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Death Penalty

9 November 1994

REPUBLIC OF LATVIA

Uldis Lujans, aged 26

Uldis Lujans, sentenced to death on 13 May 1994 by the Latvian Supreme Court, may now be in imminent danger of execution.

Uldis Lujans was convicted of aggravated murder. It is not clear whether an appeal against his sentence has been heard. However, a Swedish lawyer and former parliamentarian was able to visit him in Riga Prison very recently and has informed Amnesty International that the prisoner's appeal for clemency is about to be considered by the President of Latvia. This is the final stage of the judicial process in death penalty cases.

Procedures for executions in Latvia 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 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.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In February 1992 the Supreme Council of Latvia reduced the number of crimes which carry the death penalty from 18 under the old Soviet legislation to seven. In January 1994 Amnesty International was informed by the Ministry of Justice that five people were sentenced to death in 1992 but that no new death sentences were passed in 1993. The last execution to take place was that of Andres Sergunts in April 1993. He had been sentenced to death in July 1992 on two counts of aggravated murder. Amnesty International had appealed for commutation of his sentence. The organization knows of one other prisoner - Michael Abramkin - currently under sentence of death in Latvia. He was convicted of murder by the Supreme Court on 2 February 1994.

A committee of eight people has been working on a new draft of the Latvian criminal code. In September 1993 the Chairman of the Latvian Council of Sworn Advocates informed Amnesty International that the new draft was complete and provided for two alternatives: complete abolition of the death penalty or reduction of the number of capital offences from seven to one (premeditated murder under aggravated circumstances). A new criminal code is due to be approved by the parliament (*Saeima*) in the near future.

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.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express and airmail letters either in English, French or German or in your own language:

- appealing for commutation of the death sentence passed on Uldis Lujans;

- explaining Amnesty International's opposition to the death penalty in all circumstances without exception;
- urging the Latvian authorities to impose a moratorium on death sentences and executions pending adoption of a new criminal code.

APPEALS TOPresident

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and to diplomatic representatives of Latvia accredited to your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 10 December 1994.