Maldives: Withdraw the Death Penalty Bill and Uphold 72 Years Without an Execution

Press Statement - 26 November 2026

We, the undersigned organisations, call on the government of Maldives to **withdraw the bill on Sentencing and Implementation of the Death Penalty**, submitted to the People's Majlis on 8 November 2026; and on the People's Majlis **to reject the bill,** should the government not withdraw it. The Maldives has had a moratorium on executions since 1954, and the passing of this bill into law would be regressive, setting the country back against the clear global trend towards abolition of the death penalty, and its own international commitments as a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

What is the Sentencing and Implementation of the Death Penalty Bill?

The bill introduces a standalone framework governing death sentences and executions in the Maldives, overriding any conflicting legislation. The implied retroactivity of the bill is alarming, giving President Mohamed Muizzu's announcement on the immediate enforcement of executions for those who have exhausted all judicial appeals once the draft law is enacted[1], especially since the government disclosed in 2024 that four people had exhausted all judicial appeals and reached the execution stage.[2]

The draft law uses a combination of Islamic law principles and common law practiced in some retentionist countries that apply the death penalty for drug-related crimes, as per the Penal Code (Law No. 9/2014) or other criminal statutes, following automatic appellate reviews and a final Supreme Court ruling. In murder cases that result in conviction, every heir aged 15 or older must demand qisas (retaliation), though any heir may revoke this decision up until the execution. A seven-member panel established by the Maldives Correctional Service will review each case and schedule the execution. Executions will be carried out in private by hanging.[3]

The government maintains that the legislation establishes a clear legal foundation aligned with the Constitution, principles of international law, and the rights of both the public and the convicted, outlining judicial prerequisites, execution procedures, the convicted person's rights and grounds for postponement.[4]

This move follows amendments to the Drugs Act, ratified on 6 December 2025, which expanded capital punishment to trafficking over 350 grams of cannabis, 250 grams of

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[1] The President's Office, Republic of Maldives, "Capital punishment bill to be submitted to Parliament this session" (23 March 2026).

[2] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Experts of the Human Rights Committee Commend Maldives on Legislation Pertaining to Children, Ask Questions about the Death Penalty and Climate Change" (10 July 2024).

[3] People's Majlis, *Bill on the Determination of the Death Penalty and the Enforcement of the Penalty* (Government Bill, sponsored by MP Hanaan Mohamed Rasheed, Guraidhoo Constituency, Reg. No. 4465, submitted 8 November 2026).

[4] ibid.

diamorphine, or 100 grams of any other Schedule 1 substance, alongside tougher penalties for smaller-scale trafficking, smuggling, and facilitating drug movement.[5]

Key Concerns Warranting the Withdrawal of the Bill

The bill is concerning on a number of levels. Applying this new law retroactively explicitly breaches Article 6(2) of the ICCPR which states that a "sentence of death may be imposed only for the most serious crimes in accordance with the law in force at the time of the commission of the crime."[6] Whatever deficits in the criminal justice system that the draft law purports to address, its proposed safeguards will not have been afforded to any person already sentenced to death. Further, we know that the death penalty disproportionately impacts marginalised groups such as persons living with psychosocial disabilities and impoverished individuals and women who may be convicted in contexts of severe gender-based violence and self-defence. Given low public confidence in judicial independence[7] and the government's own past statements that judicial reforms must precede executions,[8] the system may not safely administer an irreversible punishment.

Moreover, retaining the death penalty for drug offences under the Drug Act amendments violates Article 6 of the ICCPR, which restricts capital punishment to the "most serious crimes" which various UN resolutions have confirmed does not include drug-related offences.[9] Proceeding with this legislation also directly contradicts repeated recommendations from the UN Human Rights Committee (2024)[10] and the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2025)[11] to maintain the moratorium and consider acceding to the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR, which aims at the abolition of the death penalty.

Ultimately, resuming executions runs counter to the global trend toward abolition. More than 145 states and territories are abolitionist in law or practice. These include Muslim-majority nations such as Lebanon, Türkiye, and Albania. Regional peers have also taken steps toward abolition. Pakistan abolished the death penalty for drug offences in 2023, and Malaysia abolished mandatory death sentences that same year.[12]

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[5] Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network (ADPAN) et al., "ADPAN and Partner Human Rights Organizations Denounce the Expansion of the Death Penalty for Drug Offenses in the Maldives" (9 December 2025).

[6] Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (1966, December 16). International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. United Nations. https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights

[7] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Maldives: UN raises concerns over judicial independence" (19 May 2025).

[8] Avas Online, "Maldives Govt Vows to Enforce Death Penalty After Judicial Reform" (18 December 2018).

[9] Human Rights Council, Resolution 42/24. The question of the death penalty (8 October 2019) [4]; Human Rights Council, Resolution 54/35. Question of the death penalty, UN Doc A/HRC/RES/54/35 (17 October 2023) [3]; Human Rights Council, Resolution 60/17. Question of the death penalty, UN Doc A/HRC/RES/60/17 (7 October 2025). See also UN Economic and Social Council, Capital punishment and implementation of the safeguards guaranteeing protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty, UN Doc E/2025/75 (2 June 2025).

[10] UN Human Rights Committee, 'Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Maldives' (11 September 2024) UN Doc CCPR/C/MDV/CO/2, paras 27–28.

[11] UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 'Concluding observations on the initial report of Maldives' (26 September 2025) UN Doc CRPD/C/MDV/CO/1, paras 19–20.

[12] Amnesty International, *Death Sentences and Executions 2025* (May 2026).

Calls to Action:

We urge the Government of Maldives to:

1. **Withdraw the Bill on Sentencing and Implementation of the Death Penalty:** Immediately withdraw the bill from the People's Majlis, or should the government fail to do so, ensure that the People's Majlis rejects it in full and halts all legislative and administrative steps toward resuming executions.
2. **Maintain the moratorium and abolish the death penalty:** Uphold the Maldives' longstanding de facto moratorium on executions, repeal all provisions allowing capital punishment, including recent amendments extending it to drug-related offences, and commute all existing death sentences to terms of imprisonment.
3. **Accede to the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR:** Accede to the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty, in line with international human rights standards and the recommendations of the UN treaty bodies.

Resuming executions under a flawed justice system carries an irreversible risk of executing vulnerable people, including many who may have been wrongfully convicted, and marks a critical departure from international human rights standards for the Maldives. Rather than rushing through regressive and populist legislation, the government and the People's Majlis must uphold the country's longstanding moratorium and commit to meaningful judicial reform toward abolition.

Endorsed by:

1. Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN)
2. Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network (ADPAN)
3. Capital Punishment Justice Project (CPJP)
4. Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU)
5. Informal Sector Service Centre INSEC
6. Bytes For All, Pakistan
7. Asian Resource Foundation (ARF), Thailand
8. Think Centre, Singapore
9. People's Watch, India
10. Human Rights Movement Bir Duino - Kyrgyzstan
11. The Awakening, Pakistan
12. International Legal Initiative Public Foundation, Kazakhstan
13. Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA)
14. Association of Women for Awareness and Motivation (AWAM)
15. Law & Society Trust, Sri Lanka
16. Civil Society and Human Rights Network - CSHRN
17. Harm Reduction International (HRI)
18. Safety and Risk Mitigation Organisation (SRMO)
19. AwazCDS, Pakistan
20. Task Force Detainees of the Philippines
21. Defence of Human Rights, Pakistan
22. Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC), Nepal
23. Advocacy Forum Nepal
24. Community Self Reliance Centre (CSRC), Nepal

25. Centre for the Sustainable use of Natural and Social Resources (CSNR), India
26. Colectivo de Abogados y Abogadas José Alvear Restrepo (CAJAR), Colombia
27. Centre for Human Rights and Development (CHRD), Mongolia
28. Odhikar, Bangladesh
29. Globe International Center, (GIC) Mongolia
30. People's Empowerment Foundation, Thailand
31. Malaysians Against Death Penalty and Torture (MADPET)
32. Taiwan Alliance to End the Death Penalty (TAEDP)
33. Transitional Justice Working Group (TJWG)
34. Karapatan Alliance Philippines
35. Center for Prisoners' Rights, Japan
36. APDHE, Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos de España
37. Afghanistan Democracy and Development Organization (ADDO)
38. OPEN ASIA| ARMANSHAHR
39. ALTSEAN-Burma
40. League for the Defence of Human Rights in Iran (LDDHI)
41. Public Association 'Dignity', Kazakhstan
42. INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre, Sri Lanka
43. Psychological Responsiveness NGO, Mongolia
44. World Coalition Against the Death Penalty
45. Transformative Justice Collective (TJC)

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