

# Talking about the Death Penalty



BY: TRANSFORMATIVE  
JUSTICE COLLECTIVE

## ABOUT US

The Transformative Justice Collective (TJC) is a Singapore-based collective that organises for futures free of prisons, policing, surveillance and other systems of oppression. We work in solidarity with people in conflict with the law. TJC's work is geared towards ending state violence, and building community-based capacities for harm reduction and collective action. To this end, we make interventions through research, reporting, campaigns, mutual aid, legal advocacy and community organising.

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# **A Resource Guide for Anti-Death Penalty Advocates**

By the Transformative Justice Collective

# Introduction

Over the course of our work, the Transformative Justice Collective has often heard people say that they feel strongly about the death penalty and would like to be more vocal in pushing for its abolition. Yet people are also often hesitant about engaging in debates on this issue, as they sometimes find it difficult to articulate their opposition to capital punishment or feel like they do not have enough background information to engage in a deep, informed conversation with the people around them.

In putting together this guide, we hope to equip more people with the knowledge and resources to advocate for the abolition of the death penalty in Singapore. The contents of this guide were compiled from a variety of sources, and was also heavily involved by TJC's outreach team, who have been going door-knocking to talk to Singaporeans about capital punishment.

We have split the guide into seven sections, covering a range of aspects of the death penalty—with an emphasis on the death penalty for drugs.



In **Section 1**, we start with a brief introduction on the history of the death penalty in Singapore, as well as the introduction of the death penalty for drugs. We also cover what we know about conditions on death row and the treatment of prisoners.

**Section 2** tackles a big question: whether the death penalty actually works to deter harm or violence, as so many people believe that it does.

Many people believe that only the worst of the worst criminals end up on death row, but **Section 3** points out that this is far from the reality.

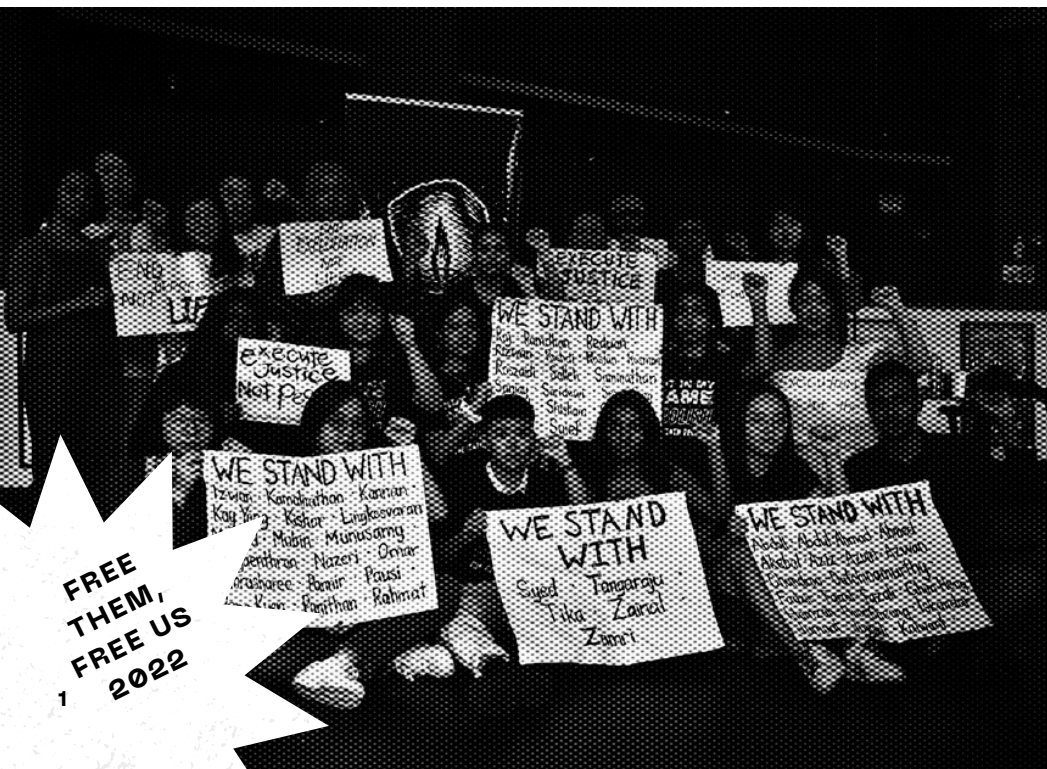
Although there is high public confidence and trust in Singapore's justice system, **Section 4** highlights issues with due process and access to justice that make the imposition of the death penalty especially troubling and problematic.

And because Singapore mainly uses the death penalty as part of a wider War on Drugs, **Section 5** addresses common misconceptions about a prohibitionist approach to drugs.

**Section 6** looks at the death penalty and religion, while **Section 7** prompts us to think about the sort of society that we would like to live in.

Most of the sections have been structured in this way: first, a table listing commonly heard arguments in favour of the death penalty, followed with bullet points highlighting key rebuttals to those arguments. There is then a "further reading" section that expands on the issues raised in the table.

If you have any questions or clarifications, you can always write to us at [transformjustice.sg@gmail.com](mailto:transformjustice.sg@gmail.com)!



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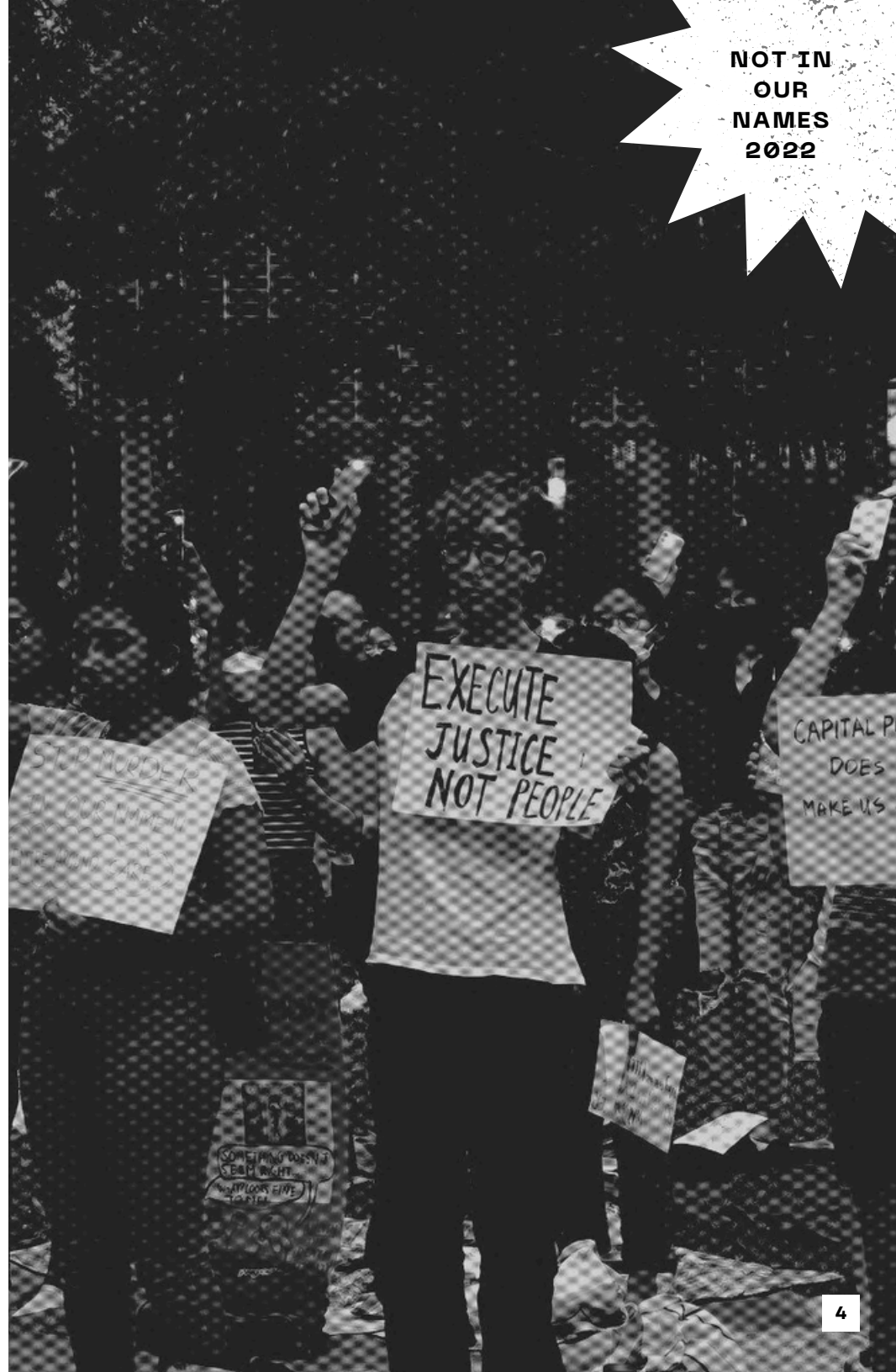
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## SECTION 1:

# THE DEATH PENALTY IN SINGAPORE

Judicial capital punishment as we know it was introduced to Singapore via the British during the colonial era. It was retained after Singapore became an independent country. The Singapore government, under the People's Action Party, later expanded the use of the death penalty to include offences like drug trafficking.

The death penalty applies to a number of offences in Singapore, but today, it is mainly used in three cases: drug trafficking, murder and firearms offences. Firearms offences are few and far between, and murder cases that end in the death penalty are also relatively rare. The vast majority of people on death row in Singapore have been sentenced to death for drug trafficking. This is why most of the debate around the death penalty in Singapore tends to revolve around drugs and drug policy.

### The Death Penalty for Drugs

In 1975, during the second reading of the Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Bill, Chua Sian Chin, the minister for home affairs and education at the time, observed that the Misuse of Drugs Act passed in 1973 to introduce harsher penalties for drug offences had proven not to be a “sufficient deterrence to traffickers”. Their conclusion was that, if the punishments weren’t deterring people from drugs and the drug trade, then even more punishment was necessary. The government proposed the imposition of the death penalty for the unauthorised manufacture of morphine and heroin, as well as for the unauthorised trafficking of over 30g of morphine or over 15g of heroin. In making this proposal, the Singapore government was drawing inspiration from other countries: “The death penalty provided in the Second Schedule of the Bill is a close parallel to the provisions in the Iranian law in that the death penalty is imposed for the unauthorised manufacture of morphine and heroin irrespective of amounts involved, but in the case of unauthorised trafficking, importing and exporting of those drugs the death penalty is imposed only when the quantities exceed a specified weight.”

In 1989, the Misuse of Drugs Act was further amended to expand the death penalty to the manufacture and trafficking of other substances, namely opium, cannabis and cocaine.

<sup>1</sup>Parliament of Singapore. (1975, November 20). Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Bill.

<sup>2</sup>Parliament of Singapore. (1989, November 30). Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Bill.

Today, the Misuse of Drugs Act specifies the mandatory death penalty for:

- Trafficking or importing more than 1,200g of opium containing more than 30g of morphine
- Trafficking or importing more than 30g of morphine
- Trafficking or importing more than 15g of diamorphine (heroin)
- Trafficking or importing more than 30g of cocaine
- Trafficking or importing more than 500g of cannabis
- Trafficking or importing more than 1,000g of cannabis mixture
- Trafficking or importing more than 200g of cannabis resin
- Trafficking or importing more than 250g of methamphetamine
- Manufacturing morphine, diamorphine, cocaine or methamphetamine

### Conditions on death row

Based on the Transformative Justice Collective’s research, as of October 2024, there are over 50 people on death row in Singapore. Of these prisoners, two were convicted of murder; the rest were sentenced to death for drug offences. As far as we know, there is one woman on death row.

Under the Prison Regulations, death row prisoners are required to be “confined apart from all other prisoners”. No one is allowed access to a death row prisoner unless permission is granted in writing by the Commissioner of Prisons. The only exemptions to this rule are prison officers in the course of their duty, prison medical officers and ministers of religion.

Death row prisoners are housed in solitary cells, where they usually remain for about 23 hours a day. “Yard time” is when they are allowed out of their cells for about an hour a day, but we are told that they still spend this time indoors, and either alone or in pairs (with a screen separating the two).

Prisoners are allowed a visit from their family once a week, for about an hour each time. Although prisoners were allowed phone calls during the pandemic when the prison was on lockdown or when the borders were closed, these phone calls ceased with the easing of restrictions and families were once again able to make their visits in person. However, some Malaysian families have pointed out that, just because the borders have reopened, it doesn’t mean that it’s easy for them to make regular trips to Singapore.

All visits with death row prisoners are conducted with a pane of glass separating the prisoner from their visitors. Even after a prisoner has been given a notice of execution, they are not allowed physical contact with their family. The only time they have the opportunity for physical contact with their family is if they are able to speak to their loved ones in the courtroom, where there is a slit in the glass that separates the dock from the rest of the room, through which they can hold hands.



# IS THE DEATH PENALTY EFFECTIVE?

Commonly heard	Response
<p><i>The death penalty for drug traffickers is the best way to prevent the spread of drugs because if we can stop one trafficker, then we can prevent thousands of drug users from accessing drugs.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There is no evidence that conclusively demonstrates that the death penalty is an effective deterrent to crimes like murder or drug trafficking.</li><li>• As long as there is a demand—and there will always be people who, for various reasons, choose to use drugs—there will be a supply. Criminalisation and harsh punishments like the death penalty for drug offences only serve to push the drug trade underground, where exploitative drug lords act with impunity and profit handsomely from smuggling and sales.</li><li>• The death penalty in Singapore punishes low-level drug traffickers and users, whose deaths make no impact on the overall drug trade as syndicates can always recruit more desperate and vulnerable people for their purposes.</li><li>• Ultimately, what is really achieved by harsh penalties like the death penalty is the driving of the drug trade underground, where more people will be exposed to unethical and exploitative syndicates, as well as unregulated and unsafe supplies of drugs.</li></ul>

*The death penalty is necessary because it's a consideration for those thinking about committing crimes. It deters potential traffickers from breaking the law!*

- Many who are caught, convicted and sentenced to death are not in a position to make decisions. Some of the drug mules who fall foul of the law have been misinformed about potential penalties, or might have been tricked or threatened. There are also cases in which the person is themselves a drug user, and had intended to keep some of the drugs for their personal consumption, but failed to convince the courts of this.
- While Singaporeans tend to assume that everyone knows about the existence of the death penalty for drug trafficking in our country, this is not necessarily the case—especially when we consider that many people who get involved in the drug trade do not come from Singapore, come from difficult circumstances and might have low levels of education that limit what they know or understand about how the laws in Singapore work.
- As long as there is poverty and desperation, there will be people who can be recruited into the illicit drug trade.

*The Singapore government says that the death penalty has been effective in deterring drugs.*

- The Singapore government has not been able to produce conclusive evidence that the death penalty is not only effective, but more effective than any other available option, in curbing the drug trade.
- Although they sometimes point to data that might look like trade in a particular drug decreased after the introduction of the death penalty, that is an overly simplistic reading that does not take into consideration the many other factors that could have affected the flow of that particular substance. For instance, changes could perhaps also be accounted for by particular drugs going out of fashion as users move on to other substances, or there could be other variables that have affected the global supply or flow of that particular drug. Just because there appears to be a correlation does not mean that there is a causal relationship.
- One of the surveys the government has quoted only shows that respondents believe that the death penalty deters drug trafficking, which is not proof that the death penalty has a significant deterrent effect.

*If we don't have the death penalty, drug use and crime will increase, our streets won't be safe anymore!*

- Those on death row are rarely, if ever, the criminals we are encouraged to believe they are. They, too, are victims of poverty, circumstance, and desperation.
- There will always be vulnerable individuals to be taken advantage of—not for drug use or consumption, but for trafficking and involvement in distribution.

*Many other countries are dangerous. Singapore is safe because we have such strict laws.*

- Is this the only deterrent from committing crime?
- In many countries where drug laws are less strict, there is hardly an instance of hard drugs at every corner.
- Similarly as in Singapore, there will always be drug use. The extent and prevalence of this are determined by many other factors—there is no evidence to suggest that the threat of death is among them.

## Further reading

There is no evidence to conclusively prove that the death penalty is an effective deterrent to the drug trade, in Singapore or anywhere else in the world. In its report “The Death Penalty for Drug Offences: Global Overview 2012”, Harm Reduction International points out the inherent impossibility of devising a study that would measure the death penalty’s deterrent effect on drugs:

“

*A plethora of indicators could be used to consider deterrence with drugs. Might it be arrests for drug offences? Representation of drug offenders in the prison population? Hospital admissions for drug-related issues? Overdose statistics (which can be brought down anyway with simple and cheap harm reduction interventions)? Moreover, which drugs: marijuana, cocaine, heroin, so-called ‘party drugs’ like ecstasy? Would a reduction in arrests for marijuana represent a successful indicator for all drugs? Trying to prove or disprove the deterrent value of drug laws is extraordinarily difficult. Anecdotally, one could say harsh drug laws do not work. For example, Iran has some of the toughest drug laws in the world and a high prevalence of injection drug use. Sweden does not have the death penalty and it has comparatively low rates of problematic drug use.*

”

In their statements, the Central Narcotics Bureau often claims that the amount of drugs a trafficker was arrested with can sustain the drug use of X number of people for Y amount of time, which sounds incredibly harmful and dangerous. But it is very unclear how they arrive at such conclusions, as rates of drug consumption can greatly vary from person to person, in the same way that everyone has different alcohol tolerance levels and are likely to drink different amounts, even if they have a problematic relationship with alcohol consumption.

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On top of this, the government has also published survey results showing that the majority of respondents from Singapore and neighbouring regional areas—they did not specify which areas were surveyed—believe that the death penalty is an effective deterrent. This has been used as evidence that the death penalty is working, but it in fact proves no such thing. The most that can be said about such survey results is that people believe that the death penalty deters drug offences, not that it actually does.

It is clear that the death penalty does not adequately address either the supply of or demand for drugs. It only punishes those who turn to trafficking because of poverty, desperation or naivete. People from the poorest communities, who lack gainful employment opportunities, have low levels of education and exposure or addiction to drugs are the most vulnerable to being both recruited and exploited by drug syndicates and being arrested and punished by the state. By killing those on the lowest rungs of the chain, the state is in effect making vulnerable people pay the price for a trade over which they have very little control, instead of investing in improving the conditions that make it more likely for them to come into conflict with the law in the first place.

**Also read:** Section 5 for responses to the War on Drugs and the need to adopt harm reduction principles and approaches.

# WHO IS ON THE DEATH ROW?

Commonly heard	Response
<p><i>The people on death row are dangerous. They're not just small-time users; they're the traffickers who are making a profit by harming others with drugs.</i></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In a 2022 interview, K Shanmugam, the minister for home affairs and law, acknowledged that drug kingpins do not come into Singapore, and are therefore not the ones who are being arrested and put on death row.</li><li>• While the people on death row might have had some involvement with the drug trade, they are almost always on the lowest rungs of the drug syndicate. They are nowhere near the centres of power and profit in the illicit drug trade.</li><li>• In TJC's experience, most of the prisoners on death row come from working class, marginalised and vulnerable backgrounds. Some of them were themselves drug users who struggled to end their dependence on drugs, and who were further marginalised and stigmatised by their experiences in the Drug Rehabilitation Centre or prison. These are people who needed support and treatment, not repeated punishment and, ultimately, the death penalty.</li></ul>

*The people on death row might have come from working class backgrounds, but they're no innocents. Just because you're poor doesn't mean you can commit crime.*

*People who traffic drugs are selfish—sure, they need to save themselves somehow, but at what cost, and at whose expense?*

- When we observe that people on death row disproportionately come from poor or working class backgrounds, we are not trying to make excuses or absolve them of all responsibility. However, it is important to recognise that people who consistently experience poverty and deprivation do not have the same access to opportunities and choices that others do, and that their communities also tend to be the ones that are subjected to more policing and surveillance, which means that they are also more likely to get caught for transgressions big or small.

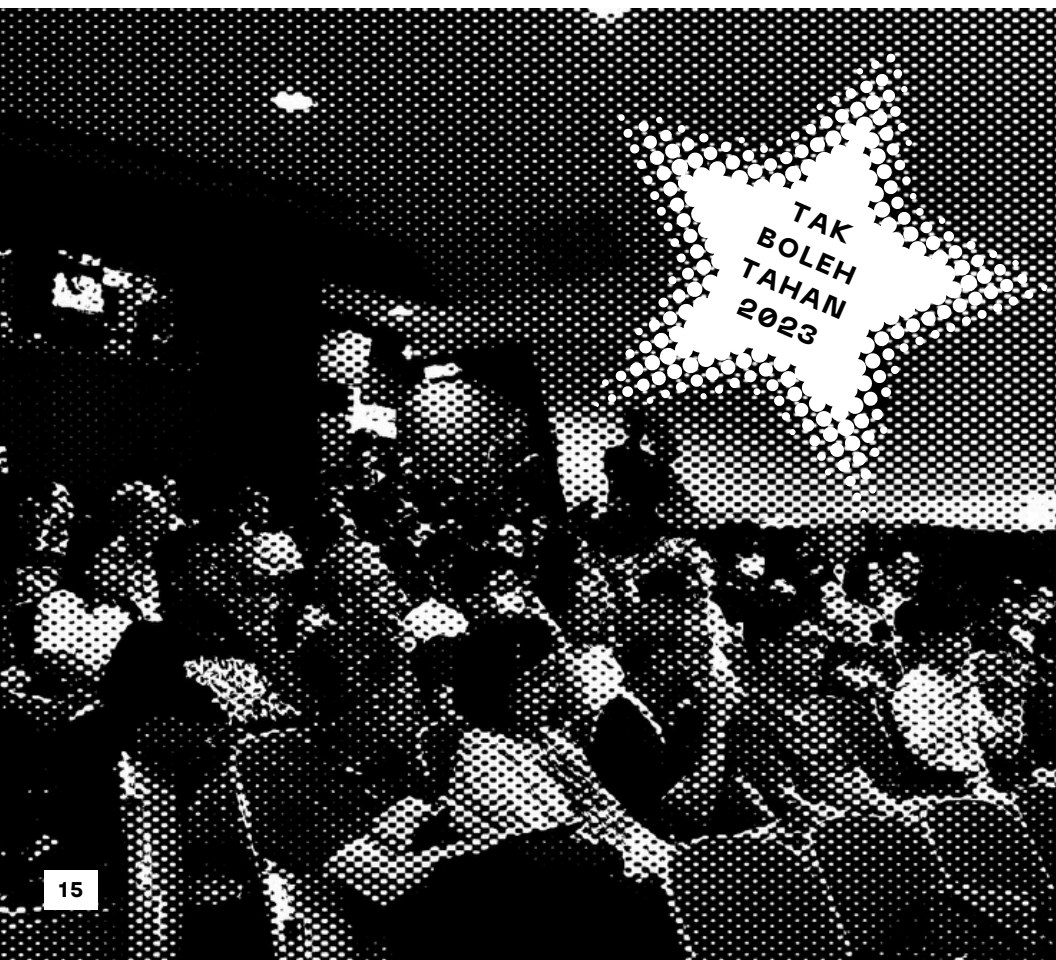
- In some cases, the ones caught were unaware of the nature of what they are asked to transport.
- Even if they are aware, what choice is there? Those who find themselves in these situations are often the very ones not able to escape this cycle.
- Rather than our judgement and sentencing, they more than anything else need our help to start over.

## Further reading

The majority of prisoners on death row were convicted of drug trafficking offences; of the over 50 prisoners on death row, only two were convicted of murder. This flies in the face of international law, which says that even if the death penalty is retained, it should only be used for the “most serious crimes”, which *does not* include non-violent drug offences. This is stated in [Article 6\(2\) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#); however, Singapore has not signed on to or ratified this covenant.

Most death row prisoners in Singapore are men. After the execution of Saridewi bte Djamani on 28 July 2023, there is only one known woman on death row.

In TJC’s experience, most of the prisoners on death row come from working class, marginalised and vulnerable backgrounds. Multiple prisoners, like [Abdul Kahar bin Othman](#) and [Nazeri bin Lajim](#), were themselves long-term drug users, whose involvement in the drug trade developed alongside repeated periods of incarceration in mandatory drug detention or prison. Others, like Nagaenthiran K Dharmalingam, had psychosocial disabilities, or IQ scores that were significantly below the average.



Although the amendments to the Misuse of Drugs Act made in 2012 were supposedly to ensure that the death penalty did not target drug mules but people higher up in the drug syndicate, most of the people on death row for drug offences are fairly low level. In all the cases that TJC has worked on, there has not been a single drug lord or kingpin. In fact, K Shanmugam, the minister for home affairs and law, has himself admitted that the big players in the illicit drug trade are not the ones getting caught in Singapore. This is what he said in [an interview with the \*Sydney Morning Herald\* in 2022](#):



*Shanmugam said Singapore had no power to catch drug lords, who capitalised on the flood of illicit substances pouring out of the Golden Triangle region on the borders of Thailand, Laos and Myanmar but were unlikely to dare venturing to the city-state themselves.*

*“So what are we supposed to do about that? Now, if I say I don’t catch traffickers and wait for the kingpins, basically my drug policy will be out of the window,” he said.*

*“Are we only catching the small guys and not the big guys? It’s a non-question because, you know, the big guys don’t come into Singapore for good reasons. Imagine if they were in Singapore, Singapore would be a very different place. That’s why they don’t come in.”*



However, we know that powerful and wealthy people linked to the drug trade *have* ties to Singapore. Lo Hsing Han (who died in 2013), for instance, was widely [known to be a drug trafficker](#) with high connections in Myanmar. He was also a business tycoon, and founded Asia World Company, which his son and daughter-in-law ran in Singapore. The family had been [blacklisted by the United States Office of Foreign Assets Control in 2008](#) for their history of illicit activities and for being financial operatives of the Burmese military junta.

One thing to consider is that true kingpins—the ones who are really making big money off the transnational illicit drug trade—have enough wealth and power to get others to do the dirty work, and therefore rarely handle the drugs themselves. They don’t need to do the drug running into Singapore in person; they can prey on people from vulnerable backgrounds to do this smuggling for them. When Singapore arrests, imprisons and executes these low-level drug couriers, there is little impact on the drug trade as a whole. As long as there is poverty and desperation, there will be a steady pool of people for drug syndicates to recruit from.



**WE STAND WITH TANGARAJU 2023**

# ACCESS TO JUSTICE, DUE PROCESS AND FAIRNESS

Commonly heard	Response
Singapore is not like other countries where there is corruption, where police, lawyers or judges can be bribed. So our justice system is much more reliable and will get things right.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• It is comforting to imagine that police investigations and the judicial process in Singapore are thorough and infallible. But this is unrealistic; like everywhere else in the world, these processes in Singapore are also prone to human error or other lapses. We’ve seen as much in high profile cases like the one against Parti Liyani.</li><li>• We don’t need to go as far as alleging corruption to point out that mistakes can occur at any stage of the process, from investigation through to prosecution and trial.</li><li>• Capital punishment is irreversible. Once executed, a person cannot be brought back to life. As long as systems and processes are fallible—as they will always be—there will be the risk of wrongful executions and innocent or undeserving people being put to death by the state.</li></ul>

*Those on death row have been found to be guilty by the courts. If there are circumstances which could explain their innocence or merit clemency from death row, then the justice system will prevent it from happening.*

- The most common use case of the death penalty is the mandatory death penalty for drug trafficking. Because the punishment is mandatory, mitigating circumstances—such as the person’s age, prior criminal record (if any), family background and motivations, or any other factors—are considered irrelevant.
- The Misuse of Drugs Act also contains presumption clauses that effectively reverse the burden of proof. For example, instead of the prosecution having to prove that the accused person knew the nature of the drug, or that they were in possession of that amount of drugs for the purposes of trafficking, it is up to the accused to prove that they did not know, or that they did not have the drugs for the purposes of trafficking. People have been sentenced to death not because there was absolutely irrefutable evidence that they were drug traffickers, but because they failed to convince the judge that the presumption that they were trafficking drugs was more likely than not to be wrong.



## Further reading

Much as we want to believe that Singapore is an efficient and well-run country where institutions are held to incredibly high standards, the reality is that all systems and processes are fallible and mistakes can be made. It doesn't even have to be at the level of corruption: it could be incompetence, lack of resources (including manpower), misjudgments, misunderstandings, accidents... any number of things could go wrong!

We saw examples of this happening in Singapore in relation to a non-capital case involving Parti Liyani, a former domestic worker who had been accused by her ex-employers of theft. Parti was convicted by the district court and appealed to the High Court. The High Court fully acquitted Parti, and noted that the police had failed to secure the chain of custody of evidence from the beginning, that Parti had not been given a Bahasa Indonesia interpreter when some of her statements were taken, that there were issues with the way the district judge assessed the evidence given by Parti's former employers, and that the prosecution had failed to disclose an important fact at trial. If Parti had not received help from a migrant labour rights NGO and the support of a pro bono defence lawyer, she would not have been able to overturn the conviction, and would have had to serve time in prison.

Parti might not have been facing capital punishment, but her case highlights the ways in which things can go wrong. When it comes to a punishment as harsh and irreversible as the death penalty, absolutely no margin of error is acceptable. Mistakes can be made throughout the process that could lead to devastating outcomes. A person wrongly hanged can never be brought back, and no amount of compensation paid to their family will be able to restore what they have lost.



There is a lack of independent research and review into cases in Singapore to find out if there have been cases of wrongful convictions or executions. (In the US, where such research and scrutiny is much more common, 192 former death penalty prisoners have been exonerated since 1973.) That said, cases like that of Gobi Avedian highlight the risk that exists in Singapore. Gobi had already exhausted his appeal and was at risk of execution when the Court of Appeal overturned their own decision and set aside his death sentence. If the human rights lawyer M Ravi had not stepped in to take up Gobi's case, Gobi could have been hanged.

Other aspects of the system in Singapore make the death penalty regime even more vulnerable to unsafe convictions and executions. One major issue is the lack of access to legal counsel from the point of arrest. People who are arrested are not allowed immediate access to a lawyer; Singapore law only states that accused persons be granted access to a lawyer within a "reasonable time". In practice, this often means that the person is only able to get legal advice after investigations have been completed and multiple statements have already been taken. These statements can later be produced in court and used against the accused.

For individuals with psychosocial disabilities, there is also a lack of adequate procedural accommodations in the system that would make the whole process fairer and more accessible. The International Principles and Guidelines on Access to Justice for Persons with Disabilities, published by the United Nations in August 2020, makes it clear that everyone has the right to equality before the law and equal protection under the law, on an equal basis with others. However, Singapore's accommodations for people with disabilities are extremely limited.



The legislation itself can open the system up to wrongful convictions and executions. The Misuse of Drugs Act contains presumption clauses that reverse the burden of proof: Section 18(1) says that, if someone is found in possession of anything containing a controlled drug—or even the keys to any thing or place in which a controlled drug is found—it is presumed that they have the drug in their possession. Section 18(2) states that anyone presumed to have the controlled drug in their possession is also presumed to know the nature of the drug. If the amount of drug is over a certain threshold—such as 2g of heroin or 15g of cannabis, Section 17 says that the individual will be presumed to be trafficking. If the amount exceeds another threshold—15g of heroin or 500g of cannabis—the penalty upon conviction is mandatory death, unless narrow criteria is met.

These presumption clauses require the accused person to rebut them on a balance of probabilities. This “balance of probabilities” threshold is a higher bar to meet than “beyond reasonable doubt”; the accused person would have to convince the judge that the presumption is more likely than not to be wrong. Even if there is reasonable doubt that the accused person actually knew about the drugs, they can still be convicted and, if the amount of drugs was over the threshold, sentenced to death as long as the judge is not persuaded that the presumption is more likely than not to be wrong.

It has also grown increasingly difficult for death row prisoners to get the courts to review their cases after they have been through the standard process of trial at the High Court and appeal to the Court of Appeal. Prisoners who have attempted to get their cases reopened have been accused of “abusing court process”, especially if they file applications after a notice of execution has been issued. Lawyers representing death row prisoners in post-appeal applications have also been accused of “abusing court process”, and subjected to hefty cost orders. The Post-Appeal Applications in Capital Cases Bill, which sets a very high bar for death row prisoners to bring a wide range of applications, was passed in November 2022, further exacerbating the problem.

Over time, it has grown more and more difficult for prisoners and their families to find lawyers willing to take on post-appeal cases. In 2022, multiple death row prisoners ended up having to represent themselves in post-appeal cases. In August 2022, 24 death row prisoners filed a joint application arguing that their right to access to justice had been undermined by the prosecution’s practice of seeking cost orders, which had deterred local lawyers from taking on their post-appeal cases. Their application should have taken months if following the regular process, but because one of the 24 had already received an execution notice, the whole case was expedited and crammed into just four days. After making the prisoners wait for about seven hours, the Court of Appeal returned close to midnight to dismiss the application, and Abdul Rahim bin Shapiee was executed hours later.



# RESPONDING TO THE WAR ON DRUGS

Commonly heard	Response
<i>Drugs are incredibly harmful and cannot be condoned in our society because of the damage that will be done.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No matter how strict the laws, how watchful the government, how severe the punishment, drugs are to be found in any society. That is not to say that we should leave them unregulated or encourage use or abuse of narcotics, but that to allow a safe and caring society, we need to watch out for each other, rather than judge and reject one another.</li><li>• Like many other more socially accepted vices such as nicotine and alcohol, drug use can of course be incredibly harmful.</li><li>• In the same way one might encourage friends or family members to cut back on drinking or quit smoking, the same tolerance needs to be shown to those who suffer from drug use. Rather, more sympathy is needed, for something as consuming and life-threatening as a drug habit may be.</li><li>• When we create a system of fear, there is small to no chance for those suffering to come forward to seek the help they need.</li><li>• Instead of painting all drug users or traffickers as criminals who are damaging society, we need to ask how we as society have allowed others to fall through the cracks – quite often into a place they cannot lift themselves from.</li></ul>

*The War on Drugs is the most effective way to deal with drug use. It is because of this approach that there is low crime in Singapore.*

- Singapore’s strict laws result in the hanging of those convicted with drug trafficking and in some cases, possession with the assumption of trafficking. Yet these hangings are not made known to the public, and for the most part, kept quiet. If not for the voices of family members and activists, the names and stories of these victims would be unknown, as would their deaths.
- If the government is so assured of their position, and so convinced that it is in fact these laws that keep Singapore safe, why are the stories not shared, why are the real statistics of Singapore’s executions kept secret or difficult to know?
- This secrecy signifies doubt, and there is hardly room for doubt when we are dealing with human lives.
- While Singapore has made efforts to improve its approach to mental health, a symptom as telling as drug use is hugely overlooked. Who are we to say we take care of our own citizens, when we so quickly and eagerly overlook and condemn those who need our help most?

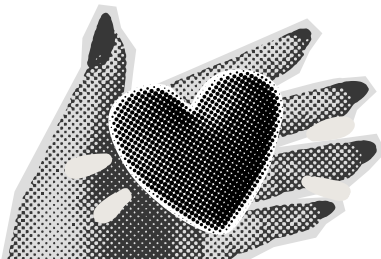


*If we didn't take this approach, there would be more drugs in Singapore and more harm caused!*

- There are many reasons crimes are committed. Poverty is one. Lack of support and resources are another.
- Even in countries where certain drugs are legal, or where laws are less strict, it is not drug use that causes crime, but the same factors it very often comes down to: poverty, hopelessness, and survival.
- Before we look at drug use as if it were a solitary act unconnected to other factors, let's first consider what concrete steps we've taken to address other areas where help is needed, and which often lead to substance dependency.
- It is not drug addicts or individuals involved in the drug trade who have failed the society we live in – it is us, as a society, who have failed them.

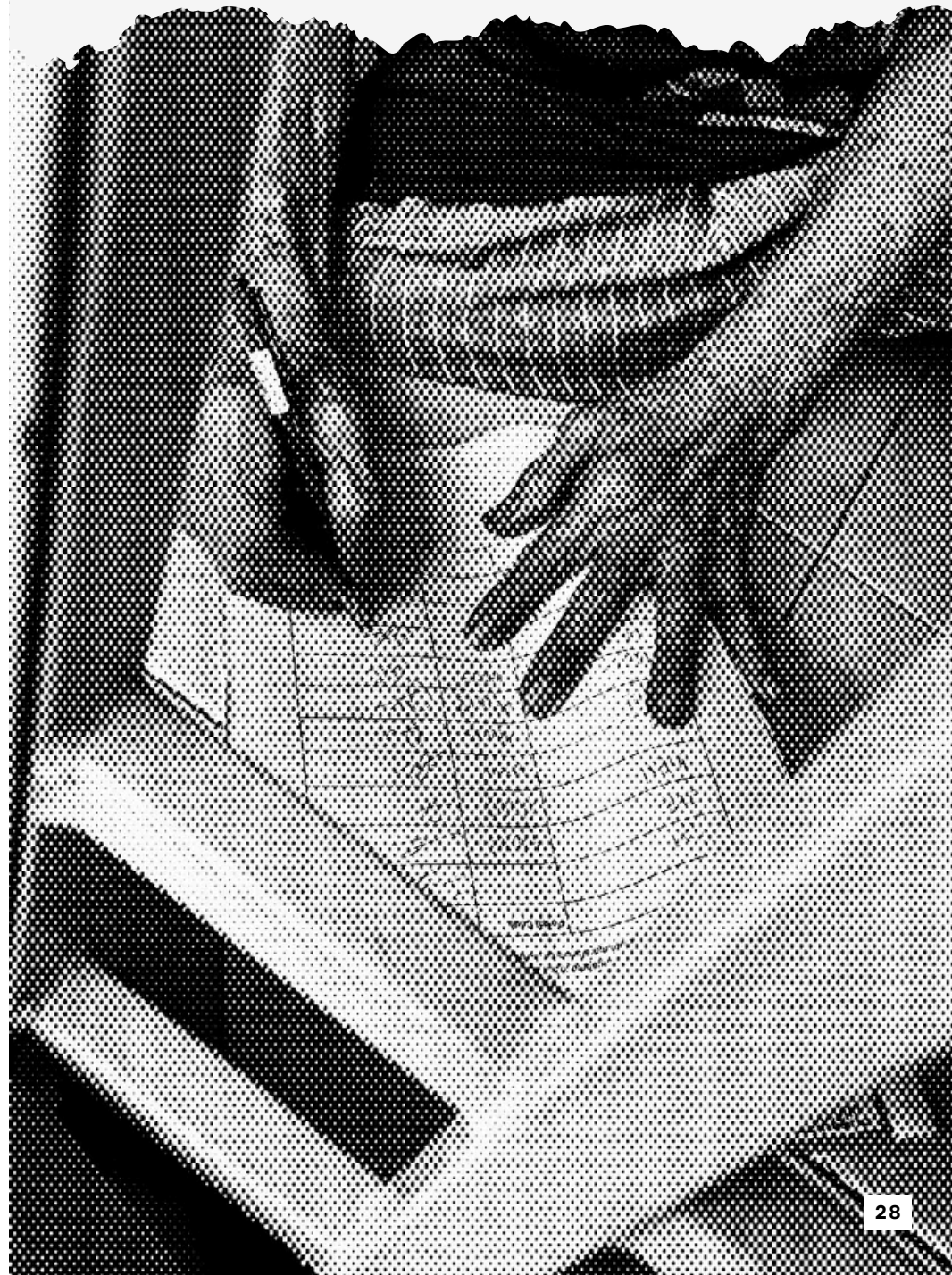
### **Further reading**

If we truly wanted a more effective way to deal with the risks of drug use and protect the maximum number of people, we would pay attention to the different harm reduction approaches being implemented across the world today, and learn from them. We would recognise that people use drugs for a variety of reasons, and that people can have very different experiences of and relationships with substance use. Instead of pursuing the fool's errand of trying to eliminate drugs—something that can never be achieved—we would focus on how to keep the maximum number of people, including people who use drugs, safe and as well as they can be.



### **DOOR-KNOCKING**

GETTING VIEWS AND SIGNATURES ON THE MORATORIUM OF THE DEATH PENALTY FROM THE PUBLIC



# THE DEATH PENALTY AND RELIGION

Commonly heard	Response
<p><i>[About the Muslim faith] Drugs are prohibited under Sharia law, so the death penalty is aligned with my religious beliefs.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharia does not have monolithic, unchanging rulings about complex issues like drug use, and many Islamic jurists, both past and present, have varying views about the status of drugs, which includes questions about which substances are considered intoxicants, the intention (niyyah) behind using drugs, and most importantly, the conditions which lead to drug use.</li> <li>• Islam often takes the perspective that nations should prioritise providing their citizens with sufficient resources and support to prevent poverty, fund education, improve public healthcare, provide affordable housing and provide workers' rights. When a nation has not taken sufficient steps to achieve all of these goals and chooses instead to shift the blame by killing citizens (and foreigners), Islam takes the view that the nation is a violent and unfair one.</li> </ul>



*The death penalty is right as it protects the most vulnerable among us who might turn to drugs.*

- While the death penalty is permitted under Sharia law, its application is only allowed in limited circumstances, ensuring the highest requirements of due process and having regard to the 'overriding objective' of Islam: justice, mercy and repentance. For many Sharia judgements, the death penalty is only permitted under such stringent and nearly impossible evidentiary requirements that it is almost certain that other judgements would be preferred.
- In 2018, the Catechism of the Catholic Church was revised to formally oppose the death penalty: "In the light of the Gospel [the death penalty] is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person" and the Catholic Church "works with determination for its abolition worldwide," said Pope Francis in a 2018 statement.
- In a recent book, the Pope wrote: "Capital executions, far from bringing justice, fuel a sense of revenge that becomes a dangerous poison for the body of our civil societies. States should focus on allowing prisoners the opportunity to truly change their lives, rather than investing money and resources in their execution, as if they were human beings no longer worthy of living and to be disposed of."

## Further reading

### In relation to the Muslim faith

According to Ibn Taymiyyah, “It is said that Allah allows the just state to remain even if it is led by unbelievers, but Allah will not allow the oppressive state to remain even if it is led by Muslims. And it is said that the world will endure with justice and unbelief, but it will not endure with oppression and Islam.”

Furthermore, while the death penalty is permitted under Sharia law, its application is only allowed in limited circumstances, ensuring the highest requirements of due process and having regard to the ‘overriding objective’ of Islam: justice, mercy and repentance. For many Sharia judgements, the death penalty is only permitted under such stringent and nearly impossible evidentiary requirements that it is almost certain that other judgements would be preferred.

And We ordained for them herein a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and for wounds is legal retribution. But whoever gives [up his right as] charity, it is an expiation for him. And whoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed – then it is those who are the wrongdoers. (Quran 5:45)

*If you punish, then punish with an equivalent of that which you were harmed. But if you are patient - it is better for the patient. (Quran 16:126)*

*The recompense for an injury is an injury equal thereto [in degree]; but if a person forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from God; for [God] loves not those who do wrong. (Quran 42:40)*

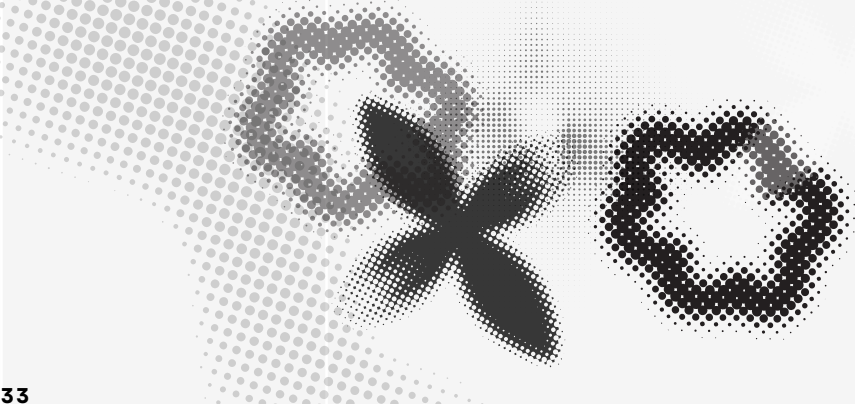
### In relation to the Catholic faith:

Catholic social teaching emphasises the principle of preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, and on that basis asks us to consider who often ends up facing the death penalty, with due regard for their marginalised status.

FREE THEM,  
FREE US  
2022

# WHAT SORT OF SOCIETY DO WE WANT TO LIVE IN?

Commonly heard	Response
<i>We need the death penalty for crimes like murder or drug trafficking because we need to have some form of retribution for the pain that victims face.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Many people who commit violent or harmful acts have themselves been victims of abuse or violence. While this does not and should not absolve them of responsibility, the death penalty does little to repair the harms done or change conditions in society that lead to people coming into conflict with the law or acting in harmful ways.</li><li>• The use of capital punishment also sets the tone and sends a message to people in a society. When we have a state that prefers violence and punishment over reconciliation or rehabilitation, we are signalling to people that conflict and problems can be solved in violent, coercive ways.</li></ul>



*A few must be punished for the greater good of all.*

- There is no clear evidence that the death penalty is an effective deterrent or that it is a good solution to problems, so it is actually unclear what “greater good” is achieved with the use of the death penalty.
- What does it say about a society where it is decided that it is acceptable to sacrifice some people to benefit others. Who gets to decide who gets punished or sacrificed? And who benefits?

*How else will we sleep safely at night?*

- How can we sleep in peace knowing that others are being killed in our names?
- We believe that the laws related to the death penalty are here to protect us. But who are they really protecting?
- (As mentioned elsewhere in this guide) There is no evidence that the death penalty actually works as a deterrence to crime, and so there is no real basis to imagine that it is what keeps us safe in our beds night after night.





### ***Further reading***

When we talk about the harm which those on death row perpetrated, we also need to consider what pushes people to commit violent crimes or cause harm in their communities. What conditions create the capacity of a person to commit violence, considering that those of us who are healthy, stable and safe are able to cope with stress, anger or fear in nonviolent ways?

Many who commit violent crimes were themselves victims of violence, such as familial abuse, exposure to rough environments, or systemic violence. Consider the toll that being raised in foster care takes on a child, and the injustices which many underprivileged youth face, which later manifest as violent behaviour.

We must also consider what role violence and pain have in our society. If the systems in our society, especially our legal systems, are contingent on a logic of violent punishment as a consequence of bad behaviour, then what does that teach citizens about how violence should be used? If violence (instead of reconciliation, rehabilitation or restoration) is the de facto method for the state to stop people from doing what they don't want us to do, then is it any wonder that we ourselves turn to violence to resolve our own problems? While it is true that the nature of individuals' actions shape legislation, the state's use of force is also an influencing factor in defining the nature of violence in society.



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