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## **Japan: Amnesty International world conference calls on government to halt imminent executions**

**CAPE TOWN** – 500 delegates attending Amnesty International's world conference in South Africa today called on the Japanese government to halt all executions in the face of strong indications that several prisoners will be hanged on or around 18 December 1997.

According to the human rights organization, detention centre officials in various cities are believed to be making preparations for the hangings. The names of prisoners are not known, as the government maintains a policy of strict secrecy on executions.

“The 500 delegates attending Amnesty International's International Council Meeting in Capetown strongly urge the Japanese government not to proceed with these executions, and express our outrage that once again December in Japan appears to be the killing season,” said Paul Hoffman, Chair of the Meeting.

“Speaking on behalf of Amnesty International's one million members worldwide, from Algeria to Zimbabwe, we want to send the strongest possible message to the government that the death penalty has no place in the modern world – particularly when it is being carried out with such secrecy and cynicism.”

Executions have occurred in Japan every December since 1994. The authorities often time these to coincide with public holiday periods and parliamentary recess, in order to minimize public and parliamentary criticism and debate through lack of awareness.

Inmates waking up on death row in Japan never know whether that day will be their last. The authorities always take them to be executed without warning, and without informing either their relatives or their legal teams. Their the ashes of their cremated bodies are simply returned to the family after the execution has been carried out.

Amnesty International believes that the death penalty does not act as a deterrent, it is often applied unfairly and its irreversibility means that the innocent may be executed.

“1998 will see the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (to which Japan is a party). We call on the Japanese government to mark this anniversary by abolishing the death penalty for all crimes, and granting clemency to all prisoners on death row,” Mr Hoffman said.

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**For an interview in Capetown, please call Mark Ogle on (27) 082 858 9356**