

# Activists renew calls for moratorium of death penalty

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Human rights groups have renewed calls for the Indonesian government to halt, if not abolish, implementation of the death penalty, as a newly released study indicates declining trends on the use of capital punishment globally.

An annual report on the death penalty released by Amnesty International last Thursday revealed a global decrease in executions from 2016 to 2017, down by 4 percent, from 1,032 to 993 cases, with Indonesia making slight progress by not executing any death row inmates last year.

The number of death sentences recorded globally also de-

creased by 17 percent, from 3,117 in 2016 to 2,591 in 2017, during which Indonesia sentenced to death 47 convicts, mostly for drug-related crimes, in a slight decline compared to 60 death sentences handed down by Indonesia in 2016.

"The global declining trends provide an opportunity for Indonesia to review its use of the death penalty. It's high time for Indonesia to impose a moratorium on all executions in 2018," Amnesty International Indonesia director Usman Hamid said recently.

Under President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo's administration, Indonesia has executed 18 death row inmates convicted of drug-related offenses, including foreigners,

in three batches since 2015.

As of 2017, there were at least 262 convicts on death row awaiting execution without a clear date.

The activists argued that a moratorium was based on evidence in at least two cases in the past they said had reflected flaws in the criminal justice system.

The Ombudsman concluded last year that maladministration had occurred in the execution of Nigerian Humphrey Jefferson Ejike Eleweke in 2016, which took place while he was still seeking clemency.

In another case that showed irregularities in the system, the death sentence of murder convict Yusman Telaumbanua was commuted to imprisonment in 2017

after a dental forensic examination proved that he was a minor when he committed the crime in 2012 and thus could not be sentenced to death.

"The government must be open to evaluation [...] they can take an initial step by admitting that our judicial system is far from perfect," said Ricky Gunawan from the Community Legal Aid Institute (LBH Masyarakat).

Maintaining the death penalty in the country could also hamper the government's diplomatic efforts to save at least 188 Indonesians currently on death row abroad. "In that case, Indonesia should not implement double standards," said Wahyu Susilo of Migrant Care.

Despite calls from the United Nations as well as foreign and domestic human rights groups, Indonesians in general have shown support of the use of capital punishment. A survey released by Indo Barometer in 2015 revealed that 84.9 percent of people approved of sentencing drug dealers to death.

But just recently, in what appeared to be an effort to accommodate both proponents and opponents of the death penalty, the government and lawmakers agreed to categorize capital punishment as an "alternative sentence" in the Criminal Code revision bill.

Under the bill, convicts who receive the death sentence will be

given a 10-year probation period, after which their sentence may be commuted to a life sentence or to a 20-year prison sentence at the discretion of law and human rights ministers.

The progress, however, was seen as merely a "middle ground" offered by Jokowi for the country's constituents who supported capital punishment, who were among both nationalist and religious camps.

"The high popularity of capital punishment among religious and nationalist figures seems to make Jokowi unable to abolish it," Usman said, adding that scrapping the death penalty might instead backfire on Jokowi, who is seeking reelection in 2019.