

EXTERNAL

AI Index: ASA 14/03/97

UA 281/97

Fear of Torture / Ill Treatment

20 August 1997

BHUTAN

Gyamtsho, aged 18, Buddhist monk, son of Tshogyel
Sangay Phuntsho, aged 29, religious teacher, son of Dorji
Tandin Wangchuk, aged 23, Buddhist monk, son of Gatuk
Kinzang Chophel, Buddhist monk, son of Tan Dorji
Sonam Tobgyel, aged 19, farmer, son of Karma Gyamtsho

There are fears that the above-named men, currently held in incommunicado detention in Samdrup Jonkhar district, are at risk of torture or ill-treatment.

Gyamtsho, a monk at Kheri Gomba Monastery in Pema Gatshel district, was arrested on 29 July 1997. Sangay Phuntsho, Tandin Wangchuk and Kinzang Chophel, also from Kheri Gomba Monastery, were arrested on 1 August. Sonam Tobgyel was arrested at his village, Shumar, in Pema Gatshel district on 11 August. Sangay Phuntsho has reportedly been detained for informing others about the arrest at the monastery of his colleague, Kinzang Dorji, on 27 July (see UA 241/97, 28 July 1997). None of the detainees has yet been charged and or given access to a *jabmi* (legal adviser) or relatives.

There is a suspicion that the men may have been arrested because of their alleged support of the Druk National Congress (DNC) and the United Front for Democracy (UFD), two political organizations set up outside Bhutan. Reportedly, they are also supporters of Rongthong Kunley Dorji, the founder of the DNC and chairperson of UFD. Rongthong Kunley Dorji is currently detained in India where he is opposing his extradition to Bhutan. Amnesty International fears that, as a result of their actual or suspected membership of the DNC/UFD and association with Rongthong Kunley Dorji, the men may be tortured or ill-treated in an attempt to extract the names of other DNC/UFD supporters. These fears are heightened by recent reports that three other people, also suspected of being supporters of these political organizations, arrested in the first week of August in Tashigang district, were tortured before being released. One of them required hospitalization for one week, subsequent to his release.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The arrests of the four men appear to be part of a growing crackdown carried out by the government of Bhutan over the past three weeks against people suspected of being supporters of the UFD/DNC and of Rongthong Kunley Dorji.

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

- seeking assurances that Gyamtsho, Sangay Phuntsho, Tandin Wangchuk, Kinzang Chophel and Sonam Tobgyel are not tortured or ill-treated while in police custody;
- urging the authorities to grant the above-named detainees immediate access to a *jabmi*, family members, and medical care as necessary;
- requesting information on the grounds of their detention and urging that, unless they are to be promptly charged with recognizably criminal offences, they be immediately and unconditionally released.

In any appeals concerning the named individuals please refer to the name of the father of each man as this helps to clarify their identities.

APPEALS TO:

Lyonpo Dago Tshering
Minister of Home Affairs
Ministry of Home Affairs
Royal Government of Bhutan
Tashichho Dzong
Thimphu, Bhutan

Telegrams: Home Affairs Minister, Thimphu, Bhutan

Salutation: Dear Minister

Major Kipchu Nangyal
Chief of the Special Branch
Royal Bhutan Police
Police Headquarters
Zhilnen Namgyelling
Thimphu, Bhutan

Telegrams: Chief, Special Branch, Royal Bhutan Police, Thimphu, Bhutan

Salutation: Dear Major Nangyal

and to diplomatic representatives of Bhutan accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your
section
office,
if
sending
appeals
after 1
October
1997.