

Embargoed until 00:01 BST 24 May 2022

Global figuresⁱ

Amnesty International recorded **579 executions** in **18 countries** in 2021, an increase of **20% from the 483** recorded in 2020. This figure represents the second lowest number of executions recorded by Amnesty International since at least 2010.ⁱⁱ

Most known executions took place in **China, Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria** – in that order.

China remained the world's leading executioner – but the true extent of its use of the death penalty is unknown as this data is classified as a state secret; the global figures for executions and death sentences therefore exclude the thousands of people that Amnesty International believes to have been sentenced to death and executed in China.ⁱⁱⁱ

Figures for **North Korea and Viet Nam**, which are believed to have extensively resorted to executions, were also not included in the global executions figure, as secrecy and lack of access to independent information made it impossible to assess trends.

Amnesty International recorded **24 women** among the 579 people known to have been executed in 2021 (4%), in the following countries: **Egypt (8), Iran (14), Saudi Arabia (1) and USA (1)**.

Belarus, Japan and UAE resumed executions. Amnesty International did not record any executions in **India, Qatar and Taiwan**, having done so in 2020.

Iran executed at least 314 people (up from at least 246 in 2020), their highest number of executions since 2017, reversing year-on-year declines since then.

Recorded executions in **Saudi Arabia** rose sharply, from 27 to 65, an increase of 140% percent.

Despite these increases, the 2021 global executions figure constitutes the **second-lowest figure** recorded by Amnesty International since at least 2010. For the second consecutive year, the number of countries known to have executed people was the lowest the organization has recorded. In 2019, 2020 and 2021 Amnesty International recorded 657, 483 and 579 executions respectively.

In July, **Sierra Leone's** parliament unanimously adopted an Act which abolishes the death penalty for all crimes. **Kazakhstan** adopted legislation in December abolishing the death penalty for all crimes, which came into effect this year.

Papua New Guinea embarked on a national consultation on the death penalty, which resulted in the adoption of an abolition Bill in January 2022, still to come into force. The Government of **Malaysia** announced that it would table legislative reforms on the death penalty in the third quarter of 2022.

At the end of 2021, **more than two thirds** of the world's countries had abolished the death penalty in law or practice. **108** countries, a majority of the world's states, had abolished the death penalty in law for all crimes and **144** countries had abolished the death penalty in law or practice. **55** countries still retained the death penalty.

Amnesty International recorded **commutations or pardons** of death sentences in **19 countries**: Bangladesh, Botswana, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guyana, India, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Taiwan, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, UAE, USA, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Amnesty International recorded **seven exonerations** of people under sentence of death in four countries: Bahrain (1), Kenya (1), USA (2) and Zambia (3).

Amnesty International recorded **2,052** death sentences imposed in **56** countries, up 39% from at least **1,477** in **54** countries in 2020.

Ethiopia, Guyana, Maldives, Oman, Tanzania, and Uganda handed down death sentences having not done so in 2020, while the reverse was true of **Bahrain, Comoros, Laos and Niger**.

At the end of 2021, at least **28,670** people were known to be under sentence of death. **Nine countries** held **82%** of the known totals: Iraq (8,000+), Pakistan (3,800+), Nigeria (3,036+), USA (2,382), Bangladesh (1,800+), Malaysia (1,359), Viet Nam (1,200+), Algeria (1,000+), Sri Lanka (1,000+).

The following methods of execution were used across the world in 2021: **beheading, hanging, lethal injection and shooting**.

Four people were executed for crimes that occurred when they were **below 18 years of age**: in **Iran (3) and Yemen (1)**. Amnesty International believes that other people in this category remained on death row in Maldives, Myanmar and Iran.

At least **134** executions for drug-related offences were known to have been carried out in two countries (China and Iran), an increase of 346% from 2020 (30). Information on Viet Nam, which is very likely to have carried out such executions, was unavailable.

Death sentences were known to have been imposed after proceedings that did not meet international fair trial standards in countries including **Algeria**,

Bangladesh, Cameroon, Egypt, Iran, Myanmar, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Singapore and Yemen.

Regional Analysis

Americas

All **11** of the recorded executions in 2021 took place in the USA. The rest of the Americas region remained execution-free for the 13th consecutive year.

25 new death sentences were handed down in three countries: **USA, Guyana and Trinidad & Tobago.**

Virginia became the 23rd abolitionist state in the USA and first southern state to have abolished the death penalty. For the third consecutive year, **Ohio** rescheduled or halted all set executions.

The new US administration also established a temporary moratorium on federal executions in July. 2021 marked the lowest number of executions in the US **since 1988.**

Asia-Pacific

Amnesty International recorded executions in **five countries**—Bangladesh, China, Japan, North Korea and Viet Nam—the lowest number in more than two decades.

At least **819** new death sentences were handed down in 16 countries, a rise of 58% compared to 2020 (517), largely linked to increases in Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Pakistan and Viet Nam.

After a hiatus of 24 months, **Japan** hanged three people. For the second consecutive year, **Pakistan** reported no executions and also prohibited the use of the death penalty on those diagnosed with severe mental (psycho-social) disabilities. **Thailand** continued to commute death sentences.

The threat of reintroduction of the death penalty in the **Philippines** diminished as three of its proponents in the Senate announced they would oppose any such move.

Although **Singapore** reported no executions for the second consecutive year, the country has resumed executions in 2022.

Europe and Central Asia

Amnesty International recorded one execution and one new death sentence, both in **Belarus**, which remains the only country in the region carrying out executions.

Kazakhstan signed into law a bill abolishing the death penalty for all crimes.

Armenia became a state party to a key international treaty on abolition of the death penalty.

The **Russian Federation and Tajikistan** continued to observe moratoriums on executions.

Middle East and North Africa

520 executions were recorded in **seven countries**—Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates and Yemen – an increase of 19% on 2020.

Recorded executions in **Iraq** more than halved, from 45 to 17, though this may have been the result of a slowdown in the executive approvals of death sentences due to the political turmoil that the state was in for much of the year.

A mass execution of **24** people in **Syria** in October made the country the **fifth** biggest recorded executor in 2021.

There were at least **834** new death sentences in **17 countries**, a jump of 32%, with sharp increases in Egypt, Iraq and Lebanon. This figure does not reflect the many death sentences that were believed to have been imposed in Iran.

At least **356** people were sentenced to death by Egyptian courts in 2021, a rise of 34% and the highest number of death sentences that Amnesty International was able to record worldwide in 2021.

Sub-Saharan Africa

The number of executions, recorded in **3 countries**, more than doubled to **33**, as a result of rises in **Somalia and South Sudan**. The other country to carry out executions was **Botswana**.

At least **373** new death sentences were handed down in **19 countries**, an increase of 22%, due to sharp rises in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mauritania**, and despite a significant drop in **Zambia**.

In July, **Sierra Leone's** parliament unanimously adopted an Act which abolishes the death penalty for all crimes. In **Central African Republic and Ghana**,

legislative processes to abolish the death penalty were started and remain ongoing.

At least **5,843** people were held under a sentence of death, with Nigeria holding 52% of them (at least 3,036).

ⁱ Amnesty International reports only on executions, death sentences and other aspects of the use of the death penalty, where there is reasonable confirmation. In many countries governments do not publish information on their use of the death penalty. Therefore, for many countries, Amnesty International's figures on the use of the death penalty are minimum figures. The true overall figures are often likely to be higher.

ⁱⁱ The total number of executions reported for 2021 is the second-lowest figure, after 2020, that Amnesty International has recorded since at least 2010. 2021 represents one of the lowest figures that Amnesty International has recorded in any given year since it began its monitoring of the use of the death penalty in 1979. However, changes in access to information, configuration of countries and methodology over the decades make it challenging to accurately compare this figure over a longer period.

ⁱⁱⁱ In 2009 Amnesty International stopped publishing its estimated figures on the use of the death penalty in China, a decision that reflected concerns about how the Chinese authorities misrepresented Amnesty International's numbers. Amnesty International always made clear that the figures it was able to publish on China were significantly lower than the reality because of the restrictions on access to information. China has yet to publish any figures on the death penalty; however, available information indicates that each year thousands of people are executed and sentenced to death.