

SINGAPORE HUMAN RIGHTS ALERT

16 Community Leaders Detained by Security Police

Early in the morning of Thursday 21 May sixteen community leaders in Singapore were picked up and detained by the Internal Security Department of the Singapore Government.

RESPECTED LAWYER DETAINED

One of those taken is Ms Teo Soh Lung, a member of the Law Society Council and a respected lawyer who has a long record of community service. Last year she achieved national prominence by giving evidence to a Parliamentary Select Committee against a bill which undermined the independence of the legal profession. The Law Society has held emergency meetings to express its concern and to initiate urgent enquiries of the government.

The sixteen leaders are involved in community work, women's awareness groups, journalism, publishing, community law, the dramatic arts, civil liberties, church work and an opposition party. Nine of them are women, four have graduated from universities in the United Kingdom, two are Malaysian citizens, and ten have been working with the Catholic Church (full or part-time).

ALLEGED COMMUNIST NETWORK

On Friday 22 May the government-controlled STRAITS TIMES reported a statement from the Ministry for Home Affairs saying that the community leaders were arrested "in connection with investigations into a clandestine communist network". Investigations are proceeding and a detailed statement would be issued "in due course".

CHURCH REACTION

The same day Father Patrick Goh, National Chaplain of Young Christian Workers, wrote to the government expressing his shock and attesting to the Christian faith and commitment of the detainees. In statements to the BBC and foreign press he said, "The government has not been happy with our efforts to educate people to the reality of poverty."

Father Edgar D'Souza, editor of Singapore's THE CATHOLIC NEWS, said, "I find it impossible to believe they are communists or communist sympathisers."

OPPOSITION PARTY CRITICISES ACTION

Singapore's Workers' Party secretary-general and main opposition leader, Mr J B Jeyaretnam, himself recently imprisoned on political charges, said the arrests were part of a campaign to intimidate the people. "If they are communists, then the Archbishop of Canterbury is a communist," Reuters quoted him as saying. There was no communist problem in Singapore and the government was using that excuse to justify the arrests, he said.

MALAYSIA ALSO AGAINST ACTION

Further reaction came from the chairman of the Malaysian Bar Council who said in a telegram to the Singapore Minister for Home Affairs, "Lawyers and those committed to the promotion and protection of human rights should not be viewed as threats to the security of the nation."

The Malaysian National Union of Journalists and the Confederation of Asean Journalists have also issued statements against the detention of the community leaders. UMNO Youth, the powerful organ of Malaysia's ruling party, has also expressed its concern and the Malaysian Foreign Minister, Datuk Abu Hassan Omar, has said he will ensure that the interests of the Malaysians arrested will be protected.

MEDIA BLACKOUT IN SINGAPORE

Opposition parties and public interest groups in Malaysia have also made statements opposing the arrests. None of the reactions have been in the Singapore media. Apart from the Ministry for Home Affairs statement there has been a black-out in the Singapore media.

STIFLING CRITICISM

It appears that the draconian Internal Security Act has been used to make the arrests and thus stifle legitimate criticism and legal opposition. This Act enables the Minister for Home Affairs to detain any person at his discretion for renewable two year periods without trial.

As a result of this legislation Singapore has had some of the longest serving political prisoners in Asia. Mr Chia Thye Poh, former member of parliament, newspaper editor and university lecturer, was detained in 1966 and remains in prison to this day.

FORCED CONFESSIONS PREDICTED

Father Patrick Goh has noted that the price of freedom for the detainees would probably be forced public confessions of guilt on national television. Observers note that the government probably

wants to put away influential community leaders well before the next elections in 1988 or 1989. The growing unpopularity of the government appears to be unsettling Singapore's political leaders.

Church and human rights groups are mobilising internationally to demand the immediate release of these prisoners of conscience and to object to the repressive actions of the Singapore government.

NAMES OF COMMUNITY LEADERS DETAINED BY INTERNAL SECURITY DEPARTMENT OF THE SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT ON 21 MAY 1987:

1. Mr Vincent CHENG Kim Chuan, 40, Executive Secretary, Archdiocesan Justice and Peace Commission, related to Urban Rural Mission Dept of the Christian Conference of Asia.
2. Mr William YAP Hon Ngian, 39, Translator, Singapore Broadcasting Corporation, previously involved with drama group, Third Stage.
3. Mr Kenneth TSANG Chi Seng, Media analyst, volunteer worker for official publication of the Workers' Party, volunteer with Catholic Church.
4. Mr CHIA Boon Tai, 36, UK graduate, Malaysian citizen, civil engineer, owns civil engineering firm.
5. Mr TAY Hong Seng, Singapore Broadcasting Corporation translator, previously involved with Third Stage drama group.
6. Ms TEO Soh Lung, 38, Lawyer and partner in law firm of Teo, Lai & Lee, member of Law Society Council, volunteer with Catholic centre for Foreign Workers.
7. Ms TANG Lay Lee, 33, lawyer, full-time worker, Young Christian Workers.
8. Ms Teresa LIM Li Kok, 33, Managing Director of publishing company and partner in a bookstore, committee member of Association of Women for Action & Research (AWARE).
9. Ms WONG Souk Yee, 29, Founder, Third Stage, a drama group which has taken up many of the social problems of Singapore in its productions.
10. Ms NG Bee Leng, social worker, staff member of Catholic

Centre for Foreign Workers.

11. Ms MAH Lee Lin, Chai Chee Catholic Centre.
12. Ms LOW Yit Leng, 28, employee in typesetting firm, volunteer with Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, former Assistant Secretary-General, Asian Students' Association, Hongkong.
13. Mr TAN Tee Seng, 28, (married to Ms Low), employee in typesetting firm, volunteer with Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, assists with Workers' Party official publication, Youth Intern with the Christian Conference of Asia in 1983.
14. Mr Kevin Desmond DE SOUZA, 26, full-time worker, Catholic Students' Society of Singapore Polytechnic.

15. Ms CHUNG Lai Mei, 26, recently returned from Hongkong where she was Assistant Secretary-General of the Asian Students' Association.
16. Ms Jenny CHIN Lai Ching, 30, Malaysian citizen, journalist with the Malaysian NEW STRAITS TIMES, married to Kenneth Tsang (No. 3 above), volunteer with Catholic Justice and Peace Commission.

27.5.87

FAX TO:

FROM EMERGENCY COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN SINGAPORE (NZ)

FAX: 64-3-65552

Attached is an update on the Singapore detentions as of 26 May 87.

FURTHER NEWS: Last night (26th) Singapore TV broadcast allegations against the detainees in a lengthy coverage of the issue. Today's STRAITS TIMES had extensive coverage of Ministry of Home Affairs statements. Some are attached. It is understood that further government releases will be made in the ST every morning over the next few days, probably focussing on new persons in turn.

ACTION REQUIRED:

The official fabrications are of such gravity that it is imperative the following actions be undertaken immediately:

- a) urgent representations by prominent persons to diplomatic missions and governments;
- b) letters should be sent to: Prof Jayakumar, Minister of Home Affairs, Ministry of Home Affairs, Phoenix Park, Tanglin Road, Singapore 1024. (Telephone: 235 9111)
- c) letters of support should be sent to:

Father Patrick Goh,
National Chaplain,
Young Christian Workers
55 Waterloo Road #09-06A
Singapore 0718

Father Edgar D'Souza
CATHOLIC NEWS
55 Waterloo Street
Singapore 0718

- d) letters of support to the families may be sent care of their leading legal counsel:
Mr Francis T Seow
#11-01/04
Straits Trading Building
9 Battery Road, Singapore 0104.
- e) it is most IMPORTANT that all statements etc be released to your local media and also to the Malaysian press & regional publications e.g. The New Straits Times, KL (Tlx: 30259 TIMES MA), The Star, Far Eastern Economic Review, ASIAWEEK etc. THOSE WHO KNOW THE DETAINEES SHOULD PUBLICLY ATTEST TO THEIR CHARACTER. IF MANY REPUTABLE PERSONS & ORGANISATIONS MAKE CLEAR STATEMENTS NOW THEN THE MALICIOUS FALSEHOODS OF GOVT STATEMENTS WILL BE EXPOSED.

For more info on other efforts contact Mr Clement John, International Affairs Sec., Christian Conference of Asia, 57 Peking Rd 4/F, Kowloon, Hkg. Tel. 3-721 9673. Tlx: 37618 URM HX

ATEST: Families allowed to see detainees today 27th.