



## My Life - My Right End the War on Drugs

In November 2018, the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) adopted the first ever “United Nations system common position supporting the implementation of the international drug control policy through effective inter-agency collaboration<sup>1</sup>”. The CEB committed to support member states in developing and implementing truly balanced, comprehensive, integrated, evidence-based, human-rights-based, development-oriented, and sustainable responses to the world drug problem within the framework of the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>2</sup>.

Reiterating to their commitments to support members states, the CEB also outlined on the following key areas:

- Recognize that the concern for the health and welfare of humankind underpins the three international drug control conventions, which, together with other relevant international instruments, are the cornerstone of the international drug control system.
- Acknowledge that the conventions allow for sufficient flexibility for countries to design and implement national drug policies according to their priorities and needs, consistent with the principle of common and shared responsibility and applicable international law.

On one hand where the UN talks about developing human-rights-based sustainable responses to counter the world drug problem and implement drug policies, increase health and harm reduction services while on the other hand, observes 26<sup>th</sup> of June as the ‘*International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking*<sup>3</sup>’ as an expression of its determination to strengthen action and cooperation to achieve the goal of an international society free of drug abuse. And each year, individuals like yourself, entire communities, and various organizations all over the world join in to observe World Drug Day to help raise awareness of the major problem that illicit drugs pose to society. To tackle the world drug problem!

This dual approaches by the UN have severely impacted in some countries in Asia and has led to serious human rights violations in the name of war-on-drugs. It has evidently resulted in compulsory detention centers, criminalization, imprisonment, and lack of appropriate services for people who use drugs including the extra judicial killings in the Philippines some years back. The HRI's Global Overview 2020 shows that 98 per cent of confirmed global death sentences for drugs, or 209 out of 213 sentences, were delivered in South-east Asian countries: 79 in Vietnam, 77 in Indonesia, 25 in Malaysia, 13 in Laos, eight in Thailand and six in Singapore<sup>4</sup>.

The above factors have compelled people who use drugs to go into-the-hiding and die a silent death due to unavailability of appropriate harm reduction services, HIV and Viral Hepatitis treatment and drug overdose management. There is no death penalty in The Philippines, but carrying small quantities of drugs (for personal use) can lead to serving long prison sentences including carrying drug paraphernalia thereby undermining harm reduction approaches.

The Network of Asian People who Use Drugs (NAPUD) is committed towards advocating for equal rights and opportunities for its community members. We would like to underscore the fact that the so called ‘war-on-drugs’ approach to counter the drug problem is a serious violation of human rights and therefore calls upon the country governments in Asia and UN partners to:

- **End the criminalization of people who use drugs:** UNAIDS calls for action against the criminalization of people who use drugs, for the redress of criminalization’s negative effects on health issues and for the respect of human rights<sup>5</sup>.
- **Eliminate the death penalty for drug related offences and ensure proportional sentencing:** Eight Asian countries namely: China, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, North Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam is

<sup>1</sup> <https://vngoc.org/2019/07/introducing-the-un-systems-new-common-position-on-drugs/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://unsceb.org/united-nations-system-common-position-supporting-implementation-international-drug-control-policy>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/drugs/index-new.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/will-2022-signal-sea-change-in-the-death-penalty-for-drugs-jakarta-post-contributor>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/pressreleaseandstatementarchive/2021/november/20211101\\_international-drug-users-day](https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/pressreleaseandstatementarchive/2021/november/20211101_international-drug-users-day)

known for death penalty for drug offences. In 2021 alone, at least nine individuals from Pakistan were sentenced to death for drug trafficking in Asian and Middle Eastern countries. In North Korea, civil society consistently identifies drug offences among the main crimes for which individuals are executed, although there are no published records or figures<sup>6</sup>

- **Close compulsory treatment centres for people who use drugs and scale up voluntary community-based drug dependence treatment services:** Many countries in East and Southeast Asia operate compulsory “treatment” facilities for people who use drugs. These facilities are a form of confinement where those accused or known to be using drugs are involuntarily admitted for detoxification and “treatment” without adequate due processes. UNAIDS & UNODC jointly gave a Press Release in January 2022 on the UN report that says compulsory drug treatment facilities in East and Southeast Asia are not closing as planned, and many policy reforms have stalled<sup>7</sup>. The UN agencies, in 2012 called on governments to close compulsory drug detention and rehabilitation centres<sup>8</sup>.

**On this 26<sup>th</sup> June 2022, NAPUD calls on Asian governments to consider:**

- Decriminalization of possession of drugs for personal use.
- Immunity from prosecution for use of drugs and referral to treatment.
- Eliminate death penalty for drug related offences.
- immediately close compulsory detention centers and release those detained therein and scale-up of evidence-informed and community-based drug dependence treatment and harm reduction services.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.hri.global/death-penalty-2021>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.unodc.org/documents/southeastasiaandpacific/press-release/2022/UNODC\\_UNAIDS\\_compulsory\\_treatment\\_joint\\_PRESS\\_RELEASE.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/southeastasiaandpacific/press-release/2022/UNODC_UNAIDS_compulsory_treatment_joint_PRESS_RELEASE.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> United Nations. 2012. Joint Statement on compulsory drug detention and rehabilitation centres