

Japan: Three executed ahead of United Nations General Assembly resolution

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Amnesty International condemns and regrets the recent execution of three men in Japan, just two months before a resolution calling for a global moratorium on executions is to be introduced to the 62nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly. Three men, Iwamoto Yoshio, Sewawa Kousou and Takezawa Hifumi, were hanged on 23 August while the Japanese Diet was in recess. Former Minister of Justice Nagase Jinen oversaw the execution of 10 prisoners in 10 months from the period October 2006 to August 2007. His predecessor Sugiura Seikan did not authorize any executions during his year-long term as Minister of Justice between October 2005 and October 2006 because of personal beliefs.

A Ministry of Justice spokeswoman announced the 23 August executions, but declined to name the men, demonstrating the secrecy surrounding the implementation of the death penalty in Japan. Under current practice, a prisoner is notified on the morning of the execution, or not at all. Family members are typically told of the execution until after the fact.

One of the defendants, Takezawa Hifumi, had been suffering from mental illness as a result of a stroke, which reportedly made him paranoid and aggressive. According to reports of his trial, doctors from both the prosecution and defence diagnosed Takezawa as mentally ill. Takezawa's case is a further demonstration of the Japanese authority's willingness to execute individuals suffering from mental health problems.

Amnesty International calls on the Japanese government to join the global trend toward abolition of the death penalty and support a moratorium on executions to be introduced at the United Nations General Assembly in October.

Background information

Amnesty International believes the death penalty constitutes a violation of right to life and is the ultimate form of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. Hanging is the method of execution in Japan. Executions are carried out without the knowledge of prisoners' families or lawyers. They are scheduled so as to prevent parliamentary or media scrutiny by coinciding with parliamentary recesses or national holidays. There are 104 prisoners facing the death penalty in Japan.

These executions go against the global momentum to end capital punishment: 129 countries from all regions of the world, including 25 from the Asia Pacific region, have abolished the death penalty in law or in practice.

For more information see:

Will this day be my last? The death penalty in Japan, July 2006 (AI Index: ASA 22/006/2006).
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa220062006>

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