i>Atkins v. Virginia</i> (2002). ¹³⁴ Federal courts can impose the death penalty for specific instances of drug trafficking, but there are no records of this ever happening.

128. D. Raynié. (2022) 'Freedoms at risk: the challenge of the century'. Community of Democracies

129. Jung-suk, C. (2025) 'Two death row inmates die in South Korea, leaving 57 remaining on death row'. ChosinBuz (2026) 'Death penalty in 2025 – Facts and figures'. Amnesty International

130. B. Rowse. 'Constitutional Prohibitions of the Death Penalty'. Amnesty International

131. (2024) 'Turkey agrees death penalty ban'. BBC News

132. 'Chart of signatures and ratifications of Treaty 187'. Council of Europe

133. (2022) 'Erdoğan says he is ready to back reinstating Turkey's death penalty'. Reuters

134. R. C. Dieter. (2003) 'International Influence on the Death Penalty in the U.S.'. Death Penalty Information Centre

Death Penalty Positions in Recipient Countries

Bangladesh	Retains the death penalty for a wide range of offences (including murder, drug-related crimes, terrorism, and offences under the Special Powers Act). Executions are carried out in practice and the number of people on death row, including for drug offences, is rising. ¹³⁶
India	India retains the death penalty, applied sparingly under the “rarest of the rare” doctrine. ¹³⁷ While drug offences are legally punishable by death under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, ¹³⁸ the death penalty in practice is rarely used for narcotics; it applies more often to ‘commercial quantities’ and only in recidivist cases. ¹³⁹
Indonesia	Retains and enforces the death penalty, particularly for drug-trafficking offences, including against foreign nationals. The law allows capital punishment for crimes such as drug smuggling, terrorism and murder. ¹⁴⁰
Iran	Capital punishment is fully in force for a broad spectrum of crimes including drug offences, ‘moharebeh’ (enmity against God), and national security law offences. Iran is one of the world’s leading execution states, particularly for drug-related cases. ¹⁴¹
Iraq	Retains and uses the death penalty under national law, particularly for terrorism- and national security-related offences and drug offences. ¹⁴² Over 300 people were sentenced to death for drug offences between 2023 and 2025.
Jordan	Jordan retains the death penalty for serious crimes including drug trafficking, murder and terrorism. ¹⁴³ It had imposed a moratorium on capital punishment between 2006 and 2014. In 2025 there were around 250 people on death row. ¹⁴⁴
Malaysia	Malaysia has retained the death penalty in law, particularly for large-scale drug trafficking under the Dangerous Drugs Act 1952. In 2023, reforms (Act 846) abolished the mandatory death penalty for certain crimes, including drug offences, allowing judges discretion. However, courts still impose capital punishment. ¹⁴⁵
Myanmar	Myanmar retains the death penalty under both military and civilian legal systems. It actively uses capital punishment, including for drug offences, terrorism, and political dissent. Since the military coup in 2021, there has been a sharp increase in death sentences and executions. ¹⁴⁶

136. Dr M. M. Rahman. (2020) ‘Living Under Sentence of Death: A study on the profiles, experiences and perspectives of death row prisoners in Bangladesh’. University of Dhaka

137. ‘Section 31A: Death penalty for certain offences after previous conviction’. India Code

138. ‘The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985’. India Code

139. (2020) ‘Death penalty for drug crimes in India’. iPleaders

140. ‘Moving Away from the Death Penalty: Lessons in South-East Asia’. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

141. G. Girelli, M. Jofré & Ajeng Larasati. (2025) ‘The Death Penalty for Drug Offences: Global Overview 2024’. Harm Reduction International

142. (2023) ‘Executions Around the World’. Death Penalty Information Centre

143. ‘Death Penalty Database’. Cornell Law School

144. (2017) ‘12 women on death row in Jordan — SIGI’. The Jordan Times

145. Ibid.

146. ‘Myanmar (Burma) - Human Rights Council - Death Penalty - July 2020’. The Advocates for Human Rights

Pakistan	Retains the death penalty and has historically applied it for drug-trafficking offences under the Control of Narcotic Substances Act, 1997 (CNSA) and other laws, such as the Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997 and Pakistan Penal Code. ¹⁴⁷ In 2023, however, Parliament passed a new amendment to the CNSA that removed the death penalty for drug offences; three death sentences for drug-related offences were reported in 2024. ¹⁴⁸
Sri Lanka	Legally retains capital punishment, but has not carried out an execution since 1976. Death sentences can still be handed down for serious crimes, such as murder or drug trafficking. ¹⁴⁹
Sudan	Sudan applies the death penalty under both civil and Sharia-based laws, including for drug-trafficking offences. Death sentences are frequent, and the legal framework mandates capital punishment for trafficking or producing narcotics by repeat offenders. ¹⁵⁰
Thailand	Thailand legally retains the death penalty for offences including drug trafficking, murder, and crimes against the monarchy. While no executions have occurred since 2018, death sentences continue to be handed down. Drug offences account for the majority of people on death row in the country. ¹⁵¹
Vietnam	Vietnam actively uses the death penalty and includes drug trafficking among the offences punishable by death. In 2025, the government removed capital punishment for eight crimes – but major narcotics crimes remain capital offences. Dozens are believed to be executed annually, often without full transparency. ¹⁵²

147. (2012) 'The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan'. National Assembly of Pakistan

148. G. Girelli, M. Jofré & Ajeng Larasati. (2025) 'The Death Penalty for Drug Offences: Global Overview 2024'. Harm Reduction International

149. (2022) 'Sri Lanka: Death Sentence for Prison Official'. Human Rights Watch

150. 'Sudan - Universal Periodic Review - Death Penalty - March 2021'. The Advocates for Human Rights

151. (2017) 'Thailand: Time to abolish the death penalty'. Amnesty International

152. 'Moving Away from the Death Penalty: Lessons in South-East Asia'. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

