

JAPANNames Unknown: about 4 prisoners awaiting execution

There are strong indications that the executions of about four prisoners will take place in Japan in the next few days. Detention centre officials in Tokyo and two other cities are believed to be making preparations for hangings on or around 18 December 1997. The names of four men have been mentioned but due to official secrecy and the arbitrary nature of execution decisions, the lawyers and relatives of prisoners are not informed before they take place. It is thought the execution orders may already have been drawn up.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Executions have occurred in Japan every December since 1994. The authorities often time these to coincide with public holiday periods and parliamentary recess, in order to minimize public and parliamentary criticism and debate through lack of awareness. Many Japanese will take their holidays in the period 20-23 December. Many parliamentarians will leave Tokyo on or after 12 December, when the Diet (Parliament) goes into recess.

Many members of Japan's large movement advocating the abolition of the death penalty share Amnesty International's concern that further executions may be planned this month. Public consternation regarding the unjust nature of the death penalty has been widely reported by the Japanese media subsequent to recent executions that have taken place.

Advocates of the death penalty in Japan invariably state that public support for the death penalty is overwhelming, however, there is no evidence of this.

Although surveys carried out by the Ministry of Justice indicate that the majority of respondents appeared to support the death penalty, studies in many countries have shown that support falls when those polled are asked whether they see the death penalty as an effective deterrent, whether they think it is fairly applied and whether they think there is a risk of miscarriage of justice. There was no significant public opposition to the *de-facto* moratorium on executions of 1989-93.

There is no significant evidence to suggest that the relatives of murder victims advocate the death penalty or systematically demand the execution of serious criminals.

Amnesty International wrote to Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro on 5 December urging him "to ensure that no execution is carried out in the period leading to the new year" and to "consider making a public statement in support of the abolition of the death penalty".

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/e-mails/faxes/express/airmail letters in Japanese or your own language:

- urging the Japanese Government to ensure that no execution is carried out in the period leading to the new year;
- urging the Government, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to contribute to the implementation of the spirit of the Declaration by expressing public support for the abolition of the death penalty;
- calling for an immediate moratorium on all executions pending the abolition of the death penalty in Japanese law.

APPEALS TO:

Mr Hashimoto Ryutaro
Prime Minister
2-3-1 Nagasaki
Tokyo 100
Japan

Telegrams: Prime Minister Hashimoto, Tokyo, Japan

Faxes: +81 3 3581 3883 (if a voice answers that you have reached office of Foreign Affairs it is OK to use)

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Mr Shimoinaba Kokichi
Minister of Justice
1-1-1 Kasumigaseki
Tokyo 100
Japan

Telegrams: Minister Shimoinaba, Tokyo, Japan

E-mails: webmaster@moj.go.jp

Faxes: +81 3 3592 7011/3593 3009 (answer machine message followed by tone)/5511 7207

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Asahi Shimbun
5-3-2 Tsukiji 5-chome
Chuo-ku, Tokyo 104-11, Japan
Faxes: +81 3 3545 0285

Yomiuri Shimbun
1-7-1 Ohtemachi, Chiyoda-ku
Tokyo 100-55, Japan
Faxes: +81 3 3246 0455

Japan Times
4-5-4 Shibaura, Minato-ku
Tokyo 108, Japan
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and to diplomatic representatives of Japan accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.