

JAPAN

Japan

Head of government: **Shinzo Abe**

Japan continued to move away from international human rights standards. The government failed to effectively address discrimination against foreign nationals and their descendants living in Japan, such as ethnic Koreans. It also failed to refute and combat attempts to deny Japan's military sexual slavery system during World War II. The number of recognized refugees remained very small. It was feared that the Act on the Protection of Specially Designated Secrets which came into force in December could negatively impact transparency.

DISCRIMINATION

The government failed to speak out against discriminatory rhetoric, or curb the use of racially pejorative terms and harassments against ethnic Koreans and their descendants, who are commonly referred to as *Zainichi* (literally "residing in Japan"). Public demonstrations were held in towns with a high proportion of Korean residents. In December, the Supreme Court ruled to ban the high-profile group "Zainichi Tokken wo Yurusanai Shimin no Kai" from using discriminatory and intimidating language while demonstrating near an ethnic Korean elementary school located in Kyoto. This decision marked the first time that the issue was treated as one of racial discrimination, based on the definition in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, rather than coming under other criminal offences such as defamation or damage of property. However, by the end of the year the government had still not passed legislation prohibiting advocacy of hatred that constitutes incitement

to discrimination, hostility or violence, in line with international standards.¹

JUSTICE SYSTEM

The *daijo kangoku* system, which allows police to detain suspects for up to 23 days prior to charge, continued to facilitate torture and other ill-treatment to extract confessions during interrogation. Despite recommendations from international bodies, no steps were taken to abolish or reform the system in line with international standards.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

The government attempted to back away from the landmark apology - known as the Kono Statement - it had made two decades earlier to the survivors of the military sexual slavery system, in which it had acknowledged responsibility and apologized to the survivors. In June the results were made public of a government-appointed study group which re-examined the drafting process of the Kono Statement. Although previous discussions and decisions were respected, the review itself increased tensions with neighbouring countries such as the Republic of Korea, as it was seen as an attempt to deny governmental responsibility. Several high-profile public figures made statements to deny or justify the system. The government continued to refuse to officially use the term "sexual slavery", and to deny full and effective reparation to survivors.

DEATH PENALTY

Executions continued to be carried out. In March a district court ordered a retrial and the immediate release of Hakamada Iwao. Hakamada had been sentenced to death in 1968 after an unfair trial on the basis of a forced confession, and was the longest-serving death row inmate in the world. He suffers from mental illness due to more than four decades of detention mainly in solitary confinement. The Prosecutor's appeal against a retrial was being examined at the Tokyo High Court.

REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS

An estimated 4,500 individuals applied for asylum in Japan but the numbers of refugees recognized under the UN Refugee Convention remained very small. A steady increase in the number of applications has occurred since 2006. Applicants from Myanmar decreased and there was an increase in applicants from countries such as Ghana and Cameroon.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The Act on the Protection of Specially Designated Secrets came into force in December 2014. This would allow the government to classify information as “Specially Designated Secrets (SDS)” when a “leak can cause a serious obstacle to national security” in the categories of defence, diplomacy and so-called “harmful activities” and “terrorism”. The law could restrict transparency by limiting access to information held by public authorities, as the definition of SDS was vague and the monitoring body lacked binding powers.

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1. Japan: Submission to the UN Human Rights Committee: 111th session of the Human Rights Committee (7-25th July 2014)
www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA22/002/2014/en

JORDAN

Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

Head of state: **King Abdullah II bin al-Hussein**

Head of government: **Abdullah Ensour**

The authorities maintained strict controls on the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. Government critics faced arbitrary arrest and detention; some were prosecuted and jailed. The government amended the 2006 Anti-Terrorism law to encompass acts deemed disruptive to Jordan’s foreign relations

and the dissemination of ideas deemed supportive of terrorism. The State Security Court (SSC) continued to try people accused under anti-terrorism legislation; some of the accused alleged torture or other ill-treatment. Jordan continued to receive and host thousands of refugees from Syria and, increasingly, Iraq, but barred entry to Palestinians from Syria. Women faced discrimination in law and in practice; at least 14 people were victims of so-called “honour killings”. Eleven prisoners were executed in December, the first executions since 2006.

BACKGROUND

Jordan felt the impact of events beyond its borders, notably the armed conflicts in Syria and Iraq, and Israel’s military offensive in Gaza. The Syrian conflict generated further refugee flows into Jordan. Jordan hosted over 600,000 refugees from Syria, according to UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, and 30,000 refugees from Iraq. Demonstrations in March over the killing of a Jordanian judge by Israeli forces at the Allenby Bridge crossing between Jordan and the West Bank were followed by mass protests in July and August against Israel’s bombing campaign in Gaza.

Conditions were tense along the border with Syria and the government tightened controls there and along the border with Iraq. In April, the government said Jordanian warplanes had fired on members of Syrian armed groups seeking to cross into Jordan. In June, the USA agreed to send missiles and military aircraft to Jordan, and in September, Jordan joined the US-led international alliance against the Islamic State armed group.

The government made little progress in implementing promised political reforms but the King gained sole authority to appoint the heads of the armed forces and the General Intelligence Department (GID) under a constitutional amendment.