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## PUBLIC STATEMENT

### MALAYSIA

#### Jail sentence for opposition parliamentarian politically motivated

Amnesty International protested today's decision by the Court of Appeal in Kuala Lumpur to sentence opposition parliamentarian Lim Guan Eng to three years' imprisonment on charges which the organization believes to be politically motivated.

Lim Guan Eng, a member of parliament for Kota Melaka (Malacca) and Deputy Secretary-General of the opposition Democratic Action Party (DAP), went on trial in January 1996. He had been charged under the Sedition Act with "*prompting disaffection with the administration of justice*" after he publicly criticized the Malaysian Government's handling of allegations of statutory rape made against the former Chief Minister of Malacca, Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Tamby Chik, in 1994. He was also charged under the Printing Presses and Publications Act with "*maliciously printing*" a pamphlet allegedly containing "*false information*" about the case.

The High Court originally convicted Lim Guan Eng in 1997, imposing a fine of RM 15,000 (approximately US \$6,000) which would have been sufficient to disqualify him from parliament. Apparently not satisfied with this, the Malaysian authorities then appealed the High Court's judgement asking for the fines to be replaced by two concurrent custodial sentences, amounting to three years in prison, and also calling on the Court of Appeal not to grant bail.

Amnesty International is concerned that the government continues to use an array of restrictive legislation, like the Printing Presses and Publications Act, in an arbitrary and selective manner. The case against him appears to reflect a desire not only to detain and silence a prominent critic, removing him from participation in public life, but also to deter others from the expression of dissenting opinion.

If the custodial sentences are subsequently upheld by the Federal Court of Appeal, and Lim Guan Eng is imprisoned, the organization would consider him to be a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for expressing his political views.

Amnesty International regrets that the Court of Appeal chose to interpret the law in a manner that, in effect, risks a further erosion of the right to freedom of expression in Malaysia. The organization is calling for his conviction to be overturned. ENDS.../

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For further information, please see *Malaysia: The trial of opposition parliamentarian Lim Guan Eng - An update (AI Index: ASA 28/03/97)*.