

UA 289/00

Fear for**INDIA Robin Thokchom, community activist**

Soldiers in Manipur are reported to have illegally detained and tortured a community activist while holding him in illegal detention. He is now in prison, in urgent need of medical treatment. Amnesty International is concerned that he may face further torture.

Robin Thokchom, Secretary General of the All Manipur United Clubs Organization (AMUCO), was arrested on 10 September in Imphal, by soldiers from the 17th Battalion of the Assam Rifles.

He was arrested at a lawyer's house, together with another senior member of AMUCO, a senior member of a human rights organisation and a member of a Manipur-based armed opposition group, the Revolutionary People's Front (RPF). Robin Thokchom and his colleagues have said that they were meeting with the RPF member in an attempt to bring peace to the community, after a number of recent attacks blamed on armed opposition groups.

The two other activists, Ito Tongbam and Surjit Chongthamcha, were handed over to police the following day, and have been charged with conspiring to wage war against the state and crimes under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. They are currently on bail.

However, the Assam Rifles denied they had arrested Robin Thokchom and RPF member Khundrakpam Tomcha, and claimed that the two men had escaped arrest.

Robin Thokchom's relatives filed a *habeas corpus* petition concerning his "disappearance" on 11 September. Another *habeas corpus* petition was filed on behalf of Khundrakpam Tomcha the following day.

Police found Khundrakpam Tomcha's body on the afternoon of 12 September. The Assam Rifles, who had previously denied arresting either man, now claimed that Khundrakpam Tomcha had been killed on the night of 11 September when he resisted arrest, and that they had arrested Robin Thokchom when they found him hiding nearby.

The Assam Rifles handed Robin Thokchom over to police on 13 September, when the Guwahati High Court ordered them to do so, on the grounds that the security forces are not allowed to hold any prisoner for more than 30 hours. He claimed he had been tortured in custody: he was blindfolded and kicked and beaten, and was hit on his ears. He was charged with membership of an unlawful association and "unlawful activities" under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, and remanded in police custody until 16 September. The magistrate ordered that he be given medical treatment. Although he was examined briefly by a doctor he was declared fit and not provided with any medication.

Robin Thokchom is now in Imphal Central Jail. A court ordered his release on bail on 16 September, but before he could be released an order was passed for him to be detained under the National Security Act (NSA), which permits administrative detention for up to one year. He has not yet been informed of the grounds for his detention under the NSA. The magistrate rejected pleas by police for him to be remanded in their custody for further interrogation. Although he has reportedly been granted access to a lawyer, Amnesty International believes he is still in danger, in the light of the serious

allegations of illegal detention and torture, and that he requires urgent medical attention.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Manipur has been riven by internal conflict for decades, fuelled by economic under-development, drug-smuggling and corruption. Local armed opposition groups within Manipur are making conflicting demands for greater autonomy and self-determination.

During the conflict the security forces have carried out widespread human rights violations. For some years Amnesty International has expressed concern about illegal detention, torture, rape, death in custody and an unofficial policy which appears to sanction killings by security forces. Special legislation introduced in Manipur decades ago, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, allows the armed forces virtual impunity.

In recent weeks there have been several attacks on journalists and newspaper offices in Imphal, reportedly carried out by armed opposition groups. These apparent attacks on freedom of speech have worried human rights organizations and community groups, who have tried to discuss their concerns with members of armed opposition groups.

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

- expressing concern about reports of the illegal detention and torture of Robin Thokchom, and urging the authorities to ensure that he receives immediate medical attention;
- urging the authorities to carry out an independent and impartial investigation into allegations that Robin Thokchom was illegally detained and tortured, including an examination by independent medical experts, with the findings made public and anyone found responsible for torture brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to carry out an independent and impartial investigation into allegations that Khundrakpam Tomcha was extrajudicially executed by the security forces;
- urging the authorities to ensure that all those associated with these investigations, including the victims and their families, are protected from further violence and intimidation.

APPEALS TO:

Mr Nipamacha
 Chief Minister of Manipur
 Office of the Chief Minister
 Imphal, Manipur
 India

Telegrams: Chief Minister, Imphal, India

Faxes: + 91 385 221 394

Salutation: Dear Chief Minister

COPIES TO:

Mr L.K. Advani
 Minister of Home Affairs
 Ministry of Home Affairs
 North Block, New Delhi 110 001
 India

Faxes: + 91 11 301 5750
Salutation:Dear Minister

and to diplomatic representatives of India accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 1 November 2000.