
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 32/95

TO: PRESS OFFICERS
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NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - **SIERRA LEONE** (this item is being released to key Africa media), **INDIA** (to be released by the Geneva UN Office for Geneva media)

PLEASE NOTE UPDATED INFORMATION ON ST VINCENT NEWS RELEASE:

(news service 31/95)

7th paragraph, 5th line should read:

By January **1995**, **54** countries worldwide had, and **15** for all exceptional crimes. A further **27** countries, while...

NOTE FOR PRESS OFFICERS WHO ATTENDED THE INTNL. PRESS OFFICERS MEETING

If you have not returned your evaluation sheets yet, can you please do so by the end of next week so that we can complete the evaluation.

Many thanks.

LAUNCH OF WOMEN'S CAMPAIGN UPDATE

If you are inviting representatives of your local media to the London conference, can you please inform Soraya Bermerjo of their names and telephone numbers etc...

Many thanks

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Northern Iraq - 28 February - SEE NEWS SERVICE 266

Campaign on Women - 8 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 12/95

Brazil - 27 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 29/95

** SYRIA - 11 April ** The main focus of the news release will be on women. There may possibly be an ENR to accompany the release.

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

AI INDEX: AFR 51/WU 01/95
16 FEBRUARY 1995

SIERRA LEONE: SERIOUS DETERIORATION IN HUMAN RIGHTS IS BEING IGNORED

Hundreds of defenceless civilians in Sierra Leone are being deliberately killed in the brutal conflict engulfing the country, yet the international community has paid virtually no attention to the widespread massacres.

"This is not a war of front lines and battle fields, but a slaughter of civilians by armed killers out of control," said Amnesty International, which has asked its members worldwide to publicise the deteriorating human rights situation in Sierra Leone and to bring it to the attention of their own governments in order to alert the international community to the scale of the human rights disaster in the country.

"A particularly disturbing aspect of this human rights crisis is that the devastation of the lives of Sierra Leoneans has continued without any condemnation or outrage by the rest of the world," the organization said. "We are actively investigating the situation with an aim to exposing to the world the atrocities being committed in that country."

As the conflict in Sierra Leone escalates, Amnesty International demands that more be done by the government, the rebel leaders and the international community to halt the killings of hundreds of unarmed civilians and bring those responsible to justice.

Current initiatives by the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to resolve the conflict between an armed political group, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), and the ruling National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), headed by Captain Valentine Strasser, do not appear to have human rights protection on the agenda.

The UN recently appointed Berhanu Dinka, a former UN ambassador, to help negotiate a peace settlement in Sierra Leone. In addition, the OAU has sent a fact-finding mission to the capital, Freetown. Led by the OAU Assistant Secretary General, Ambassador Abdulahi Said Osman, the mission's primary aim appears to be conflict resolution.

"Neither the UN nor the OAU have specifically mentioned that they will try to monitor, protect or promote the human rights of the people of Sierra Leone," Amnesty International said. "Both international bodies should condemn the deliberate slaughter of civilians in Sierra Leone and make human rights a priority for their efforts to bring peace to that country."

Since it began almost four years ago, the conflict in Sierra Leone has been characterized by gross human rights abuses by both government troops and insurgents, including the torture and killing of captured opponents and civilians. Thousands of people have fled their homes and sought refuge in displaced people's camps or in neighbouring countries, such as Guinea and Liberia.

"It's often impossible to tell whether it's Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels, deserters from the army or government troops who are devastating towns and villages throughout the country, killing, raping and mutilating defenceless people," Amnesty International said.

Witnesses report that attackers wear government army uniforms. The National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) government has admitted there are serious problems of indiscipline within the army. In some areas where attacks on civilians have occurred, large numbers of soldiers had previously gone missing and might have deserted. It appears that some disaffected soldiers have joined RUF forces, whereas others have formed separate armed groups. Both the RUF and disaffected soldiers are responsible for the torture, killing and abduction of civilians.

Government troops are summarily executing captured rebels and others suspected of collaborating with rebel forces, with severed heads of their victims sometimes displayed on army vehicles.

Background

Armed conflict between government forces and the RUF began in 1991 when the RUF launched an assault from neighbouring Liberia. Fighting continued after the NPRC came to power following a coup in April 1992. Although by the end of 1993 government troops had regained control of areas in the south and east previously held by RUF forces, fighting worsened in 1994.

It escalated still further in late December last year; dozens of people were reported killed in attacks on towns and villages around Bo, in Southern Province, and Kenema, in Eastern Province in December. On 24 December many civilians were killed during a raid on the displaced people's camp at Gondama, south of Bo, where some 80,000 people had sought refuge; others drowned in the Sewa river while attempting to escape. At least five people were killed in an attack on Kenema on 25 December; they included prominent lawyer Patrick P.B. Kebbie.

Attacks have continued into 1995. On 1 January Foredugu near Lunsar in Northern Province was attacked; some reports put the number of civilian casualties as high as 100. In a spate of attacks later in the month in both the south and north of the country, over one hundred Sierra Leoneans and at least 15 foreigners were abducted by their attackers and are still held as hostages. Two British aid workers captured by rebel forces in November 1994 also remain held. Amnesty International is calling on those holding the hostages to guarantee their safety and release them immediately.

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AI INDEX: ASA 20/WU 03/95
16 FEBRUARY 1995

INDIA: KILLINGS BY SECURITY FORCES IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR MUST BE INVESTIGATED

Recent killings of six men in Jammu and Kashmir deepens Amnesty International's concern that India's security forces in the state routinely disregard respect for the rights to life.

The human rights organization is reiterating its call on the government to invite the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteurs on torture and on extrajudicial, summary and arbitrary execution to visit Jammu and Kashmir, as they requested for the last two years.

On 10 February, six civilians were reportedly extrajudicially executed by members of the Border Security Forces (BSF) at Gada Kocha, Srinagar, in retaliation for an attack on the BSF.

Amnesty International calls on the Indian Government to order an independent and impartial investigation into the killings and to make its findings public.

Early that day a BSF bunker was reportedly attacked by an armed Kashmiri group, killing two BSF officers. Apparently in retaliation the BSF raided local shops and houses, killing five men and injuring 38 other people.

Eye-witnesses stated that shop-keepers were dragged out of their shops and killed in cold blood while pleading for their lives. Those who were reportedly killed are Bashir Ahmed Shah, aged 30; Javed Ahmed Shahri, aged 30; Ghulam Nabi, aged 47; Mushtaq Ahmed, aged 37; and Saleem Hamed Bazal, aged 17.

Local people also alleged that they were beaten by the security forces when they tried to approach the bodies. Press reports state that 38 people were injured after the attack and that one more person died, succumbed to injuries on 13 February.

The government has reportedly ordered a magisterial inquiry into this incident and the BSF have ordered an in-house inquiry. However, no impartial investigation by an independent, judicial authority is known to have been ordered.

Investigations into incidents of this nature have usually been carried out by police or army officials rather than by an independent and impartial body. The government has recently provided Amnesty International with information on action taken against 225 members of the security forces in Jammu

and Kashmir for excesses committed, only a few of which consist of long-term imprisonment.

The government, however, continues to refuse to provide any information about the type of offenses for which these punishments were imposed, the identity of the security forces involved, and the incidents to which the punishments relate.

Amnesty International welcomes the responses received from the government but would like to see this translated into real action to investigate human rights violations, identify the perpetrators and bring them to justice. The organization would also like to see structural measures taken to prevent extrajudicial killings, including changing the special laws that facilitate these and other grave human rights violations.

The Government of India in statements before the UN Commission for Human Rights currently taking place in Geneva, said that India has invited the UN High Commissioner and the Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance to visit Jammu and Kashmir.

The government, however, continues to refuse to invite the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions, summary and arbitrary executions and the Special Rapporteur on torture. These UN experts have raised numerous allegations of human right violations within their mandate and have for two years asked to visit the state to discuss numerous allegations of torture, deaths in custody and extrajudicial executions.

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