

The Implementation of Caning Law in Aceh Province, Indonesia: An Overview of the Human Rights Perspectives

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Abstract

Initially, caning in Aceh was conducted openly in public areas, including the courtyard of the mosque. However, this approach provoked both positive and negative reactions. Many viewed public caning as a form of torture and raised concerns about its potential negative impact on children who witnessed the punishment. Subsequently, the Aceh government introduced Governor's Regulation No. 5/2018, which mandated the implementation of caning punishment within correctional institutions. Despite this move, the implementation of caning punishment, whether in public or correctional institutions, continues to be criticized as a violation of human rights. However, the Rome Statute of 1998 and Law No. 5 of 1998 on the Ratification of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment stipulate that legally imposed punishments, including caning, do not constitute torture as long as they are in accordance with existing legislation.

Keywords: *Caning Law, Punishment, Aceh Province, Human Rights.*

INTRODUCTION

In Aceh Province, caning is the most commonly used form of punishment for a wide range of crimes, as defined in Qanun No. 6 of 2014, related to the Jinayat Law (Gayo, 2017). Although Islamic criminal law includes various punishments such as death penalty, imprisonment, exile, fines, amputation of hands, and stoning, the implementation of Islamic law in Aceh is limited to three specific forms of punishment: caning, imprisonment, and fines (Feener, 2013).

According to Qanun No. 6 of 2014 in Jinayat law, caning is specifically imposed for offenses classified under hudud and ta'zir. In particular, crimes that fall into the category of qishas have not been addressed or regulated by the Aceh government in the context of Qanun No. 6 of 2014, related to the Aceh Jinayat Law (Ferizal, 2019). In the context of Jarimah hudud, Qanun No. 6 of 2014 concerning Aceh Jinayat law focuses on regulating two specific offenses, namely adultery and the consumption of liquor (khamar), including making false accusations of adultery (qazab). It should be noted that other offenses classified under hudud, such as theft (sariqah), apostasy (murtad), rebellion (buqhat), and robbery (hirabah), are not addressed or regulated at all in this particular Qanun (Suryani, 2023).

The execution of the caning punishment is completely delegated to the government (ullil amri), leading to variations in the method of implementing the caning punishment in different Islamic states (Ferizal, 2019). Similar to Saudi Arabia, the kingdom enforces caning and death sentences in public spaces, with events witnessed by those in the vicinity. In Malaysia, caning punishments are administered discreetly within correctional facilities, witnessed only by inmates within these facilities (Ferizal, 2019).

Initially, the enforcement of caning sentences in Aceh resembled the method used in Saudi Arabia, which involved public executions witnessed by the wider community. These canings took place in areas where there were large gatherings, such as near mosques after Friday prayers (Abubakar, 2012). The execution of public caning punishments in Aceh is based on legal frameworks, specifically Law No. 4 of 1999 on the

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Implementation of Specialties for the Province of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam, Law No. 11 of 2006 on the Aceh Government and Qanun No. 6 of 2014 on Jinayat Law (Amsori & Jailani, 2020). Article 262, paragraph (1) of Qanun No. 6 of 2014, addressing Aceh Jinayat law, specifies that caning will be carried out in a public space visible to those present. However, this provision has been amended, as outlined in Article 30 of Governor's Regulation No. 5 of 2018, which provides that:

Administration of the caning of uqubat takes place in a public location visible to those present.

The execution of uqubat caning, as described in paragraph (1), is not allowed in the presence of individuals under 18 (eighteen) years.

The designated public location mentioned in Section (1) is within a correctional institution, detention center, or detention center branch.

The issuance of Governor's Regulation No. 5 of 2018 regarding the execution of caning in correctional facilities has elicited both approval and disapproval in society, giving rise to various viewpoints on the subject (Bahri, 2012). Additionally, the choice to abstain from conducting public caning is also thought to have been affected by external groups, who cited human rights issues as the basis for their resistance to public caning (Zainuddin, 2012).

Amnesty International has consistently and vigorously opposed the use of caning in Aceh, arguing that this form of punishment is inhumane and violates human rights principles. According to Amnesty International, the implementation of caning laws is considered a violation of the UN Convention against Torture, a treaty that Indonesia ratified in 1998 (Surbakti 2010). On 22 May 2011, Sam Zafiri, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific Director, urged the Indonesian government to end the practice of caning in Aceh, saying it was incompatible with international law (Long, 2007).

Opposition to the caning law has been primarily expressed by human rights activist groups within and outside of Aceh. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct research to determine whether the practice of caning is consistent with or violates human rights principles. This study focused on whether the enforcement of caning in Aceh is inconsistent with the principles of human rights. It also examined the strategy of the Aceh government for dealing with opposition to the application of Islamic law, particularly in relation to caning punishments.

METHODS

This study used a normative research design, specifically focusing on doctrinal or legalistic research, with particular emphasis on Islamic criminal law as defined in Qanun No. 6 of 2014 on Jinayat law. Normative research aims to uncover, clarify, examine, analyze, and methodically present specific facts, principles, concepts, theories, and laws. Its goal is to uncover new knowledge and ideas while proposing changes or innovations within the legal field (Yaqin, 2007). Normative research involves not only the analysis of the content of laws but also the study of the legal structure and cultural context of a society (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

Qualitative descriptive data analysis techniques were used in this study. Approaches used in normative or legal research include the conceptual approach, statutory approach, legal history approach, case analysis approach, and comparative legal approach (Diantha, 2017). However, our research takes an exclusively legal or statutory approach, focusing on the analysis of the implementation of caning punishment under statutory provisions. Our study also explores the position of caning punishment from a human rights perspective.

Secondary data was collected using data collection techniques from library studies, specifically documentation studies (Sonata, 2014). In addition, this research includes secondary data as supplemental information. Secondary data include primary, secondary, and tertiary legal materials (Sunggono, 2005). The legal materials used for this study are from the literature and documentation found in various libraries and references related to the research topic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Definition of Punishment

Punishment or penalty can be interpreted as both the phase of determining sanctions and the phase of administering sanctions in criminal law (Surbakti 2010). The term criminal is commonly understood to refer to law, while punishment is understood to refer to consequence or retribution (Al-Syaukani, 2006) Retaliation must be executed proportionately, indicating a balanced relationship between the gravity of the committed act and the imposed punishment. The punishment should not surpass the extent of the offender's culpability (Beccaria et al., 2009).

Punishment or penalty can be understood as both the phase of determining sanctions and the phase of implementing sanctions in criminal law. The term criminal is typically interpreted to refer to the law, while punishment is interpreted as the imposition of penalties or retribution (Hamzah, 2017). Retribution must be proportional, ensuring a balance between the severity of the act committed and the punishment imposed. The punishment should not exceed the extent of the offender's culpability (Yusuf & Basri, 2017). Van Bemmelen advocates the principle of proportionality in retaliation, arguing that in modern criminal law, satisfying the need for retribution remains crucial to preventing the transformation of individuals into vigilantes (Ablisar, 2011).

Implementation of Caning Law in Aceh, Indonesia

In the context of Islamic criminal law (*jinayah/jinayat*), the penalty of caning (*'uqubat*) applies to various categories of offenses (*jarimah*), including both *jarimah ḥudud* and *jarimah ta'zir*. Crimes falling under *jarimah ḥudud*, subject to the threat of *'uqubat caning*, encompass activities such as the consumption of alcoholic beverages, engaging in adultery, and making false accusations of adultery (*qazaf*). Furthermore, specific *ta'zir* offenses, such as *jarimah maisir*, *khalwat*, *ikhtilath*, *liwat*, *muṣaḥaqaḥ*, sexual harassment and rape, can lead to caning as the primary form of punishment.

Qanun refers to the laws and regulations implemented by the Aceh government. These regulations were intended to complement Islamic law in areas where it was considered to be lacking in regulation. Qanun No. Section 6 of 2014 outlines the various types of crime and the corresponding sanctions imposed on individuals who violate Islamic law. The categories of *jinayat* covered in this Qanun include: (a) wine; (b) *maisir*; (c) seclusion; (d) *ikhtilath*; (e) Adultery; (f) sexual harassment; (g) rape; (h) *Qadzaf*; (i) *Liwath*; and (j) *Musahaqaḥ*. The prescribed forms of punishment for those who violate Islamic law are caning, a fine in the form of gold, or imprisonment (Syihab & Hatta, 2022). The severity of the punishment, whether by lashes, fines, or imprisonment, is contingent upon the gravity of the violation of Islamic law. The mildest penalty consists of ten lashes, a fine of 100 grams of gold, or a 10-month prison term, while the harshest penalty encompasses 150 lashes, a fine of 1,500 grams of gold, or a 150-month imprisonment.

According to Qanun No. 6 of 2014 on the *Jinayat Law* and Qanun No. 7 of 2013 on the *Jinayat Procedure Law*, the administration of caning takes place in public spaces that are observable by the general public, such as mosque courtyards. Caning is a form of corporal punishment that involves the administration of lashes to an individual's body. The practice uses a rattan whip, typically 0.75 to 1 cm in diameter and 1 cm in length. The whip lacks a double end and has a handle at the base. According to Qanun No. 7 of 2013 in the *Jinayat Procedural Law*, the authority and responsibility for carrying out caning sentences rests with the prosecutor.

'*Uqubat caning* is administered following a verdict by the Sharia court, which has permanent legal authority. The postponement of the '*uqubat* execution requires the approval of the head of the district prosecutor's office based on a medical recommendation regarding the health of the convicted person. The execution of the '*uqubat* caning is coordinated by the prosecutor, who chooses the place of the caning, determines the time of the caning, and appoints an executioner. The assigned executioner is usually an officer of the *Wilayatul Hisbah* (Sharia Police), who is responsible for performing the lashing of the condemned. It is mandatory for the convict to wear a cloth head cover during the process (Syihab & Hatta, 2022).

In addition, caning is carried out within an area of at least 3 x 3 meters. The distance between the person being punished and the person administering the caning is between 0.70 meters and 1 meter, and the person

administering the caning is to the left of the person being punished. A distance of 12 meters is maintained between the administrator and the nearest observer. During the caning process, the prosecutor, supervising judge, appointed physician, and caning officer occupy a 3 x 3-meter platform (stage). The supervising judge's responsibility includes instructing the prosecutor to postpone the execution of the 'uqubat caning if certain conditions are not fulfilled.

Caning is limited to some regions of the offender's body and is prohibited in specific areas such as the head, face, neck, chest, and genitals. Punishment is limited to the area between the shoulders and the hips. The person being caned must wear light clothing that covers the private areas provided for this purpose. As to posture, a male convict is typically placed standing without support, while a female convict is placed in a seated position. However, at the convict's or doctor's request, the individual may be chastised while kneeling or standing with support, thus ensuring freedom of movement.

When the entire process of administering the 'uqubat caning has been completed, the prosecutor prepares a report on the caning. In cases where the administration of 'uqubat caning is not completed, the minutes include details of the reasons for any delay or temporary suspension, along with a record of the number of lashes administered and those still to be administered. A copy of these minutes is then given to the condemned person or their family as proof that the condemned person has served the full sentence or any part of it.

Currently, there has been a change in the execution of caning punishment from an open public execution to a more restricted public setting. This alteration is rooted in Article 30, paragraphs (1) to (3) of Governor Regulation No. 5 of 2018 concerning the Implementation of 'uqubat Caning in correctional institutions, which stipulates the following:

'Uqubat caning takes place in a public space visible to those present;

Execution of 'uqubat caning, as specified in paragraph (1), is not permitted in the presence of children under the age of 18;

The designated public space in Section (1) is located within the Correctional Institution/Detention Center/Detention Center Branch.

The introduction of Governor's Regulation No. 5 of 2018 regarding the Implementation of 'uqubat caning in correctional institutions has led to debates within society. Concerns have been raised that these regulations might not effectively achieve the intended purpose of punishment, namely, the prevention and reduction of societal bullying, leading to the establishment of order and peace within the community.

The former governor of Aceh, Irwandi Yusuf, explained that the decision to move the punishment of caning to a correctional facility was motivated by preventing children under 18 years of age from witnessing the execution of caning sentences. In line with this objective, a Governor's Regulation has been issued regarding the implementation of caning within prisons. The rationale behind this regulation is to protect children from possible psychological distress caused by exposure to acts of violence (Zainuddin, 2012).

Prison authorities have allowed public participation in the execution of 'uqubat caning, with the exception of people under the age of 18. This decision is due to the observed presence of children who witnessed the caning procedures. Furthermore, the transfer of caning to a correctional institution protects investment in Aceh Province. This measure aims to address potential concerns among investors and ensure that they do not develop fears about investing in Aceh. By maintaining a favorable investment climate, the move contributes to the improvement and development of the economic landscape in Aceh.

The implementation of 'uqubat caning in public, along with prison and administrative sanctions, serves as an educational and psychological development effort for those who violate Islamic Sharia Qanun. The intention is that through this process, the offenders will realize and regret their mistakes, which will promote personal improvement. Following the 'uqubat caning, the dissent expressed by the adulterer is not primarily due to the physical pain endured but is instead a result of the shame experienced, leading to significant psychological impacts. The most noticeable manifestation of shame occurs when the offender is brought to the stage, where

the public responds with various expressions. The sense of shame intensifies when officers publicly announce the identity of the convict (Sobari, 2017).

The primary objective of implementing caning punishment is to maintain order and prosperity in social life. In a broader context, the overarching objective of punishment in Islam is consistent with the main goals of Islamic law, which include safeguarding five essential aspects: religion, life, honor, property, and lineage. Essentially, Islamic law aims to defend benefits and prevent harm. More specifically, Islamic scholars contend that the purpose of punishment in Islamic law is centered on prevention and rehabilitation, to deter wrongdoing and facilitate the restoration of individuals.

Caning From a Human Rights Perspective

Several parties have made several allegations that the enforcement of Islamic law in Aceh, particularly the use of caning law, is contrary to human rights values. However, it is crucial to establish a common understanding of the criteria for assessing the implementation of caning in Aceh. This assessment can be approached through the lens of Western-oriented human rights principles or human rights principles rooted in an Islamic framework. Without a balanced consensus on this issue, any assessment can be susceptible to bias, potentially leading to broad criticism of all punishments prescribed by Islamic law, particularly caning.

In general, all types of punishment, whether specified in Indonesian or Islamic criminal law, are considered inconsistent with the principles of human rights. These penalties are imposed on individuals who have violated the law according to a legal framework established by a collective agreement. This allows the state to enforce the law against those who violate the rules, causing harm either to society as a whole (public law) or individuals (private law). As a result, human rights in Indonesia are not considered absolute. However, it is constrained by clear and robust boundaries outlined by legal instruments designed to counterbalance in the administration of justice.

The execution of the criminal law is not intended to cause injury or physical disability to the convicted person. The unjust imposition of punishment on an innocent individual is considered a violation of human rights. In response to allegations of human rights violations, Amin contends that it is essential to establish strict criteria to define what constitutes a violation of human rights. Caning is administered as a consequence of people being found guilty according to a set of rules and procedures. Therefore, the use of caning is not considered a violation of human rights, as it is a form of punishment reserved for those who have been legally convicted (Rahmatillah, 2012).

Furthermore, in situations where there is a conflict between individual human rights and collective human rights of the general public, Islam provides several qualifications that fall under the categories of *darur* (posing a threat to the preservation of life or fundamental rights), *half* (disrupting the continuity of life or the fulfillment of other rights), and *tahsini* (resulting in incomplete fulfillment of certain rights). This includes scenarios where conflicts arise between the rights of the individual and those of society. In such cases, Islam prioritizes and protects the rights of the community or the broader public over the rights of the individual.

The Aceh Government and its law enforcement institutions are responsible for protecting the human rights of people who have been victimized by criminals, as indicated in the above concept. Although law enforcement has the authority to impose punishment on criminals, there is a potential risk of violating the human rights of these individuals. However, during the criminal justice process, the government ensures that the human rights of individuals accused of crimes are protected. This includes upholding the right to self-defense, providing access to legal counsel, ensuring impartial and fair trials, and protecting the rights of suspects or defendants.

When assessing the use of caning as a disciplinary measure in Aceh, the international community and human rights advocates generally oppose it. They claim that caning is a form of physical or mental torture that causes suffering for those found guilty. This opposition is rooted in the belief that such punishment violates international legal instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social

and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and various other international agreements (Rahmah, 2023).

The leader of the Aceh Islamic Sharia Service emphasized that the enforcement of caning sentences is not meant to be severe or inhumane and is not intended to cause harm or physical deformity to the offender. It is recognized that if the convict feels pain during caning, it is considered a consequence of his/her actions that violate Islamic law. However, it is stated that the primary objective of caning is to create a social pressure effect, intending to provoke a sense of shame in the convict and deter him/her from repeating the same crime or committing other crimes.

Article 1 paragraph (1) of Law No. 5 of 1998 on Ratification of the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment) states that "---it does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in, or incidental to lawful sanctions, which, in essence, in terms of pain or suffering arising from the imposition of applicable legal sanctions, is not included in the definition of torture." In other words, the legal position of caning in this convention is not a form of torture, as alleged by human rights activists or the international community, who are against the implementation of Islamic law. Convention has confirmed that pain, suffering, or injury to the body of a convict is part of the punishment for the perpetrator of a crime.

The accusation of torture in the implementation of punishment is also reinforced in the Rome Statute of 1998, revised in the Rome Statute of Kampala in 2010. In Article 7, paragraph (2e), the Rome Statute states that:

--- Except that torture shall not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in, or incidental to, lawful sanctions. It is not considered an act of torture against an individual if an action that causes pain or suffering is part of a lawful punishment imposed by law enforcement institutions.

Governor's Order No. 10 of 2005 addresses allegations of coercion in the administration of caning by outlining specific procedures to ensure that the process is carried out fairly. If a convict cannot undergo caning, the punishment can be postponed until they are ready. The regulation also requires the presence of a physician and other medical personnel during the caning process to ensure the well-being of the caned person. These measures are intended to refute coercion claims and ensure that caning punishment is administered humanely and properly.

The execution of the caning is based on a court decision that has gone through a legal, judicial process based on Law No. 44 of 1999 on the Implementation of Special Autonomy for the Special Region of Aceh, Law No. 11 of 2006 on the Government of Aceh, Qanun No. 6 of 2014 on the Jinayat Law, and Qanun No. 7 of 2013 on the Jinayat Procedural Law. If a punishment is inflicted on an innocent individual without undergoing a just and lawful judicial procedure, it may be considered a violation of human rights.

CONCLUSIONS

Research findings indicated that the implementation of caning punishment in Aceh, is supported by legal frameworks that include specific laws related to the autonomy and governance of the province. These laws authorized the public and direct execution of caning, often taking place on mosque grounds. However, the practice of caning in such a prominent location has raised concerns about its impact on children who witness the punishment, and some argue that it may have adverse effects.

Furthermore, there are criticisms that the act of caning constitutes torture and goes against the principles of human rights. The Aceh Governor enacted Governor Regulation No. 5 of 2018 to modify the execution of caning penalties in correctional facilities. This regulation allows caning punishment to be carried out openly but with specific limitations. Known as the concept of "open but limited," caning is carried out by the correctional institution and is witnessed by inmates and authorized adults who visit the prison to observe the procedure. However, despite this provision, the execution of caning openly or within prison confines is considered a violation of human rights, since caning is considered a form of inhumane treatment towards individuals.

The objection to caning as a violation of human rights is addressed in the Rome Statute of 1998, with further revisions in the Rome Statute of Kampala in 2010. Additionally, Law No. 5 of 1998 on the Ratification of the

Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatments or Punishments clarifies that an act is not considered torture if it causes pain or suffering as part of a legally imposed punishment by law enforcement institutions in accordance with regulations.

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