

PUBLIC

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EXTRA 15/00 Death penalty / Fear of imminent execution

2 March 2000

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA (PRC) Hu Changqing

Former vice-governor of Jiangxi province Hu Changqing is facing imminent execution, after the provincial High People's Court turned down his appeal against his death sentence. Execution can take place hours after the sentence has been confirmed and the appeal rejected.

Hu Changqing was sentenced to death on 15 February 2000, by Nancheng Intermediate People's Court, for various crimes of corruption involving sums of up to seven million yuan (US\$843,000) between 1995 and 1999, when he was working first as a senior official in the State Council and then as vice-governor of Jiangxi.

A court official reportedly said that "We have handed over the case to the National Supreme People's Court in Beijing and are awaiting their approval [of execution]. It is hard to say how long it will take to get the [execution] order," he said.

It is possible that Hu Changqing will be executed during the annual meeting of the National People's Congress (NPC) in Beijing, due to start on 5 March. The NPC will have corruption high on its agenda, as a major crackdown on corruption is underway, in which a reported 130,000 government officials have been punished. The authorities have stated that this campaign is to be stepped up. Hu Changqing is the highest-ranking official ever sentenced to death for corruption, and it is likely that his execution will be seen as an example to other officials.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The death penalty continues to be used extensively, arbitrarily, and frequently as a result of political interference. There are often mass executions before major events or public holidays, such as 1 January and the Chinese New Year. Many of those executed are accused of relatively minor crimes which might not normally attract such a harsh sentence.

Based on incomplete public reports for 1998, Amnesty International recorded at least 2,701 death sentences and at least 1,769 confirmed executions. From 1990 to the end of 1998, Amnesty International recorded over 25,400 death sentences and over 16,600 executions. These figures, however, are believed to fall far short of the real figures, as only a fraction of death sentences and executions carried out in the country are publicly reported. Even based on this limited record, the government continues to execute many more people than the rest of the world put together. Execution is by shooting or lethal injection.

A revision to the Criminal Code in March 1997 confirmed the increasing scope for the use of the death penalty.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in English, Chinese or your own language:

- urging that the death sentence imposed on Hu Changqing be commuted;
- urging that the arbitrary and massive use of the death penalty in China be stopped;
- urging the government to exclude non violent crimes, such as corruption, from the death penalty, as recommended by the United Nations Special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions;
- expressing opposition to the death penalty in all cases as the ultimate form

of cruel and inhuman punishment, and as a violation of the right to life, as guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

APPEALS TO: please note that faxes in China are unreliable and often do not work outside office hours (GMT + 8):

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Chairman of the Jiangxi Provincial People's Congress Standing Committee

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and to diplomatic representatives of the People's Republic of China accredited

to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.