

April 2000 World wide Appeals

Nepal

‘Disappearance’ of human rights activist’

Bishnu Pukar Shrestha, a secondary-school teacher and human rights activist, “disappeared” on 2 September 1999. He was getting off a bus in Satumangal, southwest of Kathmandu, when six men in civilian clothes grabbed him and forced him inside a Jeep. Witnesses heard him shout: “My name is Bishnu Pukar Shrestha, please inform the police post.”

The witnesses contacted the local police, but no action was taken. When relatives made inquiries at police headquarters, the police denied that he had been taken into custody. Subsequent reports have suggested that Bishnu Pukar Shrestha is being held within the Armed Forces Section of the Maharajgunj Police Training Centre, an unofficial place of detention, where he may be at risk of torture and possibly death. The authorities continue to deny his arrest.

Bishnu Pukar Shrestha is married with three children. He is a central committee member of the People’s Rights Concern Movement, a national human rights organization, and has spoken out in public against increasing numbers of “disappearances” that have taken place in Kathmandu and other districts during the past year.

Bishnu Pukar Shrestha had been previously arrested in 1998 after speaking at a student seminar. After 63 days, the Supreme Court ordered his release from Central Jail, Kathmandu. He was then arrested again in April 1999 while attending a meeting of a group demanding language rights for minorities. He was held for 43 days in Nakkhu Jail.

+ Please write, expressing concern for the safety of Bishnu Pukar Shrestha and calling on the Nepalese government to investigate his fate and whereabouts and to make the findings public. Send appeals to: Rt Hon Prime Minister KP Bhattarai, Office of the Prime Minister, Singha Durbar, Kathmandu, Nepal (fax: +977 1 227286 or 428570).

Uzbekistan

Death sentences imposed amid concerns of forced confessions

Arsen Arutyunyan and Danis Sirazhev, two singers in “Al-Vakil”, a well-known Uzbek pop group, were arrested on 3 June 1999 in Tashkent. They were charged with the April 1998 murder of Laylo Aliyeva, a singer. On 3 November they were sentenced to death. Appeals were turned down by the Supreme Court in December.

The two men confessed to the killing, but Arsen Arutyunyan later claimed that his confession had been extracted under duress. They were reportedly held incommunicado for two weeks after their arrest, and, when finally granted access to a lawyer, Arsen Arutyunyan was not allowed to talk to him in private. According to reports, Arsen Arutyunyan’s family has been threatened several times, and there was an attempted assault on his sister. Some of his family have fled Uzbekistan as a result.

The death penalty continues to be imposed in Uzbekistan despite official statements indicating a move towards abolition. Concerns are heightened by the fact that a substantial number of men sentenced to death allege that they were tortured in pre-trial detention.

+ Please write, asking the President to use his constitutional authority to commute the death sentences passed on Arsen Arutyunyan and Danis Sirazhev, and expressing concern at allegations that their confessions were extracted under duress. Urge also that the Uzbek authorities impose a moratorium on the use of the death penalty, pending abolition. Send appeals to: President Islam Abduganievich Karimov, 700163 g. Tashkent, ul. Uzbekistanskaya, 43, Rezidentsiya prezidenta, Prezidentu Karimovu I.A. Uzbekistan (fax: + 998 71 139 53 15).

Syria

After eight years, fate of mother remains unknown

Khadija Yahya Bukhari, a Lebanese singer, was distraught when she heard that her son and daughter had been arrested at Beirut airport in Lebanon by Syrian security forces. When she went to the airport to find them, on 28 April 1992, she was also arrested.

After her arrest Khadija Yahya Bukhari was reunited with her children and the three were taken to the Syrian Intelligence Centre in Beirut. They were transferred to various detention centres in Lebanon and then Syria. Both her son and daughter were released in 1992, but eight years after her arrest the fate and whereabouts of Khadija Yahya Bukhari are still unknown. She was reportedly taken before a military court, but AI has no information about her sentence or trial proceedings. Reports also indicated that she had been tortured, and suffers poor health.

Khadija Yahya Bukhari and her husband were apparently suspected of “collaboration” with Israel. By a cooperation agreement between Syria and Lebanon, Syrian military and security forces are permanently present in Lebanon. These forces have been responsible for human rights violations, including abduction and detention of Lebanese nationals accused of “collaboration” with Israel or of working with political or armed groups opposed to Syria.

+ Please write, calling for an inquiry to disclose the fate and whereabouts of Khadija Yahya Bukhari. Send appeals to: His Excellency, President Hafez al-Assad, Presidential Palace Damascus, Syria.