

7 March 2001

AI Index ASA 28/002/2001 - News Service Nr. 42

Malaysia: Mohamad Ezam Mohamad Nor should be released

Malaysian opposition activist Mohamad Ezam Mohamad Nor, who is being held in incommunicado detention, is at risk of ill-treatment and should be immediately released, Amnesty International said today.

Mohamad Ezam Mohamad Nor was arrested following a report on 4 March in the pro-government newspaper Mingguan Malaysia that he had called for mass protests to overthrow the government. He has denied the accusation, stating 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".

Amnesty International's members are writing to the Malaysian government urging for Mohamad Ezam Mohamad's immediate and unconditional release, assurances that he will not be ill-treated, and that he is allowed immediate and ongoing access to lawyers and relatives.

Background

On 5 March police arrested Mohamad Ezam Mohamad Nor outside the home of the former Deputy Prime Minister and current prisoner of conscience Anwar Ibrahim. Mohamad Ezam Mohamad Nor, who is the Youth Chief of the opposition Parti Keadilan Nasional (National Justice Party) was brought before a magistrate's court on Wednesday 7 March and remanded in custody for a further three days for questioning under the Sedition Act.

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" faces a prison term of 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 being tried for 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 temporarily detained, many of whom were assaulted in police custody.

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