

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Further information on UA 380/94 (ASA 22/09/94) - Two executions - fear of further executions

JAPAN

AJIMA Yukio (m), aged 44
SASAKI Kazumitsu (m), aged 66

On 1 December 1994, Ajima Yukio and Sasaki Kazumitsu were reportedly executed. These are believed to be the first executions this year, but in line with its usual policy, the Japanese Government has refused to give official confirmation. Amnesty International fears that the Ministry of Justice may have ordered more executions, following the results of a public opinion poll on the death penalty published last week.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases, as the ultimate form of cruel and inhuman punishment. It is also concerned at the excessive secrecy surrounding executions in Japan.

Ajima Yukio, a convicted murderer, had been under sentence of death for 16 years. Both men were convicted murderers. The executions were carried out in secret in Tokyo and Sendai Detention Centres.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On 25 November the government published the results of an opinion poll showing that the majority of the public favoured retention of the death penalty. Amnesty International is now concerned that the government may use this result to justify further executions before the end of the year. Death penalty opponents are concerned that these latest executions were ordered as a hasty response to the poll, without allowing adequate time to study its results.

Seven men were executed during 1993, more than in any year since 1976 and 57 are now believed to be under finalized sentence of death. They include four prisoners who have been under sentence of death for over 20 years. A trend in recent years towards abolition now appears to have been reversed. Although there were no executions between late 1989 and 1993, there have been nine executions since then.

Executions in Japan are carried out in secret, by order of the Minister of Justice. They are not announced to the family or lawyer of the prisoner concerned and prisoners themselves may only be informed a few hours before the execution takes place. The Ministry of Justice does not release the names of executed prisoners and always refuses to confirm or deny that an execution has taken place. The Minister of Justice said recently that this policy may be reconsidered.

Conditions for prisoners under sentence of death are believed to be harsh. Many are held in solitary confinement and are denied access to anyone except selective relatives and their lawyer. Ajima Yukio had filed a lawsuit against the state for denying him access to his adoptive parent.

The abolitionist movement in Japan has gained momentum over the past few years. Supporters include a former Supreme Court judge, a former Minister of Justice, lawyers and a growing number of parliamentarians.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters either in English or in your own language:

- expressing concern about the reported executions of Ajima Yukio and Sasaki Kazumitsu, the first executions to be carried out in 1994;
- stating Amnesty International's opposition to the death penalty in all cases as the ultimate form of cruel and inhuman punishment;
- urging the government to commute all death sentences and to abolish the death penalty;
- expressing concern about the excessive secrecy surrounding the death penalty in Japan and urging the authorities to officially confirm or deny these latest executions.

APPEALS TO

Mr Maeda Isao, Minister of Justice
 Ministry of Justice
 1-1-1 Kasumigaseki
 Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100, Japan
Telegrams: Minister Isao, Tokyo 100, Japan
Fax: +81 3 3592 7011
Salutation: Dear Minister

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

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

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

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

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 13 January 1995.