

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL EU OFFICE PRESS RELEASE

20 APRIL 2006

AI Index: IOR 61/011/2006 (Public)

EU-Japan Summit: Time to Abolish the Death Penalty

For Immediate Release

(Brussels, 20 April 2006) Japan is one of the few industrialized countries which continues to practice the death penalty, says Amnesty International on the day it releases its annual analysis of the use of the death penalty worldwide.

Amnesty International calls on the European Union to use the forthcoming EU-Japan Summit to draw attention to this regrettable stain on Japan's human rights record.

A number of people have been sentenced to death in Japan for crimes they did not commit, on account of a system which relies on pre-trial "confessions" that are sometimes extracted by coercion.

Hangings are only announced after they have occurred so that vigils cannot take place and public debate is minimized. Sometimes even the prisoner is not notified of the execution.

Those condemned to death are held in a regime of solitary confinement that can last for decades. Television is prohibited, books are limited and contact with the outside world is reduced to infrequent and supervised visits from family or lawyers. As a result a number of inmates are reported to have become mentally ill while detained.

"It's a sad paradox to see one of the most industrialized countries and a great contributor of humanitarian aid, failing to uphold basic values at home", says Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International's EU Office.

The human rights organization notes that Japan is at risk of losing its observer status at the Council of Europe because it has failed to abolish the death penalty.

"The Summit provides an ideal opportunity for the EU to raise the pressure on Japan to follow the example of several nations which have recently abolished the death penalty", says Oosting.

Despite the unmistakable trend towards abolition, Amnesty International's annual findings reveal that over twenty thousand people are currently waiting on death row to be executed by their own governments.

The findings of Amnesty's latest survey demonstrate that in 2005 at least 2,148 people were executed in 22 countries. A great majority of these were killed in China, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the USA.

For further comment/background and interviews:

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