

PUBLIC

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EXTRA 32/02

Fear of imminent execution

25 April 2002

KINGDOM OF THAILAND

At least 20 people on death row

Five men were executed by firing squad on 24 April 2002, in the first executions to take place in Thailand this year. Amnesty International fears that at least 20 others on death row are now in imminent danger of execution.

Two of the five men executed on 24 April had been convicted of premeditated murder. The others had been sentenced to death for trafficking 500,000 amphetamine tablets.

In January Corrections Department chief Siwa Saengmanee stated that between 20 and 30 people would be executed this year.

The Thai prison service now has more people on death row than at any point in its history. More than 400 people under sentence of death, over 180 of whom were convicted of drug offences, are awaiting the outcome of their appeals. In August 2001 officials stated that prisoners whose petitions for a Royal Pardon were rejected would be executed the same day.

The government has repeatedly announced its intention to speed up the execution of those convicted of drug offences, as a deterrent against increasing production and trafficking. In 2001 officials stated that they wanted to deny those convicted of drug crimes the right to appeal for a Royal Pardon; however there is no indication that the necessary changes to the law have been made.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Thai authorities resumed executions in 1995, after an eight-year moratorium. In the last six years 38 prisoners have been executed. At least thirteen have been executed under the current administration, which came to power in January 2001. Five of these were executed at two hours' notice, with no opportunity to contact their relatives. The preparations for their executions were televised, reportedly on the orders of the Prime Minister. Large numbers of people convicted of drug crimes were sentenced to death in 2001: at one point more than 33 convicted traffickers were sentenced to death in a single week.

Amnesty International has strong reason to believe that there is a risk of miscarriages of justice in court cases. There are overwhelming numbers of credible reports of police ill-treating and torturing suspects in pre-trial detention to extract confessions. Confessions are regularly used as evidence in capital trials, and defendants have maintained in court that police forced them to confess.

Executions in Thailand are carried out using a machine-gun. Prisoners stand with their hands tied to a pole, and are shot from behind a curtain. Preparations are underway to introduce lethal injection to replace shooting by 2003.

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

- expressing grave concern and sadness at the execution on 24 April of Thawil Mansorn, Surakit Limcharoenwong, Sung Or, Kulchanok Inthesrat and Netnoi Sungdad;
- expressing concern that at least 20 people sentenced to death face imminent execution, and that others in the final appeals stage may also be at risk;
- urging the authorities not to carry out these executions and to establish an immediate moratorium on executions;
- stating that the death penalty is a violation of the right to life;
- recognizing the need to take measures against serious crime, but pointing out that the death penalty has not been shown to deter crime more effectively than other punishments;
- expressing concern that these executions go against international standards and recommendations by the United Nations Commission for Human Rights for a moratorium on executions and the progressive limitation of the use of the death penalty.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra
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Telegrams: Prime Minister, Bangkok, Thailand

Faxes: + 66 2 280 1443

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Purachai Piemsomboon
Minister of Interior
Ministry of Interior
Thanon Atsadang
Bangkok 10200
Thailand

Telegrams: Interior Minister, Bangkok, Thailand

Faxes: + 66 2 223 8851

Salutation: Dear Minister

Siva Sangmanee
Director General
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Salutation: Dear Director General

COPIES TO:

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Minister of Justice
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Thanon Ratchadaphisek
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Saneh Chamarik

Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission

422 Phyathai road

Srapathum Royal Palace

Pathumvan District road

Bangkok 10330

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and to diplomatic representatives of Thailand accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.