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amnesty international news release

53 Theobald's Road London WC1X 8SP Tel: 01-404 5831 Telegrams: Amnesty London Secretary General: MARTIN ENNALS

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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL SAYS INDONESIA IS TRANSFERRING LARGE NUMBERS OF UNTRIED POLITICAL PRISONERS TO PERMANENT LABOR CAMPS

Large numbers of the more than 55,000 political prisoners detained without trial in Indonesia for the past eight years are now being transferred to permanent labor camps, Amnesty International said today (Saturday).

Amnesty said the move seemed to represent a new stage in the Indonesian regime's policy towards political prisoners "and to render yet more permanent" the detention of many thousands of political prisoners without charge or trial.

Amnesty released the text of a letter sent by its Secretary General, Martin Ennals, to President Suharto expressing deep concern at the reported transfers. The reports said that the prisoners were being moved from prisons in Jakarta and other parts of Java to permanent labor camps, including the island prison of Nusakambangan.

Mr Ennals said the moves were taking place in conditions of some secrecy without the families of the prisoners being told either beforehand or afterwards. The prisoners appeared destined to work as laborers on construction and agricultural projects.

"Although the prisoners are said to be destined for arduous physical labor," Mr Ennals said in his letter to President Suharto, "we understand that they include many elderly and ailing people, and furthermore that the transfers themselves have involved placing prisoners in crowded trucks where they are compelled to squat with their hands over their heads during the lengthy journey."

Mr Ennals said that the treatment of the prisoners fundamentally contravened the United Nations' Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. He said that Amnesty International also was concerned about the small cash allocation for feeding prisoners which he said was "inadequate for subsistence living". The removal of prisoners meant that those previously held near to their families could no longer rely on their wives and children to bring them additional rations.

Earlier this year, following reports that some prisoners had starved to death, Mr Ennals wrote to President Suharto asking him for an immediate investigation into reports of severe and widespread malnutrition among the political prisoner population.

In his latest letter, Mr Ennals urged the President to stop the transfers and to release immediately all prisoners who were not going to be brought to trial.

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For further information telephone MARK GRANTHAM 01-404 5831 or (nights and weekends) 01-467 4549

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