



## Capital Punishment



Capital punishment is the practice of execution someone as punishment for a specific crime after a fair and legal trial. It can only be legally used by a state, so when non-state organisations admit they have “executed” a person, it is classed as murder. It is usually only used as a punishment for serious types of murder, but in some member states treason, types of fraud, adultery, and rape are capital crimes.

Amnesty International believes that the death penalty breaches human rights, in particular, the right to life and the right to live free from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Both rights are protected under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN in 1948.

The four most common methods of capital punishment are Beheading, Hanging, Lethal Injection and Shooting.

In 2017, most known executions took place in China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Pakistan – in that order.

China remains the world’s top executioner – but the true extent of the use of the death penalty in China is unknown as this data is classified as a state secret; the global figure of at least 993 recorded in 2017 excludes the thousands of executions believed to have been carried out in China. Excluding China, 84% of all reported executions took place in just four countries – Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Pakistan.

Amnesty International recorded at least 993 executions in 23 countries in 2017, down by 4% from 2016 (1,032 executions) and 39% from 2015 (when the organization reported 1,634 executions, the highest number since 1989).

Amnesty International recorded at least 2,591 death sentences in 53 countries in 2017, a significant decrease from the record high of 3,117 recorded in 2016. At least 21,919 people were known to be on death row at the end of 2017.

### Points to Consider:

- Is there ever a reason to use capital punishment?
- What offences should be considered as capital crimes?
- Is capital punishment better or worse than life imprisonment as a form of punishment?
- Should capital punishment be abolished?
- What should happen if an innocent person is executed?

### Useful Links:

- Amnesty international capital punishment website: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/death-penalty/>

- BBC Ethics capital punishment  
introduction: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/capitalpunishment/intro.shtml>