

UA 49/01 Fear of ill-treatment/incommunicado detention/prisoner of conscience 7 March 2001

MALAYSIA Mohamad Ezam Mohamad Nor

Opposition activist Mohamad Ezam Mohamad Nor was arrested on 5 March, outside the home of prisoner of conscience Anwar Ibrahim, the former Deputy Prime Minister. He is now held incommunicado, and Amnesty International believes he may be severely ill-treated. In September 1998 Anwar Ibrahim was severely assaulted while held in police custody. An inquiry later found that the assault could potentially have been lethal.

Mohamad Ezam Mohamad Nor is the Youth Chief of the opposition *Parti Keadilan Nasional* (National Justice Party). He was brought before the Kuala Lumpur magistrate's court on 7 March and remanded in custody for a further three days for questioning under the Sedition Act. He has only had contact with his lawyers during the 7 March court hearing.

Mohamad Ezam Mohamad Nor was arrested after the pro-government newspaper *Mingguan Malaysia* reported on 4 March that he had called for mass protests to overthrow the government. He has denied the accusation, saying he was misquoted and had merely called for peaceful protests against alleged corruption and cronyism in the government. The Deputy Prime Minister, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, is reported to have said that Mohamad Ezam Mohamad Nor was arrested "not for his political differences, but because of the words he uttered".

Nine *Keadilan* supporters, including three women, were arrested on 7 March as they held a candle-lit vigil outside the police station where Mohamad Ezam Mohamad Nor is being held. They were released the following morning. It is not known if they are to be charged.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly in Malaysia are severely curtailed by an array of restrictive legislation. According to the vaguely worded Sedition Act, anyone who utters "seditious words" may be imprisoned for up to three years. Amnesty International is concerned at the use of selective, politically motivated prosecutions under the Sedition Act to deter peaceful dissent. The law has been used recently against several opposition party members and a leading human rights lawyer.

Mohamad Ezam Mohamad Nor is also currently being tried on separate charges under the Official Secrets Act, for disclosing information to the press about allegations of corruption made against government leaders.

Since 1998 a series of public demonstrations in support of the imprisoned former Deputy Prime Minister and calling for political reform have been suppressed with force. Well over 1,200 people have been arrested, many of whom were assaulted in police custody.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

- expressing concern that Mohamad Ezam Mohamad Nor has been detained because of his peaceful dissenting political beliefs;
- urging the authorities to release him immediately and unconditionally;

- urging them to ensure that he is not ill-treated in detention, and calling for him to be allowed to see his lawyers and relatives immediately, and to be given any medical attention he needs;

- urging the authorities to guarantee the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Home Affairs

Dato' Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi
Ministry of Home Affairs (Menteri Dalam Negeri)
Jalan Dato Onn,
50502 Kuala Lumpur

Fax: + 60 3 2301 217/ 603 2301051

Salutation: Dear Minister of Home Affairs

Minister in Prime Minister's department with responsibility for legal affairs

Datuk Dr. Rais Yatim
Law Division
Prime Minister's Department, Block 1
Federal Government Administration Centre
62502 Putrajaya, Selangor
Malaysia

Fax: + 60 3 8888 3424

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Chairman, Suhakam (Human Rights Commission)

Ybhg. Tan Sri Musa Hitam
Pengerusi Suruhanjaya Hak Asasi Manusia
Kementerian Luar Negeri
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50602 Kuala Lumpur

Fax: + 603 2424808 /2425043

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Inspector General of Police

Tan Sri Norian Mai
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and to diplomatic representatives of Malaysia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 18 April 2001.