

29 September 1999

EXTRA 136/99

Death penalty / Fear of imminent mass execution

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA (PRC) 238 People

The Guangdong Provincial High People's Court is reportedly about to announce the final decisions on the fate of 238 prisoners who have been sentenced to death. It is extremely likely that they will have their sentences confirmed. Executions may occur within hours of the announcement.

They are among 818 prisoners whose sentences will be announced by the Guangdong Provincial High People's Court at 57 public rallies, to be held in the province before the 50th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China on 1 October, according to reports in the Chinese media in the past few days.

If confirmed, theirs will be the largest number of death sentences Amnesty International has known to be announced in a single set of public rallies in one province in the past decade.

It is not known if the prisoners involved had appealed against their sentences. Appeals in China are very rarely successful.

The sentencing of these 238 people will come just days after the execution, for various alleged crimes, of three ethnic Uighurs in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region on 28 September, and 26 people in the central province of Sichuan on 22 September, as part of a national "strike hard" campaign against crime and the national "clean up" prior to the celebrations surrounding the 50th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. The death penalty continues to be used extensively, arbitrarily, and frequently as a result of political interference. Mass executions are frequently carried out prior to major events or public holidays such as the Chinese New Year.

During these periods, many more people are executed than is common. Many of those sentenced may be accused of relatively minor crimes which may not attract the death penalty at other times of the year.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The death penalty is used extensively in China. Based on incomplete public reports, Amnesty International has recorded approximately 2,600 death sentences and at least 1,500 confirmed executions in China in 1998. From 1990 till the end of 1998, Amnesty International recorded over 25,400 death sentences and over 16,600 executions. These figures are believed to fall far short of the reality as only a fraction of death sentences and executions carried out in China are publicly reported. Even based on this limited record, the Chinese government continues to execute many more people than the rest of the world put together. Execution is by shooting or lethal injection.

The scope of the death penalty has increased considerably in China since the 1980s. A revision to the Criminal Code in March 1997 confirmed the increasing scope for its use, incorporating new crimes punishable by death which were previously covered by regulations, as well as redefining others.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express and airmail letters in

English, Chinese or your own language:

- urging that the death sentences imposed on the 238 people in Guangdong province be commuted;
- expressing dismay at the huge increase in the use of the death penalty during public holidays and major anniversaries;
- urging the government to make a break with past practices and not to mark this 50th anniversary with executions
- urging that the arbitrary and massive use of the death penalty in China be stopped and expressing opposition to the death penalty in all cases as the ultimate form of cruel and inhuman punishment and as a violation of the right to life as guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

APPEALS TO:

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President of Supreme People's Court of the People's Republic of China
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Telegrams: President of the Supreme People's Court, Beijing, China
Faxes: +86106 512 5012
Salutation: Dear President

Governor of the Guangdong Provincial People's Government

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 Guangdongsheng Renmin Zhengfu
 305 Dongfeng Zhong Lu
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Ministry of Foreign Affairs
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and to diplomatic representatives of the People's Republic of China accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 27 October 1999.