

## **Public Statement**

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### **Japan: Executions - continuing the secret and cruel practice**

*Amnesty International is concerned that the Japanese Government will carry out executions on or around 29 June 2001 when the parliament goes into recess, or before the Upper House elections scheduled for 29 July. The Japanese government has earlier carried out executions during periods of parliamentary recess, parliamentary elections and holiday periods. Amnesty International believes that the government chooses these periods to avoid debate within parliament and to minimize publicity.*

*In the coming days, Japan faces international scrutiny over its use of the death penalty. Executions in Japan will be on the agenda at the First World Congress against the Death Penalty in Strasbourg this week, and a resolution calling on Japan to declare an immediate moratorium on executions or risk losing its Observer Status at the Council of Europe will be debated at the Council's Assembly on Monday. The resolution is based on a recent report by the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights of the Council of Europe.*

*Executions in Japan are arbitrary and are carried out in secret. The prisoner is told less than two hours before execution, and the families and lawyers are never told of the decision to carry out the death penalty. Most prisoners are under sentence of death for many years, and endure considerable mental distress. There are at least 110 people under sentence of death in Japan, some 50 of whom have had their sentences upheld by the Supreme Court (or become final in the lower courts) and can be executed at any time. The oldest prisoner is aged 84 and has spent 29 years under sentence of death; another prisoner is 70 and has*

*spent 32 years in death row. There are at least 12 others who have spent over 20 years under sentence of death. The practice of not informing prisoners until the last hour of their execution deprives them of the opportunity to meet with family for final farewells, and makes it impossible for lawyers to file last-minute appeals.*

*The Japanese government has continuously ignored the recommendations of the United Nations Human Rights Committee which has expressed over the years grave concern at the number of crimes punishable by death. The Committee has restated its recommendation that Japan take legal measures to abolish the death penalty in practice and in law. The Committee had also expressed its serious concern at the conditions under which persons are held in death row, and had concluded that the undue restrictions on visits of the family and lawyers and the failure to notify them of executions of the prisoners on death row were incompatible with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.*

*Amnesty International opposes the death penalty as a violation of the fundamental right to life and considers it to be the ultimate form of cruel and inhuman punishment. Amnesty International calls on the Japanese government to declare an immediate moratorium on all executions and to abolish the death penalty in Japanese law.*

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>