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@HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS
UNDER FIRE

Amnesty International's Annual Report
details violations in 151 countries

Human rights activists increasingly came under fire from their governments last year, even as human rights featured on the international agenda more prominently than ever before, Amnesty International said as it released its 1994 annual report.

"In a world of rapid political change, human rights groups have sprung up in dozens of countries where they could not have operated freely before", Amnesty International said. "But the new freedoms, and those that defend them, are in danger in countries teetering on crisis and violence."

Human rights defenders -- lawyers, journalists, trade unionists, peasant leaders and many others -- can play a key role in countries going through major transitions and reforms, helping to establish legal and constitutional safeguards for human rights and creating a safe space for peaceful dissent, Amnesty International said.

"Human rights defenders often became the first victims of governments trying to build a good human rights image abroad and fearful of the damage human rights activists can do to that image", Amnesty International said.

In its global survey covering 151 countries, the organization records that last year prisoners of conscience were held in 63 countries; more than 100,000 known political prisoners were locked up in detention without charge or trial in 53 countries; more than 112 governments tortured or ill-treated prisoners; and political killings by the state took place in 61 countries. Approximately 2,000 people were put to death by the state in 32 countries.

The report calls for the United Nations to finish, after almost nine years, the process of drawing up a declaration to protect human rights defenders.

EUROPE -- In Bosnia-Herzegovina, hundreds of deliberate and arbitrary killings by all sides were reported. At least 15,000 people, many prisoners of conscience, were held in detention camps during the conflict. Armed political groups also

committed human rights abuses, such as in the United Kingdom, where Republican and Loyalist groups killed 63 civilians.

In 26 other countries in Europe, there were reports of torture or ill-treatment in prisons, police stations or other detention centres, including in France, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Turkey and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. At least 24 people in Turkey died in custody apparently as a result of torture, a practice reportedly widespread among Turkish police or gendarmes. Many victims were human rights defenders.

In some countries that emerged from the break-up of the former Soviet Union, authorities promised new rights that their security forces then suppressed. In Tadjikistan, extrajudicial executions and "disappearances" continued, killing scores of people targeted for their political activity or regional origin. In Turkmenistan, authorities jailed opponents to prevent meetings with foreign dignitaries.

MIDDLE EAST -- In the Middle East, human rights activists faced intimidation and abuses in countries where the authorities did not tolerate criticism. For example, Mansur Kikhiya, a prominent opponent of Libya's government and a founding member of the Arab Organization for Human Rights, "disappeared" in Egypt following his reported abduction by Libyan government agents. He remains missing to this date.

There were widespread arbitrary arrests of thousands suspected of opposing the government or sympathizing with Islamist groups in Algeria, Egypt and Tunisia. Prisoners of conscience were held in 11 countries, including Morocco, Syria and Tunisia. Detainees were tortured in 15 countries, including Egypt, Iran and Israel and the Occupied Territories.

The region saw a dramatic increase in use of the death penalty in Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. In Kuwait and Algeria, executions were carried out for the first time since 1989.

AMERICAS -- In 1993, Amnesty International launched an international campaign against political killings and "disappearances", violations that claimed more than a thousand lives across some 15 countries in the Americas including Brazil, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti and Peru. In Colombia, for example, the armed forces and their paramilitary agents extrajudicially executed hundreds of people. Hundreds of prisoners of conscience were held in several countries, including Peru and Cuba. In Brazil, hundreds of street children, adolescents and adults were killed or "disappeared".

Torture and ill-treatment by police was widely reported in many countries including Haiti, Venezuela, Mexico, Peru and Colombia. Although the death penalty was abolished in most of the region, 38 people were executed, including four juveniles, in the United States of America.

AFRICA -- In Africa, political killings were the predominant human rights violation, though political arrests and torture continued in 1993. Foreshadowing recent violence in Rwanda in 1994, tens of thousands of people died in Burundi as local Hutu government officials and supporters killed Tutsi civilians, while Tutsi groups and security forces also killed thousands of unarmed Hutu civilians. Hundreds of extrajudicial executions and

"disappearances" were also reported in 20 countries, including Angola, Chad, Liberia, Rwanda, Senegal, Togo and Zaire.

Elsewhere in the region, the governments of Cameroon, Nigeria and Sudan held prisoners of conscience and thousands of political detainees were held in Ethiopia. The police and army tortured detainees in South Africa and more than 4,300 people died in political violence there.

ASIA -- In Asia, extrajudicial executions and "disappearances" continued to be widespread across the region. Hundreds of extrajudicial executions were reported in Cambodia as well as in Afghanistan, where deliberate and indiscriminate bombings of homes, hospitals and mosques also left hundreds dead and thousands injured. In India, hundreds of political activists were extrajudicially executed and scores more were "disappeared" by security forces in the states of Jammu and Kashmir, and Punjab. In Pakistan, hundreds of people were reportedly tortured in police or military custody, in some cases resulting in death.

Torture and ill-treatment of political detainees, peaceful protestors and criminal suspects was common in 19 Asian countries, including China and Indonesia and East Timor, where hundreds of suspected government opponents were prisoners of conscience or possible prisoners of conscience. In Myanmar as well, hundreds of government opponents remained imprisoned, including dozens of prisoners of conscience. The death penalty was imposed in at least 10 countries. In China alone, more than 1,400 people were executed and more than 2,500 remained sentenced to death in that country.