

A statement to call for the suspension of all executions and  
the abolishment of the death penalty

July 9, 2018

On July 6, 2018, seven executions were carried out at detention centers throughout Japan: three in Tokyo, two in Osaka, one in Hiroshima, and one in Fukuoka.

Those executed on that day were the founder of the group formerly known as Aum Shinrikyō and six of the members of his group. Because of the crimes they committed, a total of twenty-nine people were killed and more than six thousand were injured. We offer our deepest condolences to the victims of their crimes.

When we think of the unimaginable grief and sorrow of the victims and the bereaved, most of whom still suffer from the loss of their loved ones, the aftereffects of the tragedies, and the post-traumatic stress disorder they caused, we find ourselves at a loss for words. Such acts of taking precious lives and violating human dignity are totally unforgivable. As Buddhists, we are shocked and indignant at the fact that they committed the crimes under the guise of religious salvation. At the same time, when we think of why those young people blindly followed the founder's orders, we reflect on our own responsibility as Buddhists for having completely failed to respond to the anxieties and pain people in modern society were and are experiencing.

However, we have serious apprehensions regarding the issue of capital punishment: the execution of the accused may have seemingly settled the case. But it forever conceals what really happened and prevents the resolution of the real problem. Therefore, we believe it is especially important for us to continue to study and contend with the problems revealed by the tragic incidents.

Based upon the spirit of Amida Buddha, who made vows to liberate all sentient beings with no one left behind, we the Shinshū Ōtani-ha denomination has urged society to continue the debate regarding the validity of the death penalty. Execution, the act of taking a person's life, is nothing less than an elimination of offenders from society. In carrying out the punishment, there is no process of self-reflection on the fundamental darkness of the human mind. Therefore, it will never lead to the resolution of problems in the true sense. Capital punishment deprives offenders of opportunities to reflect upon their own sinfulness and repent. Moreover, it is also an excuse for neglecting our society's responsibility to help offenders reform themselves, and makes it impossible to realize a world where everyone can live together.

In closing, we again express our firm opposition to the executions carried out on this occasion and wish that capital punishment will be a thing of the past. At the same time, we sincerely hope that the discussion on this issue be widely held among the public so that our society can work toward the abolishment of the death penalty.

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