

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Further information on EXTRA 20/95 (ASA 36/03/95, 28 February 1995) - Death penalty

SINGAPORE: Tong Ching-man (f), 24, unemployed waitress
Lam Cheuk-wang, 25, car park attendant

New name: Poon Yuen-chung (f), 22, sales assistant

Amnesty International has learned that Tong Ching-man, Lam Cheuk-wang and a third young woman from Hong Kong - Poon Yuen-chung - are scheduled to be hanged in Singapore on Friday 21 April 1995.

Poon Yuen-chung was only 18 years old when she and her younger friend, Lam Hoi-ka, were arrested in July 1991 at Singapore's Changi Airport after arriving from Bangkok. Both were found guilty of importing heroin, but Lam Hoi-ka received a life sentence because she was still 17 at the time of the offence.

During their trial, which took place in August 1993, the two young women claimed they did not know that drugs were hidden in false compartments in the suitcases they were carrying. They said that they had been befriended by a Chinese couple in Bangkok who had bought new suitcases for them as a present.

Hong Kong national Tong Ching-man was also just 18 when she and her companion Lam Cheuk-wang were found to be carrying heroin at Changi Airport in December 1988. They were both sentenced to death in 1993.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The death penalty was employed in Singapore during the colonial period and was retained after the country became an independent republic in August 1965.

Anyone over the age of 18 who is found in possession of more than 15 grams of heroin, 30 grams of morphine, 30 grams of cocaine or 500 grams of cannabis is presumed guilty of drug trafficking and is liable to a mandatory death sentence. At least 39 people are known to have been hanged since the beginning of 1994, the majority for drugs-related offences. The President has discretionary powers to commute death sentences, but clemency is rarely granted.

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 organization is concerned that the death penalty is often imposed on those who have less skilled lawyers to defend them, or whose social status has made them vulnerable to unfair conviction. The risk of error in applying the death penalty is inescapable, yet the penalty is irrevocable.

FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send faxes, telegrams, express or airmail letters either in English or in your own language:

- urging the President to commute the death sentences passed on Poon Yuen-chung, Tong Ching-man and Lam Cheuk-wang;

- expressing Amnesty International's opposition to the death penalty as the

ultimate form of cruel punishment and a violation of the most basic of human rights - the right to life;

- urging that all existing and pending death sentences be commuted.

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: +65 738 4673

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

The Prime Minister

The Honourable Goh Chok Tong
Office of the Prime Minister
Istana Annexe, Istana
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Faxes: +65 732 4627

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Professor Shanmugham Jayakumar
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and to diplomatic representatives of Singapore accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.