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NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - CHINA (goodnews item)
INTERNAL - PAKISTAN Q&A

PLEASE NOTE: There has been some coverage in the British and Turkish press about Mumtaz Soysal (a former IEC vice-chairman in the late 1970s) who has recently been appointed as Turkey's Foreign Minister. If you get any queries please note that we do not comment on any government appointments, but we do hope that his long experience of human rights work will be carried into his present position.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Pakistan - 27 July - SEE NEWS SERVICE 81/94 - We are sending the report out via Swift air so it should reach you in time for the release date.

Kosovo - 20 September - SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

Algeria - first week of October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

France - second week of October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

Brazil - 14 September - SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

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CHINA: TIANANMEN DISSIDENT RELEASED

After 44 days in detention, a former pro-democracy activist arrested just before the fifth anniversary of the 1989 Beijing protests was released, according to Amnesty International.

Jiang Qisheng was arrested in Beijing on 28 May and held in the Qinghe Detention Centre outside the city, until his release on 11 July. He reportedly lost about 9 kilos during his imprisonment.

Immediately the news of his arrest became known, Jiang's case became the target of international appeals¹ and in an interview with the British newspaper The Sunday Times after his release, Jiang said "the campaign was very successful and I would like to thank everyone who helped. I was told that I had not committed any crime but that I had annoyed the authorities."

Amnesty International believes he was arrested because of his association with Ding Zilin, whose son was killed during the police crackdown on the pro-democracy protests and who has been campaigning for several years for the authorities to account for all those killed in 1989 and hold those responsible accountable.

Jiang said that according to the police who arrested him, his "offence" was to have distributed money to victims of the military crackdown on the 1989 pro-democracy protests.

"Although we welcome the release of Jiang Qisheng, we are still concerned that other dissidents and human rights activists, also arbitrarily arrested around the fifth anniversary of 4 June 1989, are still being held without charge or trial," Amnesty International said.

The human rights organization is calling for their immediate and unconditional release unless they are charged promptly with recognizably criminal offenses in accordance with international standards.

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¹See Amnesty International appeal entitled, *More dissidents arrested in the run up to Tiananmen anniversary* dated 16 June 1994, AI Index: ASA 17/23/94

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INTERNAL

Questions and answers relating to the press release on blasphemy - Pakistan

Q. What is your report actually about?

A. To put it briefly, our report shows that under a vaguely formulated law, members of religious minorities or secular-minded Muslims are systematically prosecuted on malicious accusations brought by members of Islamist groups; and that the Government of Pakistan has failed to prevent abuse of the law which results in punishing the victim rather than the malicious accuser.

Q. Who are the victims?

They include scores of Ahmadis, who consider themselves Muslim but are regarded as heretics by orthodox Muslims, Christians and several secular-minded individuals. For example: well over 100 Ahmadis have been charged for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of religion. At least 18 Ahmadis and over a dozen Christians are charged under a section of the Pakistan Penal Code which appears to provide for a mandatory death sentence.

Q. How are these charges brought against them?

Let us explain the sequence in which these charges are brought: first, an accusation of blasphemy is levelled against an individual, for example, by an Islamist activist, often on grounds of business rivalry, political opinion or simply as means of persecuting religious minorities. The police then arrests the victim without questioning the motive behind the accusation. The law is also against the victim, because it does not allow release on bail and requires mandatory death sentence on conviction. As a result, the victim is kept in detention for long periods before the case is heard. But that is not the end of the story: some judges are biased and deal with the case in such a way that ensures the victim's conviction. At this stage, Islamist groups often also get involved. They may either approach individual judges warning them against acquittal of the accused, or create an intimidating atmosphere in the court while the government stands by and does nothing to ensure a fair trial.

Then comes another peril: a victim who is acquitted for lack of any evidence becomes a target of violent attacks by Islamist groups or individuals. Usually, the police provide no protection against such attacks.

Q. Is there any substance to these charges?

A. Available evidence in all blasphemy cases investigated by Amnesty International indicates that the charges of blasphemy have not been tenable. The charges have been used falsely by Islamist activists to persecute members of minority religious communities or secular-minded Muslim individuals or to seek their punishment in the context of a personal enmity and professional, economic or political rivalry.

Q. What has the government done?

A. The government has maintained on occasions that it is willing to act positively, but that it fears a backlash from the Islamist groups who might be able to get support from the main opposition alliance in its attempt to weaken the government. Nonetheless, the Government of Pakistan is obliged under international human rights law to ensure the protection of members of religious minorities and to ensure that no one is detained as a prisoner of conscience. This has not happened so far. We are urging the government to act rather than to make promises.

Q. Is there any opposition to reforming the blasphemy law in Pakistan?

Some local clergy and Islamist groups have been demonstrating against any plan to reform the blasphemy law, and there is a growing perception in Pakistan that the opposition parties may be siding with them in order to obtain political support in a campaign to unseat the government. The government has stated that it is not intending to amend the law but to introduce safeguards against its abuse. There are constitutional provisions preventing a change of the law at present, but it is certainly possible to take immediate practical steps to ensure that the law is not abused.

Q. Is Amnesty International happy with the introduction of such safeguards?

A. AI would welcome any government measures to ensure that no one is held as a prisoner of conscience and that no one is subjected to attacks on the grounds of their religious beliefs or political opinion.

Q. What is AI's position on blasphemy laws?

A. Amnesty International has no position on the blasphemy laws but AI opposes the detention of any persons for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression. All governments, regardless of their political, ideological or religious orientations have an obligation under international human rights law to ensure that their citizens are not punished for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression.

Q. Amnesty International has issued this report now on a country in South Asia but why is there no mention of any concern about Sahnan Roshde or Taslima Nasrin?

A. This report deals with abuse of the blasphemy laws in Pakistan, so it does not cover individuals subjected to abuse of the blasphemy laws in other countries. Both these cases have already been addressed in various AI documents and membership action continues on their behalf.

Q. Are attempts to silence religious minorities or any other dissenting voices confined only to Pakistan?

A. No. In Bangladesh, as well as Pakistan, this persecution takes the form of abuse of blasphemy laws. This also happens in Pakistan, and in this report, Amnesty International is urging the Government of Pakistan to ensure that the blasphemy laws are not being used to prosecute religious minorities and secular minded individuals who have peacefully voiced their religious beliefs or political opinion.

Q. Has AI got any concerns other than abuse of the blasphemy laws in Pakistan?

A. Yes, in the Amnesty International Report, 1994, which covers the year 1993, we report that:

Scores of possible prisoners of conscience were among hundreds arbitrarily detained during army operations in Sindh.

Several cases of unacknowledged detention in police custody were investigated by the courts. At least one "disappearance" was reported.

Hundreds of people were reportedly tortured in police or military custody.

The courts passed 12 sentences of flogging and two sentences of amputation.

Several dozen deaths portrayed as "encounter" killings (when police say they have encountered criminals and clashed with them) but suspected as deaths after torture were reported.

Forty seven people were sentenced to death, some by special courts which failed to meet international standards. One execution was reported.

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