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NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - MYANMAR

PLEASE NOTE: EFAI has a new address from 22 November. Following are their new details: 17, rue du Pont-aux-Choux, 75003 PARIS. Tel: +331 44 59 29 89, Fax: + 331 44 59 29 80, Mac 44 59 29 86, PC 44 59 29 87. Katie Rickards, in the Secretary General's Office at the IS has the full list of individuals' direct numbers, so please contact her if you need it.

NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Pakistan - 7 December - SEE NEWS SERVICE 137

****India - 15 December** - PLEASE NOTE ** The document is on "disappearances" in Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab, and is our first document specifically on Jammu and Kashmir for some time. Obviously, this report is an important part of the campaign on political killings and campaigns, and one of the 23 "Lives" is featured in the report, and it is important that we get good worldwide publicity on the news release. Please bear in mind that this document is embargoed for 15 December and do what you can to ensure that your campaign work does not put this embargo at risk. Thank you.

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

South Africa - 1 December - SEE NEWS SERVICE 151

Human Rights Day Speech - 9 December - SEE NEWS SERVICE 138

FORTHCOMING NEWS INITIATIVES 1994

Tunisia - 12 January

USA death penalty - 26 January Open letter to Bill Clinton, around anniversary of his inauguration as President. News item planned.

South Africa - 16 February ** PLEASE NOTE NEW DATE, WHICH IS STILL TO BE CONFIRMED **

Colombia - 16 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 123 + UAs AMR 23/56-57/93

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MYANMAR: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS ON GOVERNMENT TO IMPLEMENT UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS RECOMMENDATIONS

A report to the General Assembly, currently meeting in New York, shows that the Government of Myanmar is still failing to implement safeguards for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms as recommended by the UN Commission for Human Rights last March.

The report from the Commission's Special Rapporteur on Myanmar, Professor Yozo Yokota (Japan), notes that although over 1,000 prisoners have been released, "arrests of many persons attempting to voice political dissent have been reported in 1993". The report describes continuing violations of human rights, including political prisoners being denied fair trials. Despite the lifting of some martial law decrees in 1992, severe restrictions on rights to freedom of expression and association, the use of torture, "disappearances" and political killings are ongoing.

During 1993, Amnesty International documented continuing severe violations of human rights in Myanmar. Since the beginning of the year, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), Myanmar's ruling military authorities, have arrested at least 40 political opposition members whom they considered to be a threat to "security". These include National League for Democracy (NLD) activists who have openly criticized the SLORC's insistence on a continued prominent role for the military in the country's future political life. The NLD, founded by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi who has herself been detained for more than four years, won over 80% of the parliamentary seats in the 1990 general election; however, parliament has never been allowed to convene.

On 15 October a court in Yangon (Rangoon, the capital) sentenced 12 NLD supporters to 20 years' imprisonment. They included prisoners of conscience Dr Ma Thida and Dr Aung Khin Sint. Both were arrested in August for their peaceful political opposition activities. Dr Ma Thida, a well-known fiction writer and medical doctor, served as Aung San Suu Kyi's campaign assistant during the 1988-89 pro-democracy movement. She was charged with distributing materials which had been published by opposition groups operating outside of Myanmar.

Dr Aung Khin Sint, an elected member of parliament, was accused by the SLORC of sending "threatening" letters to fellow National Convention delegates. Amnesty International has no evidence of any threats having been made by Dr Aung Khin Sint and believes that he did no more than express his views on the progress of the Convention's discussions to fellow members of the Convention and the NLD. According to some reports, Dr Aung Khin Sint was attempting to encourage NLD members to oppose the SLORC's continued hold on power and to support the cause for democracy.

The SLORC had convened a National Convention in January in order to establish principles for drafting a new constitution, which met intermittently throughout the year. In a September meeting of the Convention a SLORC representative set out "basic principles on which the fundamental principles of the state should be based", one of which is "participation of the Defence Services in the leading role in the country's national politics".

Amnesty International is also concerned about continuing human rights violations committed by the security forces against members of the Karen ethnic minority in the context of counter-insurgency activities in the Karen State. The security forces persist in their practice of arbitrarily seizing civilians for porter duty or unpaid labour, often ill-treating them and sometimes even killing them if they do not perform their duties to their satisfaction or attempt to escape. A farmer from Hlaingbwe township who had himself been kicked in the chest and back during porter duty told Amnesty International that three of his friends were killed when they tried to escape being taken as porters in August. Civilians are also seized in their villages or fields and accused of supporting the insurgency. In October the army accused a man from Hlaingbwe township of being an insurgent, covered his head with a plastic bag, and then poured hot water into it, causing near-suffocation.

Amnesty International believes that it is imperative that the General Assembly take all possible steps to urge the Government of Myanmar to take prompt and effective action to halt these severe violations of human rights, particularly by implementing the recommendations made to it by the Commission on Human Rights.

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