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China: "Strike Hard" anti-crime campaign intensifies

Following recent Chinese government calls for a strengthening of the "Strike Hard" campaign against crime, Amnesty International today called on the government to refrain from executing more people.

"The call for an intensification of the anti-crime campaign, in advance of the Chinese Communist Party Congress in October, is likely to lead to an increase in executions and death sentences for crimes ranging from tax evasion to robbery. This is also likely to increase the potential for miscarriages of justice and torture of suspects," Amnesty International warned.

Since July 8, when the call was made, around 50 people have been sentenced to death and 25 executed. This follows scores of executions across China around International Anti-Drugs day on 26th June.

The new "Strike Hard" against crime campaign began in April 2001 and was initially targeted at serious and organised crime. Its scope was expanded by regional and provincial authorities to cover various issues including "illegal religious activities" in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR). In Tibet, it also targets those who "guide people illegally across borders".

Since the start of the crackdown the number of people sentenced to death has increased dramatically. At least 2,960 people were sentenced to death and 1,781 executed in the first three months of the campaign between April and July 2001. More people were executed in China in those three months than in the rest of the world for the last three years.

"Despite the unparalleled use of the death penalty in China, the crime rate continues to increase. Amnesty International reiterates its call on the Chinese authorities to review its drastic response to crime and find other, more effective ways of dealing with the issues of law and order," the organization said.

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