

PUBLIC

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EXTRA 74/00

Death Penalty/ executions feared

5 September 2000

JAPAN

Up to 3 prisoners, names not given

Up to three prisoners are believed to be facing execution on or around 8 September. Executions in Japan are carried out in secret. The names of those scheduled for execution are never officially confirmed.

In order to minimise parliamentary and public criticism, the government usually orders executions for summer and winter, when the Japanese parliament (the Diet) is in recess, or during public holidays. The parliament is in recess until the second half of September. Executions were carried out during this period last year.

There have been no executions yet this year, and the Japanese government could use these executions to show that they are tough on crime. Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori was reelected in June, but with a reduced majority. To strengthen its position, the government wants to show that it is dealing with the crime problem, particularly given the increase in crimes committed by juveniles.

There is reason to believe that one of the three prisoners had his appeal for clemency rejected recently. All three of the prisoners believed to be facing execution now have been on death row for more than six years.

Members of Japan's anti-death penalty movement intend to picket the detention centres in Tokyo and Nagoya where the three prisoners are held.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Executions, by hanging, are carried out arbitrarily and without informing the prisoners' families or lawyers. In Japan, the Minister of Justice signs the execution order on Monday and the executions are carried out on the Thursday or Friday of the same week.

As of 31 August 2000, there were 113 prisoners under sentence of death in Japan.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty as a violation of the right to life and the ultimate form of cruel and inhuman punishment, and calls on the government to cease all executions, to commute all outstanding death sentences and to take steps towards abolishing the death penalty. There was no significant opposition in Japan to the *de facto* moratorium on executions of 1989-1993.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/e-mails in English, Japanese or your own language:

- expressing concern that up to three people are facing imminent execution, one of whom is believed to be a prisoner over 70 years old;
- urging the Japanese government to end this arbitrary, secret and cruel ritual of executions by declaring an immediate moratorium on all executions pending the abolition of the death penalty in Japanese law;
- calling on the Japanese government to ratify the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which leads to the abolition of the death penalty.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister

Mr MORI Yoshiro

Fax: + 81 3 3581 3883

e-mail: jpm@kantei.go.jp

OR through this URL:

<http://www.iijnet.or.jp/sorifu/kantei/foreign/comment.html>

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Minister of Justice

Mr YASUOKA Okiharu

Fax: + 81 3 3592 7008 OR 5511 7200 (via Public Information &
Foreign Liaison Office)

e-mail: webmaster@moj.go.jp

Salutation: Dear Minister

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Japan Times

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and to diplomatic representatives of Japan accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 3 October 2000.