

For release on 9 May 1996

ASA 38/06/96

***Taiwan (Republic of China):
Amnesty International urges legislators to seek commutation of death sentences***

Amnesty International is calling on members of Taiwan's Legislative Yuan to support the campaign for three death sentences to be commuted. Su Chien-ho, Liu Ping-lang and Chuang Lin-hsun are widely believed to have been convicted unfairly, on the basis of confessions extracted under torture.

"Legislators, whether in government or opposition, are in a powerful position to influence government and public opinion" said Amnesty International today "we believe the support of legislators would have a significant impact in this case".

The three convicted men have exhausted all appeals and could be executed at any time. Executions in Taiwan are carried out on the order of the Minister of Justice, but the current Minister Ma Ying-jeou has said that he will not order the executions while doubt remains about the men's guilt.

Taiwan's Prosecutor General has already made three special appeals on behalf of the convicted men, all of which have been rejected. Concern about the convictions has been voiced by lawyers, academics, human rights activists and government officials, among others. President Lee Teng-hui is reported to have received around 200,000 appeals for clemency, from people in Taiwan and other countries. A special hearing about the case at the Legislative Yuan in April was attended by prominent law professors and lawyers, members of a judicial reform group and families of the prisoners.

The three men, sentenced to death in February 1995, are believed to have been tortured during police interrogation and forced to sign "confessions" which were then used to convict them. Amnesty International has called on the authorities to order an independent investigation into the reports of torture and has urged President Lee Teng-hui to use his constitutional powers to commute the three death sentences.

Amnesty International campaigns for the abolition of the death penalty throughout the world, considering it to be a violation of the right to life and the ultimate form of cruel and inhuman treatment. It also argues that the death penalty is applied in an arbitrary fashion, that it is irreversible and that it be inflicted on the innocent. In 1994 the results of a public opinion poll in Taiwan showed that most people would support a temporary suspension of executions pending further studies. Sixteen people were executed in Taiwan during 1995.