

AI Index: PRE 01/091/2013  
21 February 2013

## **Japan hangs three in first executions under ‘merciless’ Abe government**

The execution of three death row inmates is an ominous and regressive move by Japan’s new Liberal Democratic government, Amnesty International said on Thursday.

The executions are the first since the administration took office in December and raises fears that the pace of executions may increase during Prime Minister Abe’s term.

Masahiro Kanagawa, 29, was hanged at Tokyo Detention Centre on Thursday, along with Kaoru Kobayashi, 44, at Osaka Detention Centre and Keiki Kano, 62, at Nagoya Detention Centre. Kobayashi and Kano were executed despite both being in the process of preparing to apply for retrials. Roseann Rife, Head of East Asia at Amnesty International, said:

“These executions, carried out under a shroud of secrecy, are a callous act of premeditated killing. The authorities appeared alarmingly merciless in their willingness to execute during Shinzo Abe’s previous stint as Prime Minister. The fear is that this marks the beginning of a new wave of cold-blooded killing by the State. It raises serious questions whether such executions are carried out purely for political expediency.

“Rather than sign more death warrants we urge Justice Minister Sadakazu Tanigaki to step back and consider the facts. Over two thirds of countries in the world no longer use capital punishment, disproving claims it is necessary. Japan is among an isolated minority on this issue and we urge the Minister to take steps to initiate a public debate on the future use of the death penalty.”

Ten people were hanged in less than a year during Shinzo Abe’s previous time as Prime Minister between September 2006 and September 2007 – the highest rate under any Liberal Democratic Party rule. With current Justice Minister Sadakazu Tanigaki publicly expressing his support for the death penalty the concern is this may be surpassed.

The number of death row inmates, at 134, is at one of the highest levels in Japan in over half a century. Prisoners are typically given a few hours’ notice before execution, but some may be given no warning at all. Their families are typically notified about the execution only after it has taken place.

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. The death penalty violates the right to life and is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.