Executions in Saudi Arabia

A Human Rights and Legal Analysis

Research Paper

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Executive Summary

This paper examines the use of the death penalty in Saudi Arabia from a human rights and legal perspective, focusing on the period from 2024 to 2026. Data documented by human rights organizations show that in 2025 the Kingdom recorded its highest annual number of executions since the start of monitoring, with at least 356 executions. The high rate continued in 2026, with at least 188 executions recorded until mid-October. The total number of executions since King Salman bin Abdulaziz came to power in 2015 has exceeded two thousand executions.

The paper concludes that the Saudi Arabia's practice is characterized by four main patterns that contradict international law: the predominance of executions for non-violent drug offenses, the disproportionate targeting of foreign nationals, particularly migrant workers, the continued execution of people for acts allegedly committed when they were children, despite official pledges, and the use of executions in political cases and cases involving freedom of expression. These practices are accompanied by systematic violations of fair trial guarantees. The paper concludes with a series of recommendations addressed to the Saudi authorities, states whose nationals are facing execution, and the international community.

1. Introduction and methodology

1.1 Purpose and scope of the paper

This paper aims to provide a human rights and legal assessment of the application of the death penalty in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, by monitoring the scale and patterns of executions, assessing their compatibility with the national legal framework and the kingdom's international obligations, and presenting the positions of United Nations mechanisms towards the issue. The paper focuses on the period from 2024 to October 2026, while also considering the broader context since 2015, the year King Salman bin Abdulaziz came to power and the beginning of a period during which executions increased significantly.

1.2 Sources of Information

The paper relies on multiple complementary sources, most notably:

- Official statements issued by the Saudi Ministry of Interior and the Saudi Press Agency (SPA), who is generally the only public source disclosing the implementation of death sentences.

- Reports by international and regional human rights organizations, such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, ALQST for Human Rights, the European Saudi Organization for Human Rights, and the World Coalition to End the Death Penalty, and MENA Rights Group.
- Documents from United Nations mechanisms, particularly opinions of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, statements by UN Special Rapporteurs, and Universal Periodic Review documents.
- Relevant international and regional legal instruments, as well as interpretations issued by UN treaty bodies.

1.3 Monitoring Limitations

Monitoring executions in Saudi Arabia faces significant methodological obstacles.. The authorities do not publish comprehensive statistics on death sentences issued or on the number of individuals awaiting execution; furthermore. Trial records are not publicly available, and official statements are often limited to the name and nationality of the person sentenced and a brief description of the charges. Since 2015, Human Rights Watch has documented at least 51 executions that were carried out in secret[1]. Figures therefore vary between different organizations, depending on their respective methodologies and monitoring dates, and the paper highlights these discrepancies where they exist. The figures presented should be read as a documented minimum, which does not necessarily reflect the actual number.

2. Executions in Numbers: An Unprecedented Increase

2.1 Annual Developments

Available data reveal a sharp upward trend in recent years. After the authorities carried out 196 executions in 2022 and 172 in 2023, the number almost doubled in 2024, reaching a record high at the time. This figure was then surpassed in 2025, which recorded the highest annual number of executions since Amnesty International began monitoring executions in the Kingdom in

[1] Human Rights Watch, “Saudi Arabia: Surge in Executions Over a Decade”, 22 August 2026.

1990[2]. Both ALQST for Human Rights and Human Rights Watch documented at least 356 executions in 2025, the highest number ever recorded[3][4].

Chronologically, the authorities carried out 196 executions in 2022, including the execution of 81 individuals in a single day in March, and resumed executions for drug-related offenses in November of that same year. The number fell to 172 in 2023, before surging to between 338 and 345 in 2024. In 2025, at least 356 executions were recorded, the highest number ever, including 243 executions in drug-related cases.. As for 2026, at least 188 executions had been recorded by 17 October, exceeding the full-year total for any previous year.
In 2026, human rights organizations tracked the increase in executions at different stages: Amnesty International documented 96 executions by 22 June, including 61 were for drug-related cases[5].The European Saudi Organization for Human Rights (ESOHR) documented 108 executions during the first half of the year[6], a figure that rose to 116 by 27 July[7]. By 5 October, the total had reached at least 175 executions, according to Amnesty International, including 94 foreign nationals from more than twenty countries[8]. The total then reached to at least 188 following the mass execution carried out on 17 October 2026[9].

2.2 Cumulative Toll Since 2015

The number of executions since King Salman assumed power in January 2015 has exceeded the 2,000 mark[10], while Amnesty International recorded 2,084 executions between January 2014 and June 2026[11]. Notably, it took 6 years (2015 - 2021) for the first 1,000 executions to be carried out, whereas the second 1,000 were carried out in only about four years, representing an acceleration of approximately 50%[12].

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[2] Agence France-Presse, “Saudi Arabia executes seven people in a day”, 12 April 2026.
[3] ALQST for Human Rights, “Highest execution toll ever recorded in Saudi Arabia: at least 356 individuals executed in 2025”, 9 January 2026.
[4] Human Rights Watch, “Saudi Arabia: Record Number of Executions in 2025”, 23 January 2026.
[5] Amnesty International, “Saudi Arabia: Almost 100 people executed this year for drug-related offences”, 22 June 2026.
[6] European Saudi Organisation for Human Rights, “108: Saudi Executions in the First Half of 2026”, July 2026.
[7] Human Rights Watch, “Saudi Arabia: New Executions of Ethiopian Migrants”, 29 July 2026.
[8] Amnesty International, ”Saudi Arabia: Death sentence against Sri Lankan migrant worker over social media post must be quashed”, October 2026.
[9] European Saudi Organisation for Human Rights, “Statement: Saudi Arabia carries out an unjust mass execution of political prisoners, including a minor”, 17 October 2026.
[10] World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, “ Saudi Arabia executions surpass 2,000 under King Salman’s reign”, 20 April 2026.
[11] Amnesty International, “Saudi Arabia: Almost 100 people executed this year for drug-related offences”, 22 June 2026.
[12] Human Rights Watch, “Saudi Arabia: Surge in Executions Over a Decade”, 22 August 2026.

2.3 Distribution of Executions by Crime Type and Nationality

The data indicate that the majority of executions concern crimes that do not involve intentional killing. According to a Human Rights Watch's analysis of data from the past decade, murder cases account for only about 43.9% of all executions, compared with approximately 56.1% for crimes that do not meet the threshold of the "most serious crimes" under international law. Non-lethal drug-related offenses account for approximately 35% of all executions since 2015, however, their share rose to approximately 67% in 2025. Furthermore, approximately 14% of executions are linked to politically motivated charges, and more than half of the death sentences carried out fall under the category of discretionary punishments[13].

Other indicators reveal further patterns in these executions. From 2015 to April 2026, approximately 845 foreign nationals were executed, comprising 34 different nationalities and representing around 42% of the total. In addition, 41 women were executed during the same period[14]. In 2025 alone, 202 foreign nationals were executed, 94% of whom had been convicted of non-lethal drug offenses. Furthermore, 97 executions were carried out in cases involving cannabis, compared with 15 in 2024[15]. Since 2015, at least 18 people had been executed for alleged acts committed when they were children, as of October 2026, while the European Saudi Organisation for Human Rights documented at least 14 political executions in 2026.[16].

It is worth noting that the Sanad Human Rights Organization recorded 15 political executions in 2026[17], while the European Saudi Organization for Human Rights recorded 14. This discrepancy reflects differences in the classification criteria used by the organizations.

3. Saudi Legal Framework

3.1. Absence of a Codified Penal Code

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia does not have a unified, comprehensive, and codified penal code that comprehensively and in advance defines criminal offences and the penalties prescribed for

[13] Human Rights Watch, "Saudi Arabia: Surge in Executions Over a Decade", 22 August 2026.
[14] Human Rights Watch, "Saudi Arabia: Surge in Executions Over a Decade", 22 August 2026.
[15] Death Penalty Information Center, " Saudi Arabia Records Historic Number of Executions for the Second Consecutive Year", 6 January 2026.
[16] European Saudi Organisation for Human Rights, "Statement: Saudi Arabia carries out an unjust mass execution of political prisoners, including a minor", 17 October 2026.
[17] SANAD Human Rights Organization, "Saudi Arabia Carries Out Mass Execution of Five Political Detainees, Bringing Political Executions to 15 in 2026", 19 October 2026.

them. Criminal courts rely on judicial interpretation of the provisions of Islamic Sharia, alongside a number of specific laws and regulations. Punishments are generally classified into three categories:

- Hudud: Punishments prescribed under Islamic law for specific offences, some of which carry the death penalty, such as hirabah (banditry).
- Qisas: Applied in cases of intentional killing, allowing the victim's heirs to grant a pardon or accept blood money (diyah).
- Ta'zir: Discretionary punishments for which no specific punishment is prescribed in Islamic law, determined by the judge or established by the regulator.

3.2. Ta'zir Executions (Discretionary Punishments)

Ta'zir executions lie at the heart of the legal problem with Saudi Arabia's practices, as they grant judges discretionary powers to impose the most severe punishments without clear, predetermined legal standards. This conflicts with the principle of legality in criminal law ("no crime or punishment without a legal provision"), as well as the requirements of legal certainty. In many of its statements, the Ministry of Interior explicitly announces that a sentence was carried out as a ta'zor punishment, as in the execution of seven individuals in drug-related cases on 12 April 2026[18], and the mass execution of five political prisoners on 17 October 2026[19]. According to Human Rights Watch, ta'zir sentences account for more than half of the death sentences carried out since 2015[20].

3.3. Anti-Narcotics Law and Anti-Terrorism Law

The Law on Combating Narcotics permits the death penalty for drug smuggling offences. The Anti-Terrorism Law contains broad definitions of terrorism that extend to peaceful acts, such as participating in protests and expressing opinions online. It has been used primarily to issue death sentences against dissidents and protesters, particularly those from the Eastern Province. During its fourth Universal Periodic Review, Saudi Arabia merely "noted" most recommendations calling for amendments to its counterterrorism legislation[21].

[18] Agence France-Presse, "Saudi Arabia executes seven people in a day", 12 April 2026.
[19] Ministry of Interior, "Statement on the execution of discretionary death penalties against five individuals in the Eastern Province", Saudi Press Agency, 17 October 2026.
[20] Human Rights Watch, "Saudi Arabia: Surge in Executions Over a Decade", 22 August 2026.
[21] MENA Rights Group, "Saudi Arabia responds to its fourth Universal Periodic Review: 273 recommendations accepted with significant gaps remaining", 4 July 2027.

3.4. The Specialized Criminal Court

The Specialized Criminal Court was established in 2008 to hear terrorism cases. However, human rights organizations have documented how it has become a tool for prosecuting activists, dissidents and members of the Shia minority. Its proceedings are characterized by secrecy, and its rulings often rely on confessions that defendants say were extracted under duress. The court has issued death sentences in several of the most prominent cases covered in this report, including those of Abdulla Al-Durazi, Ali Al-Subaiti and Hasan Al-Faraj[22][23][24].

3.5. The Juvenile Law and 2020 Announcement: Promises vs. Implementation

The Juvenile Law was issued in 2018 and stipulates that the period of detention in a juvenile facility must not exceed ten years for offences punishable by ta'zir death sentences. In 2020, the Saudi Human Rights Commission announced that a royal order had been issued to halt the implementation of ta'zir death sentences against individuals who committed their offences as minors. It later confirmed that "no one in Saudi Arabia will be executed for a crime they committed as a minor." [25] However, this announcement did not cover hudud and qisas offences, and these measures did not prevent subsequent executions of juvenile offenders. According to data from Human Rights Watch, 13 of the 17 people executed for crimes committed during childhood between 2015 and April 2026 were executed after the Juvenile Law was issued in 2018[26].

3.6. Resumption of Drug-Related Executions

In January 2021, the Saudi Human Rights Commission announced the suspension of the death penalty for drug-related cases[27]. However, carrying out these sentences in November 2022 without any official announcement that the suspension has ended, following a halt that lasted nearly 21 months[28]. Since then, these executions have risen sharply to become the largest

[22] Human Rights Watch, "Saudi Arabia: Wave of Executions Against Child Offenders", 20 October 2026.
[23] ALQST for Human Rights, "Saudi Arabia executes third child offender in eight months", 10 April 2026.
[24] MENA Rights Group, case file of Hasan Zaki Al-Faraj.
[25] ALQST for Human Rights, "Saudi Arabia executes another child offender, in flagrant violation of international law", 21 October 2025.
[26] Human Rights Watch, "Saudi Arabia: Surge in Executions Over a Decade", 22 August 2026.
[27] Human Rights Watch, "Saudi Arabia: Surge in Executions Over a Decade", 22 August 2026.
[28] European Saudi Organisation for Human Rights, "UN experts call on Saudi Arabia to immediately halt drug executions", 2022.

category of executions carried out. This represents a clear reversal of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's 2018 pledge to significantly reduce the use of the death penalty.

4. International Legal Framework

4.1 The "Most Serious Crimes" Standard

International law does not yet absolutely prohibit the death penalty. However, it imposes strict restrictions on its use in countries that have not abolished it, most notably limiting it to the "most serious crimes" (Article 6(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights). In its General Comment No. 36, the Human Rights Committee interpreted this standard as applying only to crimes of extreme gravity involving intentional killing. It explicitly confirmed that drug offences and crimes that do not directly and intentionally result in death cannot serve as a basis for imposing the death penalty[29]. The 1984 Economic and Social Council Safeguards also uphold the same standard (Safeguard 1), alongside guarantees of a fair trial and the right to seek a pardon or commutation of the sentence (Safeguards 5 and 7) [30].

4.2. The Kingdom's Treaty Obligations

Although the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has not acceded to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, it is a party to several international and regional conventions directly relevant to the death penalty.

Article 37(a) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child prohibits the imposition of the death penalty for offences committed by persons under the age of 18, without exception. Article 2 of the Convention against Torture absolutely prohibits torture, while Article 15 requires the exclusion from evidence of any statements established to have been obtained through torture. The Arab Charter on Human Rights limits the death penalty to crimes of extreme gravity under Article 6, restricts its imposition on persons under the age of 18 under Article 7, and guarantees fair trial safeguards under Articles 13 and 16. Meanwhile, Article 36 of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations requires that a detained foreign national be informed without delay of their right to communicate with their consular authorities and be enabled to exercise that right.

[29] UN Human Rights Committee, General comment No. 36: Article 6, Right to life (CCPR/C/GC/36), 3 September 2019.

[30] UN Economic and Social Council, Safeguards guaranteeing protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty (Resolution 1984/50), 25 May 1984.

These obligations are derived from the provisions of the conventions themselves[31][32][33][34]. It should be noted that Article 7 of the Arab Charter contains an exception that refers to the legislation in force at the time the crime was committed. However, this exception does not override the absolute prohibition established by the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

4.3. Customary International Law

Saudi Arabia's failure to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights does not release it from its obligations in this regard. The right to life and the prohibition of arbitrary deprivation of life form part of customary international law, which is binding on all states regardless of whether they have ratified treaties. The prohibition of torture is also a peremptory norm of international law from which no derogation is permitted. The prohibition of executing juvenile offenders is likewise a well-established rule of customary international law.

4.4 General Assembly Resolutions on the Moratorium

Since 2007, the United Nations General Assembly has adopted a series of resolutions calling for a moratorium on the use of the death penalty as a step towards its abolition.[35] These resolutions have received increasing support from Member States. According to the latest statistics published by Amnesty International in May 2026, covering the situation as of 31 December 2025, 145 countries have abolished the death penalty in law or in practice, including 113 countries that have abolished it for all crimes.[36] In this context, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is moving in the opposite direction to the international trend. It has neither abolished the death penalty nor announced any official moratorium on executions.[37]

5. Main Patterns of Violations

[31] UN General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of the Child (Resolution 44/25), 20 November 1989, Article 37(a).
[32] UN General Assembly, Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, 10 December 1984, Articles 2 and 15.
[33] League of Arab States, Arab Charter on Human Rights, 2004, Articles 6, 7, 13 and 16.
[34] United Nations, Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, 24 April 1963, Article 36.
[35] United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 62/149 on the Moratorium on the Use of the Death Penalty, 18 December 2007, and subsequent resolutions bearing the same title.
[36] Amnesty International, "Death Sentences and Executions in 2025," 18 May 2026.
[37] World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, "Saudi Arabia Has Not Abolished the Death Penalty" (Country Profile).

5.1 Drug-Related Executions and Foreign Nationals

Drug-related executions constitute the most prominent pattern in Saudi Arabia's current practice, and such offences fall outside the scope of the "most serious crimes." This includes hashish cases, in which 97 executions were carried out in 2025 alone, compared to 15 executions in 2024.[38] Foreign nationals bear the greatest burden of these executions. They are mostly poor migrant workers from Ethiopia, Pakistan, Somalia, Nigeria, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen and other countries. An analysis by ALQST for Human Rights indicates that these individuals are usually at the bottom of trafficking networks and are exploited because of their economic vulnerability, while high-level traffickers are rarely prosecuted.[39] In a report published in July 2025, Amnesty International condemned the horrifying increase in the execution of foreign nationals convicted of drug-related crimes, often following grossly unfair trials.[40] Foreigners accounted for approximately 42% of all executions since 2015[41] and 54% of executions in the first half of 2026.[42]

The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, in its opinion issued in March 2026 concerning three Egyptian nationals sentenced to death in drug cases, expressed concern about the systematic denial of procedural safeguards to foreign nationals, noting that this may explain their disproportionate representation among those sentenced to death. It called on Saudi Arabia to reinstate the moratorium on drug-related executions.[43]

Case Study (1): Ethiopian Migrants

In April 2026, Human Rights Watch warned that at least 65 Ethiopian migrants were at imminent risk of execution on drug-related charges, following the execution of three Ethiopians by the authorities on 21 April 2026 for "participating in hashish smuggling".[44] Executions continued despite this warning. Five more Ethiopians were executed on 23 June, followed by another five on 27 July 2026. This brought the number of Ethiopians executed in drug-related

[38] Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC), "Saudi Arabia Records Historic Number of Executions for Second Consecutive Year," 6 January 2026, citing data from the European Saudi Organization for Human Rights (ESOHR).
[39] ALQST for Human Rights, "Analysis: Why Is Saudi Arabia Carrying Out So Many Executions, Particularly of Foreign Nationals, in Drug-Related Cases?"
[40] Amnesty International, "Saudi Arabia: New Report Condemns Alarming Surge in Executions, Including of Foreign Nationals Convicted of Drug-Related Offences," July 2025.
[41] Human Rights Watch, "Saudi Arabia: Executions Surge Over a Decade," 21 April 2026.
[42] European Saudi Organization for Human Rights (ESOHR), "108: Saudi Arabia's Executions in the First Half of 2026."
[43] ALQST for Human Rights and MENA Rights Group, "Working Group on Arbitrary Detention Finds the Detention of Three Egyptian Nationals Sentenced to Death in Saudi Arabia to Be Arbitrary," 23 March 2026.
[44] Human Rights Watch, "Saudi Arabia: Halt Imminent Executions of Ethiopian Migrants," 29 April 2026.

cases since the beginning of the year to at least 17, while at least 79 others remained at imminent risk of execution.[45]

Testimonies collected by Human Rights Watch revealed serious violations in the trial of the five men executed on 27 July, all of whom were from the Tigray region. They were arrested after unknowingly crossing the border while carrying a package for a Yemeni man. They were detained for more than three years at Khamis Mushait detention facility before being brought to trial. Their trial consisted of only three hearings, each lasting between three and twenty minutes. Two hearings were held remotely, they had no access to a lawyer, and an interpreter was present at only two hearings. They were also forced to sign documents written in Arabic, which they could not read.[46] The organization also documented cases in which smugglers forced migrants to carry drugs as a condition for facilitating their crossing from Yemen.[47]

Case Study (2): Husain Abu Al-Khair

Husain Abu al-Khair is a Jordanian national convicted of drug smuggling and executed in March 2023, despite the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention having found his detention to be arbitrary and called for his release, as well as allegations that his confession had been extracted under torture.[48] His case illustrates the authorities' repeated disregard for the opinions of UN mechanisms. In their 2026 statement marking the World Day Against the Death Penalty, UN experts included him among those executed despite the issuance of opinions finding their detention arbitrary.[49]

5.2 Execution of Juvenile Offenders

Despite the official announcement made in 2020, the authorities carried out at least four executions within just fourteen months against individuals convicted of acts they were alleged to have committed as children. All four belonged to the Shia minority in the Eastern Province and were convicted in cases related to participation in protests.

Jalal al-Labbad was executed on 21 August 2025 on charges related to participation in protests while he was a minor, despite the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention having found his detention to be arbitrary. He was followed by Abdulla Al-Durazi, who was executed on 20 October 2025. He had been arrested in August 2014 and sentenced by the Specialized Criminal

[45] Human Rights Watch, “Saudi Arabia: New Executions of Ethiopian Migrants,” 29 July 2026.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Human Rights Watch, “Saudi Arabia: Halt Imminent Executions of Ethiopian Migrants,” 29 April 2026.
[48] European Saudi Organization for Human Rights (ESOHR), “UN Experts Call on Saudi Arabia to Immediately Halt Drug-Related Executions” (regarding the case of Husain Abu al-Khair).
[49] UN Experts, Joint Statement on the World Day Against the Death Penalty, 10 October 2026.

Court in February 2018 on protest-related charges for acts he was alleged to have committed at the age of seventeen. His execution was the 300th carried out in 2025, and his family learned of it through the media.

On 9 April 2026, Ali Al-Subaiti was executed alongside his uncle, Mostafa Al-Subaiti, on charges including participation in protests in 2011, when he was twelve years old. He had previously spent nine months in solitary confinement and had been subjected to torture. Hasan Zaki Al-Faraj was then executed on 17 October 2026 on charges related to participation in protests and funerals between 2011 and 2012, when he was fourteen or fifteen years old, despite the Working Group having found his detention to be arbitrary in Opinion No. 71/2024.

These facts are based on reports by Amnesty International[50], ALQST[51], Human Rights Watch[52] and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.[53] With the execution of Hasan Al-Faraj, the number of people executed in Saudi Arabia since 2015 for acts they were alleged to have committed as children has risen to at least 18.[54]

The Case of Hasan Zaki Al-Faraj

Hasan Al-Faraj was arrested on 29 June 2017 in Qatif. Documented information indicates that he was subjected to beatings and electric shocks, held in solitary confinement for nearly three months, denied access to a lawyer during the first three years of his detention, and forced to make confessions under duress.

His trial before the Specialized Criminal Court began in October 2020. He was sentenced to death on 3 October 2022, and the Specialized Criminal Court of Appeal upheld the sentence on 4 November 2022.[55] [56] On 15 November 2024, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention adopted Opinion No. 71/2024, finding his detention to be arbitrary and calling for his release

[50] Amnesty International, “Saudi Arabia: Shocking Execution Exposes False Promise to Halt the Use of the Death Penalty Against Juveniles,” August 2025.
[51] ALQST for Human Rights, “Saudi Arabia Executes Third Juvenile Offender in Eight Months,” 10 April 2026.
[52] Human Rights Watch, “Saudi Arabia: Wave of Executions of Child Offenders,” 20 October 2025.
[53] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), “Saudi Arabia: UN Experts Condemn Execution of Man Convicted of Crimes Committed as a Child and Warn of Imminent Risk to Two Others,” 23 October 2026.
[54] European Saudi Organization for Human Rights (ESOHR), “Statement: Saudi Arabia Carries Out Unjust Mass Execution of Political Prisoners, Including a Juvenile,” October 2026.

[55] MENA Rights Group, Hasan Zaki Al-Faraj Case File.

[56]European Saudi Organization for Human Rights (ESOHR), “Statement: Saudi Arabia Carries Out Unjust Mass Execution of Political Prisoners, Including a Juvenile,” October 2026.

and compensation.[57] Despite this, the death sentence was carried out without prior notice on 17 October 2026.

UN experts expressed their "outrage" at this execution, stressing that "executing a person for a crime committed as a child is absolutely prohibited under international law". They also noted that the 2020 Royal Order had failed to put an end to these executions.[58]

Juvenile Offenders at Risk of Execution

In October 2026, Saudi Arabia's Supreme Court upheld the death sentences against five political detainees: Yusuf Al-Manasif, Ali Al-Mabioq, Mohamed Labbad, Ahmed Al-Dagham, and Mohamed Al-Faraj. Following this judicial confirmation, the sentences became final and no longer subject to appeal, with only the King's approval remaining before they could be carried out. Several of these individuals face an imminent risk of execution at any moment for acts they were alleged to have committed during childhood. They include:

- **Yusuf Al-Manasif:** He was fifteen or sixteen years old during the 2011–2012 protests, and reports indicate that the Supreme Court upheld his death sentence.[59]
- **Mohamed Labbad:** Reports indicate that the Supreme Court upheld his death sentence, and UN experts have warned that his life is at imminent risk.[60]
- **Jawad Qureiris, Mahdi Al-Mohsen and Ali Al-Mabyouq:** The European Saudi Organization for Human Rights (ESOHR) identifies them among documented juvenile offenders at risk of execution.[61]
- **Abdulla Al-Huwaiti:** He was arrested at the age of fourteen[62] and received a second death sentence in March 2022 after the Supreme Court overturned his initial sentence. This was despite credible allegations that his confession had been extracted under torture. He was also included in the 2026 statement by UN experts among those sentenced to death.[63]

[57] MENA Rights Group, Hasan Zaki Al-Faraj Case File.
[58] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Saudi Arabia: UN Experts Condemn Execution of Man Convicted of Crimes Committed as a Child and Warn of Imminent Risk to Two Others," 23 October 2026.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] European Saudi Organization for Human Rights (ESOHR), "Statement: Saudi Arabia Carries Out Unjust Mass Execution of Political Prisoners, Including a Juvenile," October 2026.
[62] Amnesty International, "Arrested at the Age of 14, Tortured and Now Facing Imminent Execution," June 2022.

[63] UN Experts, Joint Statement on the World Day Against the Death Penalty, 10 October 2026.

These executions and death sentences constitute clear violations of Article 37 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and Saudi Arabia's own Juvenile Law. In September 2025, UN experts affirmed that executing individuals for crimes committed when they were children constitutes an arbitrary deprivation of life.[64]

5.3 Political Executions and Freedom of Expression

The authorities use the death penalty as a tool to silence dissent, particularly in cases involving the Eastern Province and the Shia minority, by bringing broadly worded "terrorism" charges before the Specialized Criminal Court. The European Saudi Organization for Human Rights (ESOHR) documented at least 14 political executions in 2026,[65] in addition to 49 prisoners of conscience or individuals charged in connection with freedom of expression who are at risk of execution.[66]

The Mass Execution on 17 October 2026

On 17 October 2026, the Ministry of Interior announced the execution of five men in the Eastern Province under ta'zir (discretionary punishment). They were: Hasan Zaki Mohamed Al-Faraj, Mohamed Munir Mohamed Al-Zaher, Ali Rab Al-Hussein Al-Sheikh, Reda Mohamed Ali Al-Abu Abdulla, and Ali Hasan Ahmed Al-Rabah.[67]

The Ministry's statement collectively attributed several charges to them, including joining a foreign terrorist organisation, opening fire on security personnel, their facilities and vehicles, possessing weapons and ammunition, and financing and supporting terrorist operations. However, it did not specify the acts attributed to each individual, nor did it include any charge of intentional killing.[68]

This was the largest execution of its kind in 2026 and raises significant legal concerns. The charges did not involve murder, meaning that they do not meet the threshold of the "most serious crimes" under international law. The sentences were issued under ta'zir, rather than qisas or hadd, meaning they were based on judicial discretion. One of those executed, Hasan

[64] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Saudi Arabia Must Stop Executing Individuals Convicted of Crimes Committed as Minors: UN Experts," 5 September 2025.
[65] European Saudi Organization for Human Rights (ESOHR), "Statement: Saudi Arabia Carries Out Unjust Mass Execution of Political Prisoners, Including a Juvenile," October 2026.
[66] European Saudi Organization for Human Rights (ESOHR), "108: Saudi Arabia's Executions in the First Half of 2026."
[67] Saudi Ministry of Interior, Statement on the Implementation of Ta'zir Death Sentences Against Five Individuals in the Eastern Province, 17 October 2026.
[68] European Saudi Organization for Human Rights (ESOHR), "Statement: Saudi Arabia Carries Out Unjust Mass Execution of Political Prisoners, Including a Juvenile," October 2026.

Al-Faraj, was a minor at the time of the alleged acts under Saudi Arabia's own Juvenile Law. He was the second documented juvenile offender executed in 2026, following Ali Al-Subaiti.[69]

Through individuals close to them, the families of the five executed men reported that their sons had been subjected to harsh treatment before, during, and after their executions, including:

1. The executed men were not allowed to write their wills before their executions.
2. They were not allowed to meet their families or say goodbye to them.
3. Their families learned of their sons' executions unexpectedly through the media, without any prior notification or psychological preparation, particularly the mothers.
4. The families were prevented from receiving mourners in their homes, and community leaders, religious figures, and mental health professionals were barred from visiting them to provide support.
5. The families were prevented from receiving condolences by telephone or messaging applications and were informed that they were under surveillance.
6. Websites that document the names of deceased individuals on a daily basis were prevented from listing the names of the five men.
7. The bodies were buried in an undisclosed location in the desert near Dammam Prison, without being handed over to their families.

These testimonies are based on information reported by human rights[70] and opposition groups citing the families of the executed men.[71] They could not be independently verified due to restrictions on access to information inside the Kingdom.

Other Cases

- **Saud Al-Faraj:** In 2021, the Public Prosecution called for his execution under hadd punishment on charges of hirabah (banditry). He was executed in June 2026, despite the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention having found his detention to be arbitrary.[72]
- **Mohamed Al-Ghamdi:** A retired teacher who was sentenced to death in 2023 over tweets and videos he posted on YouTube, in one of the most serious cases of criminalizing digital expression. In November 2024, Amnesty International reported that

[69] Ibid.
[70] "Human Rights Organisation Reports the Execution of Five Political Detainees, Including a Juvenile," October 2026.
[71] "Opposition Group Reports the Carrying Out of Political Executions Against Five Detainees," October 2026.
[72] European Saudi Organization for Human Rights (ESOHR), "108: Saudi Arabia's Executions in the First Half of 2026."

his sentence had been reduced following a retrial.[73] Nevertheless, his case demonstrates the Saudi judiciary's willingness to impose the death penalty for peaceful expression.

- **Anujan Sivarasa:** A 24-year-old Sri Lankan migrant worker who was arrested in July 2026 over a Facebook comment deemed offensive to the Prophet Muhammad, despite having deleted it and published a video apologizing. After the Criminal Court in Al-Ahsa sentenced him to five years in prison and a fine of SAR 3 million, the Eastern Province Court of Appeal increased his sentence to death under hadd punishment on 17 September 2026.[74] [75] On 14 October 2026, Sri Lanka's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs reported that the Saudi Supreme Court had overturned the death sentence.[76]

Mass Executions as a Recurring Pattern

The authorities have repeatedly resorted to carrying out mass executions on a single day. Notable examples include the execution of 47 people in January 2016, 37 people in April 2019, and 81 people in March 2022, the largest mass execution in the Kingdom's history.

This pattern continued in 2026, with seven people executed in drug-related cases on 12 April[77] and five political prisoners executed on 17 October.[78] Mass executions raise particular concerns because they often involve defendants tried through secret proceedings and subjected to collective charges that fail to establish each individual's responsibility.

5.4 Violation of Fair Trial Guarantees

Human rights reports confirm that the official execution figures announced by Saudi Arabia do not reflect the actual scale of executions due to a policy of systematic secrecy and the lack of judicial transparency. They point to the existence of “secret executions” and cases that remain entirely undocumented behind closed doors,[79] leaving hundreds of detainees in a human rights “blind spot”. This is due to families’ fear of being harassed or arrested on charges of damaging the state’s reputation if they inform international organizations, as well as their being given false official promises of a settlement in exchange for remaining silent. As a result of this

[73] Amnesty International, “Urgent Action: Death Sentence Commuted for Social Media Posts: Mohammed bin Nasser al-Ghamdi,” Document No. MDE 23/8746/2024, 13 November 2024.
[74] Human Rights Watch, “Saudi Arabia: Death Sentence for Facebook Comment,” 13 October 2026.
[75] Amnesty International, “Saudi Arabia: Death Sentence Against Sri Lankan Migrant Worker for Social Media Post Must Be Quashed,” October 2026.
[76] Human Rights Watch, “Saudi Arabia: Death Sentence for Facebook Comment,” 13 October 2026.
[77] Agence France-Presse (AFP), “Saudi Arabia Executes Seven People in One Day,” 13 April 2026.
[78] European Saudi Organization for Human Rights (ESOHR), “Statement: Saudi Arabia Carries Out Unjust Mass Execution of Political Prisoners, Including a Juvenile,” October 2026.
[79] BBC, “Secret Executions in Saudi Arabia Leave Families in the Dark About the Fate of Their Loved Ones,” January 2023.

intimidation, the authorities carry out many death sentences without prior notification to families or lawyers. Relatives are instead taken by surprise when they learn of the executions through brief statements issued by the Ministry of Interior. This is accompanied by the continued withholding of bodies and the denial of families' right to bury their loved ones, making it impossible to document the actual charges and legal violations in an unknown number of cases.

Serious violations of fair trial guarantees are repeatedly found in documented cases, rendering the death sentences issued in these cases arbitrary under international law. The most notable violations include:

- **Confessions extracted under torture:** Courts rely on confessions that defendants say were extracted under torture, without investigating these allegations, as in the cases of Hasan Al-Faraj, Ali Al-Subaiti, and Husain Abu Al-Khair.[80] [81] [82]
- **Prolonged solitary confinement:** Defendants are held in isolation from the outside world for months during interrogation, as in the case of Ali Al-Subaiti, who was held in solitary confinement for nine months.[83]
- **Denial of access to a lawyer:** Defendants are denied legal representation during the investigation stage and, in some cases, throughout the trial, as in the case of the Ethiopian migrants.[84]
- **Lack of adequate interpretation:** Foreign defendants are tried in a language they do not understand and forced to sign documents in Arabic without knowing their contents.[85]
- **Denial of consular notification and communication:** Foreign detainees are not informed of their right to contact their consulates, in violation of Article 36 of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations.[86]
- **Secrecy of executions and withholding of bodies:** Executions are carried out without prior notification to families or lawyers, and bodies are withheld and not handed over for burial, as in the most recent mass execution.[87]

[80] MENA Rights Group, Hasan Zaki Al-Faraj Case File.
[81] ALQST for Human Rights, "Saudi Arabia Executes Third Juvenile Offender in Eight Months," 10 April 2026.
[82] European Saudi Organization for Human Rights (ESOHR), "UN Experts Call on Saudi Arabia to Immediately Halt Drug-Related Executions" (regarding the case of Husaiin Abu al-Khair).
[83] ALQST for Human Rights, "Saudi Arabia Executes Third Juvenile Offender in Eight Months," 10 April 2026.
[84] Human Rights Watch, "Saudi Arabia: New Executions of Ethiopian Migrants," 29 July 2026.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, 1963, Article 36.
[87] "Human Rights Organisation Reports the Execution of Five Political Detainees, Including a Juvenile," October 2026.

6. Positions and Mechanisms of the United Nations

6.1 Experts' Statement on the World Day Against the Death Penalty

United Nations experts issued a joint statement on 10 October 2026, marking the World Day Against the Death Penalty, calling for an immediate halt to executions and concrete steps towards abolishing the death penalty. The experts expressed grave concern over death sentences issued in cases involving serious violations of fair trial guarantees and due process. They stressed that, in countries that retain the death penalty, it must only be imposed within the narrow scope of the most serious crimes, namely intentional killing. They also expressed concern over its continued use for political offences, blasphemy, and drug-related crimes.[88]

6.2 Opinions of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention

In the same statement, the experts reviewed opinions issued by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention over the past five years concerning individuals in Saudi Arabia who had been sentenced to death or executed, despite the Working Group having concluded that their deprivation of liberty was arbitrary.[89]

Those executed despite the issuance of these opinions include Husain Abu Al-Khair, Jalal Al-Labbad, Abdulla Al-Durazi, and Saud Al-Faraj. Those who had been sentenced to death at the time the statement was issued were Abdulla Al-Huwaiti, Mohamed Al-Ghamdi, Yusuf Al-Manasif, Jawad Qureiris, Hasan Zaki Al-Faraj, Mohamed Labbad, and Mohamed Al-Faraj.

Less than a week after the statement was issued, Hasan Zaki Al-Faraj, one of the individuals named on the list of those sentenced to death, was executed on 17 October 2026. This highlights that the main challenge, as noted by organizations participating in a side event during the 62nd session of the Human Rights Council in June 2026, is not the lack of engagement by UN mechanisms, but Saudi Arabia's repeated failure to implement their opinions.[90]

6.3 Communications from Special Rapporteurs

The Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, the Special Rapporteur on torture, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and

[88] UN Experts, Joint Statement on the World Day Against the Death Penalty, 10 October 2026.
[89] Ibid.
[90] MENA Rights Group, "UN Side Event Highlights the Intersection of the Death Penalty in Saudi Arabia with Torture and Arbitrary Executions," 29 June 2026.

protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism have sent several communications and statements to the Saudi government concerning individual cases. In their statement issued on 23 October 2026, these experts, together with members of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, stressed that imposing or carrying out the death penalty in violation of fair trial guarantees, including by relying on confessions extracted under torture, constitutes a violation of the absolute prohibition of torture. They called for an immediate halt to executions and for the retrial of those sentenced to death.[91] On previous occasions, the experts also expressed concern that executions in Saudi Arabia are carried out without prior warning and are only announced after they have taken place.[92]

6.4 Universal Periodic Review and Treaty Bodies

During the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in January 2024, Saudi Arabia received 354 recommendations from 135 countries and stated that it supported 273 of them.[93] [94] However, it merely "noted" the recommendations calling for the abolition of the death penalty or the announcement of a moratorium on executions, meaning that it did not commit to implementing them. According to Amnesty International, Saudi Arabia accepted only one of the 22 recommendations concerning the death penalty.[95] It also partially accepted recommendations concerning the abolition of the execution of children, claiming that they had been "partially implemented" through the enactment of the Juvenile Law, a claim contradicted by subsequent executions.

In its concluding observations on Saudi Arabia, the Committee on the Rights of the Child addressed the execution of individuals for crimes committed before they reached the age of 18, as well as the use of coerced confessions in cases involving children sentenced to death. The Committee against Torture also expressed concern over confessions extracted under coercion and called for guarantees that such confessions would not be admitted as evidence in judicial proceedings, except when used as evidence against individuals accused of committing torture.

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[91] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Saudi Arabia: UN Experts Condemn Execution of Man Convicted of Crimes Committed as a Child and Warn of Imminent Risk to Two Others," 23 October 2026.

[92] European Saudi Organization for Human Rights (ESOHR), "UN Experts Call on Saudi Arabia to Immediately Halt Drug-Related Executions" (regarding the case of Husain Abu al-Khair).

[93] MENA Rights Group, "Saudi Arabia Responds to Its Fourth Universal Periodic Review: 273 Recommendations Accepted, with Major Gaps Remaining," 4 July 2024.

[94] Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Saudi Arabia – Addendum (Views of the State under Review on the Conclusions and Recommendations), Document No. A/HRC/56/4/Add.1, July 2024.

[95] Amnesty International, "The Use of the Death Penalty in Saudi Arabia Is Escalating," Document No. MDE 23/8623/2024, 10 October 2024.

The participation of Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB) in the Human Rights Council has placed particular focus on the death penalty in Saudi Arabia. The organization highlighted the record increase in executions and warned about the growing use of the death penalty against children for alleged crimes committed when they were minors, including the cases of Abdulla Al-Durazi and Jalal Al-Labbad. It also highlighted the lack of transparency, the failure to provide even the most basic fair trial guarantees, and the use of counter-terrorism legislation and torture to extract forced confessions.

Reports and statements issued by ADHRB and partner human rights organizations have also addressed the expanded use of the death penalty for offences that are not classified as "the most serious crimes" under international law, particularly drug-related offences and the peaceful exercise of freedom of expression or participation in protests.[96] They explained that these practices have affected vulnerable groups, including dissidents, activists, foreign workers, and women. They called on the Council and Member States to exert serious pressure on the Saudi authorities to immediately halt executions, prohibit the execution of children, and comply with international human rights standards as a step towards the complete abolition of the death penalty.

In this context, ADHRB emphasised in its reports and analyses of the outcomes of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) that Saudi Arabia's failure to implement UN recommendations highlights systematic legal gaps in national legislation. Despite the enactment of the Juvenile Law, exceptions under Article 16 leave children at risk of the death penalty in qisas and hadd cases.[97] The organization also explained how counter-terrorism laws and the Specialized Criminal Court are used to impose death sentences for non-lethal offences linked to peaceful activities or the expression of opinions online. The lack of transparency in disclosing the actual number of individuals sentenced to death further highlights the need for continued international monitoring and for Saudi Arabia to enact a penal code that complies with international standards.

6.5 Systematic Executions as a Possible Crime Against Humanity

In their statement marking the World Day Against the Death Penalty, UN experts warned that the widespread or systematic use of the death penalty in violation of fundamental rules of international law may constitute murder as a crime against humanity.[98] This warning is

[96] Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB), "Joint Statement by Human Rights Organisations: Saudi Arabia Must Immediately Halt All Executions and Honour Its Commitments to Those Sentenced for Crimes Committed as Minors and Those Charged in Drug-Related Cases," 14 November 2025.
[97] Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB), "Saudi Arabia's Universal Periodic Review Analysis: New Recommendations and Expected Developments – The Death Penalty (Part II)," 21 February 2024.
[98] UN Experts, Joint Statement on the World Day Against the Death Penalty, 10 October 2026.

particularly significant in light of the unprecedented scale of executions in Saudi Arabia, their recurring nature, and the targeting of specific groups

7. Official Discourse versus Reality

7.1 Reform Promises under Vision 2030

Under “Vision 2030”, the Saudi authorities present the country as moving towards reform and openness. In 2018, Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman pledged to significantly reduce the use of the death penalty. He later stated in an interview with The Atlantic in March 2022 that the death penalty had been limited to cases of intentional killing.[99] However, the reality reveals a wide gap between this discourse and actual practice.

While the Crown Prince pledged in 2018 to reduce the use of executions, the number rose from 196 in 2022 to 356 in 2025, reaching 188 by mid-October 2026. While it was announced in 2020 that no one would be executed for a crime committed as a minor, Jalal Al-Labbad and Abdulla Al-DUrazi were executed in 2025, followed by Ali Al-Subaiti and Hasan Al-Faraj in 2026. While a suspension of drug-related executions was announced in 2021, these executions quietly resumed in 2022, accounting for approximately 67% of all executions in 2025. While the Crown Prince stated in 2022 that the death penalty was limited to intentional killing, 56.1% of executions since 2015 have been carried out for crimes that did not involve killing. Finally, although Saudi Arabia accepted approximately 83% of the recommendations received during the 2024 Universal Periodic Review, it effectively rejected all recommendations calling for the abolition of the death penalty or a moratorium on executions.

7.2 What Saudi Arabia Hides Behind Death Sentences

The systematic lack of transparency further compounds these concerns. The authorities do not disclose the number of individuals sentenced to death, the contents and reasoning of court judgments, or notify families in advance of execution dates. Ministry of Interior statements are limited to brief announcements that attribute general charges to those sentenced to death, without providing details that would allow the fairness of proceedings to be assessed or individual responsibility to be established. A report issued by the European Saudi Organization for Human Rights on the occasion of the World Day Against the Death Penalty addressed this issue in detail.[100]

[99] Human Rights Watch, “Saudi Arabia: Executions Surge Over a Decade,” 21 April 2026.
[100] European Saudi Organization for Human Rights (ESOHR), “Report: On the World Day Against the Death Penalty: What Saudi Arabia Hides Behind Death Sentences,” October 2026.

Individuals held in death row wards have also reported living under constant threat, having witnessed other detainees being transferred from these wards for execution in recent months, following short periods of isolation and loss of contact with the outside world.[101]

7.3 International Silence

Relative international silence, linked to economic and political interests with Saudi Arabia and the major international events it hosts, contributes to strengthening the authorities' sense of impunity. Human rights organizations have stressed the importance of raising the findings of UN mechanisms during bilateral dialogues with Saudi Arabia.[102]

Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB) has pointed out that this international silence is particularly evident when some countries retreat from their critical positions and prioritise economic and trade interests over their human rights obligations and the need to ensure accountability.[103] The shift in international positions following the assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, and the failure to address the lack of accountability, is a prominent example of political and economic relations and strategic deals being prioritised over justice. This has provided implicit assurances to the authorities that they can continue their violations without fear of consequences.

In the same context, the organization has warned against the use of major events and projects to whitewash the country's human rights record,[104] amid relative international silence that reinforces the authorities' sense of continued impunity. Accordingly, human rights organisations stress the need to effectively raise the findings and recommendations of UN mechanisms during bilateral dialogues with Saudi Arabia, to ensure that human rights issues are not sidelined or sacrificed in favour of economic interests.

[101] ESOHR, "108: Saudi Arabia's Executions in the First Half of 2026."
[102] MENA Rights Group, "UN Side Event Highlights the Intersection of the Death Penalty in Saudi Arabia with Torture and Arbitrary Executions," 29 June 2026.
[103] Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB), "Why Does the United States Continue to Export Arms to Saudi Arabia?" 26 April 2019.
[104] Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB), "Vision 2030: Saudi Arabia's Plan to Whitewash Human Rights Violations," 9 May 2019.

8. Legal Analysis and Conclusions

8.1 Compatibility of Saudi Practice with International Law

First: Violation of the "Most Serious Crimes" Threshold

The majority of executions carried out in Saudi Arabia, particularly in drug-related cases and political and security cases that do not involve intentional killing, fall outside the scope of the "most serious crimes". This makes them arbitrary deprivations of life under customary international law and Article 6 of the Arab Charter on Human Rights.[105] [106]

Second: Violation of the Absolute Prohibition on the Execution of Children

Executing individuals for acts committed before the age of 18 constitutes an explicit violation of Article 37 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which absolutely prohibits this punishment without exception. Saudi Arabia's general reservation to the Convention on the Rights of the Child concerning provisions that conflict with Islamic law cannot be considered justification for excluding the prohibition on executing individuals for crimes committed before they reached the age of 18, particularly in light of Article 51(2) of the Convention, which prohibits reservations that are incompatible with its object and purpose.[107]

These executions also violate Saudi Arabia's own Juvenile Law, as Article 15 stipulates: "If the crime is punishable by death, the penalty shall be placement in a facility for a period not exceeding ten years."

Third: Arbitrariness Resulting from Violations of Fair Trial Guarantees

UN jurisprudence has established that any death sentence imposed following a trial that failed to respect fair trial guarantees constitutes an arbitrary deprivation of life.[108] Relying on confessions extracted under torture constitutes a double violation: a violation of the Convention

[105] Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 36 (2018) on Article 6: Right to Life, Document No. CCPR/C/GC/36, 3 September 2019.
[106] Arab Charter on Human Rights, 2004, Articles 6, 7, 13 and 16.
[107] Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in Resolution 44/25 on 20 November 1989, Article 37(a).
[108] Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 36 (2018) on Article 6: Right to Life, Document No. CCPR/C/GC/36, 3 September 2019.

against Torture (Article 15)[109], on the one hand, and of the right to life under Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights[110], on the other hand.

8.2 State Responsibility and the Potential Classification as a Crime against Humanity

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia bears international responsibility for internationally wrongful acts in the form of arbitrary executions. This entails obligations to cease these acts, provide guarantees of non-repetition, and make reparation to victims and their families.

The Rome Statute defines crimes against humanity as acts, including murder, committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, pursuant to a State or organizational policy.[111] In light of the warning issued by UN experts, the repeated targeting of specific groups, such as the Shia minority and poor migrant workers, together with the unprecedented scale of executions and their systematic and arbitrary nature, warrants serious examination by the competent international mechanisms of whether these practices may amount to crimes against humanity.

8.3 Responsibility of Migrants' States of Origin

Countries whose nationals are executed have a responsibility to exercise their right to consular protection, intervene urgently through diplomatic channels, and monitor the detention conditions and trials of their nationals.

Human Rights Watch called on the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to intervene urgently with its Saudi counterpart and ensure that its nationals receive immediate consular assistance.[112] The Sri Lankan government's intervention in the case of Anujan Sivaratasa, which was followed by the overturning of his death sentence, as announced by the government, demonstrates the importance of this role.[113]

[109] Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, 1984, Articles 2 and 15.
[110] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2200 A (XXI) of 16 December 1966 and entered into force on 23 March 1976, Article 6.
[111] Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, 1998, Article 7.
[112] Human Rights Watch, "Saudi Arabia: New Executions of Ethiopian Migrants," 29 July 2026.
[113] Human Rights Watch, "Saudi Arabia: Death Sentence for Facebook Comment," 13 October 2026.

Recommendations

9.1 To the Saudi Authorities

1. Announce an official and immediate moratorium on executions as a step towards the complete abolition of the death penalty.
2. Abolish the death penalty for drug-related offences and all other crimes that do not meet the “most serious crimes” threshold, and abolish ta'zir executions.
3. Commute all death sentences imposed on individuals who were under the age of 18 at the time of the alleged acts, and apply the Juvenile Law retroactively to all cases.
4. Implement the opinions of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and release individuals whose detention it has found to be arbitrary.
5. Retry individuals sentenced to death in accordance with international fair trial standards, exclude any statements obtained under coercion, and open independent investigations into allegations of torture.
6. Guarantee foreign defendants’ right to interpretation, legal representation, and consular communication from the moment of arrest.
7. Publish comprehensive and regular data on death sentences and individuals sentenced to death, notify families in advance of execution dates, hand over the bodies of executed individuals to their families, and refrain from restricting mourning ceremonies.
8. Amend the Counter-Terrorism Law to bring it into line with international standards, and ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its Second Optional Protocol.

9.2 To Migrants’ Countries of Origin

1. Intervene urgently through diplomatic channels to prevent the execution of their nationals, particularly Ethiopian migrants facing imminent execution.
2. Provide immediate consular and legal assistance to their nationals, and request access to their case files and permission to attend their trials.

9.3 To the International Community and the United Nations

1. Publicly condemn the executions and regularly raise the issue at the Human Rights Council and during bilateral dialogues with Saudi Arabia.
2. Follow up on the implementation of the opinions of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and call for country visits by the relevant Special Rapporteurs.

3. Make economic and security partnerships with Saudi Arabia, particularly cooperation programmes on combating drugs, conditional on guarantees that they will not lead to death sentences.
4. Examine whether the systematic use of the death penalty may amount to international crimes and explore possible accountability mechanisms.

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6) Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, 1998, Article 7.
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