Indonesia ponders death row change

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A groundbreaking new penal code that would allow for prisoners on death row in Indonesia to have their sentences commuted to a jail term could be passed as early as next year, according to the country’s justice minister.

“This could save the lives of some of the estimated 131 people sentenced to death in Indonesia — if they could demonstrate they had reformed after 10 years behind bars.

Law and Human Rights Minister Yasonna Laoly said he hoped the new draft of the criminal code would be passed by Parliament next year.

“We want the death penalty to still be there, but it can be changed, commuted,” Mr Yasonna said. “If possible we would like to finish it up next year. The progress looks good.”

Mr Yasonna’s comments come on the eve of the first anniversary of the execution of eight drug offenders, including Bali nine coordinators Myuran Sukumaran and Andrew Chan.

President Joko Widodo refused to grant the Australians clemency, despite their well-documented reform and rehabilitation, including Chan becoming a pastor and Sukumaran establishing art and computer classes for inmates at Bali’s Kerobokan jail.

After a year-long break from executions — which government ministers attributed to the weak economy — prison authorities have been ordered to prepare for a fresh round on Nusakambangan, known as Indonesia’s Alcatraz.

The timing of the executions and the names and nationalities of those who will face the firing squad have not yet been disclosed.

However, Fairfax Media has been told that they are likely to be Indonesians after the international outcry following the two rounds of executions last year, when 12 of the 14 killed were foreigners.

Chief Security Minister Luhut Panjaitan said Indonesia wanted to avoid the “soap opera” surrounding last year’s executions.

He said this time only three days’ notice of the timing would be given, as stipulated under Indonesian law.

New drug executions expected within weeks in Indonesia

By Jewel Topsfield
in Jakarta

Thirteen drug offenders on death row in Indonesia are listed to face the firing squad in a further round of executions expected within weeks.

Central Java police spokesman Alloysius Liliek Darmanto told Fairfax Media about 130 officers from BRIMOB — Indonesia’s special police operations force — had been prepared to carry out the executions.

“The current number of prisoners to be executed is still 13,” he said. “We don’t have details of the names. We just wait for instructions from the Attorney-General’s Office.”

In a further sign the executions are imminent, three prisoners on death row for drug offences were transferred on Sunday night from Batam to Nusakambangan, where the executions will take place.

The three Indonesians — Suryanto, 53, Agus Hadi, 53, and Rudy Lestari, 42 — were taken to Batu island, one of seven prisons on the island known as Indonesia’s Alcatraz.

Last year, 14 people — including Australians Myuran Sukumaran and Andrew Chan — were executed by firing squad in Indonesia.

The executions led to international condemnation, with several countries whose citizens were killed, including Australia, temporarily withdrawing their ambassadors in protest. Further executions were put on hold for a year, ostensibly because of the weak economy, however Indonesian authorities have confirmed they are preparing for a third round.

The prisoners are expected to be given 72 hours notice of their deaths, as mandated by Indonesian law.

Chief security minister Luhut Panjaitan recently said Indonesia wanted to avoid the “soap opera” surrounding last year’s executions, when speculation about the date dragged on for months.

Foreigners on death row for drug offences include Filipina maid Mary-Jane Veloso, Briton Lindsay Sandiford and Frenchman Serge Ataouli.

Veloso, a domestic worker, was saved from the last round of executions on April 29 last year at the eleventh hour, after her alleged human trafficker surrendered on the day Veloso was due to be shot.

The mother of two, who was arrested in 2010 in Yogyakarta with 2.6 kilograms of heroin in the lining of her suitcase, has always maintained her innocence, insisting she was duped into smuggling the drugs.

Attorney-General Muhammad Prasetyo has said Veloso will not be part of the latest round of executions, because the trial of her alleged human trafficker, Maria Kristina Sergio, is still proceeding in the Philippines.

Ataouli was also due to be executed last year alongside Chan, Sukumaran and six others but won a reprieve because his appeal had not been heard in the Administrative Court. However his future is uncertain after the appeal was subsequently rejected in June.

Ataouli, a welder and father of five, was arrested in 2005 in a meth lab in Tangerang, west of Jakarta.

He insisted he was merely installing equipment in what he thought was an acrylics factory.

Ataouli was arrested with 17 others. Several of those were also sentenced to death, including five Chinese nationals, four of whom recently had their case review rejected by the Supreme Court.

Sandiford was sentenced to death in 2013 after she was convicted of trafficking cocaine worth about $3 million. She said a drug syndicate had threatened to kill her son.