

WORLDWIDE APPEALS October 1999

Belarus

Former prime minister imprisoned in clampdown on opposition

Mikhail Chigir, former prime minister of Belarus, is currently in prison. He appears to have been detained as a result of his active role in Belarus' opposition and his intention to stand as a presidential candidate in the unofficial presidential elections held in May 1999. Amnesty International considers him a prisoner of conscience.

Mikhail Chigir was arrested on 30 March 1999 and charged with financial impropriety relating to a position he held as head of a bank. He has denied the charge. In June, a Minsk court rejected his appeal for release during the investigation into the charges against him. It seems likely that he will remain in prison throughout the period of investigation.

Mikhail Chigir's case is not the first in which criminal charges have been levelled at the opposition by the authorities. AI has learned that several members of the opposition have been imprisoned on charges of bribery and other alleged irregularities in their businesses. All of the detainees spent long periods of time in pre-trial detention while the charges against them were being investigated. As in the case of Mikhail Chigir, the charges against them appeared to be politically motivated in order to silence them and punish them for their peaceful opposition activities.

+Please write, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of prisoner of conscience Mikhail Chigir, and seeking assurances that no one will in future be subjected to ill-treatment or imprisonment solely on the grounds of their political beliefs and for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of assembly.

Send appeals to: The President of Belarus, Alyaksandr Lukashenka, Respublika Belarus, 220010 g. Minsk, pl. Nezavisimosti, Apparat Prezidenta Respubliki Belarus, Belarus. (fax: 375 172 23 58 25 (office hours only)).

Egypt

Lawyer still in prison nine years after his acquittal

Nine years after he should have been released, Hassan al-Gharbawi Shahhata remains in prison. He could be held there indefinitely, as each time one of his detention orders expires, a new one is issued. Hassan Shahhata, a lawyer, was tried and acquitted in May 1990 of involvement in public disturbances in 1989 in Cairo. However he was not released and has remained in detention ever since. He is reportedly held in al-Wadi al-Gadid Prison and in poor health, and is one of the longest-serving "administrative detainees" in Egypt.

The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention concluded in December 1993 that Hassan Shahhata's detention contravened Articles 9 and 10 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Articles 9 and 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

In 1997 the Working Group stated that the Egyptian authorities had reportedly bypassed 25 court orders for Hassan Shahhata's release by transferring him from his place of detention to 'Ain Shams police station, or to the offices of the State Security Investigation Department for a few days, then returning him under a new detention order.

The Egyptian government has failed to acknowledge that Hassan Shahhata was tried and acquitted of all charges, and that his continuing detention contravenes international human rights law and standards.

+Please write, calling for Hassan al-Gharbawi Shahhata's immediate and unconditional release.

Send appeals to: His Excellency Mohammad Hosni Mubarak, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, 'Abedine Palace, Cairo, Egypt (fax: 202 390 1998). E-mail: webmaster@presidency.gov.eg

Indonesia

Government must hold inquiry into fate of 13 'disappeared' political activists

The Indonesian government seems unwilling or unable to allow an inquiry into the whereabouts of 13 political activists who "disappeared" during 1997 and 1998. All the "disappeared" were members of political parties or had joined demonstrations in Jakarta during the last days of former President Suharto's rule in May 1998.

A group of nine political activists abducted by security forces in Jakarta in early 1998 claimed on their release that at least six of the 13 "disappeared" had been held in the same military facility as them. Although an August 1998 military inquiry concluded that the nine released men had been abducted, it found no evidence of any military involvement in the "disappearance" of the other 13.

As a result of the inquiry, three senior military officers were dismissed from their posts, although only one was discharged from the army. None of the officers was brought to trial. Eleven lower-ranking soldiers were court-martialled, however, and given prison sentences of up to 22 months for their role in the abduction of the nine men.

Human rights activists, the nine released men and relatives of the 13 "disappeared" activists believe that these legal proceedings have largely been an attempt by the authorities to prevent the full truth behind the abductions and "disappearances" coming to light.

+Please write, calling for a full and independent inquiry into the fate of Noval Alkatiri, Yani Avri, Dedy Hamdun, Mochamad Yusuf, "Ismail" and "Sony", who "disappeared" in 1997; and Petrus Bima Anugerah, Hendra Hambali, Herman Hendrawan, Yadi Muhidin, Abdun Nasir, Ucok Siahaan and "Suyat", who "disappeared" in 1998. Urge the authorities to bring to justice all those involved in the abductions.

Send appeals to: President Jusuf Habibie, Presiden RI, Istana Negara, Jl. Veteran, Jakarta Pusat, Indonesia (fax c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs: 62 21 380 5511/62 21 345 7782).