

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: POL 30/027/2007 (Public)  
News Service No: 198  
16 October 2007

**Embargo Date: 16 October 2007 17:30 GMT**

## **Death Penalty: Three death row survivors call for global moratorium on executions**

(New York: 16 October) Three men sentenced to death for crimes they did not commit, today urged member states of the United Nations General Assembly to support a resolution for a global moratorium on executions.

"I have faced death at the hands of my government and I'm here to tell the international community of the human suffering caused by the death penalty, and to urge them to end this terrible punishment," said Edward Edmary Mpagi, from Uganda who spent 18 years on death row. Mpagi, sentenced to death in 1981, was accused of killing a man who was later found to be alive.

Speaking at an Amnesty International event at the United Nations in New York, in advance of a resolution for a global moratorium on executions, the three men highlighted how unfair trials, erroneous decisions or flaws in the judicial system can result in innocent people being executed, and urged governments from around the world to stop the use of the death penalty.

"It's difficult to describe what it is like to serve time on death row knowing you are innocent," said Ray Krone, the 100th prisoner on death row in the US to be freed after DNA tests proved his innocence in 2002.

"All you know is that what seems like an awful nightmare is now reality, a reality beyond comprehension. The US death-penalty system is broken. What happened to me can happen to anyone. And it doesn't have to be that way."

In 1949, the Japanese authorities arrested Sakae Menda for the murder of two people. Police extracted a false "confession" from Mr Menda through torture, and after an unfair trial, he was found guilty and sentenced to death. Determined to prove his innocence, Sakae Menda applied for retrials six times before being granted one. In 1983, 34 years after being sentenced to death, the courts acquitted Mr Menda of the charges, making him the first Japanese prisoner on death row to be released.

"Living each day knowing that you may be sent to your death at any given month, day or moment is torture," said Sakae Menda. "Being on death row dehumanises and has a massive psychological effect on a person. It's an awful penalty to inflict on anyone, and is even more devastating for someone who is innocent."

Executions in Japan are typically held in secret and prisoners are either not warned of their impending execution, or are notified only in the morning of the day of the execution.

Speaking at the UN, Amnesty International's expert on death penalty, Piers Bannister said, "These three men provide graphic evidence that the death penalty is administered by flawed systems, whatever the culture and resources of the country concerned. No one knows how many innocent men and women have been executed through history. But the ever present risk of executing the innocent provides yet another compelling reason why the time has come for the global moratorium of executions."

### **Notes to the Editor**

- o Since the death penalty was re-established in USA in 1973, 124 people on death row have been released after being found innocent, or their conviction rested on insufficient evidence was gathered against them
- o To date, 133 countries have abolished the use of the death penalty in law or practice.

- o In 2006, 91 per cent of all known executions took place in only six countries: China, Iran, Pakistan, Iraq, Sudan and the USA.
- o In November 2007, the United Nations General Assembly (Third Committee) will vote on a resolution calling for a global moratorium on executions
- o Amnesty International calls on the 62 UN General Assembly to adopt the resolution:
  - o Affirming a right to life and stating that abolition of the death penalty is essential for the protection of human rights
  - o Calling on retentionist states to establish a moratorium on executions as a first step toward abolition of the death penalty
  - o Calling on retentionist states to respect international standards that guarantee the protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty, and
  - o Requesting the UN Secretary-General to report on the implementation of the moratorium to the next session of the UNGA.

**ENDS**

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