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PHILIPPINES: JAPANESE MAN BECOMES FIFTEENTH PERSON SENTENCED TO DEATH

A Japanese computer salesman has become the first foreigner to be sentenced to death in the Philippines since capital punishment came into force at the beginning of this year.

Hideshi Suzuki was found guilty of drug trafficking and sentenced on December 7 by Bacolod City Regional Court. When sentencing him the judge stated that Suzuki, "...having committed a crime defined by our lawmakers as heinous, has forfeited his human right to exist".

Hideshi Suzuki was arrested on April 12 as he was about to board a plane in Bacolod bound for Manila. Police allegedly found 1.9 kilograms of marijuana in a box of biscuits that he was carrying. Possession of 750 grams or more of marijuana is punishable by death.

Amnesty International is concerned that the trial proceedings may have been prejudiced by the fact that Suzuki does not speak or read English. It is believed that he was interrogated without an interpreter and was required to sign documents that he could not understand.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty under any circumstances. It is the ultimate form of cruel punishment and a violation of the most basic of human rights - the right to life, and can often result in the execution either of innocent people, or those who are most vulnerable because of their economic and social status.

Although the rationale for the use of the death penalty for drug-related offences is that it will deter drug-traffickers more effectively than other punishments, there is no compelling evidence of a decline in drug-trafficking which could be attributed to the use of the death penalty.

The use of the death penalty in drug-related cases more often than not leads to the weakest and most vulnerable links in a drug smuggling chain being caught and executed, while the syndicate's leaders walk free, according to Amnesty International.

While Hideshi Suzuki's sentence highlights the plight of at least 11 foreigners facing the death penalty in the Philippines, Amnesty International is also concerned about 11 Filipinos who have been sentenced to death for crimes ranging from rape to murder.

Amnesty International is continuing to strongly urge the Philippine Government to abolish the death penalty for all crimes and to commute the sentences of all those currently on death row, including Hideshi Suzuki.

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