

# PAKISTAN'S DRUG POLICY JOURNEY

## 1997 - CONTROL OF NARCOTICS SUBSTANCES ACT

Pakistan promulgates the Control of Narcotics Substances Act (CNSA), section 9(c) of which carries the death penalty for anyone found possessing or trafficking narcotic drugs in excess of one kilogram.

## 2019 - ANTI-NARCOTICS POLICY

The National Anti-Narcotics Policy focuses on limiting drug supply & demand leading to frequent crackdowns. However, these efforts often target low-level carriers rather than drug networks and the policy reinforces stigmatisation and criminalisation of personal drug use.

## 2009 - GHULAM MURTAZA V. THE STATE

The Lahore High Court expresses concern over the arbitrary nature of punishments in narcotics cases. The judgement *Ghulam Murtaza v. The State* sets out sentencing guidelines for narcotics offences.

## 2022 - MANDATORY MINIMUM SENTENCES

The Control of Narcotics Substances (Amendment) Act 2022 eliminates probation, parole, and bail (except women & children) and imposes mandatory minimum penalties. As a result number of prisoners under narcotics offences increases by 11.95% in year 2024-25.

## 2023 - REMOVAL OF THE DEATH PENALTY

The Control of Narcotics Substances (Amendment) Act 2023 eliminates the death penalty for narcotics offences enhancing Pakistan's compliance with its obligations under the ICCPR and the GSP+.



## » APRIL 2024 - REIMAGINING JUSTICE

Justice Project Pakistan's Reimagining Justice Conference launches Pakistan's first national dialogue on drug policy reform, bringing together key allies from the provincial and federal bureaucracy, law enforcement, judiciary, civil society, and NHRIs. Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar announces the inclusion of rehabilitation measures in the CNSA and commits to rolling back the 2022 amendment.

## NOVEMBER 2024 - PROSECUTOR GENERAL VISIT

JPP facilitates the Prosecutor General of Punjab's visit to Portugal. With the support of the EU, the Portuguese Embassy, UN OHCHR, and Harm Reduction International, the visit provides first-hand insights into Portugal's public health-centered drug policy. This engagement has been pivotal, positioning the Prosecutor General as a leading advocate of drug policy reform.



## » JANUARY 2025 - DRUG POLICY CONSULTATION

JPP convenes high-level consultations where Barrister Aqeel Malik, Government Spokesperson on Legal Affairs, affirms Pakistan's commitment to aligning its drug policy with human rights principles, signaling a shift toward rehabilitation-focused legislation, proportionate sentencing, and harm reduction strategies.

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## JANUARY 2025 - JUDGES' TRAINING



JPP launches an inaugural training for judges at the Federal Judicial Academy on the CNSA and the International Guidelines on Human Rights and Drug Policy, featuring international experts from the UN OHCHR and the International Centre on Human Rights & Drug Policy at Essex University.



## MARCH 2025 - MINISTER OF STATE FOR LAW & JUSTICE AT UN COMMISSION ON NARCOTIC DRUGS

Barrister Aqeel Malik, Minister of State for Law & Justice, represents Pakistan at the 68th Commission on Narcotic Drugs in Vienna, marking a rare moment in recent memory of senior government engagement alongside civil society at global drug policy forums. Speaking at high-level side events hosted by OHCHR, and Harm Reduction International, he outlines Pakistan's shift toward a human rights and public health-centered drug policy. His bilateral meetings with Colombia's Federal Minister of Justice, Portugal's National Drug Policy Coordinator, the EU Ambassador to the UN, and senior civil society leaders signal Pakistan's growing international leadership on drug policy reform.



## FEBRUARY 2025 - NCRC CONSULTATION ON PREVENTION OF DRUG USE IN SCHOOLS



The National Commission on the Rights of the Child (NCRC) held a high-level discussion in February 2025, gathering stakeholders from across Pakistan, on the prevention of drug abuse in schools. The consultation saw different working groups putting forth their recommendations and devising a joint action plan for the Government of Pakistan on this issue, while also incorporating a human rights and child protection approach.



## APRIL 2025 - NCHR CONFERENCE ON SDG 16

The National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) convenes Pakistan's first nation-wide conference on reforming the criminal justice system in line with SDG 16. Among several expert-led discussions, Justice Project Pakistan contributed to working groups examining issues including the impact of strict narcotics laws on prison overcrowding and the criminalisation of poverty through these laws. Participants highlighted how drug addiction is treated as a criminal rather than public health issue, recommending a shift toward decriminalising poverty-related offences and implementing rehabilitation-focused alternatives to incarceration.



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## SEPTEMBER 2025 - MINISTER OF STATE FOR LAW & JUSTICE AT THE 60<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Building on his strong presence at the 68th Commission on Narcotic Drugs in Vienna, Minister of State for Law & Justice Barrister Aqeel Malik represented Pakistan at the 60th

Session of the UN Human Rights Council, marking another rare moment of senior government engagement at global human rights and drug policy forums. Invited by OHCHR and leading international civil society organizations, he highlighted Pakistan's shift toward a rights-based and public health-centered drug policy, outlining reforms such as the abolition of the death penalty for drug offences, federal judicial trainings on the International Guidelines on Human Rights and Drug Policy, approval of Opioid Agonist Treatment, and gender-sensitive legal aid initiatives for women prisoners. His participation in high-level panels – alongside the Colombian Ambassador to the UN in Geneva, the Brazilian National Secretary for Drug Policy, and senior UN experts - and his bilateral engagements, including discussions with the Global Commission on Drug Policy Commissioner Ruth Dreifuss, reinforced Pakistan's emerging commitment to humane, evidence-based drug policy reform and underscored the country's commitment to embedding human rights into law and practice.



## SEPTEMBER 2025 - ADIALA JAIL PILOT PROJECT BY LEGAL AID AND JUSTICE AUTHORITY (LAJA)

In August 2025, the Ministry of Law & Justice, through the Legal Aid & Justice Authority, signed an agreement with the Rawalpindi Bar Association to collaborate on the provision of effective legal representation to undertrial women charged under the Control of Narcotic Substances Act, in Adiala Jail, Rawalpindi. The initiative aims to provide free-of-cost legal services to over 120 women. Through this project, indigent women receive free, gender-sensitive legal aid delivered by trained lawyers, supported by digital case management tools

that allow their cases to be tracked in real time.

As part of the project's initial phase, in November 2025 the Ministry of Law & Justice deputed lawyers from Justice Project Pakistan (JPP) to conduct in-prison interviews with women incarcerated under drug-related offences in Adiala Jail. Through this process, women requiring legal assistance were identified, enabling the project to move into its next stage of implementation. Next steps involve training lawyers on best practices for gender-sensitive legal representation, and matching women with these trained lawyers.

Upon the successful completion of this pilot, there are plans to expand this initiative nationwide. It represents an unprecedented shift in Pakistan's punitive approach to drug offences that recognised the structural vulnerabilities that push women into the drug trade.