

PUBLIC

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EXTRA 36/98

Imminent execution

28 May 1998

SINGAPORE Asogan Ramesh, aged 23
Selva Kumar, aged 24

Amnesty International has just learned that Asogan Ramesh and Selva Kumar are scheduled to be executed at dawn on 29 May 1998.

The two men were sentenced to death in November 1996 after being convicted of the unpremeditated killing of a man during a fight. Both have since expressed deep remorse.

In a rare move in early May, President Ong Teng Cheong granted clemency to a third accomplice in the crime, 19-year-old Mathavakannan Kalimuthu, whose sentence has been commuted to life imprisonment. According to press reports only five such pardons to those under sentence of death have been granted in the past 35 years.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases as a violation of the right to life and the right not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The death penalty is an inherently unjust and arbitrary punishment, however heinous the crime for which it is provided. Studies have shown that it is more likely to be imposed on those who are poorer, less educated and more vulnerable than average. The risk of error in applying the death penalty is inescapable, yet it is irrevocable. Furthermore, there is no convincing evidence that the death penalty deters crime more effectively than other punishments.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In recent years there is believed to have been a sharp increase in the number of executions carried out in Singapore. Since 1994 more than 170 executions have been recorded in the city-state where the population is only three million.

Most of these are believed to have been for drug-trafficking offences. There are fears, however, that the true number of executions may be significantly higher as the authorities do not publish relevant statistics. Execution is by hanging.

The death penalty is mandatory for drug-trafficking, murder, treason and certain firearms offences. It is not known how many prisoners are currently under sentence of death.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams and faxes in English or your own language:

- welcoming the President's recent decision to grant clemency to Mathavakannan Kalimuthu and urging him to intervene urgently to save the lives of Asogan Ramesh and Selva Kumar and commute their sentences;
- expressing the view that if the executions are carried out, they will only cause more suffering for the families of the two young men concerned;
- expressing unconditional opposition to the death penalty as a violation of one of the most fundamental of human rights - the right to life;
- recognizing the need to combat serious crime, but emphasizing that there is no proof that the death penalty deters crime more effectively than other punishments.

APPEALS TO:

The President

His Excellency Ong Teng Cheong

Office of the President

Istana, Orchard Road

Republic of Singapore 0922

Telegrams: President Ong Teng Cheong, Singapore

Faxes: + 65 336 7452

Salutation: Your Excellency

Note: the fax number provided is that of the prisoners' lawyer, who will remain in his office during the night in order to personally deliver all appeals received on behalf of Asogan Ramesh and Selva Kumar, to the President's office.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.