

EXTERNAL

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Imminent Execution

15 April 1996

SINGAPORE

John Martin, aged 36, British national

Amnesty International has learned that John Martin is due to be executed in Singapore at dawn on Friday 19 April 1996. He was sentenced to death in November 1995 for the murder of a South African tourist. John Martin has decided not to appeal against the sentence or to submit a petition for clemency to the President.

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 inherently unjust and arbitrary, however heinous the crime for which it is provided. The risk of error in applying the death penalty is inescapable, yet it is irrevocable. Although many governments argue that the death penalty deters violent criminals, the overwhelming conclusion from studies on the topic is that it has no significant deterrent effect.

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. The President has discretionary powers to commute death sentences, but clemency is rarely granted. Execution is by hanging.

Amnesty International is aware of at least 131 executions, the majority for drug offences, since the beginning of 1994. This figure is disturbingly high given that Singapore is a small state with a population estimated at three million. According to Amnesty International's records, more than half of the prisoners executed in recent years have been foreigners. The organization fears that the true number of executions may be significantly higher as many hangings are not publicized.

In March 1996, Amnesty International condemned the execution of five Thai nationals for murder despite appeals from Thai non-governmental organizations and Thai officials. It is not known how many prisoners are currently on death row.

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

- urging the President to commute the sentence passed on John Martin;
- expressing unconditional opposition to the death penalty as a violation 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 - however heinous the crimes - to be commuted;
- recognizing the need to combat violent crime and drug abuse, but emphasizing that the death penalty has no known deterrent effect and appealing to the authorities to find a more humane way of addressing the problem.

APPEALS TO:

The President

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Telegrams: President Ong Teng Cheong, Singapore
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Salutation: Your Excellency

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and to diplomatic representatives of SINGAPORE accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.