

EXTERNAL

AI Index: ASA 28/02/97

26 February 1997

Further information on UA 127/96 (ASA 28/08/96, 22 May 1996) and follow-ups (ASA 28/10/96, 28 June 1996 and ASA 28/11/96, 9 August 1996) - Legal Concern / Possible prolonged detention without trial / Possible Prisoners of Conscience

MALAYSIAN
Nasiruddin bin Ali, 37
Fakharuddin Ar-Razi bin Abdullah, 30
Pahrol bin Mohd Juoi, 36
Jaafar Ahmad, 29
Mohd Nizamuddin Ashaari, 33
Hashim Ahmad, 42
Hasyim Jaafar, 40
Ahmad Salim Omar, 49
Hashim Muhamad, 30
Azura Mohd Yusof (f)
Tengku Noriah binti Tengku Abdullah (f)
Dr Mansor bin Mohd Nor
Mohammad Abu Bakar
Sheikh Abdul Rahim

Amnesty International has learned that 14 former members of the banned *Al Arqam* Islamic sect were released on or around 5 February 1997. They had been held for between six and nine months without trial under Malaysia's Internal Security Act for acting in a "manner prejudicial to the security of Malaysia". The Prime Minister's Department had claimed the detentions were necessary to help efforts to curb "deviant" religious teachings. Amnesty International believes all the detainees named above were possible prisoners of conscience, held solely for the peaceful expression of their religious beliefs.

Only one of the above - Ahmad Salim Omar - is reported to have been released unconditionally. The others are reported to have been banished to remote districts in northern Penang and Perak, central Pahang, southwestern Negeri Sembilan and Melaka states. According to a news report they have been placed under restriction orders, requiring police permission to travel.

Deputy Minister of Home Affairs, Datuk Seri Megat Junid Megat Ayub, is reported to have said that the 14 had "realized the error of their ways" and had agreed to participate in government-run rehabilitation programmes. He is also reported to have said that the Malaysian Government does not consider the country to be "totally free of *Al Arqam's* deviant threat" and that the authorities would continue to monitor former members' movements to ascertain that they had "truly repented".

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

- noting the release of 14 former members of *Al Arqam* after being detained without charge or trial under the Internal Security Act (ISA) for between six and nine months;
- expressing concern that 13 have been placed under restriction orders, and urging that these be immediately and unconditionally lifted if the sole reason for the restriction is the *Al Arqam* members' exercise of their right to engage in non-violent religious activities;
- urging that the ISA be amended so that it no longer allows for those who peacefully express religious or political beliefs to be arrested and imprisoned;

- also calling for the ISA to be amended so that those suspected of threatening national security have the opportunity to defend themselves before a court of law.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister and Minister of Home Affairs
Dato' Seri Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad
Prime Minister's Department
Jalan Dato' Onn
50502 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Faxes: +603 298 4172
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

COPIES TO:

Deputy Minister of Home Affairs
Datuk Megat Junid Megat Ayub
Jalan Dato' Onn
50502 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Faxes: +60 3 230 1051

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 6 April 1997.