

PUBLIC

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Death penalty

SINGAPORE

Arunprakash Vaithilingam (m), aged 24, Indian national

Indian national Arunprakash Vaithilingam is facing execution after his death sentence was confirmed in February 2003. Arunprakash Vaithilingam was sentenced to death in December 2002 after being convicted of the murder of his room-mate, who was stabbed to death during a drunken argument.

Arunprakash Vaithilingam, a migrant worker from Tamil Nadu, India, went to work in Singapore as a ship's electrician in December 2000. In December 2001, his room-mate, also an Indian national, was stabbed to death with a knife. Arunprakash Vaithilingam was arrested and charged with murder. At his trial, he stated that he had not intended to kill his room-mate and that initially he did not even realize he had stabbed him. He and several friends who had witnessed the argument immediately rushed the wounded man to hospital, but he was pronounced dead shortly afterwards. Despite eyewitness evidence, the Singapore High Court found Arunprakash Vaithilingam guilty of murder, an offence which carries a mandatory death sentence.

Arunprakash Vaithilingam's relatives have petitioned the President of Singapore, who has the power to grant clemency. Amnesty International understands that petitions for clemency are due to be examined by the beginning of August. According to a report in the Indian newspaper *The Hindu*, the Indian Government has also intervened on his behalf, requesting the Singapore authorities to commute his death sentence to life imprisonment.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The death penalty is mandatory in Singapore for murder, drug trafficking, treason and certain firearms offences.

Singapore, with a population of just over four million, is believed to have one of the highest per capita rates of executions in the world. Government figures show that out of 340 people executed between 1991 and 2000, 89 were executed for murder. Between 1996 and 2000, over half those executed for murder were foreign nationals. Executions are by hanging and take place on Friday mornings at dawn. Families of convicts are normally only informed of the impending execution one week beforehand. There is virtually no public debate about the use of the death penalty in the country.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases as a violation of the right to life and the right not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The death penalty is an inherently unjust and arbitrary punishment, however heinous the crime for which it is inflicted. Studies have shown that it is more likely to be imposed on those who are poorer, less educated and more vulnerable than average. The death penalty is irrevocable, yet the risk of error in applying it is inescapable. While Amnesty International recognizes the need to combat violent crime, there is no convincing evidence that the death penalty deters crime more effectively than other punishments.

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

- urging the President to commute the death sentence passed on Arunprakash Vaithilingam;
- expressing your unconditional opposition to the death penalty as a violation of one of the most fundamental of human rights - the right to life;

- expressing sympathy for the victims of violent crime, but pointing out that the death penalty has never been shown to have a unique deterrent effect and is brutalizing to all involved;
- expressing the view that if the execution is carried out, it will only cause more suffering for the relatives of Arunprakash Vaithilingam.

APPEALS TO:

The President

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Singapore 238823

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Salutation: Your Excellency

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and to diplomatic representatives of Singapore accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 1 August 2003.