

PUBLIC

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Further Information on UA 104/05 (ASA 36/001/2005, 29 April 2005) Imminent execution

SINGAPORE Shanmugam s/o Murugesu, aged 38, former taxi-driver and window cleaner

Amnesty International has learned with deep regret that Shanmugam s/o Murugesu was hanged on 13 May at 6am. He had been sentenced to death after he was found in possession of just over one kilogram of cannabis.

On 11 May the authorities rejected an application by Shanmugam's lawyer to stay the execution and convene a Constitutional Court to review the case. The lawyer argued that Shanmugam had been treated unfairly, citing six other cases where people who had been arrested for trafficking in more than 500 grams of cannabis (an offence which carries a mandatory death sentence) had received prison terms after the charges against them were reduced. The High Court also rejected an application for the execution to be stayed.

The authorities impose tight controls on the press and civil society organizations, so public discussion of the death penalty is rare in Singapore. However, Shanmugam's case sparked unprecedented debate and public sympathy. Local activists organized petitions, vigils and other events to campaign for his life to be spared, raising awareness in Singapore about the cruel and arbitrary nature of the death penalty.

In an interview with Reuters, the President of local civil rights group the Think Centre said: "This is definitely the first time the local community has come forward to look at the death penalty issue. We know it will take time for the death penalty to be abolished in Singapore but at least now we have people saying that things should change."

While the government does not publish statistics showing how many prisoners are under sentence of death, it is thought that at least eight other people are currently on death row. Singapore, with a population of just over four million, has the highest *per capita* execution rate in the world. At least 420 people have been executed since 1991.

Many thanks to all those who sent appeals. No further action is requested from the network.