

AI Index: PRE 01/574/2011
17 November 2011

Malaysia: New ISA detentions show U-turn on reform promises

The Malaysian government must halt detentions under the draconian Internal Security Act (ISA), Amnesty International said today, after the authorities said they had used the law to detain 13 people this week.

Police arrested the detainees on 13 and 14 November in Tawau, a town in Sabah in eastern Malaysia. Seven are Malaysian, and the other six are foreign nationals.

The ISA, which allows for indefinite detention without charge or trial, has been used to imprison critics of the government and opposition politicians as well as suspected militants.

The detentions were the first since Prime Minister Najib Razak announced in September that his government would repeal the law and replace it with new security legislation.

“The Malaysian government has made a mockery of its plan to scrap the Internal Security Act by using it to detain people once again,” said Sam Zarifi, Asia director at Amnesty International.

“Promises to abolish ISA detention are not enough. Prime Minister Najib needs to end it in practice.”

The inspector-general of police, Ismail Omar, today told state news agency Bernama that all 13 detainees are being held under Section 73(1) of the ISA. This provision allows for police to arrest anyone without warrant whom they believe might “act in any manner prejudicial to the security of Malaysia.”

The ISA is also contrary to international human rights standards including the right to be free from arbitrary detention and the rights to due process and a fair trial.

“If the Malaysian police have grounds to suspect these 13 detainees of a legitimate crime, they should charge them or else release them. Locking people up without charge or trial shows flagrant disrespect for the rule of law.”

- Amnesty International specialist Lance Lattig can be contacted on +63 916 293 8145 for further comment on this press release.