



Lebanon

Foreign Nationals and the Death Penalty

Death Penalty Overview

Since Lebanon's independence in 1943, the death sentence has been a legal punishment, although its application has been sporadic. Since independence, 51 people have been executed for crimes including murder, terrorism and espionage. Of these, about 11 were foreign nationals. The last three executions to date were carried out in 2004.

Although there has been a de facto moratorium on executions in Lebanon since 2004, death sentences are still handed down by the courts. No official statistics are available on how many current prisoners are on death row. However, a [report](#) released in 2022 by Ensemble Contre la Peine de Mort (ECPM), based on data collected between 2015 and 2019 reports at least 89 death sentences in that period, 20 of whom were sentenced in absentia. According to this study, the number of people currently held on death row is approximately 81, 20 of whom are foreign nationals, most of them convicted of murder.

Lebanon used to have a mandatory death penalty for certain crimes, including murder, but this was abolished in 2001. However, cases tried before 2001 have not been reviewed.

Law 183/2011 allows judges to commute death sentences to sentences of 20-35 years imprisonment, under certain conditions, yet so far only one person has had their sentence commuted since this law began.

Despite the de facto moratorium, there is a lively public discourse on the death penalty in Lebanon. In 2008, the newly appointed Minister of Justice, Ibrahim Najjar, intervened against the resumption of executions by refusing to sign 19 death sentences that had already been countersigned by the President and the Chairman of the Council. As a result, the execution of these death sentences, was blocked, even though President Michel Suleiman had [publicly demanded](#) their enforcement. The moratorium is thus by no means firm, but subject to current political circumstances.

A lack of confidence in the judicial system and a dysfunctional government have



Prisoners held in one room in Roumieh Central Prison, 2023. © Amnesty International

recently strengthened calls for the death sentence to be enforced. Yet, since 1997, a strong abolitionist movement has also emerged in the country.

Nevertheless, in today's particularly volatile political climate, marked by the unprecedented popular uprising in 2019 and the devastating explosion in the port of Beirut, it is not clear what the future will hold in relation to the death penalty in Lebanon.

Foreign Nationals

Many foreign nationals work in Lebanon under the exploitative *kafala* system. As elsewhere in the region, foreign nationals

often face greater barriers accessing justice. In 2020, ECPM reported that at least 20 foreign nationals had been sentenced to death and imprisoned, the majority for murder charges. Most of the prisoners (13 out of 20) were Syrian nationals, the others were Sri Lankan (3), Palestinian (2), Egyptian (1) and Iraqi (1). The Sri Lankan prisoners were all women, migrant domestic workers with restricted access to legal support. Although Lebanon has ratified the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, which grants consular authorities the right to legally represent their nationals, 11 of the 20 foreign prisoners sentenced to death, have not had contact with their consulate, as reported by ECPM.

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