

North Norfolk Group

Matsumoto Kenji

28 June 2017

Our prisoner

Matsumoto Kenji is a Japanese male, 66 years old. He has been on death row since 1993. He comes from a very poor background and has an IQ estimated to be about 70. It is believed that he may be suffering from Minamata disease, a form of Mercury poisoning; this is common in the part of Japan where Kenji was born.

Our main concerns

In addition to Amnesty International's unequivocal objection to the use of the death penalty, there are two major strands to our efforts to have the Japanese authorities look again at his case:

- Kenji was convicted after a possibly coerced confession. Up until his arrest Kenji had been totally dependent on his older brother, Matsumoto Hiroshi, who, when charged with robbery and murder alongside Kenji, committed suicide. This left Kenji alone and vulnerable.
- Japan's treatment of death row prisoners is exacerbating Kenji's mental health issues. He has been held in solitary confinement for the last 24 years with very limited exercise or human contact. He may also be executed at any time; no notice of executions is given and family members are often informed after the event.

What we should be campaigning for?

We should demand:

- a review of Matsumoto Kenji's case and commutation of his death sentence; in international law it is illegal to execute someone with serious mental or intellectual disabilities;
- a review of the death penalty in Japan – both in terms of its overall existence and the conditions in which death row prisoners are held.

The bigger picture

- In 2016 Japan executed three prisoners by hanging and there is no sign of a change in, or debate about, the death penalty despite objections from outside and within Japan.
- The relatively encouraging news is that the authorities did release a former boxer and 'Amnesty prisoner' Hakamada Iwao who had spent over forty years on death row. Although now free Iwao's mental health has been severely damaged by such a time spent in solitary confinement.