

On the International Day Against
the Death Penalty:

The Law Mandating the Execution of Palestinian Prisoners Is Arbitrary and Discriminatory, and Must Be Repealed Immediately

Joint Statement



October 10, 2026

The undersigned organizations mark the International Day Against the Death Penalty, observed on October 10, renewing their rejection of the misuse of this penalty under all circumstances, and condemning in the strongest terms the law passed by the Israeli Knesset on March 30, 2026, by a vote of 62 to 48, which makes death by hanging the default sentence for Palestinians convicted before military courts of killing Israelis in acts classified as terrorism. The law does not permit judges to commute the sentence to life imprisonment except under exceptional circumstances, and allows the sentence to be handed down without a unanimous court panel.

We affirm that this law is discriminatory both in its design and in its effect. Military courts try only Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, while settlers are subject to civilian jurisdiction and are not covered by the mandatory death sentence. The harshest penalty thus becomes reserved for a single category of people, in direct contradiction of the principle of equality before the law guaranteed under Articles 2 and 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Israel ratified in 1991.

UN experts have repeatedly warned of this trajectory. In February 2026, they called on Israel to withdraw the bill, noting that a mandatory death penalty is inherently arbitrary, and that manslaughter does not fall within the “most serious crimes” for which international law permits the imposition of the death penalty. In January 2026, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk affirmed the United Nations’ opposition to the death penalty under all circumstances, and urged Israel to abandon the proposals. Following the law’s passage, Special Rapporteurs — including the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions, Morris Tidball-Binz, and the Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Francesca Albanese — declared that it constitutes a discriminatory death-penalty regime that flagrantly violates Israel’s international obligations, calling for its immediate repeal and for Israel to refrain from applying it. They further noted that trying civilians before military courts that fail to meet fair trial standards renders any death sentence issued by such courts unlawful, and that this comes against the backdrop of the International Court of Justice’s ruling that Israel’s legislation and measures in the occupied Palestinian territory violate the prohibition of apartheid.

The danger of the law is compounded by the fact that the Knesset has no legislative authority over occupied territory, and that the military courts themselves have been documented as engaging in arbitrary detention, torture, coerced confessions, and violations of fair trial guarantees — violations monitored by the Committee Against Torture, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry, and other UN bodies. In such an environment, the death penalty — an irreversible punishment — becomes a tool for taking lives outside any genuine judicial oversight.

Despite the criticism and the legal challenges filed by Israeli human rights associations before the Israeli Supreme Court seeking to annul the law and to temporarily freeze its implementation, the Court had not, as of the last available confirmation, issued a freeze order. We affirm that, as called for by UN experts, the Court must annul this legislation without delay, before irreparable harm occurs. By contrast, the inflammatory rhetoric that accompanied the law’s passage — including statements by ministers in the Israeli government — demonstrates that the motive is political and retaliatory, not judicial.

The undersigned organizations therefore demand the following:

- 1.The immediate repeal and non-application of the law, and the cessation of seeking, issuing, or carrying out death sentences under it.
- 2.An end to the trial of Palestinian civilians before military courts, and the guarantee of fair trials in accordance with international standards.
- 3.An investigation into allegations of torture and ill-treatment against Palestinian detainees, and accountability for those responsible.
- 4.States fulfilling their obligations under international law, including the non-recognition of the effect of this legislation, and the use of all available means to press for its repeal.
- 5.We call on the Office of the High Commissioner and the UN Special Procedures to continue monitoring the implementation of the law and to keep the Human Rights Council informed of it.

The undersigned organizations emphasize

that the right to life admits no discrimination, that the application of the death penalty in situations of armed conflict achieves neither justice nor deterrence, and that extending its scope against a people under occupation represents a serious setback to the global trend toward abolition.

Signatory Organizations:

- Alkarama — Geneva
- Justice for Human Rights Organization (JHR) — Istanbul
- AFDI International — Belgium
- Victims of Torture Association — Geneva
- Free Voice for Human Rights — Paris
- Tawasul for Human Rights — The Hague
- Egyptians’ Human Rights Council — Geneva
- Solidarity for Human Rights — Geneva
- Cedar Center for Legal Studies — Lebanon

