

EXTERNAL

22 March 1993

@Andres Sergunts

£Republic of Latvia

Amnesty International is concerned that Andres Sergunts may soon be executed. He was sentenced to death on 6 July 1992 on two counts of premeditated murder under aggravating circumstances. His appeal was rejected on 20 October 1992 and no judicial review of the sentence was ordered. He has submitted a petition for clemency. This is the only way in which the death sentence passed on him can now be commuted.

Background information about the death penalty in Latvia

On 5 February 1992 the Supreme Council of Latvia reduced the number of crimes which carry the death penalty to seven. Amnesty International has been informed that five people were sentenced to death in 1992. Four of these sentences have been commuted. Two executions were carried out in 1992. The most recent was that of Aleksey Volkov in May 1992. The organization had appealed to the authorities for commutation of this sentence.

A petition for clemency is submitted to the Presidium of the Supreme Council. The petition is examined by the Human Rights Commission of the Supreme Council which then makes its recommendation. The Procurator General and Chairman of the Supreme Court are also consulted by the Presidium of the Supreme Council for their opinions on the case.

Procedures for executions are laid down in joint instructions issued by the Minister of the Interior and the Procurator General. They are not made public. However, in October 1992 during a research mission to the Republic of Latvia Amnesty International was informed by the First Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Internal Affairs that executions are carried out in the investigative isolation unit of Riga Central Prison, usually within 24 hours after the petition for clemency has been rejected. The condemned person is called out from his cell during the night and is shot by a single marksman (not by a firing squad as previously believed).

A committee of eight people is currently preparing a new draft of the criminal code. This work could, however, take up to another five years. The committee also has the task of amending and improving the current code which dates from 1961.

Amnesty International has consistently pressed the Latvian authorities to review the use of the death penalty as a step towards its abolition; to impose a moratorium on death sentences and executions pending adoption of a new criminal code; and to publish comprehensive statistics on its application.