

China: 'Striking harder' than ever before

"At least 2,960 people have been sentenced to death and 1,781 executed in the last three months of China's "Strike Hard" campaign against crime," Amnesty International said today. "More people were executed in China in the last three months than in the rest of the world for the last three years."

"Like the other 'Strike Hard' campaigns before it, this crackdown is unlikely to have a lasting impact on China's growing crime problem. The campaign is nothing short of an execution frenzy -- a huge waste of human life," the organization said.

Not for many years have mass rallies and sentencing been seen on this scale. Executions have been recorded all over the country for crimes as diverse as bribery, pimping, embezzlement, tax fraud, robbing of petrol and selling harmful foodstuffs, as well as violent crimes. Hundreds have also been executed for drug offences under the slogan "treasure life, reject drugs".

Most executions take place after sentencing rallies in front of massive crowds in sports stadiums and public squares. Prisoners are also paraded through the streets past thousands of people on the way to execution by firing squad in nearby fields or courtyards. One such rally in Yunnan province was reportedly broadcast live on state television. Rallies in Shaanxi in April and May were reportedly attended by 1,800,000 spectators. Tens of thousands of arrested suspects and thousands assigned to "re-education through labour" without charge or trial have also been paraded at these rallies.

"Strike Hard" was initially targeted at organized violent crime, but national and provincial authorities have greatly expanded its scope for

the next two years. Authorities in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) aim to "deal a decisive blow to separatist forces, eliminating separatism and illegal religious activities". Many Uighur political prisoners have been executed, accused of "separatism" and a range of alleged violent crimes. In Tibet, one target is those who "guide people illegally across borders".

Guandong and other provinces execute those said to be guilty of economic crimes including tax and financial fraud, currency forgery and "disrupting the stock market". Authorities state that is in order to "tackle the serious economic crime situation before entry to WTO and the challenge of globalization". Several people have been sentenced to death or executed for tax or insurance fraud.

Police and prosecutors have been urged to cut corners, and not to "get entangled in the detail", so as to achieve "quick approval, quick arrest, quick trial and quick results". In Hunan province during a "Spring Thunder" operation from 23-25 April, police boasted of "solving 3,000 cases" in two days. In Sichuan province, police reported they had "cracked" 6,704, cases including 691 murders, robberies or bombings in six days from 19 -24 April, apprehending 19,446 people.

At meetings to prepare for "Strike Hard", lawyers were reportedly called on to coordinate with the police and prosecution, and not to hold up the judicial process. Courts have also boasted of their speed and "special procedures" during "Strike Hard".

Courts in Shandong province reportedly held an average of 65 criminal trials every day from 10 April to 25 May. Courts in Suqian City, Jiangsu Province, reported new procedures under which they completed full judicial proceedings in an average of 20 days, an example widely promoted in the official media. In such circumstances, periodic

official reminders that death penalty cases should be "iron clad" are empty rhetoric.

"Curtailed procedures plus great pressure on police and judicial authorities mean that the potential for miscarriages of justice, arbitrary sentencing and the execution of innocent people is immense," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International is appealing to the Chinese government to end its spiraling use of the death penalty and to replace this callous and counterproductive policy with more effective and humane criminal punishments, in line with global trends.

The figures above fall far below the actual number of death sentences and executions in China and are based on public reports which Amnesty International has monitored. Only a fraction of death sentences and executions carried out in China are publicly reported, with information selectively released by the relevant authorities. National statistics on the use of the death penalty remain a state secret.

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For more information please call Amnesty International in Hong Kong +852 92672116 or in London on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>