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CHINA: ONE THOUSAND EXECUTED IN "STRIKE HARD" CAMPAIGN AGAINST  
CRIME

With at least a thousand people executed over the past two months as part of a nationwide anti-crime campaign, Amnesty International is demanding that the Chinese authorities immediately stop further executions.

"This number of executions is shocking and will only serve to fuel a climate of violence and vengeance," Amnesty International said today.

"This is state killing on a massive scale -- the international community should pressure China to stop such widespread and arbitrary violation of the most basic right to life."

The campaign -- termed "*Yanda*" ("strike hard" or "severe crackdown") -- is aimed at cracking down on serious crimes. Intensive, and at times near hysterical, propaganda has been carried out by the state media, with daily exhortations to "deal a fatal blow" to criminals "so as to win a complete victory in the campaign".

The campaign has led to a level of executions unprecedented since 1983, when a similar nationwide anti-crime campaign resulted in thousands of summary executions in less than three months. The limited number of reports available to Amnesty International so far show that tens of thousands of criminal suspects have been arrested and at least a thousand people executed since the start of the "strike hard" campaign on 28 April. Amnesty International believes the real number to be far higher.

"Each year more people are executed in China than in the rest of the world put together. With the 'strike hard' campaign, China looks set to break its own record this year," Amnesty International said.

As in 1983, the vast majority of those sentenced to death in the current campaign were immediately executed after unfair and summary trials. The "strike hard" crackdown is due to last until the end of July. A top Chinese judicial official stated on 30 June that the campaign is now entering its "third vital phase".

"We are very concerned that the pressure put upon the police and judiciary to 'crack' cases and speed up prosecutions may also result in increased use of torture to force confessions," Amnesty International said.

As a result of such official instructions, some people have been executed within a few days of the crimes they allegedly committed. In Jilin province, for example, three men were executed on 31 May for allegedly robbing a car "loaded with bank notes" on 21 May. According

to an official newspaper, the three men, Tian Zhijia, Tian Zhiquan and Zhao Lian, were arrested on 24 May; they were tried and sentenced to death during an “open meeting” on the morning of 27 May – three days after their arrest. One of the defendants reportedly appealed against the verdict to the provincial high court, but this was rejected on 28 May. The three men were executed by firing squad on 31 May – seven days after their arrest and ten days after the offence was committed.

In another case in the same province, Tian Xiaowei, who was accused of stabbing a policeman to death and injuring two others on 13 May, was executed by firing squad on the morning of 20 May – barely seven days after the crime was committed.

While the campaign is said to be aimed at particularly serious crimes, some people convicted of relatively minor offences, such as theft, have also been executed. Repeat offenders, escaped prisoners and members of “hooligan” or criminal gangs are among the targets of the campaign. They may be liable to the death penalty because of their alleged criminal background rather than actual crimes.

The Chinese state media has been fully mobilized for the campaign by central government and Communist Party authorities. Arrests and executions have been publicized on a daily basis. In an intensive propaganda campaign the Chinese state-run media has repeatedly exhorted police and the judiciary to deal with offenders “severely and swiftly” so as to “deal fatal blows to criminals”.

In an article launching the campaign on 29 April 1996, the official newspaper *People's Daily* called on judicial and public security personnel to “seriously adhere to the principle of severely and quickly punishing criminals”. An editorial in the same newspaper on 15 May reiterated this need and went on to state that whoever “deserves” the death penalty according to law “must be sentenced to death”. Similar injunctions were repeatedly printed in major provincial newspapers.

Many mass rallies to try offenders or to announce arrests and sentences have been shown on national and local television. In Hubei province, for example, 20,000 people attended an “open trial” rally held on 30 May in Erzhou city to announce the “public arrest” of 41 offenders and the sentences passed on 70 others, including four who were sentenced to death and executed. A local radio report on the rally stated that the “20,000 masses” who had attended the event “all clapped their hands with joy”.

The condemned prisoners paraded at such rallies usually had their hands tied behind their back; some also had their feet shackled and a rope around their neck. In Zhuhai city, for example, 13 prisoners sentenced to death were paraded in shackles in front of an audience of 600 people in mid-May, before being led away to be shot. Three others executed in the same city on 26 June were taken from the court to the execution ground in an open truck, handcuffed and shackled, and with a rope round their neck.

Those executed during the campaign include a man named Li Xueyin, from central Hubei province, who was convicted of murdering a family planning official who had forced Li's wife to be sterilised according to the state family planning policy. In Heilongjiang province, three people, including two named as Hou Liju and Ren Zhonglu, were executed in early June after being convicted of stealing 104 farm cattle and 46 motorcycles, bicycles and jeeps between December 1990 and June 1994. International Anti-drugs Day on 26 June was marked by the execution of more than 230 people in one day in several cities.

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