



SPECIAL PROCEDURES
UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Working Group on discrimination against women and girls



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
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Confederaziun svizra

Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations

Canada



México
Misión Permanente de México
ante la Organización de las
Naciones Unidas

Access to Justice Denied: Women Facing the Death Penalty

Side event title

Access to Justice Denied: Women Facing the Death Penalty

Date and place

Date: March 12 – 3 to 4:30 pm

Place: Permanent Mission of Switzerland, 633 3rd Ave, 29th Floor, New York

RSVP: Kindly register [here](#)

Description

This side event will examine the systemic and intersectional discrimination faced by women exposed to the death penalty, with a particular focus on the structural barriers that prevent their effective access to justice. It will explore how criminal justice systems, far from being gender-neutral, often reproduce and reinforce gender inequalities, especially against women from marginalized and disadvantaged backgrounds.

The event will focus on the gendered pathways through which women come into conflict with the law, highlighting how gender-based violence, poverty, coercion, caregiving responsibilities, and discriminatory legal frameworks shape women's criminalization and exposure to the harshest criminal sanctions. A woman with lived experience being sentenced to death will use her story to demonstrate the multifaceted ways in which criminal legal systems deny women access to justice. Other speakers with relevant expertise will dedicate particular attention to situations in which women who are survivors of violence are prosecuted or sentenced to death for acts linked to prolonged abuse, coercive control, or survival-driven conduct.

The side event will address the following interrelated issues:

- **Structural barriers to access to justice**, including the lack of effective legal aid, mandatory sentencing regimes, limited judicial discretion, lack of transparency in the use of the death penalty, and the overrepresentation of women living in poverty or in marginalized situations among those sentenced to death.
- **The denial or minimization of gender-based violence** within criminal proceedings, including in capital cases. The discussion will examine how physical, sexual, and psychological violence, as well as coercion and dependency, are frequently dismissed or excluded from legal analysis, despite their central role in shaping women's actions and culpability.
- **The impact of gender stereotypes in investigations, prosecutions, and trials**, including narratives of the "bad mother," the "manipulative woman," or the "immoral woman," and how these stereotypes undermine women's right to a fair trial and influence sentencing outcomes.
- **Intersectional discrimination**, particularly on the basis of race, ethnicity, migration status, disability, and poverty, and how these intersecting forms of disadvantage contribute to women's criminalization and harsher sentencing, especially in drug-related cases

Speakers and moderator

Opening Remarks: Oliver Hoehne, DPR, Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN

Speakers:

- Ambika Satkunanathan, Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network / Just Futures Collaborative
- Doreen Namyalo-Kyazze, Penal Reform International Uganda
- Laura Nyirinkindi, UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls
- Sabrina Butler Smith, Witness to Innocence, *person directly affected by the death penalty*

Moderator: Sabrina Mahtani, Women Beyond Walls

RSVP here (by noon March 10)