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Japan: arbitrary arrest and continued detention of peace activists is a violation of their basic rights to freedom of expression

Amnesty International strongly condemns the detention in police custody of three activists for over two weeks for distributing pamphlets opposing the despatch of Japanese Self-Defence Forces (SDF) to Iraq.

The three activists -- two men and a woman -- were arrested in the western Tokyo suburb of Tachikawa on 27 February 2004 under charges of "trespassing" under Article 130 of the Japanese Criminal Code.

The activists were distributing pamphlets which called for people to think more carefully about the deployment of the SDF. They were distributed to mailboxes at the SDF personnel's housing units in the western Tokyo suburb of Tachikawa.

Amnesty International considers these activists to be prisoners of conscience, detained in violation of their right to freedom of expression guaranteed under Article 21 of the Japanese Constitution and Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, an international treaty to which Japan is a state party. They should be released immediately.

The organization also notes with concern the harassment meted out to the families of the three activists including searches of their houses and the subsequent impounding of their notes and personal computers.

The three activists have been in police custody in Tachikawa where they have been subjected to nearly eight hours of interrogation every day since their arrest. No lawyer is present during the interrogation. Information received by Amnesty International suggests that they have been interrogated by authorities belonging to the public security unit of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police suggesting that this case has national security implications.

"We call for their immediate release and pending their release, Japan should ensure that their rights -- as guaranteed in international human rights standards to which Japan is a state party -- are protected," Amnesty International said.

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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