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China: Annual execution spree looms on UN anti-drugs day

China will execute dozens and perhaps hundreds of people this week as it marks UN Anti-Drugs Day on 26 June. Amnesty International is calling on the Chinese government to halt these executions and to review all future use of the death penalty.

"We have seen an annual spree of executions in China in the run-up to UN International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking in previous years" said Amnesty International. "Yet no convincing evidence has ever been produced that the death penalty deters would-be traffickers and users more effectively than any other punishment."

More than 50 people were executed on drug-related charges in just eight of China's 23 provinces in the single week leading up to Anti-Drugs Day last year. The total number across China is likely to have been in the hundreds. Already this year three alleged drug traffickers from Hong Kong have been executed, in the southern city of Shenzhen on 11 June.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases without exception as a violation of the right to life and the ultimate form of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

The United Nations has never given any endorsement to the use of the death penalty for drug-related offences, and the UN Special Rapporteur on Summary or Arbitrary Executions has called on China to end the use of the death penalty for drug trafficking.

China faces an extremely serious and growing drugs problem. It borders two of the world's largest opium-producing areas, the 'Golden Triangle' and Afghanistan. There are 1.05 million registered drug addicts in China, and many more are thought to choose not to register. Possession of defined quantities of drugs triggers a potential death sentence. Five kilos of cannabis resin, one kilo of heroin or 50g of cocaine can result in the death penalty being passed.

In the week leading up to 26 June, UN Anti-Drugs Day and government measures to tackle drug crime are publicized in the Chinese media. Despite this extra reporting of death sentences, drug-related crime, drug use, and amounts of drugs seized by customs are all at a high level or actually rising in China. This reality seriously undermines official claims that the death penalty is an effective deterrent against drug crime in China.

Background

According to China's Drug Control Bureau, mainland police seized 9.53 tonnes of heroin in 2003, up 2.6 percent from 2002. In 2003 5.8 tons of 'ice', or methamphetamine hydrochloride, was seized, up from 4.8 tons in 2001.

The Chinese National Narcotics Control Commission has stated new addicts grew at an average rate of 13% over the last five years.

Public Document

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