

PUBLIC

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EXTRA 54/03

Imminent execution

12 December 2003

THAILAND

At least 64 persons on death row

Executed:

Boonlue Nakprasit (m), aged 46, businessman

Panthapong Sinthusung (m), aged 41

Wibul Panasutha (m), aged 49

Panom Thongchanglek (m)

After the execution of four men on 12 December, Amnesty International fears that at least 64 others are now in imminent danger of execution. They have exhausted all legal appeals after their death sentences were confirmed.

Boonlue Nakprasit, Panthapong Sinthusung, and Wibul Panasutha were found guilty of producing methamphetamine tablets. Panom Thongchanglek was arrested in June 1999, and reportedly sentenced for murder. The men are the first to be executed by lethal injection which replaced death by firing squad as the method of execution in October 2003.

According to Amnesty International's information, there are currently more people on death row in Thailand than at any point its history. At least 906 people, many of whom have been convicted of drug offences, face a possible execution should their appeals against their sentences fail.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Thai authorities resumed executions in 1995, after an eight-year moratorium. In the last six years, at least 54 prisoners have been executed. Five of these were executed at two hours' notice, with no opportunity to contact their relatives. The preparations for their executions were televised, reportedly on the orders of the Prime Minister.

The numbers of persons on death row in Thailand have nearly tripled in the last two years. Large numbers of people convicted of drug crimes are among those under sentence of death. Those on death row reportedly include citizens of Ghana, Hong Kong, Laos, Myanmar and Singapore, and members of Thailand's hill tribes, including the Hmong and Yao.

There are credible reports of police ill-treating and torturing suspects in pre-trial detention to extract confessions. These are regularly used as evidence in capital trials, and defendants have maintained in court that police have used force to extract confessions.

Those executed by lethal injection are strapped to a gurney, and then injected with an anaesthetic, followed by a paralyzing agent and finally potassium chloride, which stops the heart. Thai authorities have characterized the introduction of lethal injection technology as a humane measure that will ensure less "accidents" take place during execution. However, a growing number of legal and medical experts in the United States have recently expressed concern that the cocktail of drugs used in lethal injections may leave the condemned prisoner conscious, paralysed, suffocating and in intense pain before death.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- expressing concern that at least 64 people sentenced to death face imminent execution, and that others in the final appeals stage may also be at risk;

- expressing your sympathy for the victims of drug related crime, and murder and recognizing the need to take measures against serious crime, but pointing out that the death penalty has never been shown to have an unique deterrent effect and is a violation of the right to life;
- expressing concern that, in some cases, confessions extracted by force have been used as evidence in capital cases, and urging that all such reports be effectively and independently investigated;
- expressing grave concern at the execution on 12 December of Boonlue Nakprasit, Panthapong Sinthusung, Wibul Panasutha and Panom Thongchanglek;
- urging the authorities not to carry out any further executions and to establish an immediate moratorium on executions, with a view to abolition, in line with recommendations by the United Nations Commission for Human Rights.

APPEALS TO:

(Please note that fax machines may be switched off outside office hours - seven hours ahead of GMT)

Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra
Office of the Prime Minister
Government House
Pitsanuloke Road, Dusit
Bangkok 10300
Thailand

Telegrams: Prime Minister, Bangkok, Thailand
Faxes: + 66 2 282 9479
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Wan Mohamed Noor Matha
Minister of Interior
Ministry of Interior
Thanon Atsadang
Bangkok 10200
Thailand

Telegrams: Interior Minister, Bangkok, Thailand
Faxes: + 66 2 223 8851
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Pongthep Thepkanjana
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
6 Rajinee Road
Bangkok 10200
Thailand

Telegram: Minister of Justice, Bangkok, Thailand
Fax: + 66 2 502 6699
Salutation: Dear Minister

and to diplomatic representatives of Thailand accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.