

AI Index: PRE 01/548/2011  
28 October 2011

## **Japan: Minister must not cave in to pressure on death penalty**

Japan's justice minister should not sign execution warrants, Amnesty International and the Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network said today, following the minister's announcement that he does not intend to end capital punishment, despite saying last month that he would not approve executions.

Justice Minister Hideo Hiraoka said Friday he would look at each death row case individually, after a prominent politician reportedly had encouraged him to exercise his power to authorize executions.

"After showing reluctance to sign execution warrants last month when he first took office, it is deeply alarming that Minister Hideo Hiraoka now seems to be under pressure to approve executions despite his own calls for caution," said Catherine Baber, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for Asia and the Pacific.

"The minister must stand by his original commitment which was to suspend executions until Japan's application of the death penalty can be more carefully considered," she added.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Osamu Fujimura reportedly encouraged Minister Hiraoka at a parliamentary committee on Wednesday to press ahead with executions.

The last executions in Japan were carried out on 28 July 2010, when Ogata Hidenori and Shinozawa Kazuo were hanged in the Tokyo detention centre.

A study group on the death penalty was established by the former Minister of Justice Keiko Chiba in 2010. The study group is continuing to work under the current Minister, Hideo Hiraoka, who encouraged discussions on the subject both in public and within his ministry, taking into account international trends and opinions.

No date for its report has been announced.

There are currently 126 people on death row in Japan.

Executions in Japan are by hanging and are typically carried out in secret. Death row inmates are only notified on the morning of their execution and their families are usually informed only after the execution has taken place.

This means that death row prisoners live in constant fear of execution. Enduring these conditions for years or even decades has led to depression and mental illness among many death row inmates..

More than two thirds of the countries in the world have abolished the death penalty in law or practice. Out of 41 countries in the Asia-Pacific, 17 have abolished the death penalty for all crimes, nine are abolitionist in practice and one – Fiji – uses the death penalty only for exceptional military crimes.

This means that less than half of the countries in that region still use this ultimate and irreversible punishment. Of the G8 nations, only Japan and the United States still use capital punishment.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty as a violation of the right to life in all cases, regardless of the nature of the crime, the characteristics of the offender, or the method used by the state to carry out the execution.

“Japan should immediately commute all death sentences and introduce an official moratorium on executions as a first step towards abolition of the death penalty,” said Catherine Baber.

Notes to editors

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566 or email: [press@amnesty.org](mailto:press@amnesty.org)

The Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network (ADPAN) is a regional network including lawyers, NGOs, journalists, human rights defenders and activists from 23 countries across the Asia Pacific region.

ADPAN campaigns for an end to the death penalty across all countries in the region.