

6 June 2000

## Japan: Secret executions

Up to nine prisoners under sentence of death may be executed secretly in Japan on or around 9 June, Amnesty International warned today calling on the government to declare an immediate moratorium on all executions.

"The prisoners, their lawyers and their families are unable to obtain official confirmation of the names of those scheduled for execution. If the Japanese government is not ashamed of the death penalty, why do they continue to execute in secret?" Amnesty International asked.

There are fears that the Minister of Justice could already have signed the order for these executions on 5 June and that they are intended to signal the government is tough on crime ahead of parliamentary elections scheduled for 25 June.

The Japanese government orders the executions of prisoners every summer and winter, when the Diet (parliament) is in recess to avoid public and parliamentary reactions to the use of the death penalty.

The arbitrary selection of prisoners for executions by the Ministry of Justice is seen to be an attempt to minimize public opposition to the death penalty.

Three of the nine had appealed for clemency, one of which was rejected in late May 2000. The outcomes of the other two are not

known. Four of the nine submitted habeas corpus petitions in December 1999, and another lodged an appeal for a retrial.

As in similar cases in 1999, Amnesty International fears their executions will go ahead even though these appeals have reportedly not yet been decided.

Citing biased Japanese government surveys, advocates of the death penalty in Japan claim that public support for the death penalty is overwhelming. However, there was no significant opposition in Japan to the de facto moratorium on executions of 1989-93. There are currently around 100 people under sentence of death in Japan.

Many members of Japan's large anti-death penalty movement intend to picket the four detention centres where the nine prisoners are being held. A press conference calling for an end to executions in law and practise will be organized by Amnesty International Japanese Section and other anti-death penalty groups. ENDS.../

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