

EXTERNAL

AI Index: ASA 28/14/96

14 November 1996

Further information on EXTRA 176/96 (ASA 28/13/96, 12 November 1996) - Prisoners of conscience

MALAYSIARajendran Devaraj

Tan Swee Ann

Liew Say Hian

Tan Chin Hong

Chan Kok Wah

Tan Soon Kiat

Chua Tian Cheng

Chin Woon Kong

Yap Swee Seng

Dr. Nasir Hashim

V. Selvam

Steven Gan, journalist

Dr. Kua Kia Soong, academic and former opposition parliamentarian

Sivarasa Rasiah, lawyer

Amnesty International has just learned that all of the above-named prisoners of conscience have now been released from police custody. Rajendran Devaraj was released on 12 November, followed by Steven Gan, Chin Woon Kong and Yap Swee Seng who were released on 13 November. Also on 13 November, the Magistrate's Court ordered the remaining 10 detainees to spend another three days in jail to allow police to investigate whether to bring charges against them. However, on 14 November the Malaysian High Court overturned the decision and ordered their immediate release.

At a press conference held on 14 November, Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, head of the youth wing of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) ruling coalition, is reported to have defended the violent demonstration led by his members which disrupted the Asia Pacific Conference on East Timor (APCET II). He is reported to have said that the move was "justifiable to defend the good name of the country, to protect Malaysia's ties with Indonesia and to safeguard peace in the region". He went on to say: "If the NGOs (non-governmental organisations) feel they have the right to defy the government, then we also have the responsibility to defend the integrity and the good name of our country....This is a loud and clear message from us and the government to warn the NGOs not to defy any cabinet decision in the future".

While the detainees were held in custody, relatives and supporters held a candlelight vigil outside the police station. A message from the detainees, smuggled out of the cells, reads: "To Everyone.....Thank you for your solidarity. In our sleepless night, your candles are our only companions which brighten up our hope...."

Amnesty International has also received a faxed message of thanks from a local human rights organization.

No further action is required from the Urgent Action Network. Thank you to all those who sent appeals.