

Justice minister may halt executions

The Yomiuri Shimbun

Justice Minister Satsuki Eda indicated his intention not to authorize the execution of death row inmates for the time being in an exclusive interview with The Yomiuri Shimbun, one year after the last death sentences were carried out on July 28, 2010.

Considering the Justice Ministry has been discussing the future of the death penalty system, "It's very unlikely [that I will] enforce it," Eda said

According to the ministry, 107 inmates remained on death row following the last execution. Since then, the number of death row inmates has risen to 120.

The ministry launched an internal study group in August to discuss the death penalty, including the possibility of abolishing it. The group is still reviewing points of the argument.

"Human beings are rational creatures. I think it's wrongheaded to claim that taking the life of a person is the expression of a rational nature," Eda told The Yomiuri Shimbun on Tuesday.

"I'm considering how to exercise the authority given to the Justice Minister, keeping in mind the global trend [to eliminate the death penalty]," Eda added.

The Criminal Procedure Code stipulates that execution of inmates on death row should take place within six months of a death sentence. However, executions are not conducted as long as the Justice Minister has not signed the order of execution.

The death sentences of two men were enforced on July 28, 2010, based on orders by then Justice Minister Keiko Chiba. They were the last cases of the death penalty being imposed to date.

At an inaugural press conference in January, Eda said, "I think it [the death penalty] is a form of punishment with various defects." Eda later retracted the remark.

(Jul. 29, 2011)