



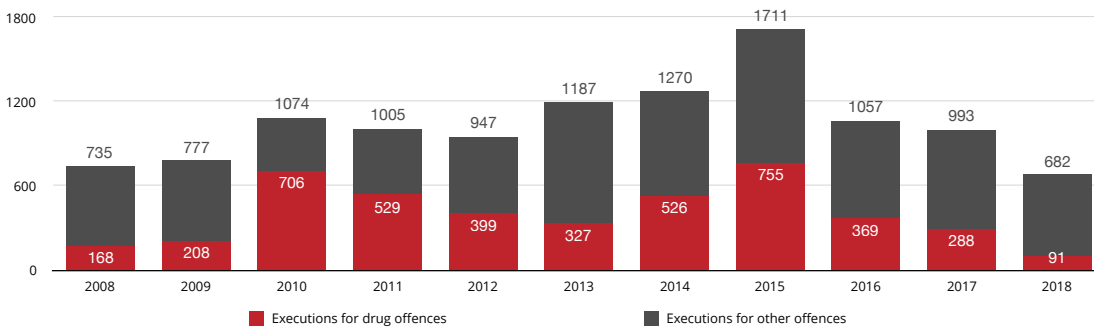
**HARM REDUCTION
INTERNATIONAL**

The Death Penalty for Drug Offences: Global Overview 2018

Policy Briefing

At least 35 countries and territories worldwide maintain the death penalty for drug offences in law. Between 2008 and 2018, 4,366 people (excluding data from China, and including very limited data from Vietnam) were executed for drug offences. Of these, 3,975 were in Iran alone.

Chart 1: Global executions per year (minimum confirmed figures, excluding China)



The death penalty for drug offences is a clear violation of international law. This has been recognised by, amongst others: the UN Secretary General; Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council; UN human rights treaty bodies; the UN Office on Drug Control (UNODC); the International Narcotics Control Board; and, the European Union.

“Drug issues everywhere are best tackled through a focus on health, education and opportunities – not the death penalty, or death squads”

Michelle Bachelet – UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (September 2018)

KEY FINDINGS FROM 2018

Executions for drug offences were carried out in **China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Singapore**. It is likely that Vietnam carried out drug-related executions, but because of state secrecy this is not possible to confirm.

- At least **91 people** were executed for drug offences (excluding China and Vietnam): this represents a 68% decrease from 2017 figures.
- **Saudi Arabia** was responsible for the most confirmed drug-related executions in 2018 (at least 59).



Over 7,000 people are currently on death row for drug offences globally.

Due to state secrecy and a lack of transparency, hundreds more people are likely to be awaiting execution for drug offences around the world.

- At least 13 countries sentenced a minimum of **149 people** to death for non-violent drug offences in 2018. A significant proportion of those sentenced are foreign nationals.
- Individuals on – or facing - death row endure grave human rights violations, including: fair trial violations; physical and psychological abuse; isolation; and, denial of food and water.

Chart 2: Death row for drug offences, 2018 (minimum confirmed figures)

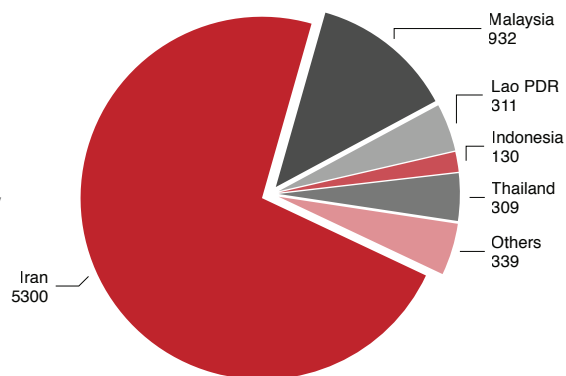
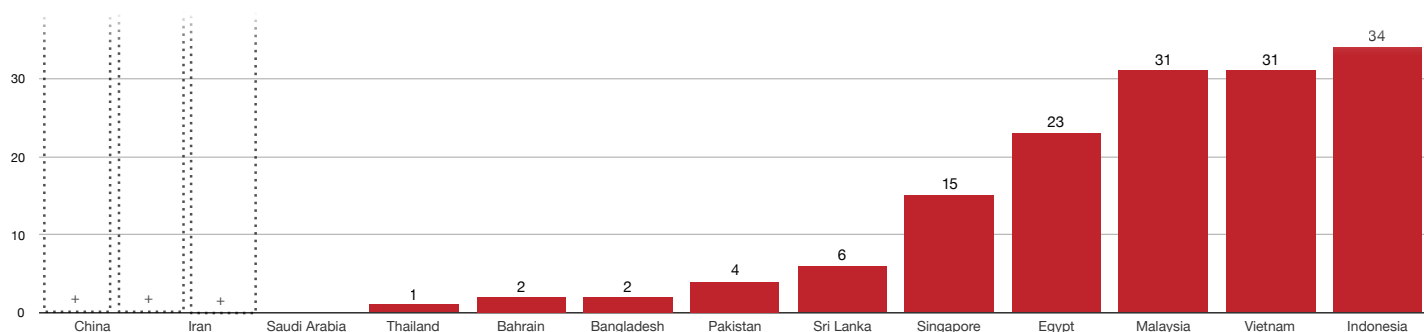


Chart 3: Death sentences for drug offences in 2018 (minimum confirmed figures)



NOTABLE DEVELOPMENTS IN 2018

- ✓ Following a 2017 reform and consequent review of eligible sentences, executions for drug offences in **Iran** fell 90% between 2017 and 2018. This translated in a 50% decrease in total executions in the country
- ✓ On 10 October 2018, the government of **Malaysia** committed to abolish the death penalty for all offences
- ✓ For the second consecutive year, **Indonesia** did not carry out executions
- ✗ **Singapore** executed nine people in 2018 (one more than 2017), all of them for drug offences
- ✗ The application of the death penalty for drug offences was expanded to encompass more substances in **Bangladesh**
- ✗ The Government of **Sri Lanka** pledged to end a 43-year moratorium by executing people convicted of drug trafficking
- ✗ **The Philippines** and the **USA** called for the imposition of the death penalty as a central element of their repressive drug control strategies

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **All states imposing the death penalty** for drug offences should immediately halt executions and commute death sentences
2. **Retentionist states** should take steps to abolish the death penalty for drug offences as a first step towards full abolition
3. **The Commission on Narcotic Drugs** should adopt a Resolution explicitly acknowledging the incompatibility of the death penalty for drug offences with international human rights law, also in line with the position of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime
4. **The European Union** should continue advocating for the abolition of the death penalty, including in multilateral fora and in its dialogues and consultations with retentionist countries