



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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153rd IPU Assembly

Arusha,
United Republic of Tanzania
5–9 October 2026



Panel discussion

The role of parliamentarians in the abolition of the death penalty

*Tuesday, 6 October 2026, 10:30–12:00
Mbayuwayu Hall, seventh floor, Ngorongoro Wing*

Concept note

Background

The global situation regarding the death penalty is at a significant juncture. As of June 2026, 113 countries had abolished the death penalty for all crimes, while at least 7 had abolished it for ordinary crimes, retaining it only for exceptional circumstances such as times of war. In addition, a number of countries still retained the death penalty in law but had not carried out executions for many years and were therefore considered abolitionist in practice. Taken together, at least 140 countries had abolished the death penalty in law or practice.

Parliamentarians have played a central role in this progress, including by reforming domestic legislation and supporting international commitments to abolish capital punishment. At the 9th World Congress Against the Death Penalty, held in Paris, France, from 30 June to 2 July 2026, Lebanon announced that its parliament was in the process of adopting a draft abolition bill, which it did on 11 August 2026. Sierra Leone also announced that, with parliamentary support, it would become a State Party to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the only global treaty dedicated to the abolition of the death penalty. Cambodia, the Central African Republic and Chad also indicated that they were considering becoming States Parties to the Protocol.

At the same time, recent reports recorded at least 2,707 executions in 2025. This was the highest figure since 1981 and a 78% increase on the previous year, although these executions were carried out by only 17 countries. This underlines the continued need for parliamentary engagement.

Parliamentarians have a central role to play in advancing the global movement towards abolition by shaping domestic legal frameworks, exercising oversight, influencing public debate, promoting international cooperation and ensuring that legislation complies with international human rights standards. They can repeal or narrow death penalty laws, support moratoriums and abolitionist treaties, scrutinize criminal justice systems, prevent the reintroduction of the death penalty, and work with civil society, the United Nations and parliamentary networks.

This side event is supported by the International Commission against the Death Penalty (ICDP), an independent international body composed of 28 high-level Commissioners from all regions, including former Heads of State and Government, ministers, parliamentarians, judges and senior UN officials. Established in 2010 at the initiative of Spain, with its Secretariat in Madrid, ICDP works to promote the universal abolition of the death penalty. The IPU and ICDP have a long-standing relationship, including a joint seminar held on 10 October 2013 and continued cooperation on promoting human rights standards among parliamentarians.

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Objectives

This panel discussion aims to provide a dedicated space for parliamentarians to exchange experiences, discuss challenges and identify concrete parliamentary action to advance abolition, particularly in countries where the death penalty remains in law or practice.

Guiding questions

- What parliamentary steps have proven most effective in moving countries from retention of the death penalty towards moratorium, restriction or abolition?
- How can parliamentarians build political and public support for abolition in contexts where the death penalty remains popular or is presented as necessary for security or justice?
- What legislative, oversight and budgetary tools can parliamentarians utilize to reduce the use of the death penalty, prevent its reintroduction and safeguard fair-trial rights?
- How can parliamentarians from abolitionist and retentionist countries work together, including through peer dialogue, parliamentary networks and international forums?
- What concrete forms of cooperation between the IPU, ICDP and interested parliaments could help advance abolition following this panel discussion?

Moderator

- Ms. Claudia Roth (Member of the German Bundestag)

Panellists

- Ms. Barbara Lochbihler (Commissioner, ICDP; former Member of the European Parliament)
- Ms. Sylvie Kayitesi (Commissioner, ICDP; former Deputy Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Rwanda; former Commissioner, African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR); former Chairperson of the Working Group on Death Penalty in Africa; former Chairperson of the ACHPR Working Group on Specific Issues)
- Parliamentarians from abolitionist and retentionist countries participating in the 153rd IPU Assembly

Interventions will be followed by an interactive discussion with participants.

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