

Man found guilty in '63 murder case seeks retrial

Kyodo News

A man who was given a life sentence and spent almost 32 years in prison for a 1963 murder in Sayama, Saitama Prefecture, before being released on parole filed his third petition for a retrial with the Tokyo High Court on Tuesday, insisting he is innocent.

Kazuo Ishikawa, 67, was arrested 43 years ago and charged with the murder of a 16-year-old female high school student in a case that became known as the Sayama Incident.

He insists he never committed the crime but was forced to confess by police during interrogation.

"I'm fighting with the determination that this (third) petition for a retrial will be the last. I want to bring all of our anger to the court and end this once and for all," Ishikawa said in front of about 4,000 people who gathered in support of him at Hibiya Park in central Tokyo.

The supporters included members of the Buraku Liberation League, the Citizen's Support Group for the Sayama Case and the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism.

Lawmakers including Social Democratic Party leader Mizuho Fukushima and Democratic Party of Japan member Ryuji Yamane, as well as lawyers and former victims of false accusations, also participated in the event.

Members of the groups, mostly carrying banners or flags, marched through To-



KAZUO ISHIKAWA (left), convicted in the infamous Sayama Incident murder case, faces reporters Tuesday in Tokyo while his lawyer holds up evidence of his handwriting that they say proves his innocence. KYODO PHOTO

kyo for about an hour to appeal for a retrial.

In the retrial petition, the 23-member defense council for Ishikawa said his handwriting does not match that of the ransom note, and that he did not have the ability to write such a skilled letter at that time.

Ishikawa said he could barely read and write until he was imprisoned and taught by prison guards.

"I am actually not asking the court to give me a not-guilty sentence quickly because I am innocent. I am only asking the court to review the evidence, for the truth will reveal itself in the process," said Ishikawa.

Ishikawa admitted to the charges and was given the death penalty by the Urawa District Court in 1964. He denied the charges during an appeal but was sentenced to life in prison by the Tokyo

High Court in 1974. The ruling was finalized by the Supreme Court after it dismissed his appeal in 1977.

Ishikawa says he was told by police officers during interrogation that he would be released in 10 years if he admitted to committing the crime.

He was paroled in 1994. As a parolee, Ishikawa says he still faces restrictions, including having to report on his daily life to a probation officer.

"I want to be able to live a normal life without restrictions," Ishikawa said after submitting the petition.

Lawyers and human rights groups say the courts concluded that Ishikawa was guilty based on preconceptions, and there was underlying discrimination against those who were designated "burakumin," social outcasts in feudal Japan.