
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL NETWORK

Human rights information and web links for health professionals

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-----RECENT AI STATEMENTS & REPORTS

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia: Ethnic Albanian physician abducted [AI Index: EUR 70/46/99, 27 April 1999]. 48-year-old paediatrician Dr Flora Brovina was abducted from her home by a group of about eight men in the afternoon of 22 April 1999 and has not been seen since. Inquiries made by members of her family to the local police have yielded no results. See <http://www.amnesty.org/news/1999/47004699.htm>

USA: Amnesty International calls for release of Leonard Peltier [News Service 080/99, 27 April 1999]. Amnesty International is not able to take a position regarding Leonard Peltier's guilt or innocence, and does not consider him a prisoner of conscience, but has decided to call for his release from prison because of continuing doubts about the fairness of the legal proceedings against him. A retrial no longer seems a feasible option. See <http://www.amnesty.org/news/1999/227apr99.htm>

-----KOSOVO

The International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC] said on 27 April that it hoped to receive security pledges from Yugoslav authorities and NATO which would allow it to resume emergency aid in Kosovo. The humanitarian agency had withdrawn its 19 international staff on 29 March 1999, five days after NATO air strikes began, due to deteriorating security conditions. [Reuters, 27 April 1999]. One day earlier, on 26 April, Cornelio Sommaruga, head of the ICRC, expressed his concern at the number of civilians affected by NATO air strikes against Yugoslavia but said he was not able to assess independently the extent of civilian casualties caused by the bombing. ICRC situation reports are available at <http://www.icrc.org/unicc/icrcnews.nsf/c1256212004ce24e4125621200524882?OpenView>

Information on the report of Medecins Sans Frontieres in Kosovo is available at <http://www.msf.org/projects/yugoslavia/kosovo/index.htm>

Satellite images of the site of an alleged mass grave at the town of Izbica in Kosovo reportedly show an estimated 150 graves, making it the largest of the 43 mass grave sites that NATO and US officials have potentially identified. See the Christian Science Monitor of 23 April 1999 at <http://www.csmonitor.com/durable/1999/04/23/fp1s3-csm.shtml>

Recent articles of interest include

Doctors Targeted in Kosovo, Refugees Say: Attacks on Medical Workers Would Violate Geneva Conventions. By R. Jeffrey Smith, Washington Post Foreign Service, 20/04/99, at <http://search.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/WPlate/1999-04/20/036I-042099-idx.html>

Traumatized Refugees Grappling With Scars From Kosovo Terror, Elizabeth Shogren, Los AngelesTimes, 23 April 1999, at http://www.latimes.com/CNS_DAYS/990423/t000036498.html

Friends Whose Lives Were Shattered. By BBC correspondent Ben Brown, 11 April 1999, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/from_our_own_correspondent/newsid_316000/316711.stm

For the latest Amnesty International documents and news services, see http://www.amnesty.org/ailib/intcam/kosovo/indx_lat.htm

-----DEATH PENALTY NEWS

1999 Commission on Human Rights: At its 55th session, the UN Commission on Human Rights adopted a resolution on the question of the death penalty after a roll-call vote of 30 in favour to

11 against and 12 abstentions. The Commission urged all States that still maintained the death penalty not to impose it for any but the most serious crimes; not to impose it for crimes committed by persons below 18 years of age; to exclude pregnant women from capital punishment; and not to impose it on a person suffering from any form of mental disorder. Amnesty International welcomed the resolution as a step forward, but said the Commission had taken two steps backward with regard to Cambodia and Human Rights Defenders. For an AI press release [AI Index: IOR 42/05/99, 29 April 1999], see <http://www.amnesty.org/news/1999/I4200599.htm> ; also: <http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/europe/9904/28/BC-UN-RIGHTS-DEATH-1.reut/index.html>

Uganda: Amnesty International and representatives of the European Union have urged the government of Uganda to spare the lives of 28 prisoners scheduled to be executed on 30 April 1999 in the country's first executions since 1996. Unconfirmed reports earlier this week had stated that some or all of the men have already been executed. Amnesty International expressed grave concerns about the implications a resumption of executions would have for the more than 1,000 prisoners on death row in Uganda [Reuters, 29 April]. See <http://www.amnesty.org/news/1999/15901399.htm>

USA: Ronald Williamson, aged 46, was released from death row in Oklahoma on 15 April 1999 after DNA tests proved his innocence. Williamson, who always maintained his innocence, had been on death row since 1988 for allegedly raping and murdering a 21-year-old waitress. A federal appeals court overturned Williamson's conviction in 1997 because his trial lawyer was incompetent. Another man who had been sentenced to life imprisonment for the same crime has now also been set free. The two men had originally been found guilty based on testimony from a third man who has now been implicated in the killing by the DNA tests [AFP, 16 April 1999].

USA: In Texas, a Senate panel approved a bill on 21 April 1999 that would ban using the death penalty on Texas defendants with mental retardation. Under the proposal, defendants who prove they were mentally retarded at the time of the offense would be spared from execution. If convicted, they would instead face life in prison without parole. If the Legislature approves Ellis' bill, Texas would become the 13th state to ban executions of criminals with mental retardation. [Death Penalty Information Center]

Russia: President Boris Yeltsin on 23 April 1999 ordered a presidential pardons commission to review all cases against death row prisoners by the end of May. The commission already pardoned 149 death row prisoners last year but said earlier this year that 418 cases still had to be reviewed. Yeltsin also issued an instruction for a national conference on the abolition of the death penalty to be held in Moscow on 3-4 June. Participants will reportedly include representatives from the Council of Europe [Reuters and ITAR-TASS News agency on 23 April 1999]

Viet Nam: Nguyen Dinh Quyen, deputy director of Viet Nam's National Assembly's law department, was quoted on 27 April 1999 as saying that Viet Nam had to consider "a more humane method of execution to replace the firing squad ... in relation to the development of science and technology, and [to] study the experiences of death penalties in other countries". [Reuters, 27 April 1999]

-----ZIMBABWEAN JOURNALIST DESCRIBES TORTURE

In an interview with the BBC World's HARDtalk, Mark Chavanduka, editor of the Zimbabwe Standard, described how he was subjected to beatings and torture by electrocution and water suffocation while he was detained by the military following the publication of a story alleging a coup plot against President Robert Mugabe. Mark Chavanduka is currently in the UK to receive medical treatment, but will have to return to Zimbabwe to face trial. For an earlier Amnesty International news service on the case ["Severe torture and illegal detention of journalists threatens breakdown in rule of law", AI Index: AFR 46/02/99, 21 January 1999] see <http://www.amnesty.org/news/1999/14600299.htm> . For extracts from the BBC interview see http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/africa/newsid_326000/326845.stm

-----ALLEGED MASS GRAVE IN SRI LANKA

A leading Sri Lankan human rights group has called for an open investigation into an alleged mass grave at Chemmani in Sri Lanka's northern Jaffna peninsula. The organization accused the Sri Lankan government of deliberately delaying investigations in the alleged site since in July 1998 a soldier on trial for murder told a court that up to 300 bodies had been buried at Chemmani. See http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/south_asia/newsid_331000/331824.stm For a 1998 press release by Amnesty International ["Safety must be guaranteed for experts working on mass graves exhumation", AI Index: ASA 37/27/98, 29 October 1998] see <http://www.amnesty.org/news/1998/33702798.htm>

-----MILITIA FIGHTING REPORTED IN SOMALIA

According to witnesses, at least 14 people have been killed in fighting between rival militia groups in two separate incidents in Somalia on 28/29 April 1999. Reportedly the Dr Hassan Jis Memorial hospital in the Shirkoleh District of southwest Mogadishu was also shelled by militiamen. See <http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/africa/9904/29/BC-SOMALIA-VIOLENCE.reut/index.html>

-----CRIME ON THE INCREASE IN THE PHILIPPINES

According to the Free Legal Assistance Group, a non-governmental organization in the Philippines, the number of murder and rape cases in the Philippines has gone up in the first three months 1999. The group, which said it based its statement on official crime statistics released by government, claimed this showed that, contrary to the Government's claim, capital punishment was not deterrent to crime. President Estrada had repeatedly said that prior to the resumption of executions in February 1999 that the death penalty was to send a strong message to criminals in the country. On the 6 April, Estrada granted a 90-day reprieve to three other death row convicts who had been scheduled to die on 7 April 1999. [AFP, 23 April 1999]

-----FGM CONDEMNED BY INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S FORUM

Speakers at the Khartoum conference of the International Women's Forum, a global organization of Muslim Women, on 22 April 1999 condemned the practice of female genital mutilation [FGM] as harmful to the physiological, psychological, economic and social well-being of women. See <http://www.africanews.org/PANA/news/19990422/feat9.html>

-----PUBLICATIONS

Human Rights Watch. Red Onion State Prison: Super-Maximum Security Confinement in Virginia. April 1999. This "super-max" prison was opened as part of a massive prison-building program launched by then-Gov. George Allen (R) in August 1998. Many of its inmates are held in 23-hour-a-day solitary confinement cells. One out of five of the detainees is due for release in the next ten years. The report, documenting unnecessary and abusive use of physical force at the prison, is available at <http://www.hrw.org/hrw/reports/1999/redonion/> A related article in the Washington Post of 18 April 1999 is available at <http://search.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/WPlate/1999-04/18/164I-041899-idx.html>

Torture: Never More. 26 June newsletter from the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims in Copenhagen, reflecting the plans and descriptions of activities around Torture Victims' Day in 1998 received at IRCT from some 200 organizations in more than 40 countries. If you wish to receive a copy of the newsletter, contact the IRCT at <mailto:webmaster@irct.org>, Phone: +45 - 33 76 06 00, Fax: +45 - 33 76 05 00

Bauschard S. Death Penalty Annotated Bibliography. University of Michigan. Available at <http://www.umich.edu/~debate/mndi/supp/death.html>

Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers. The Use of Children as Soldiers in Africa. This new report has found that more than 120,000 children under 18 years of age are being used as soldiers across Africa. Some of these children are no more than 7 years of age. The report is available at http://www.child-soldiers.org/Africa_report.htm. For more information contact Ian Levine, UN representative for Amnesty International, at <mailto:ilevine@amnesty.org> or Tel: +1.212.867.8878 or Reed Brody from Human Rights Watch on Tel: +1.212.216.1206 A special BBC website on children in conflict can be found at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/childrenofconflict/>

-----MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES

First international conference and exhibition on Forensic Human Identification, 24 - 26 October 1999, Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, London. The aim of this conference, which is organized by the UK Forensic Science Service, is to stimulate intellectual debate, to promote professionalism in the field of forensic science and to unite experts in the field of forensic science, human genetics and biometrics world-wide.

For more information see <http://www.fss.org.uk/millen/intro.htm>

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