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## **PUBLIC STATEMENT**

### **Japan: Secret hangings challenge international human rights protection**

At a time when Japan should be taking a lead in protecting human rights in the Asia region by backing international action on East Timor, it has instead chosen today to secretly execute another three people, Amnesty International said.

The human rights organisation deeply regrets the hanging of Masashi Sato, 62, Katsutoshi Takada, 61, and Tesuyuki Morikawa, 69, who had each spent seven years on death row. As usual, the executions were carried out without their families being informed.

The timing of the executions seem to send a message that the government of Japan is once again flagrantly ignoring the UN Human Rights Committee's (HRC) recommendations in October 1998 that Japan take steps to abolish the death penalty. The HRC also expressed serious concern about the conditions under which persons are held on death row. It recommended that conditions of detention be 'made humane' in accordance with articles 7 and 10 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The decision to hang three men when the world's attention is focused on the crisis in East Timor also appears to indicate Japan's unwillingness to face public criticism for its use of the death penalty. Carrying out these executions during a period of parliamentary recess indicates further the government's deliberate attempt to avoid accountability.

The three men executed today had been detained for several years in conditions that amount to cruel and inhuman treatment. Death row prisoners in Japan continue to be held in solitary confinement with almost no contact with the outside world. They are generally prevented from meeting and talking to other prisoners, from receiving visits or letters and even from engaging in conversation with prison guards.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases, as it violates the right to life and constitutes the ultimate form of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. The organization is particularly concerned about the secrecy surrounding executions in Japan.

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