

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 36/006/2001

25 September 2001

Further information on EXTRA 43/01 (ASA 36/004/2001, 13 July 2001) - Death Penalty/imminent execution

SINGAPORE Thiru Selvam s/o (son of) Nagaretnam, aged 28

Thiru Selvam is scheduled to be hanged on 28 September.

Thiru Selvam was sentenced to death for drug trafficking in September 2000. At his trial he was reportedly told that if he confessed he would be sentenced to 25 years in prison and 24 strokes of the cane. Thiru claimed he was innocent, and refused to confess. All his subsequent appeals have been rejected.

Thiru is married with two young children. He began using drugs as a child after his parents died. He was admitted to a residential centre for drug rehabilitation at the age of 15.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The death penalty is mandatory in Singapore for drug trafficking, murder, treason and certain firearms offences. Anyone over the age of 18 found in possession of more than 15 grams of heroin, 30 grams of morphine or cocaine, or 500 grams of cannabis, is presumed to be trafficking in the drug, unless the contrary can be proved, and faces a mandatory death sentence. Persistent drug addicts who have been admitted more than twice to a drugs rehabilitation centre are treated as criminals who may be imprisoned for up to 13 years and caned. Despite these draconian anti-drugs laws, drug addiction continues to be a problem.

Since 1991, out of 340 executions in Singapore, 247 people have been hanged for alleged drug trafficking offences. Executions are by hanging and take place on Friday mornings at dawn. Families of convicts are normally only informed of the impending execution one week beforehand. There is no public debate about the use of the death penalty in the country.

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 death penalty is an inherently unjust and arbitrary punishment, however heinous the crime for which it is inflicted. Studies have shown that it is more likely to be imposed on those who are poorer, less educated and more vulnerable than average. The death penalty is irrevocable, yet the risk of error in applying it is inescapable. While Amnesty International recognizes the need to combat drug trafficking, there is no convincing evidence that the death penalty deters would-be traffickers more effectively than other punishments.

FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- appealing to the President to reconsider his earlier decision to reject the clemency petition of Thiru Selvan s/o Nagaretnam, and commute his death sentence;
- expressing your unconditional opposition to the death penalty as a violation of the most fundamental of human rights - the right to life;

- recognizing the need to combat drug trafficking, but emphasizing that there is no proof that the death penalty deters would-be traffickers more effectively than other punishments, and appealing to the authorities to find a more humane way of tackling this problem.

APPEALS TO:

The President

His Excellency S R Nathan
Office of the President
Istana, Orchard Road
Republic of Singapore 0922
Telegrams: President S R Nathan, Singapore
Faxes: + 65 738 4673
Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

The Prime Minister

The Honourable Goh Chok Tong
Office of the Prime Minister
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Orchard Road
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Telegrams: Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, Singapore
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Minister of Law

Professor Shanmugham Jayakumar
Ministry of Law
250 North Bridge Road
07-00 Raffles City Tower
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Minister of Home Affairs

Wong Kan Seng
Ministry of Home Affairs
Phoenix Park
Tanglin Road
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and to diplomatic representatives of Singapore accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 23 October 2001.