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EU: confront Japan on death penalty

(Brussels, 5 June 2007) As it hosts one of the last country summits of its EU Presidency, Germany should not forget human rights concerns at today's meeting with Japan.

Although Japan is a major contributor of humanitarian aid abroad, it continues to have some serious human rights issues at home, starting with the fact that it is one of the few industrialized countries to practice the death penalty. Since executions were resumed on 25 December 2006, seven people have been hanged in Japan.

In a letter (available at www.amnesty-eu.org) Amnesty International urged the German Presidency, in light of the EU guidelines on the death penalty, to ask that Japan takes practical steps to abolish the death penalty. The organization also urged the Presidency to raise the issue of forced confessions that continue to occur under a pre-trial detention system, which fails to meet international standards.

“Japan is often associated with modernity but its capital punishment system is anything but. On the contrary, it has medieval features such as executions by hanging and a secrecy policy whereby sometimes even the prisoner is not notified of the execution”, said Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International's EU Office.

Prison conditions under which prisoners are held are another serious cause of concern to Amnesty International. Death row prisoners are confined, sometimes for decades, under a regime of solitary confinement. Contact with the outside world is reduced to infrequent and supervised visits, television is denied and books limited. As a result, several inmates are reported to have become mentally ill.

The human rights organization also urged the EU Presidency to raise the issue of Japan's military sex slaves during the Second World War, known as “comfort women”.

“The failure of Japanese authorities to offer full apologies and compensation to all survivors of sexual slavery is another stain on Japan's human rights record that should be raised at the summit” said Oosting.

For further comment/background and interviews:

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