

EXTERNAL

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Death penalty

17 February 1997

SINGAPORE Lee Teck Yeong, aged 28, painter and welder

Amnesty International fears that Lee Teck Yeong may soon be executed. The 28-year-old heroin addict was arrested after Central Narcotics Bureau officers raided his sister's flat where they discovered up to 50 grams of heroin hidden in a drawer and in shoe boxes. According to an article in *Straits Times* newspaper, the officers had been "tipped off" by an informant. Lee Teck Yeong is reported to have denied any knowledge of the drugs and claims they may have been hidden there by his heroin supplier. He was sentenced to death on 25 October 1996 for trafficking in the drugs.

According to a report in the *Straits Times* on 29 January 1997, Lee Teck Yeong has decided not to appeal against his sentence. It is not known whether he will submit an appeal for clemency to the President, who has discretionary powers to commute death sentences, but it is extremely rare for clemency to be granted.

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 provided. Studies have shown that it is more likely to be imposed on those who are poorer, less educated and more vulnerable than average. The risk of error in applying the death penalty is inescapable, yet it is irrevocable.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In recent years there has been a sharp increase in the number of executions carried out in Singapore. Since 1994 well over 150 people, including many foreign nationals, have been executed in the tiny city-state with a population of only three million. Most of the executions are believed to have been for drug-trafficking. There are fears that the true number of executions may be significantly higher as the Singapore authorities do not publish statistics on the use of the death penalty. Execution is by hanging.

The death penalty is mandatory for drug-trafficking, murder, treason and certain firearms offences. Anyone over the age of 18 found in possession of more than 15 grams of heroin, 30 grams of morphine or cocaine, or 500 grams of cannabis is presumed, unless the contrary can be proved, to be trafficking in the drug and faces a mandatory death sentence. Despite draconian anti-drugs laws, drug addiction continues to be a problem in Singapore.

While Amnesty International recognizes the need to combat drug abuse, there is no convincing evidence that the death penalty deters would-be traffickers more effectively than other punishments. Furthermore, there is always a risk that drug abusers will be executed, while those behind the crime of trafficking evade arrest and punishment.

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

- urging the authorities to commute the death sentence passed on Lee Teck Yeong;
- expressing unconditional opposition to the death penalty as a violation of one of the most fundamental of human rights - the right to life;

- expressing deep concern at the high rate of executions in Singapore and calling for all pending death sentences to be commuted;
- recognizing the need to combat drug abuse, but emphasizing that there is no proof that the death penalty deters crime more effectively than other punishments and appealing to the authorities to find a more humane way of tackling this crime;
- urging the authorities to publish statistics about the use of the death penalty in Singapore.

APPEALS TO:

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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 19 March 1997.