
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 63/95

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NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - **USA** - embargo for 27 March at 2300 Hrs GMT (this item is dateline New York, but will also be released to international media from London)

INTERNAL -

PLEASE NOTE: It appears that the document on Rwanda has already been sent out to your campaign coordinators. It will also be going out in the weekly mailing. Please have a word with your coordinators if you wish to see an earlier copy.

PLEASE NOTE: The date for the Ethiopia news release has been put back to May/June. The precise date will be confirmed as soon as we have more information.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

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

RWANDA - 6 April - SEE NEWS SERVICE 37/95

SYRIA - 11 April - SEE NEWS SERVICE 32/95

GERMANY - 23 MAY - SEE NEWS SERVICE 59/95

ETHIOPIA - JUNE - SEE NEWS SERVICE 59/95

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

ISRAEL AND OCCUPIED TERRITORIES - 11 May - SEE NEWS SERVICE 59/95

IRAN - 31 May - SEE NEWS SERVICE 59/95

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.

Brazil - 28 March (Pierre's visit) - SEE NEWS SERVICE 29/95, 59/95, 60/95

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

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

MISSION TO HAITI 18 March - 3 April - SEE NEWS SERVICE 58/95

MISSION TO CHAD - 27 April - SEE NEWS SERVICE 59/95

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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CRITICISES HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS ON THE EVE OF UNITED NATIONS SCRUTINY

NEW YORK -- Repeated violations of human rights, especially of racial minorities, continue to be reported in the United States of America (USA), according to a report released by Amnesty International today.

On the eve of a detailed examination of the human rights record of the USA, Amnesty International is publishing a report about violations like the death penalty, brutality and excessive force by police officers and torture and ill-treatment in jails and prisons.

In all these areas, Amnesty International has found violations of international human rights standards, including those contained under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which the USA ratified in 1992.

The Human Rights Committee, a body of 18 experts which monitors states' compliance with the treaty, is meeting in New York and will tomorrow consider the USA's initial report. Amnesty International has already sent its report to the committee members as well as other documents on human rights violations in Argentina, Haiti, New Zealand, Paraguay and Rwanda -- the other countries whose reports are also being considered by the committee.

Amnesty International's concerns in the USA include:

- The death penalty. The USA continues to flout international standards by executing juvenile offenders, in clear violation of Article 6 of the ICCPR. Many poor defendants sentenced to death or executed since 1977 were inadequately represented by lawyers untrained in capital punishment law, and at least 50 mentally ill or retarded prisoners have been executed in violation of UN safeguards.

Racial discrimination remains a serious concern. More than 40 per cent of death row prisoners are black compared to just 12 per cent of the US population and 84% of the 266 prisoners executed since 1977 were convicted of murdering white victims, despite the fact that black and white people are murdered in roughly equal numbers.

- Police brutality is widespread and persistent in many areas, with numerous complaints concerning beatings or excessive force by patrol officers during arrests, traffic stops or at the end of pursuits. In many areas African Americans or members of other racial minorities have been the main victims

of abuses. There have also been a disturbing number of deaths in custody due to apparent excessive force.

- Allegations of torture and ill-treatment in jails and prisons are also widespread and include beatings; the punitive use of restraints; sexual abuse of inmates; and a denial of adequate medical or psychiatric care for prisoners.

According to Amnesty International, conditions in some high maximum-security prison units in the USA -- in which prisoners are isolated indefinitely in sealed, sometimes windowless cells with no access to prison activities -- also violate international standards prohibiting cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

- The report also cites examples of questionable police shootings where suspects appeared to offer no immediate threat to life, in violation of international standards on the use of lethal force.

"Law enforcement officers in the USA are rarely criminally prosecuted for excessive force and disciplinary action is often inadequate," Amnesty International said.

- Amnesty International has also campaigned for the repeal of discriminatory sodomy laws in some US states. These laws provide penalties of imprisonment for consensual sexual acts between persons of the same sex, in violation of the principles of non-discrimination and the right to privacy under the ICCPR. Although the provisions have not been used recently, the organization would consider any adult imprisoned for such acts in private to be a prisoner of conscience.

Amnesty International has continually urged the US government to withdraw its limiting reservations to the ICCPR. These include reservations to Article 6 (where the US reserves the right to execute juveniles) and Article 7 (prohibiting torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment). In relation to the latter, the US government considered itself bound by Article 7 of the ICCPR only to the extent that "cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment" meets the definition of "cruel and unusual punishment" under the US Constitution.

For further information, please refer to the following Amnesty International report:

USA - HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS: A SUMMARY OF AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S CONCERNS
(March 1995, AI INDEX: AMR 51/25/95)