

EXTRA 29/98

Death Penalty

20 April 1998

SINGAPOREJimmy Chua Hwa Soon, aged 25

Amnesty International fears that Jimmy Chua Hwa Soon may be at risk of imminent execution. The 25-year-old former sergeant in the Singapore Armed Forces was sentenced to death for murdering his 39-year-old sister-in-law in 1996. In February 1998 the Court of Appeal upheld his death sentence, dismissing his claim that he was suffering from a psychotic disorder when he committed the murder. His final recourse is to petition the President of Singapore for clemency and it is believed that he has until 23 May 1998 to do so. Clemency has only reportedly ever been granted in two cases.

According to a report in the *Straits Times*, Jimmy Chua Hwa Soon began a secret affair with the wife of his elder brother when he was only 15 years old. The affair ended when he married in 1994. He is reported to have killed his sister-in-law after she threatened to expose their relationship, following his refusal to resume the affair. Jimmy Chua Hwa Soon is reported to be full of remorse for his crime. He and his wife, who visits him regularly in prison, have a three-year-old daughter.

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 provided. Studies have shown that it is more likely to be imposed on those who are poorer, less educated and more vulnerable than average. The risk of error in applying the death penalty is inescapable, yet it is irrevocable. Furthermore, there is no convincing evidence that the death penalty deters crime more effectively than other punishments.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In recent years there has been a sharp increase in the number of executions carried out in Singapore. Since 1994 Amnesty International has recorded more than 170 executions in the city-state which has a population of only three million. Most of the executions are believed to have been for drug-trafficking. There are fears that the true number of executions may be significantly higher as the Singapore authorities do not publish statistics on the use of the death penalty. Execution is by hanging.

The death penalty is mandatory for drug-trafficking, murder, treason and certain firearms offences. It is not known how many prisoners are currently under sentence of death.

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

- urging the authorities to commute the death sentence passed on Jimmy Chua Hwa Soon;
- expressing the view that if the execution is carried out, it will only cause more suffering for the family concerned;
- expressing unconditional opposition to the death penalty as a violation of one of the most fundamental of human rights - the right to life;
- expressing deep concern at the high rate of executions in Singapore and calling for all pending death sentences to be commuted;

- recognizing the need to combat murder and drug abuse, but emphasizing that there is no proof that the death penalty deters crime more effectively than other punishments and appealing to the authorities to find a more humane way of tackling these crimes;
- urging the authorities to publish statistics about the use of the death penalty in Singapore.

APPEALS TO:

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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 1 June 1998.