

EXTERNAL

AI Index: ASA 22/04/96

UA 297/96

Death Penalty

20 December 1996

JAPANHIRATA Mitsunari, aged 59

IMAI Yoshito, aged 55

NOGUCHI Satoru, aged 48

It has been reported on 20 December that three prisoners have been executed in secret in the Tokyo Detention Centre in Japan. Amnesty International fears that further executions may take place at any time. It urges the Japanese Government to stop executions immediately.

All three executed prisoners had long claimed that their death sentence had been imposed unfairly. In particular, they all claimed that they had not been told of their right to the assistance of a lawyer during the pre-trial interrogation period. They had all spent many years on death row, following their original death sentences and its subsequent confirmation by the Supreme Court.

Hirata Mitsunari had been on death row for 15 years. His death sentence was confirmed in 1987 by the Japan Supreme Court. Imai Yoshito had been on death row for over 10 years. Satoru Noguchi had been sentenced to death 16 years ago.

Executions in Japan are carried out on the orders of the Minister of Justice. These executions bring to six the number of executions carried out in Japan in 1996, following three executions carried out in July (see UA 177/96, ASA 22/02/96, 12 July). These are the first executions ordered by the current Minister of Justice, Mr Matsuura Isao, since his appointment in November 1996.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases, as a violation of the right to life and as the ultimate form of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. The organization is also concerned about the secrecy surrounding executions and about conditions of detention in Japanese prisons, which may amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in Japanese or your own language:

- condemning the executions of Hirata Mitsunari, Imai Yoshito and Noguchi Satoru;
- stating unconditional opposition to the death penalty and urging the commutation of all death sentences and the abolition of the death penalty;
- urging the Japanese authorities to end the secrecy surrounding executions, by giving detainees, their relatives and lawyers advance notice of impending executions;
- urging a full and independent review of conditions of detention for prisoners awaiting execution.

APPEALS TO:

Mr Matsuura Isao, Minister of Justice

Ministry of Justice

1-1-1 Kasumigaseki

Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100, Japan

Telegrams: Minister Nagao, Tokyo, Japan

Fax: +81 3 3592 7011

Dear Minister

Mr Hashimoto Ryutaro, Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
1-6 Nagata-cho
Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100, Japan
Telegrams: Prime Minister Hashimoto, Tokyo, Japan
Fax: +81 3 3581 3883 or 3581 2361
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

COPIES TO:

Asahi Shimbun
5-3-2 Tsukiji 5-chome
Chuo-ku, Tokyo 104-11, Japan
Fax: +81 3 3545 0285

Yomiuri Shimbun
1-7-1 Ohtemachi, Chiyoda-ku
Tokyo 100-55, Japan
Fax: +81 3 3246 0455

Japan Times
4-5-4 Shibaura, Minato-ku
Tokyo 108, Japan
Fax: +81 3 3453 5456

and to diplomatic representatives of Japan accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 10 February 1997.