

Protest Regarding Executions  
December 27, 2018

Center for Prisoner Rights  
Japan Innocence and Death Penalty Information Center

Today, two prisoners, Keizo Okamoto and Hiroya Suemori, were executed by order of Justice Minister Takashi Yamashita. The Center for Prisoner Rights and the Japan Innocence and Death Penalty Information Center strongly protest this action.

No year has brought more condemnation from the international community upon Japan's criminal justice system than 2018. The world shook in the month of July at the 13 executions of former members of the Aum Supreme Truth cult. And then in November, our criminal justice system drew ridicule and condemnation at the arrest of Nissan president Carlos Ghosn—due to the long period of detention, and, the absence of attorneys during interrogation.

The two executions today bring the year's total to 15, the most in any year since 2008. Of the two, Okamoto was still seeking retrial. The justice ministry has announced, "Retrials should be given careful consideration in delaying executions. Executions should proceed only when this reason is absent."

2019 will see the enthronement of a new emperor. In 2020, Tokyo will host the Olympics and Paralympics, and Kyoto will host the United Nations Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. While Japan intends to show good will to the world over the next two years, the execution of 15 prisoners in 2018 masks a separate intention.

On December 19, 121 countries of the UN General Assembly, a new record, voted for a universal moratorium on the death penalty. Speaking before the press shortly after today's executions, Justice Minister Yamashita repeated, "Our country's criminal justice system is an issue that is fundamental to our livelihood." This shows that the government has a strong intention to continue to support the death penalty.

The Japanese government continues to disregard voices from the international community and declines dialogue. It wrongly believes that executions are a "realization of justice." This conviction must be abandoned.

We strongly request the Japanese government and the Ministry of Justice to join with the international community for immediate discussion to create a concrete plan aimed at suspending executions and abandoning the death penalty.