

**EXTERNAL**

4 October 1994

**Michael Abramkin**

**Republic of Latvia**

Amnesty International is concerned that Michael Abramkin may soon be executed. The 24-year-old man was sentenced to death on 2 February 1994 by the Latvian Supreme Court. He had been convicted on three counts of murder. It is not clear whether an appeal against the sentence has been heard. Michael Abramkin is believed to have chosen not to submit an appeal for clemency to the President of Latvia. However, Amnesty International understands that his case is still due to be considered by the President, who has the right to grant clemency in capital cases.

**Background information about the death penalty in Latvia**

In February 1992 the Supreme Council of Latvia reduced the number of crimes which carry the death penalty from 18 under the old Soviet legislation to seven. In January 1994 Amnesty International was informed by the Ministry of Justice that 5 people were sentenced to death in 1992 but that no new death sentences were passed in 1993. The last execution to take place was that of Andres Sergunts in April 1993. He had been sentenced to death the previous July on two counts of aggravated murder. Amnesty International had appealed for commutation of his sentence. Amnesty International knows of one other prisoner - Uldis Lujans - currently under sentence of death in Latvia. He was convicted of murder on 13 May 1994 and is believed to have submitted a petition for clemency to the President.

Procedures for executions are laid down in joint instructions issued by the Minister of the Interior and the Procurator General. They are not made public. However, in October 1992 during a research mission to the Republic of Latvia Amnesty International was informed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs that executions are carried out in the investigative isolation unit of Riga Central Prison, usually within 24 hours after the petition for clemency has been rejected. The condemned person is called out from his cell during the night and is shot by a single marksman.

A committee of eight people has been working on a new draft of the criminal code. In September 1993 the Chairman of the Latvian Council of Sworn Advocates informed Amnesty International that the new draft was complete and provided for two alternatives: complete abolition of the death penalty or reduction of the number of capital offences from seven to one (premeditated murder under aggravated circumstances). A new criminal code is due to be approved by the parliament (Saeima) in the near future.

Amnesty International has consistently pressed the Latvian authorities to review the use of the death penalty as a step towards its abolition; to impose a moratorium on death sentences and executions pending adoption of a new criminal code; and to publish comprehensive statistics on its application.