

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

MEDIA BRIEFING

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Death penalty 2017: Facts and figures

Global figures

Amnesty International recorded at least **993 executions** in **23 countries** in 2017, down by 4% from 2016 (1,032 executions) and 39% from 2015 (when the organization reported 1,634 executions, the highest number since 1989).

Most executions took place in **China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Pakistan** – in that order.

China remained the world's top executioner – but the true extent of the use of the death penalty in China is unknown as this data is classified as a state secret; the global figure of at least 993 excludes the thousands of executions believed to have been carried out in China.

Excluding China, 84% of all reported executions took place in just four countries – Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Pakistan.

During 2017, **23 countries** are known to have carried out executions – the same as 2016.

Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) resumed executions in 2017. Amnesty International did not record executions in five countries – Botswana, Indonesia, Nigeria, Sudan and Taiwan – that carried out executions in 2016.

Executions **noticeably fell** in Belarus (by 50%, from at least 4 to at least 2), Egypt (by 20%) Iran (by 11%), Pakistan (31%) and Saudi Arabia (5%). Executions **doubled or almost doubled** in Palestine (State of) from 3 in 2016 to 6 in 2017; Singapore from 4 to 8; and Somalia from 14 to 24.

In 2017, two countries – **Guinea** and **Mongolia** – abolished the death penalty in law for all crimes. **Guatemala** became abolitionist for ordinary crimes only. **Gambia** signed an international treaty committing the country not to carry out executions and to move to abolish the death penalty in law.

At the end of 2017, **106** countries (a majority of the world's states) had abolished the death penalty in law for all crimes and **142** countries (more than two-thirds) had abolished the death penalty in law or practice.

Amnesty International recorded commutations or pardons of death sentences in **21** countries: Bangladesh, Cameroon, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Mauritania, Morocco/Western Sahara, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Qatar, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Tunisia, UAE, USA and Zimbabwe.

Fifty-five exonerations of prisoners under sentence of death were recorded in **six** countries: China, Maldives, Nigeria, Taiwan, USA and Zambia.

Amnesty International recorded at least **2,591** death sentences in **53** countries in 2017, a significant decrease from the record-high of 3,117 recorded in 2016.

At least **21,919** people were known to be on **death row** at the end of 2017.

The following **methods of execution** were used across the world in 2017: beheading, hanging, lethal injection and shooting. Public executions were carried out in Iran (at least 31).

Reports from 2017 indicated that at least **five people** were executed in Iran **who were under 18** at the time of the crime for which they were sentenced to death.

In many countries where people were sentenced to death or executed, the proceedings did not meet international **fair trial** standards. This included the **extraction of “confessions” through torture** or other ill-treatment, including in Bahrain, China, Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

Regional analysis

Americas

For the **9th** consecutive year, the USA remained the only country to carry out executions in the region.

The **number of executions (23) and death sentences (41)** in the USA slightly **increased** compared to 2016, but remained within historically low trends of recent years. For the second year in a row, and the second time since 2006, the USA did not feature among the top five global executioners, with its position in the global ranking dropping from **7th** to **8th**.

The number of US states carrying out executions increased from **five** in 2016 to **eight**, with Arkansas, Ohio and Virginia resuming executions after a hiatus. **Four** states – Idaho, Mississippi, Missouri and Nebraska – as well as US federal courts, imposed death sentences in 2017, after a hiatus, bringing the number of US states imposing death sentences to 15 (2 more than in 2016). Kansas, North Carolina and Oregon, which imposed death sentences in 2016, did not do so in 2017.

Only **three** countries in the region imposed death sentences – Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago and the USA.

Guatemala became the **142nd** country to have abolished the death penalty in law or practice.

Asia-Pacific

At least **93** executions in **nine countries** were known to have been carried out throughout the region in 2017 – down from at least 130 in 11 countries in 2016. The decrease was linked to a decline in Pakistan, where executions reduced by **31%**. These figures do not include the thousands of executions that Amnesty International believed were carried out in China.

Singapore doubled its number of executions (**from 4 to 8**) compared to 2016. All its executions were for drug-related offences.

At least **1,037** new death sentences were imposed, a slight decrease from 2016. This number is down to a variation in figures for a number of countries, and because of information provided to Amnesty International by authorities. Figures for death sentences in India, Indonesia Pakistan and Thailand, among other countries, were lower compared to 2016.

Increases were recorded in countries including Bangladesh (from at least 245 to at least 273), Singapore (from at least 7 to 15) and Sri Lanka (from at least 79 to 218).

Eighteen countries across the region were known to have imposed death sentences, the same number as in 2016. Brunei Darussalam imposed a new death sentence after it did not impose any in 2016; Papua New Guinea did not impose any death sentences in 2017, after it did so in the previous year.

Across Asia Pacific, the death penalty was extensively used for offences that did not meet the threshold of the “most serious crimes”, going against international law.

Europe and Central Asia

In Europe and Central Asia, Belarus was the only country to execute people. The country carried out at least **two** executions in 2017; at least **four** new death sentences were imposed.

One man remained under sentence of death in Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation and Tajikistan continued to observe moratoriums on executions.

Middle East and North Africa

There was a small reduction in the use of the death penalty in 2017. The number of executions recorded in the Middle East and North Africa decreased by **1%**, from **856 in 2016** to **847 in 2017**.

Iran, Saudi Arabia and Iraq remained the top three executing countries, accounting for **92%** of executions in the region.

Iran executed at least **507** people, accounting for **60% of all confirmed executions in the region**. Saudi Arabia executed **146** people, representing **17% of all confirmed executions in the region**.

At least **264 executions** were carried out for **drug-related offences (27% of all recorded executions in 2017)**.

Amnesty International confirmed that at least **619 death sentences** were imposed in the region in 2017, a reduction on the **764 death sentences** recorded in 2016. Egypt imposed at least **402 death sentences**, the most in the region.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Positive steps were taken across Sub-Saharan Africa, with a reduction in the number of executing countries recorded.

Two countries (Somalia and South Sudan) recorded executions in 2017, compared to **five** countries recorded in 2016.

Twenty-eight executions were carried out, **24 in Somalia** and **four in South Sudan**, a slight increase compared to at least 22 recorded in 2016.

Death sentences decreased, from at least **1,086 in 2016** to at least **878 in 2017**.

Nigeria imposed the highest number of death sentences and had the highest number of people under death sentence in the region at the end of the year.

Guinea abolished the death penalty for all crimes. **Burkina Faso, Chad, Gambia and Kenya** made important strides towards abolition of the death penalty.

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