

44/96

AI INDEX: EUR 57/05/96

7 MARCH 1996

KAZAKSTAN: 1995 EXECUTION FIGURE AMONG HIGHEST IN WORLD, NEW EXECUTIONS FEARED IMMINENT

Amnesty International is appalled to learn that Kazakstan was among the world's biggest executioners in 1995 -- with 101 people put to death -- and fears more executions may be imminent.

This statistic, officially confirmed to Amnesty International, places the Central Asian state of under 17 million people in the top four countries for which execution statistics are known, behind China, Saudi Arabia and Nigeria.

"This shameful statistic deserves world-wide condemnation," Amnesty International said today. "We call on Kazakstan's government to make those 101 executions the last."

So far in 1996 there have been no executions, but apparently only because of bureaucratic obstacles. At the beginning of the year responsibility for carrying out executions was transferred from one Interior Ministry department to another, but practical arrangements have yet to be worked out.

Nevertheless, there are grave fears that executions could resume shortly after the next meeting of the presidential clemency commission, scheduled for 13-14 March. Amnesty International has learned the names of six men under sentence of death whose clemency petitions are due to be decided at this meeting. It is calling on the clemency commission to commute these death sentences.

"To point to a soaring crime rate is no justification for the government to continue its use of the death penalty," Amnesty International said. "There is no proof that the death penalty has a deterrent effect."

The human rights organization last year condemned Kazakstan twice for showing an execution on state television.

ENDS\