

but still lead world: report

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BEIJING — China's use of the death penalty has dropped significantly, but the country still executed more people last year than the rest of the world combined, a human-rights group said yesterday.

China executed approximately 3,000 people — more than eight a day — last year, according to a report by Amnesty International. The figure was a 31% drop from the 4,367 executions in China in 1996.

Amnesty's estimate of 3,000 executions "represents only a fraction" of the total, said Catherine Bayer, a China specialist for the London-based human-rights organization.

Government-run media reports are a major source for Amnesty's estimate, and they often fail to provide accurate counts of criminals executed, she said. The findings are in a report to be released tomorrow.

The death penalty still is used too much and disproportionately on China's growing underclass, Bayer said.

Nevertheless, the figure mirrors comments a senior Chinese judge

made to John Kamm, a visiting U.S. businessman who has lobbied the Chinese government on behalf of political prisoners for eight years. Kamm said yesterday the judge, whom he did not identify, told him there had been a "big drop" in executions.

The judge cited a new criminal code and sentencing guidelines as the prime reasons for the decline, Kamm said.

The code, which went into effect last Oct. 1, narrowed uses of the death penalty for theft. Now, only bank robbery and theft of cultural relics are punishable by death, Kamm said.

But the new sentencing guidelines, as well as the number of executions, are considered state secrets, Kamm said. China carries out most executions by gunshot, but it is introducing lethal injections, also.

The report on executions comes before the arrival Sunday in China of Mary Robinson, the UN high commissioner for human rights. Both sides want her week-long visit, the first by a UN human-rights chief, to promote cooperation in a relationship often marked by confrontation.

Friday, September 4, 1998 • DAILY NEWS

Film crew reexamines JFK shoot theory

DALLAS — A film crew used laser beams yesterday to retrace the path of the bullets that killed President John F. Kennedy in 1963, in a test of the official theory that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone assassin.

"We haven't come here with any agenda. We are just trying to use modern technology to help establish the facts," said Dan Goldman, producer of the in-the-works TV documentary "The JFK Assassination Files."

His crew fired lasers with the

same angle and trajectory as the bullets Oswald was said to have fired from the sixth-floor window of the Texas School Book Depository as Kennedy's limousine drove by on Nov. 22, 1963.

But other beams were fired from key vantage points on a grassy knoll and two other buildings that conspiracy theorists have claimed were where Kennedy's real killers opened fire.

Reuters