

China's horrifying use of the death penalty remains one of the country's deadly secrets, as the authorities continue to execute thousands of people each year, Amnesty International said in its 2016 global review of the death penalty, published recently.

A new in-depth investigation by Amnesty International, shows that the Chinese authorities enforce an elaborate secrecy system to obscure the shocking scale of executions in the country, despite repeated claims it is making progress towards judicial transparency.

Excluding China, states around the world executed 1,032 people in 2016. China executed more than all other countries in the world put together, while the USA reached a historic low in its use of the death penalty in 2016.

"China wants to be a leader on the world stage, but when it comes to the death penalty it is leading in the worst possible way – executing more people annually than any other country in the world," said Salil Shetty, Secretary General, Amnesty International.

"The Chinese government has recognised it is a laggard in terms of openness and judicial transparency, but it persists in actively concealing the true scale of executions. It is high time for China to lift the veil on this deadly secret and finally come clean about its death penalty system."

"Just a handful of countries are still executing people on a large scale. The majority of states no longer condone the state taking human life. With just four countries responsible for 87% of all recorded executions – the death penalty is itself living on borrowed time."

### **China transparency claims "misleading"**

Amnesty International's investigation shows that hundreds of documented death penalty cases are missing from a national online court database that was initially touted as a "crucial step towards openness" and is regularly heralded as evidence that the country's judicial system has nothing to hide.

China's database contains only a tiny fraction of the thousands of death sentences that Amnesty International estimates are handed out every year in China, reflecting the fact that the Chinese government continues to maintain almost total secrecy over the number of people sentenced to death and executed in the country.

China classifies most information related to the death penalty as "state secrets" and in any case virtually any information can be classified as a state secret under China's overbroad secrecy laws.

Amnesty International found public news reports of at least 931 individuals executed between

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2014 and 2016 (only a fraction of the total executions), but only 85 of them are in the state database.

The database also omits foreign nationals given death sentences for drug-related crimes -despite media reports of at least 11 executions of foreign nationals. Numerous cases related to "terrorism" and drug-related offences are also absent.

"The Chinese government uses partial disclosures and unverifiable assertions to claim progress in reducing the number of executions yet at the same time maintains near absolute secrecy. This is deliberately misleading." said Salil Shetty.

"China is a complete outlier in the world community when it comes to the death penalty, out of step with international legal standards and in contravention with repeated UN requests to report how many people it executes."

[Read Amnesty report here](#)