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China: Hasty executions highlight unfair Xinjiang trials

Chinese authorities must ensure all individuals charged with offences during July riots in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) receive a fair trial and do not face the death penalty, Amnesty International said today.

The China Daily reported today that authorities prosecuted another 20 suspects on Monday, 9 November for offences ranging from murder, arson and robbery linked to the riots.

The trial follows the execution of eight Uighurs and one Han Chinese individual, announced by authorities yesterday. The announcement did not say when the nine were executed but reported that it was after the Supreme People's Court reviewed and approved the sentences.

“In hastily executing these individuals after unfair trials, the Chinese authorities are perpetuating some of the very injustices that helped trigger the outburst of violence in the first place,” said Roseann Rife, deputy director of the Asia-Pacific program.

The nine were among 21 individuals tried and sentenced in October in relation to the July unrest. Another three received suspended death sentences while the rest were sentenced to lengthy prison terms. Their trials lasted less than a day. Their sentences were upheld by the XUAR Higher People's Court on 30 October.

Amnesty International believes that statements made by Chinese officials following the unrest made it very difficult for a fair trial to be conducted. Urumqi's Communist Party Secretary stated in a news conference in July that “brutal criminals will be sentenced to death”.

The defendants were also denied legal representation of their choice, with judicial authorities in Beijing putting pressure on human rights lawyers not to take up the cases of the accused.

Amnesty International is concerned about the lack of openness and transparency relating to the trials. Public notices about the trials were not issued and no observers were present in court.

“Given the large number of detentions reported by Chinese officials in connection with the unrest, dozens more trials could take place, possibly leading to more executions. The Chinese government must ensure that the trials are conducted in line with International human rights standards, with transparency and without recourse to death penalty”, said Roseann Rife.

Amnesty International interviewed eyewitnesses following the unrest who accuse the authorities of using excessive force against peaceful protesters including beatings, use of tear gas, and shooting directly into crowds of protesters.

Amnesty International calls on Chinese authorities to examine all acts of violence during the July unrest, including possible excessive use of force on the part of security forces against peaceful Uighur demonstrators.

“A process that fails to openly investigate crimes and acknowledge underlying causes of unrest will only perpetuate

tensions and the existing sense of injustice among ethnic minority groups,” said Roseann Rife.”