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Arrests and harassment of Islamic followers

3 August 1994

**MALAYSIA**

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Up to 41 followers of the Islamic sect Al Arqam have been arrested in the past two weeks for distributing leaflets in Kuala Lumpur and other states of Malaysia. The leaflets contained information about Al Arqam and were responding to government allegations about the group.

On 22 and 23 July, 27 people were detained in and around Kuala Lumpur. 10 were released on bail shortly after but are expected to be charged in the following weeks. Seven more individuals were arrested on Tuesday 26 July.

Amnesty International fears that these people have been detained solely for the peaceful expression of their religious beliefs, a right guaranteed under Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

On 5 August the National Fatwa Council, a conference of muftis or Islamic religious authorities, will announce its fatwa (ruling) on Al Arqam. As a result the group could be banned and its activities become illegal. Amnesty International fears that this could lead to mass arrests of Al Arqam followers.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Islam is the official religion of Malaysia and the majority of Malaysian muslims are Sunnis. The Al Arqam sect was founded in 1968 by Ashaari Muhammad, a 57 year old Malaysian who has been living in Thailand since 1986. Al Arqam is a Shia sect with 100,000 followers in Malaysia and many more in other Asian countries, such as Indonesia and Thailand. The group runs a number of Islamic communities in Malaysia, has a network of schools in Southeast Asia and Pakistan and has important business interests.

Ashaari Muhammad has written 64 books, a number of which have been banned in Malaysia.

Over the years Al Arqam has been accused by government officials of preaching deviationist religious teachings and the Malaysian Government now seems to regard the group as a security threat. To Amnesty International's knowledge, there is no evidence that Al Arqam has been engaged in violent activities or incites its followers to violence. At the beginning of July Ashaari Muhammad was banned from entering Singapore and Indonesia religious leaders banned the teachings of Al Arqam.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes and airmail letters:**

- expressing concern at the arrests of 41 followers of Al Arqam, apparently for peacefully expressing their views;
- urging the government to respect the right to freedom of religion and to freedom of expression as guaranteed in Article 18 and 19 of the ICCPR;
- urging the government to either release the detainees immediately or to charge them with a recognisable criminal offence;
- appealing to the government to stop the harassment of Al Arqam members.

**APPEALS TO**

Datuk Megat Junid Megat Ayub  
Deputy Minister of Home Affairs  
Ministry of Home Affairs  
Jalan Dato' Onn  
50546 Kuala Lumpur  
Malaysia

**Telegrams: Deputy Minister Megat Ayub, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia**

**Fax: +60 3 230 1051**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

**COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:**

Datuk Syed Hamid bin Syed Jaafar Albar  
Minister of Justice  
Ministry of Justice  
21st-22nd Floor  
Bangunan Kuwasa  
Jalan Raja Laut  
50506 Kuala Lumpur  
Malaysia

**Fax: +60 3 292 4754**

Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman  
Deputy Minister and Minister-in-charge of  
Islamic Religious Affairs  
Prime Minister's Department  
Jalan Dato' Onn  
50502 Kuala Lumpur  
Malaysia

**Fax: +60 3 238 3784**

**+60 3 238 7214**

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 14 September 1994.