



Amman Center for Human Rights Studies statement on 2020 Executions in the MENA Region

IN A NUTSHELL

The Middle East and Northern Africa region topped the global list of executioners in 2020, accounting for 88% of the 483 reported executions carried out worldwide in 2020. Many of these executions violated international law due to unfair trials and convictions, states using the death penalty as a political deterrent, the use of torture to obtain confessions, and the execution of people who committed their offenses when they were children. ACHRS condemns the death penalty in all situations.

Introduction

The Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) region topped the global list of executioners in 2020, with Iran, Egypt, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia accounting for 88% of the 483 reported executions carried out worldwide in 2020. These figures come from Amnesty International's Death Penalty Report, which tracks global executions along with the sentences, trials, and methods of execution. China, North Korea, and Vietnam were excluded from the report due to state secrecy and an inability to verify information; however, China is believed to execute thousands of people each year, placing them in the first position globally.

Iran carried out at least 246 executions, placing them second behind China. Of the League of Arab States, 8 of 22 countries executed people: Egypt, Iraq, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen. Syria's numbers were not included in the reported totals as the numbers could not be verified. Oman and Qatar resumed executions, taking a step backwards from the past several years.

Background

As most countries globally move away from the death penalty, MENA states make up the majority of those nations committed to carrying out executions. 2020 saw a sharp decrease in executions in the MENA region, largely due to COVID-19 slowing legal proceedings. Saudi Arabia saw a 95% drop, and Iraq carried out fewer than half the number of executions compared to 2019. However, though MENA execution rates dropped overall, Egypt's numbers more than tripled, going from 32 executions in 2019 to 107 in 2020. In October and November of 2020, Egyptian authorities executed at least 57 people. Iran's 246 executions kept Iran as the top executing country in the MENA region and second worldwide after China.

Qatar and Oman both took steps backwards, ending their death penalty moratoriums. Qatar executed Nepali national Anil Chaudhary in the nation's first execution in 20 years. Oman executed four people in 2020, their first executions since 2015. Additionally, MENA states were the only states to execute women in 2020, with Iran killing nine women, Egypt killing four, Saudi Arabia executing two, and Oman putting one woman to death.

International Law Violations

One of the biggest concerns with MENA states' use of the death penalty is the prevalence of unfair trials that result in a death sentence. Death sentences were imposed after unfair trial proceedings in Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. Confessions obtained through torture or other ill-treatment were recorded in Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. At least 23 of the 107 put to death in Egypt were killed in connection to "political violence," after unfair trials relying on forced confessions obtained through torture, threats, enforced disappearances, and other human rights violations. Mandatory death sentences were imposed in Iran and Saudi Arabia, and military courts sentenced civilians to death in Egypt and Libya.

Additionally, several states executed people for crimes that did not qualify for the death penalty under international law, which requires intentional killing before the death penalty can be considered. In Iran and Saudi Arabia, executions for drug-related offenses made up at least 9% of the nations' totals, and Egypt and Iran carried out executions for rape as well. Finally, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen executed people convicted of crimes against the state, including "questioning the leader's policies," whether or not these crimes led to a loss of life.

Iranian authorities used the death penalty as "a weapon of political repression" against dissidents, protestors, and members of ethnic minority groups. At least one public execution was recorded in Iran, and Iran also executed three people for crimes that occurred when they were under the age of 18, which also violates international law.

The Amman Center for Human Rights Studies condemns all uses of the death penalty, due to its finality, inhumanity, and irreversibility. We especially condemn the use of the death penalty for crimes that occurred under the age of 18, as well as the use of torture and unfair trials to obtain confessions. MENA states must adopt a moratorium on the death penalty and work toward eliminating the use of the death penalty in sentencing.