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Japan: New executions emphasize need for death penalty moratorium in Japan

The new Japanese Minister of Justice should immediately re-examine the country's death penalty policy following the hanging of Mantani Yoshiyuki (68), Yamamoto Mineteru (68) and Hirano Isamu (61) in Japan today, 11 September, said Amnesty International.

The most recent executions bring to 13 the number of executions carried out in 2008. These are the first round of executions carried out by Minister of Justice Yasuoka Okiharu who took office on 2 August 2008. They are further evidence of Japan's intent to continue sanctioning the state taking of life.

Japan executed nine people in 2007. In 2007 only 24 countries are known to have carried out executions. Among G8 members, Japan and the USA are the only countries to carry out executions.

There are currently around 102 people on death row in Japan. Prison authorities carry out executions by hanging in Japan, usually in secret. Officials notify death row inmates just hours before the execution, and inform family members only after the execution has taken place. Once the appeals process is complete, a death row prisoner in Japan may wait for years or even decades before execution. This practice means that these prisoners live in constant fear of execution.

Amnesty International called on Japan to adopt a moratorium on executions as a first step towards abolishing the death penalty and to end secrecy surrounding the death penalty.

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