

Statement

The death sentence for the founder of the Aum cult, Chizuo Matsumoto (more commonly known by the alias, Shoko Asahara) was confirmed today.

It was the world's first trial of the leader of a destructive cult that committed serious crimes, and the trial's developments had attracted worldwide attention. It is extremely regrettable that the sentence was confirmed due to the technicality issue, because the defense counsel has failed to submit the appeal prospectus within the designated time limit.

However, it must be noted that, Matsumoto did make his followers to carry out actions which resulted in more than 30 deaths between 1988 and 1995. He was the mastermind for the production and the use of sarin gas, a deadly chemical agent, which was the tool for indiscriminate mass murder. His deeds have plunged the Japanese society into fear, and the whole world was shocked. Therefore, it is only just that Matsumoto be punished severely.

Matsumoto is also responsible for the fate of the followers. To satisfy his personal desires, he made his followers to engage in many serious crimes, which the followers were sentenced severely, including twelve death sentences. One of these death sentences has already been confirmed by exhausting the appeal and the other cases are still undergoing the appellate process. This is the unique responsibility of the leader of a destructive cult.

The Japan Society for Cult Prevention and Recovery (JSCPR) strongly requests that the death sentences should be commuted, and for the confirmed cases, that the cabinet should issue a pardon for commutation. In any case, they should not be executed.

Even the supporters of the death penalty agree that the death penalty should only be given to extreme cases after careful scrutiny of the mitigating circumstances. We believe that it will do more harm than good to execute the 12 followers of Matsumoto.

The members of the JSCPR, has met many incarcerated Aum members in and out of prison, at court, in various capacities, such as witness, expert witness, expert, victim or just as another caring human being. This experience has made us reach the firm convictions as written below.

Matsumoto was everything and meant more than God to the defendants. He assessed the "karma" for all existences and ruled over previous and after lives. The defendants committed religious murders as "practices of Mahamudler" or "relief of Vagirayana" as instructed by Matsumoto.

The defendants had no criminal records or criminal proclivities before they joined the Aum, and none of them were aware that they would be involved in crime when they joined the Aum. That is clear to all of those who were involved in the case, including even the panel of judges at the Tokyo District Court, that handled the case of Yasuo Hayashi, who was charged with the murder of 8 people by releasing sarin gas. The panel mentioned in its verdict that "Nothing is more pathetic than choosing a wrong mentor, and in that sense, it can be said that the defendant was also met with hard luck and misfortune."

We believe that death sentences and the execution of these 12 followers for crimes committed under the order of their absolute Guru Matsumoto are totally

unjust.

The 12 followers have committed the crimes including mass murder only as a result of the mechanisms of mind control and brainwashing based on accumulated use of sophisticated psychological manipulation techniques as well as LSD and stimulant drugs by the Guru. This clearly exhibits Aum's character as a destructive cult. Therefore, as being released from the Guru's mind control, the ex-members find themselves totally lost, and then, fall into the abyss of self-disgust for what they have done. Even for those few defendants who are yet to be released from the the Guru's mind control, it is highly probable that the day will come when they will face the fact. What on earth can be gained from sentencing these 12 people to die?

Instead, these 12 people should be treated as living witnesses who will help people comprehend the true nature of the Aum as a destructive cult. While we cannot expect the Guru Matsumoto to speak a word about the motivation for his acts and deeds, it is critically important to listen to what these 12 people have to say. The detailed testimony and statements made as they repeatedly reflect upon their own experiences including their relationship with the Guru Matsumoto, are extremely important for us in elucidating the Aum case as a whole.

The reality of mind control and brainwashing was not clarified through the court proceedings of the Guru Matsumoto himself. Had such reality be clarified in the court proceedings, the prosecutors would fail or would have failed to justify their demands for death penalty. For the defense counsel of the Guru Matsumoto also, clarifying such reality simply meant an added disadvantage that Matsumoto's severe responsibility for the crimes in question would have been articulated more firmly. Finding the truth regarding Matsumoto's responsibility will remain incomplete until the 12 defendants will speak out each and every detail of their experiences and thoughts as they live through their remaining lives.

For the purpose of preventing recurrence of the diabolical criminal acts by a destructive cult in Japan or in any part of the world, facts and truth of the Aum case must be thoroughly studied, clarified, as well as understood widely.

In addition, it is crucial to have the 12 defendants to be alive and speak to the remaining followers of the Guru Matsumoto. Some of the 12 defendants have been trying hard to send messages from their detention cells in their efforts to persuade the current Aum members retaining their faith in the Guru to leave the group, and in fact, their efforts have been proven successful. Furthermore, if those defendants who are remaining under some control of the Guru Matsumoto are executed, the current Aum members will treat them as martyrs i.e. the objects of veneration. In other words, executing them will strengthen the conviction and faith among the current followers, and as a result, will prolong the Aum's existence.

Furthermore, executing the 12 will be an outright demonstration of incomprehension by the Japanese judiciary and judicature of the true nature of destructive cults, and will leave the source of a calamity for the future generations.

It is Matsumoto's desire to have the 12 defendants to be executed, and to have them follow him to the end of their lives. Executing the 12, therefore, equate to making the Guru's wish to come true.

Based on the reasons stated above, at this juncture of Matsumoto's death sentence being confirmed, JSCPR herein reiterate its requests that the 12

defendants will not be sentenced to die nor executed. We strongly believe that for these 12 people, commutation of sentences under an amnesty should be given, and execution should never be carried out.

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The Japan Society for Cult Prevention and Recovery

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Representative Director

Minister of Justice,

Our association consists of approximately 130 people, including psychologists, members of religious organizations, clinical psychologists, lawyers, psychiatrists, religion sociologists, counselors, and former members and families of the "People with Things to Discuss and Argue" group. We have studied various issues related to cult-related problems and given information on counseling for members of destructive cults and their families. We have also taken preventative action such as giving out brochures, making videos, and publishing books, as well as holding a training lecture and an open lecture. We submitted "A Written Request for the Support of Former Aum Cult Members" on February 1, 2000 and gave "A Statement to Object the Death Penalty for the Aum Defendants" on April 7, 2005. This association was formerly known as the Japan Freedom from Cults Association, established in June 1995.