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Japan: More secret executions feared this Friday

Continuing a trend in end-of-year executions since 1993, Amnesty International has just received information that several prisoners may be executed in Japan this Friday.

"This move would fit a pattern from previous years in which executions were carried out during the parliamentary recess and holiday period to minimize public and parliamentary reactions to the use of the death penalty," the organization said.

"At a time when Japan should be taking a lead in protecting human rights in Asia, it continues to kill its own citizens with the death penalty," the organization added.

The death penalty system in Japan is extremely cruel. Executions by hanging, are carried out without the knowledge of families or lawyers and apparently in an arbitrary manner. Prisoners are held in prolonged solitary confinement for years on end with little opportunity for contact with anyone except prison guards and many of them suffer from psychological problems as a result of harsh prison conditions.

Amnesty International urges the Japanese Government to halt executions, guarantee the security and welfare of prisoners as provided for under the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners and the government's own rules for all penal institutions, and take steps towards abolition of the death penalty.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases, as it violates the right to life and constitutes the ultimate form of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. The organization is particularly concerned about the secrecy surrounding executions in Japan.

Background

One case which illustrates the profoundly cruel situation for death row prisoners in Japan is that of Mr Ota Katsunori, a prisoner on death row for 15 years who was found dead in the Sapporo Detention Centre on 8 November 1999. He had committed suicide by slashing his neck with a razor blade while taking a bath. It was also reported that three suicide notes written by Mr Ota on 7 November 1999 were discovered in his cell following his death. This death calls into question the commitment of the concerned authorities to guarantee the security and welfare of prisoners.

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