



FORUM: Social, Cultural and Humanitarian Committee (SOCHUM)

TOPIC: Examining Saudi Arabia's Extensive Use of Capital Punishment

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POSITION: Co-Chair

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear Delegates,

My name is Athina Orfanou, I am 16 years old and I am an 11th grade student at the Arsakeio-Tositseio Ekalis school. It is with great honor that I'm serving as a Co-Chair in the Social, Cultural and Humanitarian Committee in this year's AMLMUN Conference. This marks my first time chairing and my fifth time participating in an MUN conference overall.

Firstly, I would like to congratulate all delegates for taking the decision to step into the beautiful world of MUN. If you can come to see it not simply as a conference but as an experience that stays with you long after, then you have truly understood what makes MUN so special. Whether it is the confidence you gain from speaking in front of a room, the friendships you make between sessions, or simply the new perspectives and ambitions you leave with, every part of this experience has something to offer.

I have been involved with Model United Nations for about 2 years now, and what I have valued the most is the chance to engage with issues that genuinely matter. The preparation that leads up to every conference, every debate, allows you not only to form well-researched arguments, but also to challenge your own way of thinking, by considering an issue from the perspective of a possibly entirely different country. Yet, MUN is not only academics, it's also building character. Throughout all sessions, I have seen myself change to a more extroverted version of myself, not afraid to spark conversations with other delegates and openly express my opinion on various topics.

In this year's Social, Cultural and Humanitarian Committee, we are faced with two critical matters, "Examining Saudi Arabia's Extensive Use of Capital Punishment", being one of them. The following guide aims to provide you with all the information needed for the conference, such as past attempts to resolve the issue, relevant Treaties and Conventions, as well as possible solutions, which can be very helpful regarding the forming of clauses. Nevertheless, I would encourage you to run some personal research as well, according to your assigned country and not simply rely on this guide alone.

I look forward to meeting you all and hope to make your MUN experience unforgettable! If any question comes up, please, do not hesitate to contact me via email! (athina.v.orfanou@gmail.com)



TOPIC INTRODUCTION

Indisputably, the laws of capital punishment have been a subject of debate and controversy, especially for the international community. While different advocates and other parties have actively expressed their disapproval of the death penalty, several countries across the world have embraced it as a fundamental part of their criminal justice systems, often deriving from legal traditions, cultural values, religious principles, or national security concerns. Capital punishment, also known as the death penalty, is the execution of an offender who is sentenced to death after being convicted of a criminal offence by a court of law. Throughout history, it has been implemented by states as one of the most severe forms of criminal punishment.

Traditionally, the main purpose of the death penalty often centers on retribution, reflecting the principle that individuals who commit the gravest of crimes should receive a proportionate punishment. Nevertheless, supporters of the measure in question also maintain that it serves as a unique deterrent to violent crime, arguing that the possibility of execution may discourage potential law-offenders from committing a crime. Others also support that it serves as a guarantee for public safety by permanently preventing convicted felons from reoffending.

On the contrary, those opposing capital punishment argue that it violates the fundamental human right to life and constitutes a type of inhumane or degrading punishment. Several human-rights centered organizations, such as Amnesty International, further support that the risk of ex-ecut-ing the inno-cent pre-cludes the use of the death penalty. However, another question arises concerning the proportionate application of the death penalty, as most advocates against it condone that it is more often used on people who are poor, marginalized, or belong to groups who already face entrenched discrimination.

However, why are we solely discussing the case of Saudi Arabia? The state in question is ranked as the third leading executioner worldwide following Iran and China. Furthermore, statistics show that the number of executions in Saudi Arabia has been constantly increasing over succeeding years. Even though the country's legal system is inherently rooted in the Islamic Law (*Shari'ah*) and in Islamic law as expressed in the Qur'ān, in which capital punishment is endorsed, there are many other factors that have led to making Saudi Arabia a particularly significant case for examination. International concerns have been raised as a significant number of executions involve a wide range of offenses, regardless of the minority or the majority of each. These include non-violent crimes such as drug-trafficking and "hudud" crimes, but also severe crimes such as murder and terrorism-related offences. This contradicts global legal frameworks that restrict the death penalty solely to intentional murder. Secondly, the measure in question disproportionately impacts low-income migrant workers and foreign nationals, casting doubt upon the equality before the law and non-discrimination. These



particular social groups may appear vulnerable due to their language barriers, unfamiliarity with the legal system, limited financial resources and difficulty accessing legal counsel or consular assistance. Lastly, concerns also focus on how trials are conducted due to allegations of coerced confessions and other procedural issues such as safeguards, leaving the international community in a state of worry regarding fair-trial standards.

The issue in question calls for a balance between state sovereignty and international human rights obligations. While Saudi Arabia's legal system reflects its religious and cultural traditions, it clashes with the advocacies of numerous UN bodies aiming to restrict or abolish the use of capital punishment. However, as stated by Amnesty International, the responsibility for bringing these changes rests with the Saudi Arabian government. It is also the duty of the international community to ensure that Saudi Arabia fulfils its international human rights obligations relating to the use of the death penalty. Consequently, Saudi Arabia's extensive use of capital punishment remains a critical issue within the international human rights discourse, highlighting the necessity of examining the legal, ethical and humanitarian challenges surrounding the measure.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Retribution

"Severe punishment for something seriously wrong that somebody has done"¹

Deterrent

"Something that makes somebody less likely to do something"²

Entrenched discrimination

"Often referred to as Institutional racism. Institutional racism refers to the systemic operation of societal institutions in ways that favor certain groups over others, often resulting in unequal access to opportunities and resources based on race or ethnicity. This concept highlights how discrimination can occur unintentionally through established policies and practices, rather than solely through individual prejudiced attitudes."³

¹ "Retribution Noun - Definition, Pictures, Pronunciation and Usage Notes | Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary at Oxfordlearnersdictionaries.Com." *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries*, www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/retribution. Accessed 24 July 2026.

² "Deterrent Noun - Definition, Pictures, Pronunciation and Usage Notes | Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary at Oxfordlearnersdictionaries.Com." *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries*, www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/deterrent_1. Accessed 24 July 2026.

³ Delgado, Hector L. "Institutional Racism | Sociology | Research Starters | Ebsco Research." *EBSCO*, 2022, www.ebsco.com/research-starters/sociology/institutional-racism.



Shari'ah

"Islamic religious law based on the teachings of the Koran and the traditional sayings of Muhammad."⁴

Qur'ān

"(or Koran) The holy book of the Islamic religion."⁵

Hudud

"The set of laws and punishments specified by Allah in the Koran. Courts cannot reduce or alter these punishments, which treat the acts as crimes against public and divine order. Several examples of hudud crimes are; theft, drinking alcohol, highway robbery"⁶

Language Barrier

"A problem communicating because two people do not speak the same language"⁷

Coerced Confession

"A coerced confession is an involuntary confession. Coerced confessions are elicited by investigating officers' use of coercive tactics. Coerced confessions are sometimes authentic but are often false."⁸

Moratorium

"A moratorium (on something) is the temporary stopping of an activity, especially by official agreement. "⁹

Shi'a

"One of the two main branches of the Islamic religion."¹⁰

Sunna

"A collection of traditional Muslim laws based on the prophet Muhammad's life and actions, used along with the Koran to guide Muslims"¹¹

⁴ "Sharia Noun - Definition, Pictures, Pronunciation and Usage Notes | Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary at Oxfordlearnersdictionaries.Com." *Oxford Learner's Dictionary*, www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/sharia.

⁵ "The Koran | English Meaning - Cambridge Dictionary." *Cambridge Dictionary*, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/koran. Accessed 24 July 2026.

⁶ "Definition of 'Hudud.'" *Collin's Dictionary*, www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/hue-river. Accessed 24 July 2026.

⁷ "Language Barrier Collocation | Meaning and Examples of Use." *Cambridge Dictionary*, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/language-barrier. Accessed 24 July 2026.

⁸ Connors, Christina J. "Sage Reference - the Sage Encyclopedia of Criminal Psychology - Coerced Confessions." *Sage*, sk.sagepub.com/ency/edvol/the-sage-encyclopedia-of-criminal-psychology-1e/chpt/coerced-confessions. Accessed 24 July 2026.

⁹ *Moratorium Noun - Definition, Pictures, Pronunciation and Usage Notes | Oxford Advanced American Dictionary at Oxfordlearnersdictionaries.Com*, www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/moratorium. Accessed 26 July 2026.

¹⁰ *Shia Noun - Definition, Pictures, Pronunciation and Usage Notes | Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary at Oxfordlearnersdictionaries.Com*, www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/shia. Accessed 26 July 2026.

¹¹ "Sunna." *Cambridge Dictionary*, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/sunna.



Qisas

"In Islam, the term "qisas" means retribution. They are prescribed in Islamic law for murder, voluntary manslaughter, involuntary killing, intentional physical injury, and unintentional physical injury. In cases of intentional killing and physical injury, the family or victim may waive retribution and exact monetary compensation. In other cases, only monetary compensation can be exacted. The perpetrator's clan is responsible for payment of compensation, which is divided by the victim's clan."¹²

Ta'zir

"Punishment for offenses at the discretion of the judge or ruler of the state; one of three major types of punishments or sanctions under sharia law¹³."

Diyah

"In Islam, the traditional compensation due for the shedding of blood"¹⁴

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Saudi Arabia's Legal System

An understanding of Saudi Arabia's legal framework is essential to explore the country's application of capital punishment. Firstly, the state's legal system is inherently rooted in Islamic Law (Shari'ah) derived from the Qur'an and Sunna, with the Basic Law of Governance acting as its supreme constitutional charter.

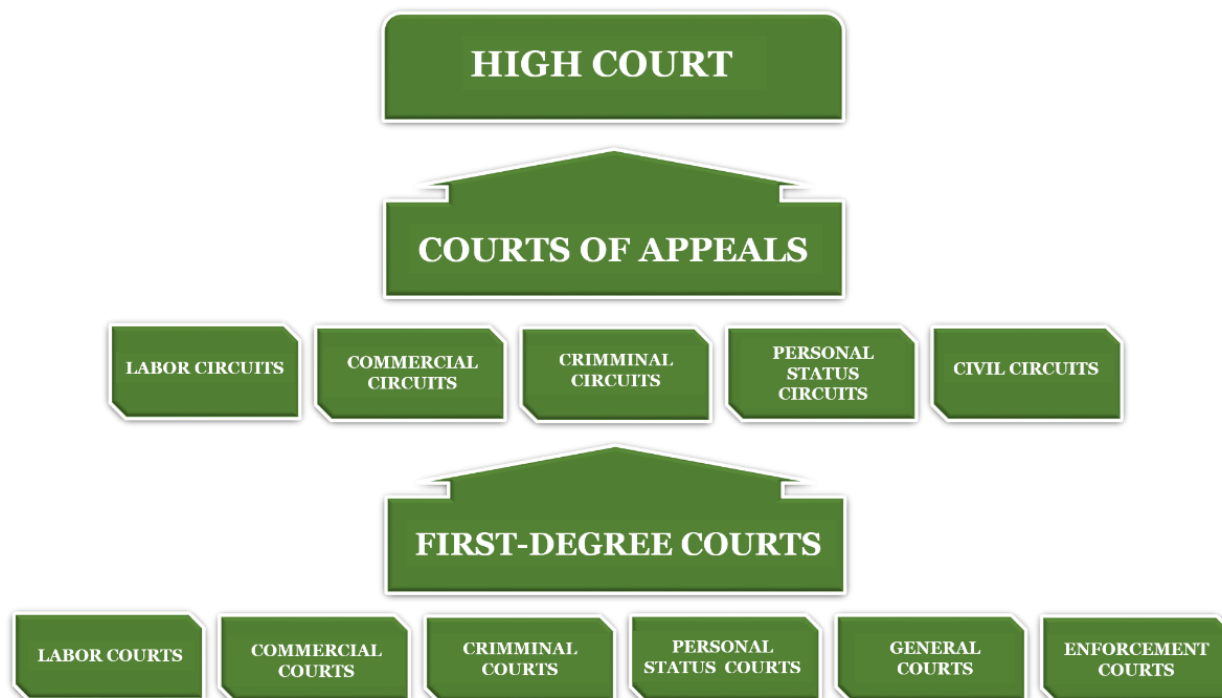
Before Saudi Arabia's judicial system reached the state it has now, it has gone through several reforms. The most important one, which has shaped it into what it is today, is that of 2005. On 2 April 2005, a Royal Order was issued, approving amendments in principle to the structure of the judicial system. It called for the creation of specialized courts in order to handle all cases, so as to avoid conflict over jurisdiction. This led to the creation of the "High Court" which supervises the implementation of Islamic law (Shari'ah) and regulations enacted by the King. The High Court also reviews rulings issued or upheld by the Courts of Appeal (courts that hear appealable decisions from lower courts). Its review is mandatory in cases of major offences involving qisas or hudud.

As can be seen in the image below, the High Court is not the only actor in Saudi Arabia's judiciary system. It consists of the courts seen in the image above. Specifically, the Courts of Appeals and the First-Degree Courts. The courts examined principally in our topic are the Criminal Courts. These exist in most of the Kingdom's administrative regions and governorates.

¹² Qisas - Oxford Reference, www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100357713.

¹³ "Tazir - Wiktionary, the Free Dictionary." Wiktionary, en.wiktionary.org/wiki/tazir.

¹⁴ Diyah | Definition, Punishment & Compensation | Britannica, www.britannica.com/topic/diyah.



The different type of courts and their hierarchy¹⁵

The Criminal Courts consist of the following three specialized areas:

1. *qisas* (retaliatory punishment)
2. *hudud* (Qur'anic prescribed punishment)
3. *ta'zir* (discretionary punishment)

Qisas relates to avenging justice, particularly in cases involving physical assault or homicide. This principle allows the victim or their heirs to demand equivalent punishment, accept financial compensation (*diyah*), or offer a pardon.

Hudud crimes are those for which punishments are explicitly stated in the Qur'an or Sunnah. These offenses are viewed as violations of the rights of God and include theft, adultery, false accusation of adultery, alcohol consumption, apostasy, and highway robbery.

Ta'zir covers all offenses for which no fixed punishment is defined under Islamic law. These include modern offenses such as embezzlement, bribery, cybercrimes, and defamation. Judges are granted wide latitude to determine appropriate penalties, which may include; imprisonment, fines, public reprimand, asset forfeiture and travel bans.

¹⁵ "An Overview of the Saudi Arabian Legal System." *GlobaLex | Foreign and International Law Research*, www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex/saudi_arabia1.html.



Punishment and decision-making

Saudi Arabia's collection of laws is structured in a way that only judges officiate criminal cases, unlike judicial systems in other countries. For instance, in the United States, a criminal case may be supervised by a judge or jury, depending on the court type or the criminal defendant's wishes. Contrastingly, a jury system is not operated by Saudi Arabia, which leads to the conclusion that judicial decision-making carries a lot of weight in the state in question, thus there is a need to understand how these decisions are made justly and discretionally.

There are specific steps to the judges' exercise of discretion. The first one is categorization of offenses. The judicial approach depends entirely on whether an offense falls entirely under hudud, qisas or ta'zir. Particularly, for ta'zir crimes, since there are no fixed punishments, judges should hold a broader scope interpreting traditional law and usually, set punishments common to those mentioned above. Finally, the exercise of discretion involves a lot of independent interpretation due to the minimal nature of penal codes, which have led judges to relying heavily on their own individual scholarly training and evaluation of the Quran and Sunnah to determine both guilt and the severity of the sanction.

Crimes Punishable by Death

What is unique about Saudi Arabia's application of capital punishment is the broader range of offences that are involved. In the following sub-sections are listed most of the crimes punishable by death.

Violent and property crimes

Murder: In this specific case, the crime is treated as a civil crime and is covered by the law of *qisās* (retaliation), whereby the relatives of the victim decide whether the offender is punished with death by the authorities or made to pay diyah (wergild) as compensation.

Armed robbery: Highway robbery or violent theft (*Hirabah*), which can carry a sentence of death or crucifixion if it results in loss of life or severe societal terror.

Kidnapping: Abduction or false imprisonment, particularly when paired with physical assault, torture, or burglary.

State Security and Political Crimes

Terrorism: Planning, executing, or funding acts of terrorism, or establishing/joining a banned extremist group.

High Treason: Acts aimed at overthrowing the monarchy, working with foreign adversaries, or waging war against the state (*Hirabah*).



Espionage: Spying or leaking critical state secrets to a foreign power.

Sedition: Inciting public disorder, organizing illegal anti-government protests, or severely threatening national unity.

Dissident Journalism: In extreme cases, publishing or broadcasting material deemed treasonous against the state.

Drugs and Smuggling

This category of crimes has recently been brutally punished, against global legal frameworks that restrict the death penalty solely to intentional murder. Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman has supported the slogan "No one will be spared" to be adopted by officials in the Kingdom's war against drugs.

Religious and Ideological Offenses

Apostasy: Formally abandoning Islam or converting to another religion.

Blasphemy: Severely insulting God, Islam, or the Prophet Muhammad.

Sexual Offenses and Morality crimes

Rape: Non-consensual sexual offenses.

Homosexuality: Same-sex relations, particularly when involving repeat offenses or aggravated circumstances.

Current Application and Trends

"On December 21, 2025, the European Saudi Organisation for Human Rights (ESOHR) reported that Saudi Arabia carried out 347 executions in 2025, marking a new high for the nation, after a record-breaking 345 executions in 2024. The majority (79%) of executions in 2025 were for crimes failing to meet the international legal threshold of a "most serious crime" and predominately included executions for drug-related charges (69% of all executions).", officially states the ESOHR.¹⁶

¹⁶ "Saudi Arabia Breaks Its All-Time Execution Record: 347 Executions in 2025." *السعودية تكسر رقمها التاريخي للقتل: 347*، إعدام في 2025 – المنظمة الأوروبية السعودية لحقوق الإنسان www.esohr.org/en/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%83%D8%B3%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D9%82%D9%85%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AE%D9%8A-%D9%84%D9%84%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84-347-%D8%A5/. Accessed 18 Aug. 2026.



The number of executions in 2025, while similar to that of 2024 (345 executions¹⁷), when compared to that recorded by the Death Penalty Information Center in 2023, sounds extreme, doubling from 172¹⁸ to 347¹⁹. However, when compared to the reported 65 executions of 2021, it seems alarming for international communities and human-rights organizations. Meanwhile, Amnesty International has already reported nearly 100 executions so far this year, including at least 61 for drug-related offences, the latest of which was on 18 June.²⁰

Due Process and Human Rights Concerns

Once again, according to Amnesty International, almost all human rights defenders brought to trial before the SCC (Specialized Criminal Court), which remained notorious for undermining fair trial rights, or before other courts, were given harsh sentences following unfair trials. A thorough analysis of the judicial practice in Saudi Arabia illustrates the fact that it fails to preserve the basic rights of fair trial, such as the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty, embracing fair and equitable procedures as demanded by international human rights standards.

Arrest and detention of suspects in Saudi Arabia are regulated by the "Statute of Principles of Arrest, Temporary Confinement and Preventive Detention". However, this statute is not compliant to international standards and even its limited terms are not always respected. Secondly, the secrecy surrounding detention and court proceedings creates an environment which encourages human rights violations. Such circumstances have resulted in thousands of victims, ranging from those blindly deprived of their liberty due to their religious or political beliefs, to those who have been subjected to irreversible penalties amounting to cruel punishment.

Another primary concern has been the lack of accessibility to legal representation and consultation. The country does not have a state-funded legal aid system and independently employed lawyers are often not granted access to their clients until late stages of procedure, or after sentencing has already unfolded.

Moreover, several allegations have risen concerning coerced confessions and lack of effective investigation. In fact, practice has shown that in Saudi Arabia, most executions and convictions are carried out on the basis of solely forced confessions. What has increased the

¹⁷ *Saudi Arabia: Escalating Executions for Drug-Related Offences*, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/07/saudi-arabia-escalation-executions-foreign-nationals-drug-related-offences/.

¹⁸ Purcell, Andrew. "Saudi Arabia Executed at Least 172 People in 2023." *Reprive UK*, 11 May 2026, reprive.org.uk/news/saudi-arabia-executed-at-least-172-people-in-2023/.

¹⁹ "Saudi Arabia: Record Number of Executions in 2025." *Human Rights Watch*, 13 Jan. 2026, www.hrw.org/news/2026/01/13/saudi-arabia-record-number-of-executions-in-2025.

²⁰ *Saudi Arabia: Almost 100 People Executed so Far This Year as Dozens More Remain on Death Row for Drug-Related Offences*, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2026/06/saudi-arabia-almost-100-people-executed-this-year-for-drug-related-offences/.



reliance on allegedly forced confessions seems to be the systematic disability of authorities to investigate allegations of torture, since, in most cases examined, complainants made allegations of torture only for them to be rejected without investigation.

Additionally, several cases, documented by organisations reporting to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Rights Group, have revealed a pattern of discriminatory application of capital punishment, especially against members of the Shi'a ethno-religious minority and foreign nationals. Many Shi'a individuals have been arrested, prosecuted, and sentenced to death with reference to their exercising their freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and religion or belief. In the context of conflicts related to discrimination against the Shi'a community, protests in the Eastern Province intensified during the 2011–2012 period. The authorities responded with a suppression on individuals suspected of either participating in or supporting protests or expressing views critical of the State, resulting in the arrest of numerous Shi'a protesters, including minors, and the use of the death penalty as a punitive measure. Likewise, foreign nationals are subjected to the death penalty in Saudi Arabia, specifically in cases involving drug-related offences. This pattern could be seen evidently following the lifting to a moratorium on executions for narcotics-related offenses in 2022, after which executions carried on in cases that had previously been paused. Available data shows that the majority of death penalties assigned in 2025 (240 in total) concerned drug-related cases, 81% of which (188 individuals) were not citizens of Saudi Arabia.²¹

Lastly, in 2018, Saudi Arabia passed the Juveniles Law, which introduced procedural protections for children. Later, in 2020, a royal decree declared that the death penalty would no longer be imposed on people convicted of crimes committed before the age of 18, setting a maximum ten-year term in juvenile detention. Internationally, these steps were received as indications of positive development. However, on the 21st of August 2025, Saudi Arabia's authorities executed Jalal al-Labbad, a young member of the Shi'a minority, for offenses he allegedly committed during protests in 2011 and 2012, being a minor. He was firstly arrested without a warrant in 2017 and was further not allowed to access legal counseling, while being subjected to solitary confinement and physical abuse. The execution of individuals because of crimes they may have committed as minors is a violation to one of the strictest restrictions of international human rights law. Article 37(a) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) states that "neither capital punishment nor life imprisonment without possibility of release shall be imposed for offences committed by persons under 18 years of age."²² The CRC has attained near-universal ratification with 196 States parties, inscribing this prohibition as a binding norm

²¹ "New Harm Reduction International Report: Drug-Related Executions Worldwide Reached Record High in 2025 amid Intensification of 'War on Drugs' Rhetoric." *Death Penalty Information Center*, 15 Apr. 2026, deathpenaltyinfo.org/new-harm-reduction-international-report-drug-related-executions-worldwide-reached-record-high-in-2025-amid-intensification-of-war-on-drugs-rhetoric.

²² Convention on the Rights of the Child | Ohchr, www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child



of international consensus. Saudi Arabia ratified the CRC in 1996 and therefore is legally bound under Article 37(a).

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

Germany

Germany has also firmly condemned Saudi Arabia's executions. Specifically, closely after the execution of 37 people in 2019,²³ the state has criticized the action and particularly expressed its concern on the reports that indicated that some of those executed had been minors at the time of committing the crime they were sentenced for.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is indisputably the primary state concerned, as it is this State's policies that are being examined, the country is one of the biggest executioners worldwide and its domestic policies are currently the center of international debate. The Kingdom strongly supports the retention of capital punishment, arguing that the measure is a legitimate component of its criminal justice system. There is a legal basis on which the implementation of capital punishment stands. Firstly, the compliance of its legal system with the Islamic Law, the Shari'ah, which reflects its religious values, traditions and sovereign right to determine its own criminal legislation. The state is also a firm believer of the fact that capital punishment contributes to public safety and deters severe crime. However, it is criticized by many governments and international organizations which argue that several practices conflict with international human rights standards.

Amnesty International

As can be easily indicated throughout its references in every action against capital punishment, Amnesty International has played a significant role against the issue in question. From publishing numerous informative articles regarding the topic and signing documents with other NGOs, to actively protesting against it, they have put up a big fight against the death penalty. One of their most important actions is the worldwide documentation of executions, as well as the publication of annual reports. Other important highlights of their work are its repeated criticism against Saudi Arabia and advocacy in favour of the global abolition of the death penalty.

²³ "Saudi Arabia: Mass Execution of 37 Men." *Human Rights Watch*, 28 Oct. 2020, www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/24/saudi-arabia-mass-execution-37-men.



Amnesty International activists hold signs opposing the death penalty.²⁴

European Union (EU)

The EU has incessantly expressed its opposition to Saudi Arabia's extensive use of capital punishment, calling for a moratorium on executions and supporting that the death penalty is a violation of the right to life and human dignity.

Human Rights Watch

Human Rights Watch has also taken up a crucial role concerning the issue. Specifically, they have recently written detailed reports regarding Saudi Arabia's extensive use of capital punishment, as well as articles and investigations. The organization takes action in order to protect vulnerable groups and minorities, which is what has made it criticise the disproportionate application of capital punishment against foreign nationals and other vulnerable groups.

United Nations (UN)

There are various UN organs responsible for monitoring the issue in question. Firstly, the Human Rights Council (HRC) has conducted several investigations, but has also called out several of Saudi Arabia's actions. Secondly, the Human Rights Office of The High Commissioner (OHCHR) with its mandate to promote and protect all human rights, advocates for the universal abolition of the death penalty. More specifically, it often publishes various statements opposing the performance of executions against individuals and, mostly, against its disproportionate application on foreign nationals and non-compliance with fair trial and international human rights standards. Lastly, the UN has established a Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary

²⁴ "Amnesty International Global Report: Death Sentences and Executions 2024." *Amnesty International USA*, 20 July 2026, www.amnestyusa.org/reports/amnesty-international-global-report-death-sentences-and-executions-2024/. Accessed 18 Aug. 2026.

or arbitrary executions, which handles cases of deliberate killing of individuals outside of any legal framework.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	EVENT
1948	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
1966	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
1984	Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
1989	Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
1996	Ratification of CRC by Saudi Arabia
2007	United Nations General Assembly Resolution 62/149: Moratorium on the Use of the Death Penalty
2011-2012	Protests against Shi'a discrimination in Saudi Arabia
1st of August 2018	Juveniles Law signed in Saudi Arabia
2020	Royal order calls for no death penalty on minors
January 2021	Moratorium on drug-charge executions
21st of August 2025	Execution of Jalal al-Labbad
21st of December 2025	ESOHR report shows 347 executions within the year ²⁵

²⁵ "Saudi Arabia Breaks Its All-Time Execution Record: 347 Executions in 2025." السعودية تكسر رقمها التاريخي للقتل: 347 إعدام في 2025 – المنظمة الأوروبية السعودية لحقوق الإنسان www.esohr.org/en/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9-



RELEVANT UN TREATIES, CONVENTIONS AND RESOLUTIONS

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a document adopted by the United Nations General Assembly that codifies some of the rights and freedoms of all humans. The articles most relevant to the issue are articles 3, 5 and 10, which concern the right to life, the right to not be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and the right to a fair trial. The purpose of the concerned treaty was to establish universal human rights after World War 2 (WWII). It had a crucial impact on the world as it became the foundation of international human rights law and influenced many treaties.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights is a multifaceted treaty that commits nations to respect the civil and political rights of individuals, including the right to life, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, electoral rights and rights to due process and a fair trial. The covenant mentioned has established international standards limiting the death penalty to the “most serious crimes” cases, encouraging several states to either abolish or limit its application. Under international criminal law and the founding treaty of the International Criminal Court, the "most serious crimes of concern to the international community as a whole" comprise four core categories: genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the crime of aggression.²⁶ However, it must be mentioned that Saudi Arabia has not signed the covenant.

Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984)

The Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (otherwise known as the United Nations Convention Against Torture (UNCAT)) is an international human rights treaty under the review of the United Nations. Its purpose is to prevent torture and other acts of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment worldwide. As a result, it has encouraged investigation into torture allegations and has safeguarded individuals from coerced confessions. This convention is particularly important due to the concerns surrounding confessions in various execution cases in Saudi Arabia.

[%D8%AA%D9%83%D8%B3%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D9%82%D9%85%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AE%D9%8A-%D9%84%D9%84%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84-347-%D8%A5/](#). Accessed 18 Aug. 2026.

²⁶ *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court* | Ohchr, www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/rome-statute-international-criminal-court.



Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international human rights treaty which sets out the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children. The outcome of this almost universally ratified convention has been the strengthened protection against juvenile executions. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia is a party of it, as mentioned beforehand.

United Nations General Assembly Resolution 62/149: Moratorium on the Use of the Death Penalty (2007)

This resolution is a call for a moratorium on capital punishment. The UN General Assembly expressed its concern through it and specifically urged states that still implement the death penalty to respect international standards that provide safeguards guaranteeing protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty and other similar measures. Furthermore, it aims to eventually abolish the application of capital punishment completely. It should be noted, however, that Saudi Arabia has consistently voted against this resolution and its subsequent renewals.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

2018 Juveniles Law and 2020 Royal Decree

In 2018 August 1st, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia signed the Juveniles Law, a set of rules and criminal procedures regulating juvenile crimes for individuals who have reached the age of seven and are under eighteen years old, whether male or female. This Law imposed several limits as to the legal prosecution of minors, banning death sentences for those under 15. The aforementioned royal order consists of an improved version of the 2018 Juveniles Law, as it concerns the extension of protections offered to juvenile offenders, formally stating that the death penalty is not applicable to individuals under 18, replacing it with a maximum of 10 years in prison.

2021 Drug Moratorium

In January of 2021, Saudi Arabia's Human Rights Commission (SHRC) declared a moratorium on drug-related executions. It remained in place for 33 months, between February 2020 and November 2022. In this period, Saudi Arabia stopped executing people for drug-related offences, providing a welcome but brief pause for those on death row awaiting execution. In November 2022, the moratorium was abruptly revoked, followed by a spike in drug-related executions.



United Nations Human Rights Council – Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Saudi Arabia

During each UPR cycle, numerous member states urge Saudi Arabia to make changes in certain parts of its policies, such as the use of the death penalty. Specifically, the state has been recommended to abolish executions for non-violent offenses and improve fair trial standards. The country has both accepted and rejected certain of these recommendations, showing that Saudi Arabia has been willing to make some changes, especially regarding labour and administrative adjustments, while continuing to maintain its position on others, namely its stance on capital punishment.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Restriction of the scope of capital punishment

As can be indicated throughout reports and investigations conducted by several actors, one of the issues in Saudi Arabia's extensive use of capital punishment is its broad range of crimes to which the measure is applicable. Therefore, promoting stronger consistency with international human rights obligations regarding death penalty implementation such as its limitation to "most serious crimes" (genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crimes of aggression) or violent crimes could potentially be a feasible solution, if carried out accordingly, respecting the state's legal traditions and beliefs.

Fair trial guarantees and protection of vulnerable groups

One of the primary concerns of human rights advocates about Saudi Arabia's procedure for executions is the lack of transparency and compliance with standards. Consequently, there should be an effort to establish access to a fair trial by supporting vulnerable groups, who are disproportionately faced with the death penalty. An effective solution would be guaranteeing access to qualified defense lawyers from the beginning of the proceedings, while also providing financial legal aid to those who are not able to cover the expenses alone.

Diplomatic protection of foreign nationals

In order to address the large application of the death penalty against foreign nationals and immigrants, legal and consular support should be strengthened. First of all, it is important to guarantee consular officials' timely access to defendants throughout the trial process. Embassies and governments of the individual's country of origin could maintain regular communication with Saudi authorities, request updates on the legal proceedings, and raise concerns through diplomatic channels when fair trial standards are not sufficiently upheld. Moreover, international organisations, as well as the UN, could encourage Saudi Arabia to establish a clear protocol for notifying consular authorities when a foreign national is arrested



for an offense carrying the death penalty. Lastly, through guaranteeing translation services, the language barriers when investigating allegations can be overcome, in order for foreign nationals to have a comprehension of the legal procedure.

Human rights education and capacity building

For the purpose of preserving human rights and ensuring that there is no violation of them, there ought to be a proper education and awareness raised of the people involved. Thus, training for judges, prosecutors and law enforcement as well as a public human rights education on fair trial standards could truly assist in the improvement of procedural loopholes that concern the international community regarding capital punishment trials in Saudi Arabia.

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