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Amnesty International
International Secretariat
1 Easton Street
United Kingdom

London WC1X 8DJ

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WEEKLY UPDATE SERVICE 08/93

Contained in this weekly update are external items on Sri Lanka and China.

Nobel Peace Prize Winners Mission

There is currently discussion about a mission in mid- to late-February by Nobel Peace Prize winners to attempt to go to Myanmar - to protest about the imprisonment of Aung San Suu Kyi. AI, as a Nobel Peace Prize winner, will be involved. There will be a weekly update item with more details will follow shortly.

NEWS INITIATIVES

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Racism in Europe - 3 February

Please note correction to the news release: Racism: Police in Europe guilty of human rights abuses, AI Index: EUR 03/01/93.

Page 2, point 3 on Denmark should read:

"Denmark 1990, Babading Fatty, a Gambian tourist, and Himid Hassan Juma, a Tanzanian tourist, are detained by police and allegedly ill-treated while in prison by prison guards. Their cases were included in a wider judicial investigation into the treatment of asylum-seekers in Copenhagen prisons."

Australia - *1301 hrs gmt 10 February*

Please note that the embargo has been confirmed for 1301 hrs gmt, Wednesday 10 February for the news release and document on Aboriginal deaths and ill-treatment in custody.

Japan - 0500 hrs gmt, 17 March

Please note the embargo is confirmed for 0500 hrs gmt, 17 March for this document on refugee issues and we anticipate a high level of media interest in this news release. The Japanese Section requested the change in embargo to allow them to translate the document in time for a press briefing they will hold in Tokyo.

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

Sri Lanka - 12 February

An item enclosed in this weekly update and document about the Sri Lankan government's implementation of AI's recommendations, to coincide with the Human Rights Commission in Geneva. The Research Dept feel that it would be very helpful if high profile newspapers in Europe ran pieces on it - probably more feature based than news. The IS Press Office plans to send it to selected media. The document will be sent out in today's Weekly Mailing.

Algeria - date undecided

A document is currently being prepared. There may be a weekly update to coincide with it.

Section Initiatives

French Section - International Diary

The French Section is producing a diary which will be sold in bookshops and through their catalogue. They would appreciate it if each section sent one black and white negative or slide representing an interesting image for human rights - in order to have a really international diary. They need about 53 photographs. Please send your contribution to Dominique Dupont-Viau, Publications and Trade Officer at the Paris Section Office.

French Section - European Press Officers' Meeting

The second European Press Officers' meeting will take place in Paris this year. The registration forms have not arrived yet, but when they do please send them to Luisa de Soriano or Josette Debord at the French Section Press Office before the end of February. The date of this meeting is now fixed for 15 and 16 May as the majority of you asked for. It will be focused on two themes: Audiovisual work (production and TV experiences) and how to improve it; and the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna. The French Section Press Office will send the program to all participants during the last week of February. Many thanks.

Audio-visual News - World Conference on Human Rights

To help in preparing packages of video material for use in connection with the World Conference on Human Rights, the Media Unit would be most grateful if you could advise whether your section would be able to provide video footage under the following categories:

- 1) Footage of AI section and group campaigning activities and background footage illustrating the cities and towns in which these activities took place and the volunteers who undertook it;
- 2) Footage illustrating uses to which Electronic News Releases released by the Media Unit have been put by TV stations in your country or footage of press conferences held by your section;
- 3) Footage demonstrating the effectiveness of AI work through interviews with released prisoners or others in a position to confirm the effectiveness of our campaigning methods;

Ideally, footage in categories 1 and 3 should be freely available for international use and have no copyright restrictions attached. Footage in category 2 can be in the form of off-air recordings.

If your section has some footage to offer or has advice on where to acquire it, please contact Adam Lloyd in the Media Unit in the first instance. Your help in assisting this footage research effort will be much appreciated.

2. ASA 37/WU 01/93 EXTERNAL
EMBARGOED FOR 12 FEBRUARY 1993

SRI LANKA: DESPITE GOVERNMENT PROMISES GROSS HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS CONTINUE

Despite the Sri Lankan Government's promises, crucial safeguards to protect prisoners from "disappearance" or torture have not been implemented, and publicly announced military orders have not been followed on the ground, said Amnesty International in a report issued today.

"The government of Sri Lanka now displays much greater openness to scrutiny by international human rights organizations, but many of the Amnesty International recommendations for human rights safeguards - which it said it had accepted in late 1991 - have not yet been implemented," said the organization.

Said Amnesty International, "No certificates of arrest were being issued during cordon and search operations, no complete, central register of detainees was yet available to the public, and no list of authorised places of detention had been published."

Amnesty International delegates visited Sri Lanka in October and November 1992 and found that although fewer "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions had been committed in 1992, these gross violations continued in the east at a high rate, with scores of "disappearances".

Senior military officers admitted that the army holds certain prisoners with no safeguards at all. They are held in unacknowledged detention with no written record of the arrest and deliberately hidden from the International Committee of the Red Cross. Amnesty International learned of prisoners who had been held in secret by the army for up to a year. Prisoners continued to be tortured and ill-treated in military and police custody. In addition, several thousand political prisoners detained in connection with armed insurgencies remain detained without trial with no time limit on their detention. Serious intimidation continued in the south, where lawyers, trades unionists and journalists were subjected to death threats during the year.

In accepting 30 of Amnesty International's 32 recommendations, the government undertook to expedite cases against those believed responsible for violations of human rights. Yet trials of security forces personnel - usually of police officers, not soldiers - implicated in grave human rights violations, have generally failed to reach conclusions, in some cases even after several years.

Gross violations such as the massacre of civilians and the "disappearing" of prisoners by soldiers had earlier remained outside public scrutiny. Since mid-1991 the government has been more willing to acknowledge that, in certain recent instances, extrajudicial executions have been committed by the military and home guards in the east, and inquiries of different types have been held into these events.

Nevertheless, the follow-up to these inquiries remains slow and only one case so far has come to trial. That case - the first and only massacre by soldiers to have been the subject of an independent Commission of Inquiry in Sri Lanka - was tried before a military tribunal not a civilian court. The government had acknowledged the responsibility of soldiers for the murder of at least 67 civilians at Kokkadichcholai in June 1991, and had paid compensation to relatives. However, 19 of the 20 accused were acquitted of all charges and the lieutenant in charge was found guilty on the lesser charges of failing to control his troops and disposing of the bodies at the site of the massacre.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) continue to commit gross abuses of human rights. Shortly before Amnesty International's visit, LTTE forces attacked and killed over 190 civilian Muslim villagers in Polonnaruwa District. In its report, Amnesty International documents the deliberate killing of civilians, the torture of prisoners, the holding of hostages for ransom and the execution of those considered traitors by the LTTE.

3. ASA 17/WU 01/93 EXTERNAL
3 February 1993

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA: TWO PROMINENT POLITICAL PRISONERS REPORTED RELEASED

According to unofficial sources in Beijing, the Chinese authorities announced late last week the release on parole of two prominent political prisoners, Wang Xizhe and Gao Shan. The reports did not specify the date of their release. According to some sources, Gao Shan has already been freed and Wang Xizhe's release is imminent.

Wang Xizhe, 43, formerly a worker from Guangzhou (Canton) in south China, has been jailed for nearly 12 years for his activities during the Democracy Wall movement of the late 1970s. Arrested in April 1981, he was sentenced one year later to 14 years' imprisonment on charges of involvement in "counter-revolutionary" activities. Wang Xizhe had edited a dissident journal and become associated with other activists of the Democracy Wall movement in 1979 and 1980. He had been jailed for about two years previously for co-authoring a political poster which was displayed publicly in Guangzhou in 1974.

Since 1988 Wang Xizhe had been held in isolation in a special compound for political prisoners in Guangdong Provincial No.1 Prison in Huaiji county. Amnesty International considered him a prisoner of conscience and has campaigned many years for his release. The organisation last mentioned his case in a report entitled "Torture in China" (AI Index: ASA 17/55/92, published in December 1992) in connection with the organisation's concern for the condition of prisoners held for long periods of time in solitary confinement. Wang Xizhe was not due for release until April 1995 and may be subjected to parole restrictions.

Gao Shan, 37, an economist detained since late May 1989, had been sentenced in August 1992 to four years' imprisonment on charges of "leaking state secrets". His case was linked to that of Bao Tong, a former high-ranking Communist Party official, who received a seven year sentence on the same charge. Amnesty International regards them both as prisoners of conscience. Having served over three years in detention before he was tried, Gao Shan was due for release in May 1993.

According to other sources, the Chinese authorities have also issued passports to two former prisoners of conscience who have been applying to leave the country. They are Zhang Weiguo, a former journalist for the now defunct Shanghai weekly, World Economic Herald, and outspoken critic of government policies, who was detained nearly 20 months following the 4 June 1989 crackdown; and Li Jinjin, 38, a law lecturer at Beijing University who acted as legal adviser to the Beijing Workers' Autonomous Federation during the 1989 pro-democracy protests. As a result Li Jinjin was detained for nearly two years and was expelled from Beijing University following his release in April 1991. Zhang Weiguo had been under house arrest since his release in February 1991.

The release of Wang Xizhe, if confirmed, is particularly significant. Among the prominent Democracy Wall activists serving prison sentences of over ten years, he will be the first to be released before the end of his sentence. Other activists still serving long sentences include Wei Jingsheng, held near Tangshan in Hebei province, and Xu Wenli, held at Beijing Prison No.1.

Amnesty International is currently seeking confirmation of the releases.