

AI INDEX: ASA 36/06/98
27 November 1998

PUBLIC STATEMENT

RESTRICTIONS ON SINGAPORE'S LONGEST-SERVING POLITICAL PRISONER LIFTED

Strict restraints on the civil and political rights of Chia Thye Poh, 58, formerly Singapore's longest serving prisoner of conscience, were lifted today as the government announced that the Internal Security Act (ISA) restriction order against him would not be renewed.

Amnesty International, which has campaigned on behalf of Chia Thye Poh since 1969, considers the announcement to be more than thirty years' overdue.

Amnesty International believes that ChiaThye Poh's twenty-three years' detention without trial, and the subsequent prolonged restriction of his freedom of expression, association and movement, are a potent symbol of the oppressive effects of the ISA on Singapore's political and civil life.

The ISA remains at the heart of a formidable array of legislation which restricts the ability of Singaporeans to enjoy fundamental human rights. Such laws continue to effectively deter Singaporeans from expressing dissenting political opinions, or from participating in political life without the consent -- overt or tacit -- of the ruling People's Action Party (PAP).

Amnesty International again calls for the ISA to be amended so that it no longer allows for the arrest and imprisonment of those who peacefully express political or religious beliefs. The ISA should be changed so that those who are suspected of threatening national security have the opportunity to defend themselves before a court of law.

BACKGROUND

Chia Thye Poh, a former Member of Parliament representing the opposition Barisan Sosialis (Socialist Front - a breakaway faction of the PAP), was arrested on 28 October 1966 for participating in demonstrations and strikes.

He was detained for twenty-three years without trial under the ISA. On his release in 1989 Chia Thye Poh was placed under restriction orders curtailing his freedom of movement, expression and association, in order to "prevent him from acting in any manner prejudicial to the security of Singapore". He was prohibited from participating in any political activity, issuing any public statements or joining any association without the permission of the government. For three years after his release he was required to live on the island of Sentosa, off the coast of Singapore.

During his detention, the Singapore government had alleged that Chia Thye Poh was a member of the banned Communist Party of Malaysia (CPM), and that he would be released when he was prepared to give a public undertaking "disowning the CPM's use of force and terror". Chia has repeatedly denied all allegations that he was a communist or had planned to use force to overthrow the government.

The ISA allows the Executive to order the detention -- without charge or trial -- of any person deemed to be a threat to the security or economic life of the state for two year periods, without limitation on renewal. Following release, individuals may be placed under two-year renewable restriction orders preventing them from making public statements, participating in organizations or political activity, travelling, and communicating or associating with individuals formerly detained under security legislation, without official permission. In a 1989 amendment to the constitution and the ISA, judicial review for the grounds of detention was disallowed.

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