

EXTERNAL

AI Index: ASA 14/04/97

UA 311/97 Fear of torture/ill-treatment

1 October 1997

BHUTANDorji Norbu, aged 31, son of Namgay Wangchuck;
Kunga, aged 43, son of Tenzin;
Dorji Tshewang, aged 25, son of Chhoderu;
Namkha Dorji, aged 25, son of Wangchuck;
Chhoeten Tshering, aged 48, from Lumang village, Tashigang district;
Tachi, son of Kezang Gyeltshen, from Wamrong sub-division, Tashigang district;
Sengye Phuentshok, from Wamrong sub-division, Tashigang district;
Chhoedra, from Wamrong sub-division, Tashigang district.

The above-named eight people were recently arrested in eastern Bhutan by the Royal Bhutan Police (RBP) and are being held in incommunicado detention. It is feared they are at risk of torture and ill-treatment.

Dorji Norbu, Kunga, Dorji Tshewang and Namkha Dorji were reportedly arrested on 10 September 1997 in Pemagatsel district and are now in detention at Pemagatsel police station. Since their arrest they have been reportedly held in shackles and subjected to daily public floggings with willow and other branches. This apparently takes place in the police station court yard in front of members of the public and their relatives.

Amnesty International has also been informed that Chhoeten Tshering, Tachi, Sengye Phuentshok and Chhoedra were arrested from villages in the Wamrong sub-division, Tashigang district. No information has been received about their precise place of detention.

None of the detainees are known to have had access to a *jabmi* (legal adviser) or relatives or to have been charged. It is suspected that their arrests were prompted by their alleged membership of two exiled political organizations, the Druk National Congress (DNC) and the United Front for Democracy (UFD). It is likely that the authorities extracted their names from other UFD/DNC supporters being held in detention by means of torture or ill-treatment (see UA 270/97, ASA 14/02/97, 12 August 1997 and UA 281/97, ASA 14/03/97, 20 August 1997).

Relatives and members of the public who witnessed the floggings were apparently informed by those carrying them out that this is the standard punishment used against supporters of the DNC and UFD.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The arrests described above appear to be part of a recent crackdown by the RBP against those suspected of being UFD/DNC sympathizers. Support for both organizations is reportedly increasing in eastern Bhutan. This has resulted in threats by the RBP that punitive measures will be taken against UFD/DNC supporters.

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

- expressing shock at reports that some of those arrested have been subjected to floggings;
- urging the authorities to immediately end any form of torture or ill-treatment, and seeking assurances that none of the above-named individuals is being held in shackles while in police custody;

- urging the authorities to provide the detainees with adequate medical care;
- urging the authorities to grant the detainees immediate access to a *jabmi* and to their family members;
- asking for information concerning the reason for their detention, and urging that unless they are to be promptly charged with recognizably criminal offences, they be immediately and unconditionally released.

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

No fax numbers were obtainable for the two addresses supplied but faxes may be sent to the following numbers with a request for them to be forwarded to the above addressees:

Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Fax + 975-2-22079

Speaker of the National Assembly: Fax + 975-2-24210

COPIES 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 12 November 1997.