

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 36/005/2005

02 December 2005

Further Information on UA 279/05 (ASA 36/003/2005, 24 October 2005) and follow-up (ASA 36/004/2005, 17 November 2005) - Imminent Execution

SINGAPORE Van Tuong NGUYEN (m), aged 25, Australian national

Van Tuong Nguyen was hanged on 2 December at 6am. He had been sentenced to death for transporting 396.2 grams of heroin into Singapore.

The death sentence imposed on Van Tuong Nguyen attracted considerable international attention, particularly after the President of Singapore rejected an appeal for clemency on 21 October. In Singapore, though tight controls on the press and civil society organizations has meant that previous public discussion of the death penalty has been muted, local campaigners note that this year has seen the most vigorous debate in four decades.

According to campaigners in Australia, opposition to the death penalty there reached an unprecedented level. Tens of thousands of signatures, letters, emails and SMS messages against the death penalty were sent to the government of Singapore. Candlelit vigils were held in each state and territory in Australia; the most recent was outside the parliament building in the capital, Canberra.

Among international appeals to stop the execution of Van Tuong Nguyen, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Philip Alston, argued that the mandatory nature of death sentence was a violation of international legal standards. "Making such a penalty mandatory – thereby eliminating the discretion of the court – makes it impossible to take into account mitigating or extenuating circumstances and eliminates any individual determination of an appropriate sentence in a particular case", he stated.

The Death Penalty Coordinator for Amnesty International Australia, Tim Goodwin, said those attending vigils and services for Van Tuong Nguyen were "not just talking about Singapore, they are telling us they are determined and they want to see the death penalty eliminated regionally and globally. I think what this execution has done today is ... increased their determination to keep the fight up in Singapore and across the region and in the broader world."

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Singapore, with a population of just over four million, is believed to have the highest per capita execution rate in the world. More than 420 people have been executed since 1991, the majority for drug trafficking. The Government of Singapore consistently has maintained that the death penalty is not a human rights issue. The Misuse of Drugs Act provides for a mandatory death sentence for at least 20 different offences and contains a series of presumptions which shift the burden of proof from the prosecution to the defence. Prisoners facing execution may be granted clemency by the President, but this is extremely rare.

Many thanks to all who sent appeals on behalf of Van Tuong Nguyen. If possible, please send a final round of appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- expressing deep regret at the execution of Van Tuong Nguyen;
- stating your belief that executions violate human rights and that, as the UN Commission on Human Rights has stated, abolition of the death penalty would contribute to the progressive development of human rights around the world;

- urging the authorities to reconsider their position on the death penalty, to lead an informed public debate towards complete abolition of the death penalty, and in the mean time to impose an immediate moratorium on executions.

APPEALS TO:

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COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Singapore accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.