

Condemnation of the Mass Execution Authorized by the Japanese Minister of Justice: Yoko Kamikawa

July 26, 2018

Center for Prisoner Rights

www.cpr.jca.apc.org

Japan Innocence and Death Penalty Information Center

www.jiadep.org

Today, according to an order signed by Minister of Justice (Ms) Yoko Kamikawa, six former members of the Aum Supreme Truth Cult, Satoru Hashimoto, age 51; Toru Toyoda, age 50; Kenichi Hirose, age 54; Yasuo Hayashi (later named Yasuo Koike), age 60; Masato Yokoyama, age 54; and Kazuaki Okazaki (later named Kazuaki Miyamae), age 57, were executed. Hayashi and Okazaki changed their surnames after they were imprisoned.

The Center for Prisoner Rights and the Japan Innocence and Death Penalty Information Center strongly protest this mass execution. Including the 7 executions carried out on July 6th, 13 executions have occurred inside twenty days. This is the first time in modern Japanese history that so many executions have occurred in such a short time span.

After the 7 executions on July 6, many voices throughout the world have criticized the Japanese government regarding this awful act. Leading movements such as The World Coalition Against the Death Penalty (WCADP), and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), have shouted loudly for the revocation of the death sentences against the remaining six

cult members. Four of these, Yokoyama, Koike, Toyoda and Hirose, had filed for retrials.

Executing those who have filed for retrial violates the right of due process, and nullifies the right of having an objective court of law decide a proper outcome. The United Nations Human Rights Committee has repeatedly admonished the Japanese government to postpone execution of those who have filed for retrials.

Furthermore, in March of this year, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has insisted that the executions of the Aum defendants who were seeking retrials would be in violation of United Nations' standards for the protection of human rights.

In addition, many other voices have called for the termination of executions. These include the Japan Society for Cult Prevention and Recovery (www.jsopr.org/english), and the families of former Aum members -including a victim of violence- have spoken out against execution. They seek a better understanding of the dynamics which caused this tragedy, and methods to prevent future occurrences.

With today's executions, the total number authorized by Minister of Justice Yoko Kamikawa, including her previous term (from October, 2014 to October, 2015), is now 16. This is the highest number since executions were restarted in 1993, and even surpasses the 13 authorized by a previous minister, Kunio Hatoyama, who the media dubbed as the "grim reaper."

This past September (2017), Kamikawa presented the welcome remarks at the World Congress on Probation in Tokyo. The motto of the conference was "People can change." As justice minister, Kamikawa's motto is "a society in which no one is left behind." A politician with two faces, she obviously does

not believe that people will change, and is happy to dispose and leave behind prisoners sentenced to death, including those who show remorse and have apologized for past acts.

In 2019, Japan will hold the Enthronement Ceremony for the new emperor, in 2020, Tokyo will host the summer Olympics and Para-Olympics, and Kyoto will host the 14th United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. In light of these events which are celebrations of harmony and friendship among nations, the mass execution of former Aum Supreme Truth cultists is truly a contradiction.

On December 30, 1997, the nation of South Korea carried out 23 executions in one day. Since then, no executions have occurred. We strongly request that the Japanese government and the Ministry of Justice follow the lead of international society and abandon abnormal punishment. We hope that this round of executions will be the last in Japan, and that concrete investigation and dialogue be immediately opened toward the abolishment of the death penalty.