
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL NETWORK
Human rights information and web links for health professionals
Bulletin no. 15, 23 July 1999 **AI Index: ACT 84/15/99**

-----**RECENT AI STATEMENTS & REPORTS**

USA: Time for Humanitarian Intervention: The Imminent Execution of Larry Robison [AI Index: AMR 51/107/99, July 1999]. Larry Keith Robison is scheduled to be executed on 17 August 1999 for a killing committed in Fort Worth, Texas, on 10 August 1982. Larry Robison was first diagnosed as suffering from paranoid schizophrenia three years before the murders, but the Texas mental health care services repeatedly said that they did not have the resources to treat him unless he turned violent. See <http://www.amnesty.org/ailib/aipub/1999/AMR/25110799.htm>

Iran: The Authorities Must Guarantee Fundamental Rights [AI Index: MDE 13/08/99, 14 July 1999]. Amnesty International expressed grave concern about reports that in the course of recent events in the Islamic Republic of Iran, dozens of persons have been injured, some seriously, hundreds arrested, and at least five killed. Among those who are known to have been arrested are at least three student activists who Amnesty International believes may be prisoners of conscience. See <http://www.amnesty.org/news/1999/51301899.htm>

-----**DEATH PENALTY NEWS**

USA, Florida: The Florida Supreme Court has held that the execution of those who were 16 years old at the time of their crime would be cruel and unusual, and hence, unconstitutional. Florida has not executed a 16-year-old offender in half a century. The issue arose in the case of Keith Brennan who was 16 when in October 1995 he assisted in the murder of Tommy Owens. He was first sentenced in March 1997 and will now serve a life without parole sentence. The Court had previously forbidden the execution of those who were 15 at the time of their crime. [Death Penalty Information Center]. Go to <http://www.gate.net/~wyman/flo/courts.html#supct> and search for case name "Keith Brennan" in July 1999.

USA, Virginia: Thomas Strickler, sentenced to death in September 1990 for abduction, robbery and capital murder, was executed by lethal injection on 21 July 1999 despite the fact that prosecutors withheld exculpatory evidence. While Strickler admitted to beating and abducting his victim, he always maintained that his co-defendant, who is serving three life-terms, had killed her. For background on the case of Thomas Strickler see <http://www.vadp.org/cases/strick.htm>

Saudi Arabia: According to a report in the British paper *The Independent*, 55 criminals have so far been executed in Saudi Arabia this year, including two women. Saudi Arabia, which strictly enforces sharif law, imposes the death penalty for murder, rape, armed robbery, drug trafficking and for drug addicts. Aisla Saada Kassel, a Nigerian woman found guilty of drug smuggling, was beheaded by the sword on 16 July 1999. [Another Nigerian woman had been executed for trying to smuggle cocaine at the end of May in the first execution of a foreign woman since an Indonesian was beheaded in September 1997 for murder.] [AAP, 16 July 1999].

Philippines: President Joseph Estrada said on 21 July 1999 he was unlikely to stop the first execution of a woman in the Philippines after she was sentenced to death on drug trafficking charges. Josephine Aspers, one of 18 women now on death row, was sentenced to death in 1994 for smuggling 20 kg (44 lb) of methamphetamine hydrochloride from Hong Kong. The court has not set a date for Aspers' execution but under Philippine law the execution could take place anytime between next month and February. Josephine Aspers has always maintained her innocence. [Refuters, 21 July 1999]

-----**MENTAL ILLNESS IN US PRISONS AND JAILS**

In the first comprehensive study of mental illness in US prisons and jails, the US Bureau of Justice Statistics found that over 280,000 inmates are mentally ill, and estimated that an additional 547,000 have been released into the community on probation. Only 60 percent of

inmates in state or federal prisons and 41 percent in jails receive any form of mental health treatment. For more information see http://www.courttv.com/national/1999/0712/inmates_ap.html or for the B'S's press release <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/press/mhttp.pr> ; paper versions of the report can be ordered via email: puborder@ncjrs.org or fax +1 410 792.4358

-----HEALTH CARE IMPROVES IN AZERBAIJAN'S PRISONS

In a statement released on 13 July 1999, the chief of Azerbaijan's Justice Ministry, Niyazi Mammadov, said that prison conditions had improved significantly over the last few years. The number of deaths in custody fell from around 500 in 1996 to 180 in 1998 with appointments for medical care in prisons increasing more than 6 times between 1993 and 1998. In cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross and the World Health Organization, special attention has been paid to fighting tuberculosis in prisons, according to Mammadov. [BBC World Service, 13 July 1999]

-----ICRC NURSE RELEASED IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS

Geraldo Cruz, a 54-year-old New Zealand national working as a nurse with the International Red Cross who had been kidnapped Nalchik in the North Caucasus on 16 May 1999, was released by his captors on 20 July 1999. Cruz appeared to be in good health but was taken to a hospital in Geneva where he had been flown to for medical checks. No details on the circumstances of the release were given (also see AI Bulletin No. 11, 28 May 1999). [Refuters, 20 July 1999]. See http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/europe/newsid_399000/399051.stm

-----TORTURE SUSPECT REMAINS IN DETENTION IN FRANCE

A French court has rejected a plea to release a Mauritanian officer accused of torture, in a case that has sparked a major diplomatic row between France and Mauritania. The officer was arrested on 2 July 1999 after allegations against him from Mauritanian refugees living in France [also see Bulletin No. 14, 9 July 1999]. [BBC World Service, AAP, 22 July 199]

-----INDIA RATIFIES MINE CONVENTION

India on 20 July 1999 ratified amended protocol II [relating to prohibition or restrictions on the use of mines, booby traps and other similar devices] and the additional protocol IV [relating to blinding laser weapons] of the UN Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May be Deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects ("Inhumane Weapons" Convention). The Convention restricts the use of conventional weapons which are particularly cruel and directly affect the civilian population [The Hindu]. The text of the Convention can be found through a search at <http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/>

-----HUMAN RIGHTS IN TOGO

A report by the Benin Human Rights League presents similar findings to those by Amnesty International into atrocities committed against Togolese opposition members after Togo's presidential election in 1998. Following publication of the latest AI report on Togo, AI Secretary General Pierre Sané was prevented from entering Togo on 21 May 1999, and Togolese security forces detained and tortured a Nigerian AI member [also see AI Bulletin No. 12, 11 June 1999]. The Togolese government has accused Amnesty International of lying and has announced that it will institute proceedings against Pierre Sané for propagation of false news. For a statement delivered by Pierre Sané at a press conference in Paris on 20 July, prior to the departure of the French President Jacques Chirac for a 2-day visit to Togo, see <http://www.amnesty.org/news/1999/15702599.htm> ; for an article in the South African paper *Daily Mail and Guardian* see <http://www.mg.co.za/mg/news/99jul2/22jul-togo.html> The AI report *Togo: Rule of Terror* [AI Index: AFR 57/01/99, 5 May 1999] is available at <http://www.amnesty.org/ailib/aipub/1999/AFR/15700199.htm>

-----PRISON GUARDS SUSPENDED OVER DEATH IN CUSTODY

Frank Valdez, on death row in Florida for killing a guard in Palm Beach County prison in 1987, was found dead in his cell at the Florida State Prison in Starke on 17 July 1999. Nine guards have been suspended after a criminal investigation was launched into the death which has been classified as a murder. Prosecutors reportedly said Valdez had broken ribs and boot marks on

his body. For articles on Frank Valdez in the *Miami Herald*, go to <http://www.herald.com/> and search for 'Frank Valdez'.

-----**TORTURE ALLEGATIONS OF US DETAINEES IN ZIMBABWE**

Overruling a Supreme Court decision, President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe has invoked special powers to maintain a strict prison regime for three US citizens detained in Zimbabwe. The Supreme Court had earlier ruled that the defendants, who have been held in solitary confinement, should be allowed free movement inside their cell block, that the electric lights in their cells should be switched off at night, and that visitors were to be allowed to bring food into the prison.

Zimbabwe's Justice Minister, acting as a spokesperson for the president, said that "such an order would result in chaos in the running of prisons" and that the three men continued to be a security risk. The Americans had been arrested on 7 March 1999 and initially faced espionage charges which were then commuted to possession of offensive weapons; all three allege having been tortured following their arrest. See

http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/africa/newsid_401000/401263.stm

-----**PERU WITHDRAWS FROM INTER-AMERICAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS**

On 7 July 1999, Peru's Congress voted to withdraw from the jurisdiction of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Amnesty International expressed serious concern that by refusing to recognize the jurisdiction of the Court as binding, the Government of Peru has effectively denied human rights abuse victims any redress before an international court of law. Peru's president Alberto Fujimori defended the move which followed the Court's decision in June that new trials should be held for four Chileans sentenced to life terms in prison on terrorism charges by "faceless judges" in military courts in the 1990s [*Washington Post*]

-----**MASS GRAVES FOUND IN ALGERIA AND ANGOLA**

According to media reports, mass graves have been found in Algeria and Angola. In Algeria, a former "Islamic militant", who is currently serving a 10-year jail term, has led security forces to three wells some 20 kilometres from the capital Algiers, containing "numerous bodies". In Angola, two mass graves reportedly containing more than 90 bodies have been uncovered in recent days. The bodies reportedly had been burned, riddled with bullets, and appeared to have had their hands tied together with rope. Local authorities blamed Unita rebels for the massacre. See http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/africa/newsid_398000/398693.stm

-----**FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION**

On 12 July 1999, the US Supreme Court of Appeals for the 2nd Circuit ruled that immigration judges had been wrong to decide that there was not enough evidence to grant asylum to a Ghanaian woman fleeing female genital mutilation in her home country. The Court ruled that Ms Abankwah provided convincing evidence that her fear of genital cutting as punishment for having had premarital sex with a boyfriend "is objectively reasonable." Adelaide Abankwah had been detained by the US Immigration and Naturalization Service since she arrived in the US in March 1997, but has now been temporarily released by the INS while her case is reconsidered. See http://news2.thls.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/africa/newsid_394000/394345.stm

For an article recently published by the Earth Times News Service which calls upon African men and women to lead the fight against FGM see

http://www.earthtimes.org/jul/genderissuesafricanmenandjul14_99.htm

-----**GENEVA INITIATIVE ON PSYCHIATRY**

The Geneva Initiative on Psychiatry [GIP], an international foundation for the abolition and prevention of political psychiatry, offers three new sites on the Internet, accessible in English and Russian at <http://www.geneva-initiative.org>. The sites provide information on the GIP itself, the Association of Reformers in Psychiatry, and extracts from the Russian journal *Review of Contemporary Psychiatry*. The GIP can be contacted at P.O. Box 1282, 1200 BG Hilversum, The Netherlands, Tel: +31.35.6838727, Fax: +31.35.6833646, email: gip@euronet.nl

-----**MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES**

World Psychiatric Association: XI World Congress of Psychiatry. Hamburg, Germany. 6-11 August 1999. This 6-yearly congress will include sessions touching on human rights though it will cover all aspects of psychiatry and related policy. For more information see: <http://www.wpa-hamburg.de/guest/>

-----**PUBLICATIONS**

Rejali D. *Electric Torture: A Global History of a Torture Technology.* February 1999. Available on-line at <http://humanities.uchicago.edu/cis/torture/abstracts/dariusrejali.html>

Doyle R. Behind bars in the U.S. and Europe. *Scientific American*, August 1999. In no Western country has the incarceration rate risen more than in the U.S, although the crime rate is about the same. The author attributes the high U.S. rate to a shift in public attitudes towards crime that begun about 30 years ago. See <http://www.sciam.com/1999/0899issue/0899numbers.html>

Human Rights Watch. *Nobody's Children: Jamaican Children in Police Detention and Government Institutions.* July 1999. This report is the result of an investigation conducted by Human Rights Watch in cooperation with Yale Law School. It concludes that in Jamaica, children are often detained for months in filthy and overcrowded police lock-ups, in the same cells as adults accused of serious crimes, and without access to adequate food, medical care, education and basic sanitary facilities. The full report is available at <http://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/jamaica/> ; an accompanying press release can be found at <http://www.hrw.org/press/1999/jul/jam799.htm>

-----**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR POST VACANT: SAN FRANCISCO**

Survivors International (USA) is seeking an Executive Director from September 1999. Applications: Send resumé and cover letter to Search Committee, Survivors International 447 Sutter Street , Suite 811, San Francisco, CA 94108 USA, Tel: +1 415 765.6999, Fax: +1415 765.6995. General information about the programs of SI can be found at: <http://www.survivorsintl.org> ; further information on the post of director can be obtained by writing to email: SurvivorsIntl@msn.com