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Japan: Amnesty International condemns new round of “streamlined” executions

Amnesty International strongly condemns the hanging in Japan today of three men: Keishi NAGO (aged 37), Masahiko MATSUBARA (aged 63), and Takashi MOCHIDA (aged 65).

“The Japanese government has shown its disregard for both the universal protection of human rights and the clear international trend to move away from using the death penalty,” said Tim Parritt, Deputy Director of Amnesty International’s Asia Pacific Programme. On 18 December 2007 the United Nations General Assembly adopted, by 104 votes in favour, a resolution calling for a moratorium on executions. Very few countries currently carry out executions. Data gathered by Amnesty International suggests that, in line with the UN moratorium, fewer countries executed in 2007 than in 2006. Among major industrialized countries, Japan is conspicuously the only country with a fully operational death penalty system. In the US, the Supreme Court has blocked all planned executions in the country pending its rules on whether executions can be carried out by lethal injection.

“The Japanese government must end executions and adopt an immediate moratorium on executions in accordance with the UN resolution,” added Tim Parritt.

Background:

These are the second set of executions during the term of office of current Minister of Justice Kunio HATOYAMA, who has sought to streamline capital punishment after final appeals. In September 2007 he announced a plan to scrap the rule under the Criminal Procedure Code which requires the signature of the Minister of Justice for executions.

“We have considered a variety of factors so that we can carry out executions in a methodical manner, rather than thinking about the intervals and the timing,” Minister Hatoyama told reporters.

Japan executed nine people in 2007, and over 100 are currently on death row. At least 23 cases carrying the death sentence were confirmed by the courts last year – the highest number since 1962. Executions in Japan are typically held in secret and carried out without prior notice to the prisoners or their family; prisoners are informed just hours before their executions.