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## **Japan: Amnesty International calls for inquiry into arrest of prominent human rights activist**

Following the adoption of resolutions in the Japanese Diet calling for respect for human rights earlier this month, Amnesty International today wrote to the Japanese Prime Minister drawing the government's attention to the arrest and detention of one of Japan's most prominent human rights defenders.

Lawyer Yasuda Yoshihiro was arrested on 6 December reportedly on suspicion of obstructing the compulsory seizure of rental income used as collateral by one of his client companies, Sun's Corporation Tokyo Ltd. Since his arrest he has been held continuously in police detention at the Metropolitan Police Department in Tokyo.

"It is highly unusual for a lawyer to be arrested and detained in this way," Amnesty International said. "Mr Yasuda was reportedly cooperating fully with the police investigation before his arrest and had promised to disclose everything he knew. His arrest and detention appear somewhat arbitrary."

Yasuda Yoshihiro is a leading campaigner against the death penalty in Japan. He was also heading the team of lawyers defending the leader of the AUM religious sect, Asahara Shoko, currently facing capital charges in connection with the gas attack in Tokyo in March 1995.

"The arrest and detention of his main lawyer may have a serious impact on Asahara Shoko's defence. We have asked the government to detail the measures it is taking to protect Asahara Shoko's right to a fair trial," Amnesty International said.

Following his arrest, the Japanese media have engaged in intense speculation over the character of Yasuda Yoshihiro, particularly in connection with his human rights work and his role as a defence lawyer for Asahara Shoko.

Japanese human rights activists have reacted by claiming that his arrest and detention have been prompted more by his status as a human rights defender than his suspected involvement in the present case.

"The arrest of a human rights defender is a serious matter in any country. We are calling on the Japanese government to conduct a thorough inquiry into the circumstances of Mr Yasuda's arrest and detention," Amnesty International added. "We are also concerned that he may be at risk of ill-treatment at the hands of the police."

In Japan, the police are allowed to detain suspects for up to 23 days without charge. Amnesty International has documented a number of cases where police officers have reportedly ill-treated suspects in an attempt to obtain a confession.

In October, the UN Human Rights Committee registered concern about this “substitute prison” system and recommended that the interrogation of suspects in police custody be strictly monitored and recorded by electronic means.

Amnesty International has asked the Japanese authorities to detail the measures it is taking to guarantee the rights of suspects in police custody, including Mr Yasuda.

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