

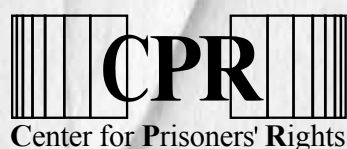
5th REGIONAL CONGRESS ON THE DEATH PENALTY IN EAST ASIA

7-9 NOVEMBER 2025
TOKYO-JAPAN

Organised by



in partnership with



WHAT IS THE REGIONAL CONGRESS ON THE DEATH PENALTY?

ECPM has been organising the Regional Congress on the death penalty since 2012. In addition to establishing the progress and obstacles towards the abolition in the target region, the Regional Congress aims above all to bring together a variety of regional actors engaged in the abolitionist movement and encourage a holistic conversation on the development of a step-by-step strategy to abolish the death penalty.

After the MENA region in 2012 (Rabat-Morocco), Southeast Asia in 2015 (Kuala Lumpur-Malaysia), Sub-Saharan Africa in 2018 (Abidjan-Ivory Coast) and the Middle East in 2023 (Amman-Jordan), the 5th Regional Congress on the death penalty will be held in Tokyo in 2025 and will target the Eastern region of Asia. It will precede the organization of the 9th World Congress against the death penalty which will be held in Paris from 30 June to 3 July 2026.

The 5th Regional Congress on the death penalty will be organised in partnership with the Center for Prisoners' Rights (CPR), a Japanese NGO specialised in prison reform. Established in March 1955, CPR cultivates a long-standing expertise on penitentiary conditions, human rights and the death penalty in Japan.

GOALS

The 5th Regional Congress on the death penalty in East Asia shall gather a variety of regional actors to participate in a holistic conversation on how to use different entry points for abolition, and identify strategies towards the abolition of the death penalty.

THE CONGRESS WILL PARTICULARLY AIM TO

- Highlight the recent positive steps towards the abolition of the death penalty as well as the challenges encountered within the region.
- Promote the exchange on the best practices and the networking of legislative actors at national and regional level.
- Stimulate dialogue and collective action and the emergence of initiatives towards the abolition.

TARGETED PARTICIPANTS

Participants representing the 6 East Asian countries and territories (China, Japan, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea, Taiwan) and 2 countries from Southeast Asia (Malaysia and Singapore).

- Civil society organizations
- Political authorities, diplomats
- Prison administrations
- Academics
- Journalists
- Actors in the criminal chain system
- Members of Parliament
- Former death row prisoners and their families
- University Students
- Media actors

DISCUSSIONS WILL TACKLE TOPICS SUCH AS

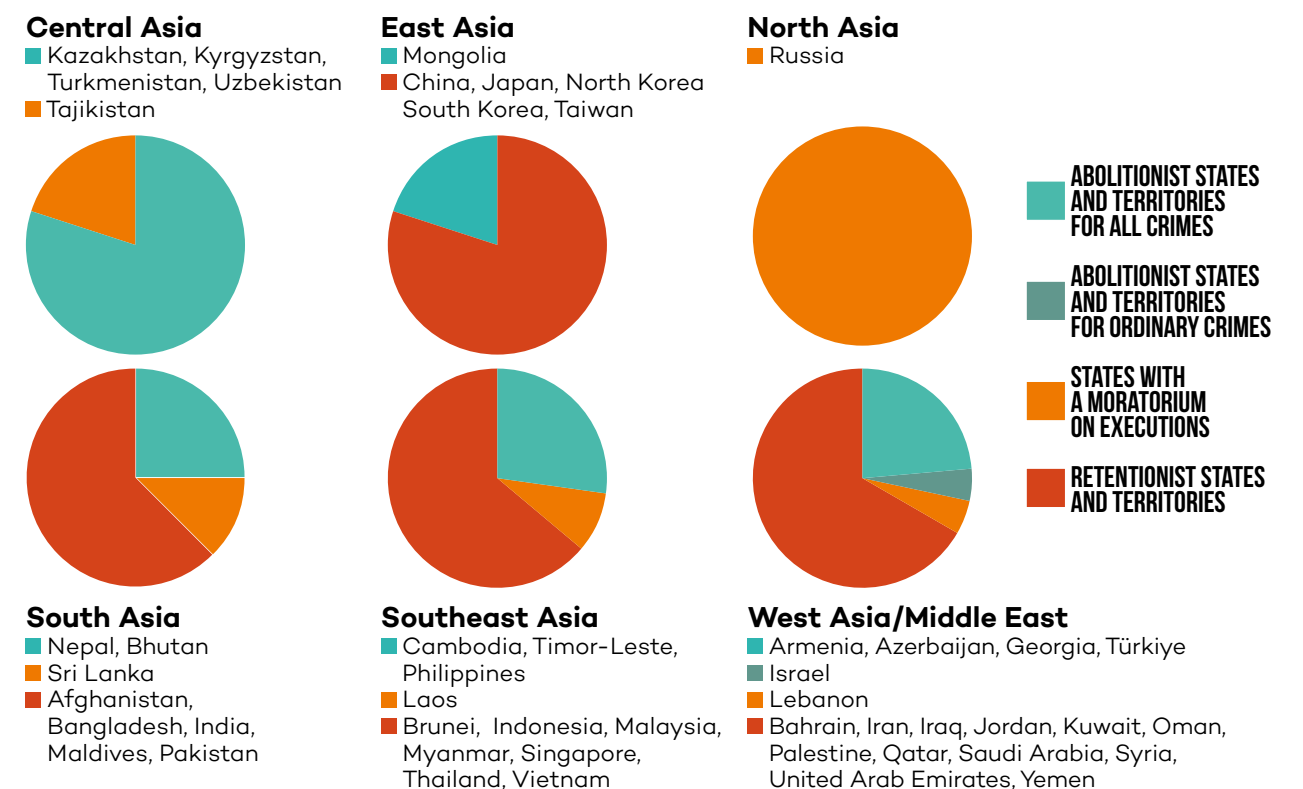
- Instrumentalization of the death penalty
- Public opinion
- Use of the death penalty for offences beyond “the most serious crimes” (in particular drug-related offences)
- Transparency
- Legal representation
- Conditions of detention and death row phenomenon
- Foreign nationals
- Transmission to the new abolitionist generation
- Positive steps towards abolition
- Mandatory death penalty

SITUATION OVERVIEW

While the trend of abolition of the death penalty is pretty consistent in some parts of the globe – particularly in Africa, with, in average, 1 abolition per year for the past 5 years – Asia still remains the continent where there is the most use of the death penalty worldwide.

STATUS

In Asia, at the end of April 2024, 15 countries had abolished the death penalty, 5 were under a de facto moratorium and 29 were retentionist.



EXECUTIONS

Asia is the continent with the highest number of executions in the world. China remains the world's leading executioner but continues to keep its death penalty figures shrouded in secrecy. In East Asia, 2 countries carried out executions in 2023 : China and North Korea. The last execution in Japan was carried out on 26 July 2022.

POSITIVE STEPS IN THE TARGETED COUNTRIES

In 2015, **Mongolia** became the first East Asian country to abolish the death penalty. Three (3) years earlier, in 2012, Mongolia had ratified the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty.

In April 2023, **Malaysia** abolished the mandatory death penalty provided for 11 capital offenses, including drug-trafficking, murder and terrorism, and introduced sentencing discretion for all offenses for which it was applicable. Judges are now granted with alternative sentences of imprisonment between 30 and 40 years and whipping. In November 2023, the resentencing process started for, at least, 850 people sentenced to death eligible for resentencing.

In April 2024, the Constitutional Court of **Taiwan** heard a challenge on the constitutionality of the death penalty in the country. The debate came after Taiwan's 37 death row inmates, with help from a coalition of NGOs and research institutes, petitioned for a constitutional review of capital punishment. In September 2024, the Court delivered its judgment, confirming the constitutionality of the death penalty but declared the current safeguards surrounding its use to be insufficient, opening the way to restrictions of its application.

TARGETED COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES

- Japan, North Korea, South Korea, China, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia and Mongolia.



THE 5TH REGIONAL CONGRESS ON THE DEATH PENALTY

Date: 7-9 November 2025

Duration: 3 days

Location: Tokyo, Japan

Number of participants:
around 200 participants from
at least 8 countries

Structure (TBC):
An opening session,
1 plenary,
4 roundtables,
5 workshops
and a closing session

Organiser:
ECPM – Ensemble contre
la peine de mort (Together
against the death penalty)
CPR – Center for Prisoner's Rights
in partnership with ADPAN



1 ABOLITIONIST STATES
FOR ALL CRIMES

1 STATES WITH A MORATORIUM
ON EXECUTIONS

6 RETENTIONIST
STATES

DEATH PENALTY IN JAPAN

Capital punishment exists as a sentence in the Japanese criminal justice system for 19 offenses, although it is almost exclusively imposed in cases of murder.

The death penalty system in Japan remains very opaque. Executions are carried out without any date being set in advance. Prisoners are only notified a few hours before the execution, and families are generally informed after it has been carried out.

As a result, people sentenced to death live in permanent fear and uncertainty, often for many years, given that many executions are carried out years after the conviction. The main remedy for capital punishment is a retrial, which can be a very uncertain and lengthy process.

The last execution was carried out in July 2022 when Tomohiro Katō was hanged at the Tokyo Detention House. At the beginning of 2025, there are 107 prisoners on death row awaiting execution in Japan.

Capital punishment is deemed very popular in Japanese society, although information on the reality of the death penalty is very scarce.

However, recent mediatisation of cases like that of Iwao Hakamada (see box below) are opening new avenues for debate within the Japanese society. For instance, a reflection panel on the death penalty linked to the Japan Federation of Bar Associations issued recommendations to the Japanese government in November 2024, questioning the deterrent effect of capital punishment and its utility to the victim's families. These recommendations were rejected by the Chief Cabinet Secretary, but still serve as a testimony of the momentum for public debate in Japan.

IWAO HAKAMATA, 46 YEARS ON DEATH ROW

The public debate in Japan was shaken up in 2024 when Iwao Hakamada, the longest serving death row prisoner in the world, under sentence of death since 1968, was declared innocent 56 years after his conviction.

Arrested in 1966 over the murder of a family of four in Shizuoka, Hakamada was convicted and sentenced to death in 1968, on the basis of a confession made to the police during an interrogation, which he later retracted.

After decades of fighting to maintain his innocence and demand a retrial, Hakamada and his supporters were finally heard in 2014 when the Shizuoka District Court released him after they found there was reason to believe evidence against him had been falsified. After 46 years on death row, and another decade of litigation, Iwao Hakamada was formally acquitted in 2024.

Four decades on death row weighed heavily on Hakamada, who became mentally ill. During this period, he wrote a large number of letters to his family, sharing his fears and anxiety: "My heart sometimes grows cold beyond description out of unending fear of the unknown-execution."

In the wake of the media coverage of Hakamada's case, some actors are advocating to seize the opportunity to deepen the debate with a view to abolishing the death penalty.

Furthermore, similar cases like those of Michitosi Kuma (executed on the basis of a doubtful conviction) or Nobuo Oda (now the longest-serving death row prisoner) can also spark a discussion on the place of the death penalty in the Japanese legal system.

PROVISIONNAL PROGRAM

The program and the list of speakers will be defined by by the Academic Committee of the 5th regional congress on the death penalty. This Committee is composed of experts in human rights and the abolition of the death penalty in Asia.

NOVEMBER 7, 2025 (FRIDAY)

▶ 2.30 PM \ 5.30 PM

Opening session

NOVEMBER 8, 2025 (SATURDAY)

▶ 10 AM \ 12 PM

Plenary session

▶ 12 AM \ 2 PM

Lunch break

▶ 2 PM \ 3.30 PM

Round Table

▶ 3.30 PM \ 4 PM

Coffee break

▶ 4 PM \ 5 PM

Workshop 1

▶ 4 PM \ 5 PM

Workshop 2

▶ 4 PM \ 5 PM

Workshop 3

NOVEMBER 9, 2025 (SUNDAY)

▶ 10 AM \ 11.30 PM

Round Table

▶ 11.30 AM \ 11.45 AM

Coffee break

▶ 11.45 AM \ 12.45 PM

Workshop 4

▶ 11.45 AM \ 12.45 PM

Workshop 5

▶ 11.45 AM \ 12.45 PM

Workshop 6

▶ 12.45 AM \ 2.15 PM

Lunch break

▶ 2.15 PM \ 3.45 PM

Round Table

▶ 3.45 PM \ 4 PM

Coffee break

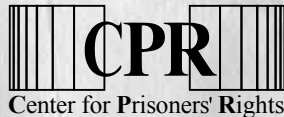
▶ 4 PM \ 5.30 PM

Closing session



Founded in 2000, ECPM is a leading global association fighting for universal abolition of the death penalty. With a presence in a dozen countries across the world, ECPM has been conducting intense advocacy work with national and international bodies for the past twenty years, in particular by supporting local actors and by organising, every three years, the biggest abolitionist event in the world: the World Congress Against the Death Penalty. ECPM also founded the World Coalition against the Death Penalty.

For more information: www.ecpm.org



The Center for Prisoners' Rights (CPR) was established in March 1995 as the first Japanese NGO specializing in prison reform. CPR's goal is to reform Japanese prison conditions in accordance with international human rights standards and to abolish the death penalty. The organisation researches human rights violations in Japanese prisons and makes its finding known to the public both inside and outside Japan. CPR gives legal advice to prisoners and provides legal assistance through attorneys if necessary. It studies international human rights standards in the prison reform area, introduces them to Japan and promote ratifications of international human rights treaties. CPR publishes a newsletter four to five times a year, which features prison litigations, reports on visits to foreign prisons and digests of the seminars held by the organisation several times a year. The newsletter is sent to about 5,000 people including prisoners and their families, lawyers and researchers.



ADPAN is a regional network of organizations and individuals committed to working towards abolition of the death penalty in the Asia Pacific. ADPAN's role is to create wider societal support for abolition of the death penalty in the Asia Pacific region through advocacy, education, and network building.

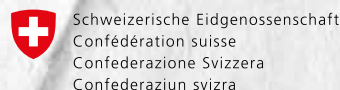
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