

T0: Section Directors, Press Officer and Campaign
Coordinators.

FROM: IS Press Office

DATE: 13 February 1991

SUBJECT: @HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE SHADOW OF WAR

Here is the final text of the statement which the IS plans to make public on Thursday 21 February. Please accept our apologies for not sending it to you when we said we would (ie on Monday) but we trust you will appreciate that the IS has been in considerable shock and turmoil over the past few days.

We plan to issue the statement with a news release embargoed for 0001 hrs GMT Thursday 21 February. We shall send the text of the news release tomorrow.

Providing they do not make the statement public before then, sections may use it in any way they consider appropriate. Those sections that indicated previously that they would like to use the statement in paid advertisements in their media are free to do so, as indicated in Richard Reoch's note of Friday 8 February, provided the advertisements do not appear before the embargo time.

Thank you again for your responses to the draft statement. If there are any queries please call or fax the Press Office.

Draft text of statement

HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE SHADOW OF WAR

Human rights are under increased attack today in many countries as a result of the Gulf conflict.

Nothing could make clearer the risk that persistent human rights violations pose to a just and stable world order than this present crisis, which is already claiming a rising toll of war casualties.

Whatever its political and military outcome, it is imperative that the war not be allowed to further claim human rights as one of its casualties.

Amnesty International has made repeated appeals over the past decade both to individual governments and to the United Nations to deal constructively and effectively with human rights abuses in all regions of the world. Our concerns have included large numbers of prisoners of conscience in the Soviet Union and other East European countries under former governments; mass "disappearances" in Latin America; widespread extrajudicial executions in a number of African countries; arbitrary arrest and unfair trials in China and other Asian countries, and the increasing use of the death penalty in the USA, among other countries, in the face of a worldwide trend towards abolition.

In the Middle East, throughout the 1980s we have attempted again and again to focus world attention on the suppression of fundamental human rights in Iraq. We have drawn attention year after year to gross violations in Iran; to the consistent pattern of abuses inflicted on Palestinians detained or killed during the unrest in Israel and the Occupied Territories; to political detainees and the use of torture and the death penalty in Saudi Arabia; to torture and extrajudicial executions in Syria; and to torture and "disappearances" in Morocco. We have published exhaustive reports on our efforts to end torture and arbitrary arrest in Bahrain, Jordan and Egypt. And we appealed repeatedly for respect for fundamental human rights in Kuwait before the Iraqi invasion.

When the governments of the world had a clear opportunity to deal with these grave and compelling issues, they chose not to do so. Governments across the political spectrum failed to pay due consideration to the human rights records of the countries to which they exported military, security and police assistance that could be used to commit further violations. Now, the resolution of these and broader issues is subject to the consequences of war.

The human rights Amnesty International seeks to protect are most at risk when political, military and economic considerations become the overwhelming preoccupation of governments.

States must not be permitted to condone by their selective silence the human rights violations committed by their allies and to condemn violations by others for propaganda purposes. When that happens, the shadow of war is cast far beyond the battlefield, and in distant lands the jailers, torturers and killers sense the slackening of international concern for human rights.

Since the events of 2 August 1990 we have seen this deeply distressing pattern re-enacted. We have documented the human rights violations inflicted on the people of Kuwait by the Iraqi forces - a catalogue of arbitrary detention, torture and extrajudicial killing sadly familiar to anyone who has studied our previous reports on violations in Iraq itself. We have reported the detention and torture of large numbers of Yemeni nationals held in Saudi Arabia -- apparently for no other reason than the Yemeni government's position on the Gulf crisis.

Now Amnesty International is receiving reports that people in several other countries who have dissident views about the crisis are being arrested or imprisoned. They include Magdy Ahmed Hussein, an Egyptian journalist and deputy leader of the Socialist Labour Party who spoke against the war at a Cairo mosque. In Turkey, three Socialist Party members were arrested while trying to mail a US flag to President Turgut Ozal in protest at his Gulf policies - they are to be prosecuted for "insulting the President".

Opposition to the war has begun to surface within the armed forces. In the USA, a soldier was jailed after he refused to help prepare supplies for troops in Saudi Arabia because he had come to object on moral and religious grounds to participating in all wars. He is a prisoner of conscience.

In times of war, the risk of arbitrary detention escalates. People are detained without charge or trial, with no effective possibility of defending themselves against the authorities' accusations. In Israel and the Occupied Territories, Dr Sari Nusseibeh, a leading Palestinian advocate of a peaceful solution of conflicts in the region, has been arrested and put in administrative detention. He too is a prisoner of conscience.

In the United Kingdom, the detention of more than 50 Iraqi and other nationals pending deportation on national security grounds was contrary to international standards because they were not told specific reasons for their detention and did not have the right to a fair judicial hearing, with legal representation.

Each of these cases is a matter of concern to Amnesty International, but taken together they give rise to great disquiet:

the fear is that such measures will be tolerated and eventually become systematic for as long as the war and its aftermath persist. We must prevent this happening.

The preoccupation with this present conflict threatens respect for human rights in a number of other countries because violations there risk being seen as secondary by a world whose attention is rivetted on the Gulf.

We have seen that the violent suppression of peaceful forces for democratic change in Myanmar has continued unabated, as has the practice of torture, "disappearance" and extrajudicial execution in the context of civil war in Sri Lanka. In Mauritania, mass arrests and deaths under torture of black Mauritians have increased since November 1990 and in neighbouring Mali, children as young as 12 have been tortured after pro-democracy demonstrations in January 1991. In Lebanon, forces of the Syrian army carried out the deliberate killing of captive soldiers and civilians in October 1990. This year in Morocco - following the unrest there in December 1990 - hundreds of people have been sentenced to up to 15 years' imprisonment after trials which were grossly unfair. In China, pro-democracy advocates have been jailed after grossly unfair political trials. Unarmed civilians were shot dead by Soviet troops in Lithuania and there have been increasing fears for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in other areas of the Soviet Union.

Respect for human rights -- recognized by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights as "the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world" -- must not be sacrificed to political expediency.

If peace is to emerge from the present conflict, it can only hope to endure if it is built on principles that include a genuine commitment by every government to the universal and impartial protection of the human rights of all people.

The challenge for all those working for human rights at this grave moment is to insist on a single standard for human rights worldwide. For its part, Amnesty International will continue to apply its impartial and strictly defined mandate to free all prisoners of conscience, ensure fair trials for political prisoners and oppose torture and executions wherever they occur.