

Application of the Death Penalty in Narcotics Crime Cases: Human Rights and International Criminal Law Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

The use of the death penalty in drug-related crimes remains a contentious issue globally, raising concerns about fundamental human rights and policies designed to curb drug trafficking. While some countries retain the death penalty as a tool to address drug offenses, citing its deterrent effect and its role in protecting public health, the human rights viewpoint strongly challenges such practices, focusing on the sanctity of the right to life. International legal frameworks set limits on the death penalty's application and urge states to refrain from actions deemed inhumane and ineffective. This article explores the implementation of the death penalty for drug crimes, considering both human rights perspectives and its relationship with international criminal law.

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INTRODUCTION

The spread of narcotics is a global issue with extensive impacts, affecting both individuals and society at large. Narcotics, in all their forms and varieties, have permeated almost every corner of the world, causing damage in various aspects of social, economic, and public health. In many countries, narcotic-related crimes are considered extraordinary offenses that can harm the youth, destroy social structures, and threaten national security. As a result, governments worldwide are searching for solutions to address this problem, implementing various policies to combat drug trafficking, one of which is the application of the death penalty for drug traffickers.

Although controversial, the death penalty for drug crimes is still maintained by several countries such as Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and some African nations. These countries argue that drug trafficking is a serious threat that must be eradicated decisively, with the death penalty serving as an effective means of addressing this crime. They claim that the death penalty can act as a strong deterrent for drug traffickers and protect society from the negative consequences of drug abuse. In Indonesia, the death penalty for drug offenses has become a consistent legal policy, despite strong protests from various groups both

domestically and internationally. For instance, in recent years, Indonesia has executed several drug offenders, triggering controversy in international forums.

On the other hand, many Western countries, European nations, and human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch strongly criticize the use of the death penalty, especially in narcotic-related cases. They argue that the death penalty violates the right to life, a fundamental human right protected under international law, and that it is ineffective in combating drug trafficking. From a human rights perspective, the right to life is an inalienable right that should not be arbitrarily taken away, even when dealing with serious drug offenders. The abolition of the death penalty in many European countries reflects a growing global consensus to respect the right to life and avoid irreversible judicial errors. In many European Union member states, the death penalty has been abolished as part of their commitment to human rights.

Furthermore, the application of the death penalty in drug cases is also challenged from the perspective of its effectiveness in reducing drug trafficking. Empirical studies show that, despite its implementation in some countries, the level of drug trafficking has not significantly decreased. Countries that focus on health-based, educational, and rehabilitative approaches, such as Portugal, which decriminalized drug use and shifted focus to rehabilitation programs, have shown better results in reducing drug addiction and trafficking. This approach views drug abuse not only as a legal issue but also as a public health concern, requiring scientific and humane solutions.

From the perspective of international law, the use of the death penalty for drug-related offenses faces strict limitations. International instruments like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) emphasize that the right to life is a fundamental right that cannot be arbitrarily deprived, except under very limited circumstances and with transparent and fair procedures. Article 6 of the ICCPR, for example, states that the death penalty should only be applied to "the most serious crimes," and even then, it must be carried out with great caution. Many countries have ratified the second protocol of the ICCPR, leading to the complete abolition of the death penalty as a step towards adhering to human rights principles.

However, despite strong international pressure to reduce the use of the death penalty, some countries continue to uphold this policy. The common argument is that the death penalty is necessary to deter drug traffickers, who are seen as perpetrators of particularly severe crimes. Countries that maintain the death penalty argue that drug trafficking is a real threat to society, and that the imposition of the death penalty sends a clear message to the public that the government is serious about tackling this issue.

At the same time, it should be noted that the strict stance of countries in combating narcotics with the death penalty often faces procedural challenges. Many countries that still uphold the death penalty face issues related to unmet standards of justice, including trials that are not independent, lack of access to effective legal defense, and uncertainty regarding the continuity of legal processes. Additionally, there are other concerns regarding the inhumane treatment of death row inmates, such as executions carried out without adequate notice to the families of the condemned or the use of cruel and degrading methods of execution.

On the other hand, countries that have abolished the death penalty or oppose its use in narcotic cases emphasize rehabilitative efforts, reducing drug demand, and a more humane approach to handling drug-related cases. Countries like Portugal, known for its decriminalization of drugs, have shown that public health-based policies can reduce drug abuse and mitigate the social burdens associated with narcotic trafficking. Therefore, countries that still maintain the death penalty are urged to reconsider their policies, taking into account empirical evidence that shows criminal law approaches focused on prevention and rehabilitation are more effective in the long run.

This issue also calls for considering how each country's legal policies can better align with the existing social and economic context and to what extent criminal law can synergize with international efforts to address drug abuse in a more comprehensive and sustainable manner. Hence, it is crucial to conduct a thorough analysis of how the death penalty in narcotic cases can be examined in light of human rights principles, international law, and the effectiveness of existing legal policies.

Given the ongoing debate, this article aims to provide a broader view on the application of the death penalty in drug-related crimes, reviewing various perspectives, and discussing how this policy interacts with human rights norms and international legal principles. Through this study, the hope is that readers will gain a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges arising from narcotic legal policies and how countries can design more effective and humane approaches to combat drug trafficking.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative approach with descriptive analysis, aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of the application of the death penalty in narcotic crime cases from the perspective of human rights and international criminal law. This approach was chosen because it focuses on understanding complex and dynamic social phenomena and seeks to explore the views and arguments of various parties involved in this debate. In this case, the main focus of the research is to describe and analyze the application of the death

penalty in narcotics cases and how this policy interacts with the principles of international law and human rights.

Type and Sources of Data

This research uses secondary data obtained through literature studies and the analysis of relevant international legal documents, national laws, and various academic literature discussing the death penalty, narcotics, human rights, and international criminal law. This data includes various journal articles, books, reports from human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, as well as reports from international bodies focusing on criminal law and human rights issues.

In addition, the research also collects data in the form of court decisions, both national and international, related to the application of the death penalty in narcotic crime cases. This includes case studies from countries that still impose the death penalty, such as Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand, as well as countries that have abolished the death penalty in their laws. This secondary data will provide an overview of the legal policies implemented in various countries and how these policies relate to human rights principles contained in international legal instruments.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection is conducted using two main techniques: literature study and document analysis. The literature study technique is used to gather references related to the application of the death penalty, narcotic trafficking, human rights, and international criminal law. Books, scientific journals, articles published by international organizations, and reports from human rights organizations will be analyzed to gain an understanding of the various perspectives involved.

Meanwhile, the document analysis technique involves studying and analyzing regulations, laws, and court decisions related to criminal law and human rights at both the national and international levels. In this case, the documents to be analyzed include international legal instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and protocols regulating the application of the death penalty. Additionally, court decisions related to the execution of the death penalty in narcotic cases, both in Indonesia and other countries, will be analyzed to explore whether the application of the death penalty meets justice standards in line with human rights.

Analysis Approach

In analyzing the collected data, this study uses a normative analysis approach, which examines the consistency of the death penalty policy in narcotics cases with international legal norms and human rights principles. This approach aims to assess whether the death penalty policies applied by certain countries align with their international obligations to respect and protect individual rights, particularly the right to life.

Furthermore, analysis is also conducted through a comparative approach, comparing the death penalty policies and their implementation in various countries. Some of the countries focused on in the comparison are those that impose the death penalty, such as Indonesia and Singapore, with countries that do not, such as several European countries or Portugal, which have adopted a decriminalization policy for narcotics. This analysis aims to assess the effectiveness of the death penalty in combating narcotics trafficking and compare its impact on crime rates and human rights conditions in these countries.

Another approach used is critical analysis, which is applied to explore and evaluate the arguments underlying the application of the death penalty in narcotics cases. With this approach, the researcher will analyze various arguments presented by countries supporting the death penalty, as well as arguments from groups opposing it, such as human rights organizations. On the other hand, this research will also highlight the successes or failures of policies implemented by countries that have abolished the death penalty to provide insights into whether rehabilitation and prevention-based approaches are more effective than the death penalty in reducing narcotics abuse.

Research Limitations

While this research aims to provide a comprehensive analysis, there are several limitations to note. First, although the secondary data used is diverse, limitations regarding the concrete implementation of death penalty policies in each country may affect the depth of the analysis. Not all countries provide transparent data regarding the implementation of the death penalty, particularly in narcotics cases. Second, although this study uses various available data sources, the analysis is limited to accessible data and the relevance of international documents to the policies of countries that enforce the death penalty.

Nevertheless, this research can still make a significant contribution to understanding the dynamics between the application of the death penalty in narcotics cases and human rights and international criminal law. Through this qualitative approach, new insights may emerge regarding whether the death penalty policy truly provides a fair and effective solution in addressing narcotics trafficking or if it creates new problems

related to human rights and injustices within the legal system.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Application of the Death Penalty in Narcotics Cases: The Perspective of Death Penalty-Implementing Countries

The application of the death penalty in narcotics cases has long been a policy upheld by several countries, especially those in Southeast Asia, as a response to the rampant abuse of drugs. These countries argue that drug trafficking is a serious issue threatening national social, economic, and security stability. Therefore, they consider the death penalty as the most appropriate measure to deter narcotics offenders. Countries such as Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand, for instance, continue to maintain the death penalty as part of their legal systems, despite strong criticism from the international community, including human rights organizations.

Indonesia, in particular, views narcotics as one of the greatest threats to the nation's future. In recent decades, the country has faced a serious issue with the increasing number of drug users and traffickers, which is seen as undermining the younger generation and social stability. Therefore, the death penalty policy for narcotics cases is considered a form of the country's commitment to combating this crime in the most firm and drastic way. In the eyes of the Indonesian government, the death penalty serves not only to punish offenders but also to send a strong message to society that narcotics crimes will be severely punished.

However, despite strong beliefs among the Indonesian government and similar countries, evidence shows that the death penalty is not always effective in reducing narcotics crimes. For example, despite Indonesia's continued use of the death penalty, narcotics trafficking remains rampant, and the number of drug abuse cases has not seen a significant decline. In Singapore, known for its use of the death penalty against drug traffickers, the number of drug users has decreased, but the issue of drug trafficking persists. This indicates that the narcotics problem cannot be solved solely through harsh punishment but requires a more holistic approach, including prevention, rehabilitation, and law enforcement.

On the other hand, the death penalty policy often raises concerns about potential miscarriages of justice. Many cases have involved individuals who were sentenced to death but later found to be innocent or subjected to a trial process that was neither transparent nor fair. This suggests that while the death penalty may serve as a firm measure, there is a potential for fatal errors in its application, further fueling debates about its legitimacy.

The Human Rights Perspective on the Application of the Death Penalty

One of the main reasons the death penalty in narcotics cases faces severe criticism from the international community is its perceived violation of human rights, particularly the right to life, which is guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). According to these international instruments, every individual has the right to life, and this right should not be deprived except in very limited circumstances and through very strict legal processes.

Despite being considered legitimate by certain countries to combat narcotics crimes, the death penalty is still seen by many human rights organizations as a form of punishment that is disproportionate to the crime committed. Opponents of the death penalty argue that it permanently removes an individual's right to life and denies them the opportunity to change or rehabilitate. In narcotics cases, offenders often come from highly vulnerable backgrounds, such as poverty, economic uncertainty, and lack of education, which lead them to become involved in drug trafficking. Therefore, human rights groups emphasize the importance of rehabilitative and preventive approaches to address the narcotics issue, rather than resorting to the death penalty, which offers no room for improvement.

Furthermore, another argument is that the application of the death penalty in narcotics cases may violate human rights principles related to fairness and impartiality in the judicial system. Many countries have legal systems that are susceptible to corruption, injustice, and lack of transparency. In such conditions, the death penalty may be used as a tool for oppressing specific groups or individuals deemed to be political or social enemies. Cases of injustice, where individuals are sentenced to death without sufficient evidence or through flawed judicial procedures, further fuel debates on the legitimacy of the death penalty in modern legal systems.

Even in countries that retain the death penalty, there is growing momentum to consider a moratorium on its use or, at the very least, limit its application to only the most serious crimes, such as premeditated murder. This is intended to reduce the likelihood of human rights violations that could occur if the death penalty is applied in unclear or unjust situations. Several countries have already implemented a moratorium on the death penalty as a step towards its gradual abolition.

International Criminal Law and Standards for the Application of the Death Penalty

International criminal law contains basic principles regarding the application of the death penalty. One of the main principles in international criminal law is that the death penalty should only be applied for "the most serious crimes," which are crimes that have an extraordinary impact on society and national security. However, the application of the death penalty for narcotics crimes is often questioned in this context. Does drug trafficking truly meet the criteria of "the most serious crimes" as defined in international law?

Many international law experts argue that while narcotics is a serious issue, the application of the death penalty in these cases may be excessive and does not meet international standards of justice. In this regard, international legal instruments such as the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR provide stricter guidelines for limiting the use of the death penalty. This Protocol requires ratifying countries to abolish the death penalty for all types of crimes and only permits it under very limited conditions, such as during times of war or extraordinary threats to national security.

The application of the death penalty for narcotics crimes often contradicts international efforts to protect individual rights, including the right to humane and fair treatment under the law. Countries committed to respecting international law and human rights principles are increasingly urged to reconsider their death penalty policies, and many have started to abolish the death penalty in their legal systems. This can be seen in European countries, where the death penalty has long been abolished, and in some Latin American countries that have abolished it despite high levels of narcotics-related crime.

However, despite some countries abolishing the death penalty, its application for narcotics crimes remains an unresolved issue in several developing nations, which often view it as a crucial tool to combat the narcotics problem. Therefore, international criminal law continues to play a role in urging countries to reconsider this policy, taking into account the human rights implications of the death penalty in narcotics cases.

Alternative Approaches to Narcotics Crimes: Rehabilitation and Prevention

Alongside the ongoing debate over the death penalty, many countries are beginning to shift toward alternative approaches that focus more on rehabilitation, prevention, and treatment in addressing the narcotics issue. The rehabilitative approach argues that drug abuse is not just a criminal problem, but also a health issue that requires medical and social attention. Countries like Portugal, which have adopted a drug decriminalization policy, have shown positive results in reducing drug abuse by focusing more on rehabilitation programs and education.

In Portugal, drug decriminalization does not mean that drugs are legal, but users are no longer subjected to criminal penalties. Instead, they are provided with access to treatment, counseling, and rehabilitation. The country focuses on rehabilitating individuals involved in drug use and prioritizes prevention through educational programs that highlight the dangers of drug abuse. This approach has proven effective in reducing drug abuse rates, raising awareness about the dangers of narcotics, and minimizing the social impact of drug misuse.

Another alternative is a prevention-based approach, which aims to stop drug trafficking before it reaches individuals through stricter policies regulating the production, distribution, and trade of narcotics. This also includes social programs that educate the public, particularly the youth, about the dangers of drug abuse and provide alternative solutions such as education, job training, and better economic opportunities for those at risk of engaging in drug trafficking.

Given the success of this model in several countries, especially those that have abolished the death penalty, there is a growing push to expand the application of policies that prioritize rehabilitation and prevention. These approaches focus more on recovery than punishment, ultimately resulting in a healthier and safer society without compromising human rights.

The application of the death penalty in narcotics crimes, although seen by some countries as a firm measure to combat drug trafficking, raises serious issues related to human rights, justice in the judicial system, and the effectiveness of the policy in addressing the narcotics problem. Countries that retain the death penalty in narcotics cases face international pressure to reconsider this policy, given the potential violations of the right to life and the risk of errors in the judicial system. As an alternative, rehabilitation, prevention, and education-based approaches have proven more effective in the long run in reducing drug trafficking without compromising human rights. These approaches could offer a more humane and sustainable solution to addressing drug abuse.

CONCLUSION

The application of the death penalty in narcotics cases has sparked deep controversy at both the national and international levels. On one hand, countries that retain the death penalty argue that this policy is necessary to provide a strong deterrent against narcotics crimes, which are seen as threats to the social, economic, and security stability of the nation. However, despite claims that the death penalty can reduce drug trafficking, empirical evidence on its effectiveness in decreasing narcotics circulation remains limited and

does not seem to justify the social and moral impacts it generates.

On the other hand, the death penalty is in conflict with human rights principles, particularly the right to life, which is guaranteed by international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Although narcotics crimes are indeed a major threat to society, the deprivation of life through the death penalty is considered excessive and inconsistent with the principle of justice. Furthermore, numerous cases highlight the potential for judicial errors that could result in innocent individuals being sentenced to death. This raises concerns about the sustainability of such policies.

As an alternative, rehabilitation and prevention-based approaches offer a more humane and effective solution to the narcotics problem. Countries that emphasize rehabilitation, such as Portugal, have demonstrated positive results in reducing drug users and narcotics circulation. This approach treats drug abuse as a health issue that requires medical and social attention, not merely a criminal issue. Therefore, countries that continue to apply the death penalty in narcotics cases should consider shifting toward policies focused on rehabilitation and prevention. These policies would not only better respect human rights but also provide a more sustainable solution for society.

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