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Executions

20 September 1990

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA (PRC): DENG Fengyou
+ 63 others

Sixty-four prisoners were executed on 18 September 1990 in Guangzhou (Canton), a major city in southern China, according to a report that day in the Yangcheng Evening News published in Guangzhou. The newspaper reported that those executed had been sentenced to death by 13 different courts (presumably courts in various districts of Guangdong province, of which Guangzhou is the capital). They included "24 robbers, 20 thieves, 14 murderers, four weapons dealers and two hooligans", according to a report by the news agency Reuters. The Guangzhou newspaper cited the case of DENG Fengyou, a woman who was executed for allegedly beating to death the son of her husband's first wife.

The newspaper reported that Guangzhou vice-mayor SHI Anhai, speaking before an audience of 5,000 people at a mass rally organized in connection with the executions, said that "society must create an awesome power to frighten criminals so that they get caught up in the sea of the masses and have nowhere to hide". Other officials have in recent months referred to the death penalty as a "deterrent" against crime. To Amnesty International's knowledge, however, no study has ever established that the death penalty has any special deterrent effect compared to other forms of punishment. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that the death penalty in China is a discriminatory punishment which tends to disproportionately affect people of low social standing.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

These executions have taken place in the context of a continuing campaign described as a "stern crackdown" against crime which started in May 1990. On the basis of official reports, Amnesty International has recorded over 350 death sentences in June and July 1990 alone.

Some of the death sentences pronounced in the last few months have been officially described as means to ensure "social order" and "stability" in China before the start of the Asian Games, due to open in Beijing on 22 September.

Amnesty International has found in the past that death sentences are often announced in large numbers in the period leading to the Chinese national day, on 1 October, and other important festivals or political events.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases, on the grounds that it constitutes the ultimate form of torture and ill-treatment and that it violates the right to life. The organization has repeatedly urged the Chinese authorities to put an end to the use of the death penalty and to commute all death sentences. Its concern at the extensive use of the death penalty in China is heightened by the fact that trials in China fall far short of international standards for fairness.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing regret at the reports of the recent executions;
- urging that executions be halted and that all death sentences be commuted;

- urging that every prisoner accused of an offence punishable by death be afforded all facilities, including free access to a lawyer of his or her choice, for a fair trial before an independent, competent and impartial tribunal, and that the rights of the accused be protected at all stages of the judicial process.

APPEALS TO

Page 2, UA 379/90...

SHI Anhai Fushizhang (Guangzhou Vice-Mayor SHI Anhai)
 Guangzhoushi Zhengfu
 Guangzhoushi
 Guangdongsheng
 People's Republic of China

Faxes: +86 20 342016
 Telexes: 44563 OFAGD CN
 (please forward to SHI Anhai Fushizhang)

LIN Ruo Shuji (Guangdong Province Party Secretary LIN Ruo)
 Zhonggong Guangdongsheng Weiyuanhui
 Guangzhoushi
 Guangdongsheng
 People's Republic of China

Faxes: +86 20 342016
 Telexes: 44563 OFAGD CN
 (please forward to LIN Ruo Shuji)

XIAO Yang Jianchazhang (Provincial Chief Procurator XIAO Yang)
 Guangdongsheng Renmin Jianchayuan
 Guangzhoushi
 Guangdongsheng
 People's Republic of China

Faxes: +86 20 342016
 Telexes: 44563 OFAGD CN
 (please forward to XIAO Yang Jianchazhang)

LIU Fuzhi Jianchazhang (Procurator-General LIU Fuzhi)
 Zuigao Renmin Jianchayuan
 Beijingshi
 People's Republic of China

Telex: 210070 FMPRC CN or 22478 MFERT CN
 (Please forward to Procurator General LIU Fuzhi)

COPIES TO:

Zong Bianji (Editor)
Renmin Ribao (People's Daily)
 2 Jintai Xi Lu
 Chaoyangmenwai
 Beijing 100733

Zong Bianji (Editor)
Fazhi Ribao
 Chaoyangqu
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 Beijing 100015

Zong Bianji (Editor)

Yangcheng Wanbao (Yangcheng Evening News)
Yangcheng Wanbao She
Guangzhoushi
Guangdongsheng
People's Republic of China

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PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 1 November 1990.