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China: Halt imminent execution of woman who killed violent husband

A Chinese woman who beat her husband to death with a gun after suffering months of domestic violence should not be executed, Amnesty International urged on Wednesday.

Li Yan, 41, from Sichuan province in South West China could be executed any day between now and the Chinese New Year in early February.

“Justice is not served by executing Li Yan. Amnesty International calls upon the Chinese authorities to commute her death sentence to a term of imprisonment,” said Roseann Rife, Head of East Asia at Amnesty International.

Li was sentenced to death in August 2011 for the murder of her husband, Tan Yong, in late 2010.

Tan inflicted frequent beatings on his wife, he cut off one of her fingers, stubbed cigarettes out on her face and during the freezing Sichuan winters locked her outside on the balcony of their apartment for several hours with little clothing.

The prolonged violence at the hands of her husband began not long after the couple were married in early 2009.

Li Yan contacted the authorities, including the police, on several occasions to seek protection and required hospital treatment after one attack.

The police took pictures of Li’s injuries after one beating but no action was taken. Unsurprisingly, the violence continued.

Amnesty International is concerned that the judges did not fully take into account the evidence of sustained abuse that Li suffered, including testimonies of the abuse by others, when sentencing her to death and at her subsequent appeal.

“Had the Chinese authorities protected Li, as they are required to under international law, this tragic outcome could have been avoided. Li’s claims should have been properly investigated and her husband prosecuted before she resorted to violence herself,” said Rife.

“Victims of domestic violence should not have to live in fear and isolation. The Chinese authorities are obliged to prevent violence against women, including by their husbands, and to properly investigate all claims and prosecute those responsible. They need to address this issue urgently and provide proper support and protection.”

The Supreme People’s Court in Beijing approved Li Yan’s death sentence in mid-January. She is currently being held at Anyue County Detention Centre.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases without exception regardless of the nature of the crime, the characteristics of the offender or the method used by the state to carry out the execution.

* This press release was corrected on 24 January 2013. The opening paragraph was corrected to state Li Yan beat Tan Yong to death with a gun, not stabbed as previously reported.

Notes to editors

Violence against women, including domestic violence, violates fundamental human rights and is unlawful discrimination under the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against

Women, to which China is a party. Under the Convention, China is obliged to exercise due diligence to prevent violence against women and to properly investigate and punish those who commit violence against women, including by private actors like Li's husband. China is also required to provide compensation to victims of violence like Li. [Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, General Recommendation 19, A/47/38 (1992)]