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MALAYSIA: OPPOSITION PARLIAMENTARIAN ON TRIAL FOR SEDITION

Amnesty International is concerned about the imminent trial of a Malaysian parliamentarian who faces up to six years jail and disqualification from parliament because of his public criticism of the Malaysian government.

“Imprisoned for peacefully expressing his political views in the 1980's, Lim Guan Eng is again at risk of being locked up for freely speaking his opinions,” Amnesty International said.

Lim Guan Eng is a member of parliament for Kota Melaka (Malacca) and deputy secretary-general of the opposition Democratic Action Party (DAP). He has been charged under the Sedition Act and the Printing and Publications Act. His trial opens on Monday 29 January 1996 at the Malacca High Court.

Amnesty believes that if convicted, Lim Guan Eng would be a prisoner of conscience imprisoned solely for the peaceful expression of his opinions. The organization is therefore urging the Malaysian authorities not to pursue charges against Lim Guan Eng and to allow him to continue to represent the views of his constituents.

“This appears to be a political trial, designed to intimidate dissenting voices and to limit debate on an issue of genuine public concern,” Amnesty International said.

Malaysian police arrested and charged Lim Guan Eng on 28 February 1995 under the Sedition Act after he publicly criticised the government's handling of allegations of statutory rape made against the former Chief Minister of Malacca, Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Tamby Chik in 1994. He was also accused of printing a pamphlet containing allegedly false information about the case.

There is now a strong possibility that Lim Guan Eng, seen as a potential future leader of the opposition, will be imprisoned and will lose his parliamentary seat. Members of parliament who are jailed for a year, or fined more than RM2,000 (US\$784), automatically forfeit their seats.

“If Lim Guan Eng is imprisoned and disqualified from parliament, not only is he being denied the right to peacefully express his political opinions, but his constituents are being denied their elected representative simply because he took up their concerns,” Amnesty International said.

For a briefing document on events leading up to the trial of Lim Guan Eng, please contact Amnesty International’s International Secretariat at tel 44-171-413-5566 or fax 44-171-413-5835.