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# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 46/95

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NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - **WOMEN AS ACTIVISTS, WOMEN AT RISK**

PLEASE NOTE: Campaign on Women -- briefing sheets

Earlier this week we sent you a short briefing sheet on the first chapter of the report on women, and in this news service we are sending two other briefing sheets on chapters two and three.

The briefing sheets draw in greater detail the material in the report, which couldn't be included in the news release for space reasons. They highlight the issues, and give sample cases.

The sheets do not cover all of the issues in each chapter, and each sheet does not cover cases from each region. We have tried to touch on some of the key issues, and achieve overall regional balance in the three sheets.

The sheets are provided as additional material for use in your media work, which you can use if appropriate for your media. You may feel that a different summary of the report is more appropriate for your media work, and should feel free to do this.

PLEASE NOTE: The Burundi mission has been postponed to 13 - 27 March.

## **INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES**

Campaign on Women - 7 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 12/95, 34/95, 37/95, 42/95 & 44/95

Brazil - 27 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 29/95

RWANDA - 6 April - SEE NEWS SERVICE 37/95

SYRIA - 11 April - SEE NEWS SERVICE 32/95

## **TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES**

CAMBODIA - 14 MARCH - SEE NEWS SERVICE 37/95

## **EVENTS AND MISSIONS**

The details below are for your information only, and there may or may not be media work involved. Can you please not publicize anything until further notice from the IS.

MISSION TO BURUNDI 13 - 27 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 37/95

MISSION TO KENYA 16 March - 2 April - SEE NEWS SERVICE 37/95

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EMBARGOED FOR 7 MARCH 1995

WOMEN AS ACTIVISTS

Activists are often seen by governments as a thorn in their side, and become targets of repression because they are challenging the status quo. When women stand up as lawyers, trade unionists, grassroots campaigners or human rights activists, governments often try to silence them by violating their human rights.

The issue is not that they are women, but that they are seen as a threat by the authorities. And in the case of these three women, they have paid for their outspoken stance by losing their lives or their liberty.

- Trade Unionist - Marsinah

Twenty-five year old Marsinah led a strike in May 1993 demanding the minimum wage at the watch factory where she worked -- and paid with her life. Other workers were interrogated by the military and told to resign or face criminal charges. Marsinah was brutally murdered.

Her body was found by a group of children in a shack at the edge of a rice field over 100 kilometres from her home. It was bloodied and covered in bruises. An investigation by an Indonesian human rights organization concluded that high-ranking military authorities may have been responsible for her murder, yet none have ever been brought to justice.

- Political Activist - Ngawang Kyizom

A protest that lasted only 90 seconds ended with a three-year jail sentence for Ngawang Kyizom. At the entrance of a Buddhist shrine in the Tibetan capital Lhasa, she shouted "Long Live the Dalai Lama" and "Free Tibet".

For this outburst in 1990, Chinese secret police kicked and beat her, and jabbed her with an electric cattle prod on her breasts and thighs. She was jailed without a proper trial.

- Human Rights Activist - Blanca Cecilia Valero de Durán

Blanca Cecilia Valero de Durán worked for a human rights organization in one of the worst areas of Colombia for human rights violations. Staff at the Magdalena Medio Human Rights Regional Committee faced constant (death) threats -- threats that were carried out in the case of Blanca Valero's case.

She was gunned down at point blank range on 29 January 1992 by two men in civilian clothes. Witnesses say the killing was watched by police, who did nothing to stop it or to catch the killers.

Despite media reports that naval officials admitted the killing -- only one among scores -- no one has ever been brought to justice for her murder.

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#### WOMEN AT RISK

No country in the world treats its women as well as men. Despite moves to introduce equality for women on the legal and political front, discrimination on grounds of gender remains an international reality.

Discriminated against as women, they are as likely as men, if not more so, to become victims of human rights violations. Such discrimination is often reflected in national law -- and if the law regards a woman as a second-class citizen, where is the incentive or the opportunity for society as a whole to respect women's human rights?

Women in custody in many countries risk rape and other sexual torture or ill-treatment not meted out to men. Women are sometimes sentenced more harshly than men convicted of the same offenses. And some judicial systems provide cruel, inhuman and degrading punishments for crimes for which most offenders are women.

#### At risk in custody

In many countries the social stigma attached to rape and sexual abuse amounts to a rapists' charter of impunity. Rape by the security forces is a particularly oppressive form of torture as many women are too afraid and ashamed to speak out about their experience.

In India, hundreds of cases of police rape have been reported in recent years, but convictions of police officers for raping women in their custody are rare.

In one 1990 case, five police officers were suspended for allegedly raping Kankuil Santra over and over again in a police station. They tried to avoid responsibility by saying she was mentally ill and a "bad" woman -- when charges were finally brought they were dismissed for "lack of evidence".

#### At risk in law

Women were the main target of a June 1993 crackdown on "vice and social corruption" in Iran, during which hundreds of women were arrested for not following the strict dress laws. Most were released shortly after arrest, but a number were sentenced to be flogged -- 74 lashes for infringing the dress code.

In Pakistan, women are most frequently convicted of the offence of Zina - extramarital sexual relations - which carries penalties of public flogging, imprisonment, or stoning to death.

In one case, a couple was accused by the woman's first husband of adultery and unlawful marriage. When they were found guilty the woman, Nasreen, was sentenced to five years in prison before being stoned to death and her husband, Ghulam Jaffer, was sentenced to public flogging. The judgment was later suspended pending a hearing by a full bench of the Shari'a Court, and the couple was released.

#### At risk in society

The majority of women who fall victim to human rights violations come from the poorest and most vulnerable groups in society, such as the homeless, indigenous women, and women from minority or disadvantaged groups.

In Myanmar (Burma), hundreds of women have been abducted and forced to work for Myanmar's army in recent years as porters or unpaid labourers. The dreadful conditions that porters work under -- long hours, little food, and hard labour -- lead to illness and death in many cases. In addition to the poor conditions and beating, women are also at risk of rape by troops.

One 16-year-old Muslim woman from Hlaingbwe township described her treatment:

At night we were made to sleep separately from the male porters, in with the soldiers .. they would come and pull girls out from the group and make the girls sleep with them.. all of them were very rough with us girls, treated us not like humans...

#### Guilty by association -- relatives as victims

Women are often detained, tortured, held hostage and sometimes even killed because their relatives or people they know are connected to political opposition groups, or are wanted by the authorities.

As the security forces crack down on the illegal Islamist Movement al-Nahda in Tunisia, women have been randomly punished by the authorities because of their relationship to men in jail or wanted by the authorities. In detention, they have been tortured, beaten, sexually abused and threatened with rape in custody to force them to give information on where their husbands or other male relatives are.

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