

EXTERNAL

FI Index: FI/11/96

Distrib: PG/SC

Date: 25 April 1996

DEATH OF PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE

Dr Thomas Wainggai
INDONESIA

Amnesty International has learned that Thomas Wainggai, a prisoner of conscience serving a sentence of 20 years' imprisonment, died on 12 March 1996. He was in his late 50s and had been convicted of subversion for organizing a peaceful flag-raising ceremony. He was well-known in Irian Jaya for his opposition to Indonesian rule and advocacy of independence for the province. His death provoked large-scale riots in Abepura, close to Jayapura, the capital of Irian Jaya.

Background

Thomas Wainggai graduated in law from Okayama University in Japan and gained a PhD in public administration at Florida State University, USA. He was working as a civil servant at the time of his arrest on 14 December 1988. Some 60 people were arrested with him during a flag-raising ceremony in Jayapura to proclaim an independent state of "West Melanesia". (Irian Jaya occupies the western half of the island of New Guinea and is a province of Indonesia, whereas the eastern half of the island forms the independent state of Papua New Guinea. Members of independence movements in Irian Jaya frequently refer to Irian Jaya as West Papua or West Melanesia.) A crowd of people had gathered at a sports stadium for the ceremony which was interrupted by the arrival of military vehicles and all present were arrested.

Dr Wainggai, in particular, was accused of assigning tasks related to the flag-raising to others in the group and his wife was accused of having sewn the West Melanesian flag. She served 4½ years in prison for this. Both were imprisoned in Jakarta, approximately 3,700 km west of their home.

In 1995 there were reports that there had been a deterioration in Thomas Wainggai's emotional state and Amnesty International issued a medical action on his behalf. A response was received from an official at Cipinang prison where he was held stating that there was a possibility of his conditional release after he had served _ of his sentence and that his health situation had improved. There was no indication at the time that he was suffering physical health problems, but before his death he was experiencing stomach problems and was frequently unable to keep food down. The information currently available to Amnesty International is that some days before his death he began to ask for transfer to hospital as his condition had become worse. He asked to be taken to a private hospital, but was told that he could only be admitted to a military hospital. It appears that he was fearful of being poorly treated in a military hospital. In the event, he was persuaded to go to

military hospital and is reported to have died on 12 March 1996 during the journey to the hospital. An autopsy was performed and, although Amnesty International does not have access to the autopsy report, available information suggests that the cause of death may have been stomach cancer.

Thomas Wainggai's body was flown from Jakarta back to Irian Jaya for burial on 19 March and a crowd of several thousand is said to have come to the airport to meet the plane. The military prevented the crowd from paying their last respects to Wainggai and this led to rioting which left five people dead according to the official Antara news agency and much damage to buildings. Rioting was at its worst in Abepura, Thomas Wainggai's home town, where there was considerable fire damage, public buildings were closed and public transport suspended.

Amnesty International is seeking further information from the Indonesian government about the cause of Thomas Wainggai's death and about whether he was under medical treatment at the time of his death.

EXTERNAL

AI Index: ASA 21/11/96

Distrib: PG/SC

To: Medical professionals
From: Medical Office / Asia Regional Program
Date: 25 April 1996

MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION
Dr Thomas Wainggai
INDONESIA

Keywords: POC/Death in custody

Summary

On 12 March 1996 Thomas Wainggai, an adopted prisoner of conscience, died while on his way to hospital. He was serving a sentence of 20 years' imprisonment. Please see the details attached.

Recommended Actions

Letters are requested from medical professionals to the addresses below:

- expressing regret at the death of Dr Thomas Wainggai on 12 March 1996
- noting that an autopsy was performed and asking for information on the findings and in particular the cause of death
- asking what symptoms Thomas Wainggai manifested prior to his death, whether he had been under medical treatment at the time and, if so, the nature and duration of the treatment

Addresses

The Director, LP Cipinang
Jl Bekasi Raya Timur
Jatinegara
Jakarta Timur
Indonesia
(Director of the prison in
which Thomas Wainggai was held)

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