



THE DEATH PENALTY IN JAPAN

WRONGFUL CONVICTIONS AND PUBLIC OPINION

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the application of the death penalty in Japan through the lens of wrongful convictions, systemic flaws in the judicial process, and international human rights concerns. Drawing upon studies, expert commentary, and official statistics and reports, it argues that Japan's capital punishment system operates under a structure vulnerable to miscarriages of justice, particularly due to coercive interrogation practices, limited defense rights, and opaque procedures. The retention of the death penalty is frequently justified by reference to public opinion, yet such reliance is ethically and methodologically questionable. This paper contends that abolition should not be contingent on public sentiment but guided by principles of human dignity, justice, and legal safeguards. Comparative perspectives from other abolitionist countries and international advocacy are presented to frame Japan's stance within the global context.

KEYWORDS

Death penalty in Japan • Wrongful convictions • Hostage justice system • Public opinion and capital punishment in Japan • Coerced confessions • UN and EU stance on Japanese death penalty • International law

1. JUDICIAL AND POLICE ERRORS AND MISCONDUCT IN JAPAN

The Japanese judicial system, like any other, is not immune to error. In *“The Culture of Capital Punishment in Japan”*¹, criminal justice scholar David T. Johnson highlights the uncertainty surrounding the true number of wrongful convictions, pointing to the lack of comprehensive research and reliable estimates. He notes efforts to identify and count strongly suspected wrongful convictions, though acknowledges that historical documentation, especially for prewar cases, is limited. Even for postwar decades, the available data likely under represents the true scale. Between the 1940s and 2000s, researchers identified 159 likely miscarriages of justice, averaging approximately 2.3 cases per year.

As Johnson emphasizes, these figures likely represent only the "tip of the iceberg". They exclude less serious offenses such as drug violations and most importantly, many wrongful convictions are never uncovered.

While every wrongful conviction is a bitter injustice, those that result in a death sentence are uniquely unacceptable. Even when execution is not carried out, the sentence itself becomes a cruel mockery, a brutal betrayal of justice and a heinous abuse of state power. For the condemned, it means wasting away for years, sometimes decades, on death row, each day haunted by the fear of being killed, each night weighed down by the unbearable knowledge of their own innocence. It means waking every morning under the shadow of death, never knowing if this day will be the last, all while carrying the crushing truth: I did not do this.

Drawing on reported cases of wrongful incarceration in Japan, at least ten involved individuals who had been sentenced to death. Five such cases, death row inmates acquitted on retrial, are documented on the website CrimeInfo (crimeinfo.jp)².

They are:

SAKAE MENDA³

Menda was convicted of murdering a couple and sentenced to death. His conviction was based on a confession forcibly extracted under intense duress, without access to legal counsel. For 34 traumatic years, he endured life on death row, trapped in the agonizing wait for an execution he did not deserve. It was only in 1983, during his sixth retrial, that new exculpatory evidence finally proved his innocence, leading to his acquittal and release.

¹ David T. Johnson, *“The Culture of Capital Punishment in Japan”*, Palgrave macmillan, 2020, at <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-32086-7>

² https://www.crimeinfo.jp/data/dplist/retrial_innocent/

³ Daniel H. Foote, *“From Japan om Japan's Death Row t s Death Row to Freedom”*, at https://digitalcommons.law.uw.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?params=/context/wilj/article/1016/&path_info=from.pdf

SHIGEYOSHI TANIGUCHI⁴

Taniguchi was found guilty of robbery and murder in Kagawa Prefecture and sentenced to death. His conviction rested largely on a confession obtained during an exhausting and coercive four-and-a-half-month interrogation, one he later recanted. For 34 long years, he endured the cruel uncertainty of death row, living each day under the shadow of a sentence for a crime he insisted he did not commit. It was not until 1984 that Taniguchi was finally acquitted and released.

MASAO AKAHORI⁵

Akahori was sentenced to death for the murder of a six-year-old girl based solely on a confession coerced during police detention, a confession he steadfastly recanted afterward. Autopsy findings directly contradicted crucial details in his coerced statement, and the court found no other evidence tying him to the crime. Yet, he spent more than 30 agonizing years under the shadow of a death sentence, trapped in a nightmare not of his own making. Finally, in 1989, he was declared innocent and freed.

YOSHIO SAITO⁶

Charged with the 1955 murders of four members of a farming family in northern Japan, Saito spent 24 agonizing years on death row, living under the constant shadow of execution for a crime he maintained he did not commit. His prolonged ordeal exposed serious flaws in police procedures and raised deep doubts about the reliability of the investigation that led to his conviction. After more than two decades of enduring injustice, he was finally released.

IWAO HAKAMATA⁷

In 1966 the bodies of a couple and their two children were recovered from a fire at their home in Tokyo. All four had been stabbed to death. Iwao Hakamata⁸, a former professional boxer, was accused of murdering the family, setting their house on fire and was sentenced to death. The decades-long legal battle that followed his incarceration hinged on bloodstained clothes that were found and used to incriminate him. Hakamata initially denied the crime, but later gave what he came to describe as a coerced confession following beatings and interrogations that lasted up to 12 hours a day during 19 days⁹.

For years, Hakamata's lawyers argued that the DNA recovered from the clothes did not match his nor the DNA of the victims, suggesting that police could have fabricated the evidence to frame a "culprit".

Prolonged legal proceedings took until 2024 for the final ruling of the court. The Presiding Judge Koshi Kunii said that key evidence in Hakamata's conviction (five pieces of clothing with bloodstains) had, in fact, been fabricated by police. Judge Kunii also said investigators effectively violated Hakamata's right to remain silent and coerced a confession by imposing physical and mental strain on him, which the judge described as inhumane interrogations¹⁰.

⁴ Wrongly Convicted Database Record, at <https://forejustice.org/db/Shigeyoshi--Taniguchi-.html>

⁵ Japon : Justice et criminalité, la garde à vue, une procédure très contestée, at https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1989/02/08/japon-justice-et-criminalite-la-garde-a-vue-une-procedure-tres-contestee_4113136_1819218.html

⁶ Clyde Haberman, Japanese gallows: Case of the 'wrong man' at <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/07/22/world/japanese-gallows-case-of-the-wrong-man.html>

⁷ Amnesty International at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/09/japan-acquittal-of-man-who-spent-45-years-on-death-row-pivotal-moment-for-justice/>

⁸ ITW news at <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/hl7K3vsB1rc>

⁹ Gavin Butler and Shaimaa Khalil, World's longest-serving death row inmate acquitted in Japan, at <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5y9x6zrkrrr>

¹⁰ Kanako Takahara and Himari Semans, "In rare retrial, Shizuoka court rules ex-boxer not guilty of 1966 murders", at <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2024/09/26/japan/crime-legal/hakamata-retrial-ruling/>

Hakamata was finally declared innocent and released. Fifty six years under a sentence of death, mostly in solitary confinement with the ever-present threat of execution, have taken a heavy toll on Hakamata's mental health. A Japanese court ordered the government to pay Iwao Hakamata 217 million yen (\$1.4 million)¹¹ compensation.

Petra Schmidt¹², on “**Capital Punishment in Japan**” (page 135 onwards)¹³, reports an additional case, the Tomiura case:

Three men, **Kondo Katsutaro**, **Kondo Gohei** and **Koshima Yuko**, were indicted for robbery and murder and discarding the bodies of four members of the family of confectionary producer Hagiwara. From the first hearing, all four denied the accusations and complained about police torture. The Shizuoka District Court, Hamamatsu Branch, sentenced all three to death. One year later, “the Tokyo High Court dismissed the appeal, but on 14 January 1957, the Supreme Court revoked the decision because of doubts about the credibility of the confessions, and sent the case back to the High Court, which on 28 February 1959 returned not-guilty verdicts. The appeal filed by the prosecution was turned down by the Supreme Court on 9 July 1963”. By then, the three men had spent fifteen years on death row for a crime they had not committed.

Japan Innocence and Death Penalty Information Center describes also two other cases:

TAKEMITSU MORI¹⁴

Mori was accused of murdering his daughter-in-law, Mayumi Mori, and her 1-year-old son in their Osaka apartment. In 2006, he was sentenced to death by the Osaka High Court and spent several traumatic years on death row, burdened by the weight of a conviction built largely on circumstantial evidence. His case raised serious doubts about the reliability of the investigation and the fairness of the judicial process. Finally, in 2012, the Osaka District Court acquitted Mori, ruling there was no proof he had even entered the apartment on the day of the tragedy.

KAZUO ISHIKAWA¹⁵

Ishikawa was sentenced to death in 1964 for the rape and murder of a high school girl in his hometown of Sayama. Under intense and relentless police interrogation, he confessed to the crime, only to later recant, insisting that his confession had been coerced. Despite these serious doubts, he was convicted, though his sentence was eventually reduced to life imprisonment on appeal. After spending decades behind bars, he was released on parole in 1994 but remains trapped in uncertainty as he awaits a retrial. The glaring inconsistencies in the forensic evidence, coupled with the shadow of his coerced confession, have cast deep doubt on the legitimacy of his conviction. A formal exoneration is expected.

¹¹ <https://punchng.com/japan-rewards-man-1-4m-after-wrongful-conviction/>

¹² Petra Schmidt earned a Ph.D. from Hamburg University, where she studied Law, Japanese Studies, and Chinese Studies. Her doctoral thesis, published under the title *Die Todesstrafe in Japan*, is an extensively researched 807-page study on capital punishment in Japan.

¹³ Petra Schmidt, *Capital Punishment in Japan*, page 135, Wrongly Convicted Database Record, at https://books.google.be/books?id=8fZKH4cbcmQC&pg=PA138&lpg=PA138&dq=Yoneya+1952+murder+japan&source=bl&ots=MbEaqYdanZ&sig=zN9afQ2iziTHa1oFP_5hCjmHZms&hl=en&ei=Go9uTq-kDMTjiAKL5ZCSBw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&sqj=2&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=true

¹⁴ Major Exonerations in Japan, at https://jiadep.org/Major_Retrials_files/page476_1.html?. Ce cas est aussi publié par “thejapantimes”, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2010/05/15/editorials/a-new-standard-for-guilt/>

¹⁵ Japan Innocence & Death Penalty Information Center, at [Sayama | Japan Innocence & Death Penalty Information Center](http://Sayama|JapanInnocence&DeathPenaltyInformationCenter) 日本冤罪・死刑情報センター

Wrongful convictions constitute profound failures of justice, and in Japan, one of the most significant contributors to such miscarriages is the prevalence of false confessions, often obtained under coercive interrogation practices. Johnson has extensively examined this issue, noting that Japan's wrongful conviction problem "is probably much larger than it appears"¹⁶ largely due to its interrogation and detention practices. Suspects are required to undergo interrogation even after invoking their right to silence, and prolonged questioning, often lasting dozens or even hundreds of hours, can erode their will and lead to involuntary confessions.

Furthermore, the restrictive conditions under which non-confessing suspects are detained, including limited access to legal counsel and family, exacerbate the likelihood of false confessions. Johnson refers to this system as "hostage Justice", emphasizing that it is not merely the product of individual misconduct but is structurally enabled by Japanese law and judicial practice.

In the context of capital punishment, these systemic flaws present grave ethical and legal concerns. The reliance on confession-based convictions in a justice system that permits such coercive practices significantly increases the risk of sentencing innocent individuals to death.

This critique was underscored in a newspaper advertisement published on 1 October 2024 to mark International Wrongful Conviction Day in Japan.

The statement declared:

"Under "hostage justice," criminal suspects are denied the rights to due process and a fair trial. Authorities detain suspects for prolonged periods, sometimes months or years. They may be detained for longer periods if they do not confess. Authorities subject suspects to harsh interrogations to coerce confessions from them during the pre-indictment detention. Defense lawyers are not permitted to be present during interrogations, and the questioning does not stop even when a suspect invokes their constitutional right to remain silent."¹⁷

Similarly, Nobuo Gohara, a former prosecutor, remarked in a 2019 interview with **The Japan Times**:

"You are basically held hostage until you give the prosecutors what they want. This is not how a criminal justice system should work in a healthy society."¹⁸

The application of the death penalty in a legal system so vulnerable to false confessions and structural coercion is not only deeply problematic but ethically indefensible.

¹⁶ Japan rewards man \$1.4m after wrongful conviction, at <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Hostage-Justice-and-Wrongful-Convictions-in-Japan-Johnson/9b088b1c76b28aef0d7904a5e83e03e25ec34938>

¹⁷ Riyo Yoshioka, at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/10/01/japans-abusive-hostage-justice-system-persists>

¹⁸ Japan's "Hostage Justice" System, at <https://www.hrw.org/report/2023/05/25/japans-hostage-justice-system/denial-bail-coerced-confessions-and-lack-access>

2. PUBLIC OPINION ON DEATH PENALTY IN JAPAN

Japan retains the death penalty largely on the grounds that “public opinion supports it”, a claim grounded in government surveys conducted every five years.

Criminologist Mai Sato has shown that such public opinion is highly malleable. In a 2015 study replicating the government survey, Sato added questions designed to probe respondents’ reasoning. While initial answers indicated over 80% support for the death penalty, the study revealed that 71% of those supporters would accept abolition if the state were to decide on it. When participants were given contextual information and encouraged to engage in reflective discussion, many shifted toward abolition. Sato concludes that “The idea that Japanese public opinion unequivocally supports the death penalty is a myth. The reality is more complex and dynamic.” This finding is reinforced by other studies, such as a 2018 report by the Death Penalty Project at Oxford, which demonstrated that in-depth surveys presenting concrete contexts and highlighting procedural flaws often reveal significantly lower levels of support for capital punishment, even in societies where retention initially appears popular. The report provides examples from several countries¹⁹.

The most recent Japanese government survey was conducted between October and December 2024, with results published in February 2025. Of the 3,000 individuals surveyed, only 1,815 submitted valid responses (60.5%), leaving 39.5% as non-responses. This considerable level of disengagement suggests limited public familiarity with the criminal justice system.

The central question of the survey asked whether the death penalty is “unavoidable” or should be abolished. Among valid responses, 83.1% supported retention, which equates to just 50.3% of the total sample. Yet the design of this question is deeply problematic. It requires respondents to choose between a concrete punishment (the death penalty) and “abolition”, which is not, in itself, an alternative sanction. Lacking a clear substitute, many respondents may have opted for the death penalty out of concern that abolition would imply excessive leniency.

The final question in the survey asked: “If a new life imprisonment without the possibility of parole were to be introduced, do you think it would be better to abolish the death penalty, or do you think it would be better not to abolish it?” In response, support for capital punishment fell sharply, from 83.1% to the previous question, to 61.8% among valid responses, and from 50.3% to just 37.4% of the total sample. Even so, this question retained the same limitation as before: it asked citizens to morally or politically endorse or reject capital punishment, again displacing onto them a decision that is properly the responsibility of lawmakers, potentially making respondents uncomfortable or discouraging participation altogether.

Several broader limitations further undermine the credibility of these government surveys:

¹⁹ <https://deathpenaltyproject.org/public-opinion-and-the-death-penalty/>

LACK OF CONTEXT

Public discourse on capital punishment in Japan unfolds in a setting of limited transparency and information. The state rarely acknowledges the risks of wrongful convictions or the possibility of executing an innocent person, while fostering a narrative of judicial infallibility. Structural issues such as police and judicial misconduct, prolonged solitary confinement for death row prisoners, secrecy surrounding executions, and opaque appeals procedures are rarely disclosed to the public.

FRAMING BY AUTHORITIES AND MEDIA

The government and mainstream media often portray the death penalty as indispensable for justice or public safety, reinforcing support and creating a self-perpetuating cycle: public opinion is invoked to justify policy, while policy is framed as reflecting public consensus.

POLITICAL AVOIDANCE

Lawmakers cite supposed public backing to sidestep debate or legal reform, thereby evading their responsibility to lead on issues of justice and human rights.

Taken together, these factors suggest that the government survey is designed less to measure public attitudes impartially than to legitimize existing policy. This impression is strengthened by the government's selective emphasis, widely repeated in mainstream media, on the questionable 83% support figure.

3. A HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE ON DEATH PENALTY

Discussions about the death penalty often turn to the role of public opinion. Human rights advocates caution, however, that such decisions should not depend solely on majority sentiment. They point out that fundamental rights are generally understood as protections that should not shift with changes in popular mood. A number of arguments are commonly made in support of this view:

- International treaties such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights affirm the right to life and prohibit cruel or degrading punishment. These protections are considered independent of shifts in public sentiment.
- History offers reminders that widespread approval has at times stood behind serious injustices: slavery, racial segregation, or the denial of women's suffrage among them. This raises the concern that popularity does not necessarily equal moral ethical governance.
- Support for the death penalty in many countries, including Japan, suggests public backing for executions may stem from mistaken beliefs, such as the idea that it deters crime, even though available empirical data largely contradicts

this claim, as confirmed by the Japan Federation of Bar Associations²⁰. Public opinion is also prone to fluctuation due to political shifts or emotional reactions to highly publicized and sensational criminal cases.

- Elected officials and policymakers should not act merely as transmitters of public opinion, but also bear a duty to protect human rights, advance justice, and safeguard society's moral integrity.
- All judicial systems are fallible. The execution of an innocent person constitutes a permanent and irreversible miscarriage of justice. No level of public support should ethically justify such an outcome.

In light of these concerns, fundamental rights, especially the right to life and freedom from cruel or inhuman treatment, should not be subject to the shifting winds of public opinion. Instead, the decision to abolish the death penalty should rest on principled judgment and human rights standards.

Numerous national case studies illustrate this point. In each, abolition occurred despite prevailing public support for capital punishment:

CANADA (1976)

Though 60% of the population still supported the death penalty, Parliament voted to abolish it based on concerns over wrongful convictions and lack of deterrent effect. Canada has since become a leading voice in global abolition efforts.

UNITED KINGDOM (1965)

Despite over 70% public support for the death penalty, Parliament abolished it following revelations of wrongful executions (e.g., the case of Timothy Evans). The UK is now firmly opposed to capital punishment in all cases.

FRANCE (1981)

With over 60% public support for capital punishment, President François Mitterrand and Justice Minister Robert Badinter pursued abolition, citing its incompatibility with human dignity. Badinter famously declared: "Because no man is completely responsible, because no justice can be absolutely infallible, the death penalty is morally unacceptable."²¹

SOUTH AFRICA (1995)

Amid high crime rates and continued public support for executions, the Constitutional Court²² declared the death penalty unconstitutional, emphasizing human dignity, the right to life, and the need to depart from the legacy of apartheid-era justice.

²⁰ See answers to question 6 in: <https://www.nichibenren.or.jp/activity/criminal/deathpenalty/q12.html>

²¹ <https://www2.assemblee-nationale.fr/decouvrir-l-assemblee/histoire/grands-discours-parlementaires/robert-badinter-17-sep-tembre-1981>

²² *S v Makwanyane and Another* (CCT3/94) [1995] ZACC 3; 1995 (6) BCLR 665; 1995 (3) SA 391; [1996] 2 CHRLD 164; 1995 (2) SACR 1 (6 June 1995)

These examples suggest that principled leadership often requires departing from public opinion in order to protect fundamental rights and align with broader human rights commitments. In each instance, abolition ultimately strengthened legal protections and deepened national commitments to justice and human rights.

Relying on surveys to justify the death penalty, especially when these surveys have methodological limitations and are carried out without genuine efforts to inform the public, can be challenged as falling short of the requirements of a democratic society such as Japan. The future of the death penalty debate may need to be rethought: not as a matter of popular approval, but as an affirmation of Japan's commitment to justice, human dignity, and fundamental rights.

4. THE UN AND EUROPEAN UNION STANCE ON JAPAN'S USE OF THE DEATH PENALTY

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and associated mechanisms have consistently expressed concern over Japan's continued use of the death penalty, urging the country to undertake reforms in alignment with international human rights standards. During Japan's fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in January 2023, 32 United Nations Member States issued 18 recommendations pertaining to capital punishment. These included calls for the establishment of a moratorium on executions and the eventual abolition of the death penalty. Japan, however, declined to accept any of these recommendations.

In a further expression of concern, six UN Special Rapporteurs jointly issued a statement in November 2024, urging Japan to impose a moratorium on executions. The statement highlighted several aspects of Japan's capital punishment system that may contravene international legal norms. These include the failure to provide advance notice of execution to inmates, executions carried out despite pending retrial requests, and the prolonged solitary confinement of death row prisoners under constant surveillance practices that may amount to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, in violation of international human rights law.

In December 2024, the United Nations General Assembly adopted its tenth resolution calling for a universal moratorium on the use of the death penalty, urging all states that still retain capital punishment to establish a moratorium with a view toward its eventual abolition. Japan, as a member of the international community, should not disregard resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, which reflect a broad and growing global consensus on fundamental human rights norms.

The European Union, a key partner and ally of Japan, has consistently expressed strong opposition to Japan's continued use of the death penalty. Alongside the Heads of Mission of the 27 EU Member States and the diplomatic representatives of Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland²³, the EU has repeatedly called upon the Japanese government to adopt a

²³ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/japan/japan-joint-local-statement-execution-japan_en

moratorium on executions as a preliminary step towards abolition. The EU argues that capital punishment violates the inalienable right to life and constitutes cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment. Furthermore, it emphasizes that there is no conclusive evidence that the death penalty serves as an effective deterrent to crime, and notes the irreversible nature of capital punishment in the event of judicial error.

In addition to its formal objections, the European Union encourages Japanese authorities to promote a wide public debate on the death penalty. It argues that public engagement is essential for enabling citizens to consider international experiences, particularly those of European nations, where the abolition of the death penalty has strengthened the capacity of judicial systems to deliver justice effectively.²⁴

5. GLOBAL AND REGIONAL CONTEXT

Japan's continued retention of the death penalty increasingly diverges from prevailing international trends. As of December 2024, Zimbabwe became the 119th United Nations Member State to abolish the death penalty in law, reflecting a growing global consensus against capital punishment. Among the remaining retentionist countries, significant progress toward abolition is also evident. Executions were carried out in only 15 countries worldwide in 2024, indicating a sharp decline in the number of countries using capital punishment.

In the United States, Virginia became the 23rd US state to abolish the death penalty in 2021, and executions are now conducted in only a small number of states, further signaling a shift away from its use even within historically retentionist jurisdictions. Meanwhile, although China retains the death penalty at the national level, it has continued to honor its commitment to maintain Hong Kong and Macau as abolitionist jurisdictions, reinforcing the broader international movement toward abolition.

Japan's low number of executions in recent years, including the absence of any executions between June 2022 and June 2025, is a welcome development. However, it is high time for the Japanese government to take more decisive steps toward aligning with international human rights norms, starting with the formal abolition of the death penalty and the commutation of existing death sentences for the more than 100 individuals currently on death row.

CONCLUSION

Japan stands at a critical crossroads in its approach to capital punishment. Mounting evidence of wrongful convictions, systemic coercion, and flawed public consultation processes cast doubt on the legitimacy of its continued use.

²⁴ [Joint local statement on executions in Japan | EEAS](#)

Although the Japanese government cites public opinion to justify maintaining the death penalty, the reliability of the survey data it relies on is questionable. Low participation, biased question design and lack of contextual information undermine the credibility of the reported results. The official communication of the findings exaggerates support for capital punishment while downplaying contradictory evidence. Rather than capturing an informed and independent public consensus, the survey serves to manufacture legitimacy for existing state policy.

Japan's continued use of the death penalty stands in conflict with international human rights norms. As argued, decisions about fundamental rights, such as the right to life and protection from cruel or inhuman treatment, should not hinge on public opinion. Ethical governance requires leaders to uphold these rights, even when doing so is unpopular. As the experiences of countries such as Canada, the UK, France, and South Africa demonstrate, principled abolition is both possible and necessary, even in the face of popular support for capital punishment. These examples affirm that governments committed to justice and dignity must lead with moral clarity.

International pressure reflects this view. The United Nations, European Union, and other global actors have repeatedly urged Japan to establish a moratorium and move toward abolition, citing serious concerns with its death penalty system, especially secrecy, prolonged solitary confinement, and the risk of wrongful execution. Japan's refusal to engage meaningfully with these recommendations undermines its credibility as a democratic, rights-respecting nation.

Meanwhile, the global trend is clear: over two-thirds of UN Member States have abolished the death penalty in law or practice. Even retentionist countries are narrowing its use. Japan is increasingly isolated, and its informal moratorium since 2022 offers a vital opportunity to shift course.

Abolition would not only align Japan with international standards but also strengthen the integrity of its justice system. The choice ahead is not about public approval, it is a test of Japan's commitment to justice, dignity, and human rights.