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## **TOWARDS A WORLD WITHOUT EXECUTIONS**

### **Amnesty International's Annual Report details human rights abuses in 142 countries**

Despite historic steps forward in the struggle against impunity made in 1998, perpetrators of gross human rights abuses continued to escape justice, Amnesty International said today as it released its annual report.

The report details abuses committed by governments and armed opposition groups in 142 countries and territories during 1998, and documents extrajudicial executions in 36 countries; judicial executions in 36 countries; prisoners of conscience in at least 78 countries; cases of torture and ill-treatment in 125 countries and "disappearances" in 37 countries. However, Amnesty International believes that the true figures for all these statistics are much higher.

The organization's report focuses this year on the use of the death penalty in countries such as the United States, China, Saudi Arabia and Sierra Leone and calls for a worldwide ban on executions to mark the year 2000.

"The premeditated killing of defenceless people should not be condoned by any society," said Amnesty International's Secretary General Pierre Sané. "Accepting executions means condemning ourselves to living in a world where murderers set the moral tone and brutality is officially sanctioned."

"Those governments which still cling to the death penalty as a justified response to high crime levels do so in the face of an increasing international momentum towards abolition. Deliberately killing someone violates the most basic of all human rights -- the right to life itself -- and has no place in today's world."

Mr Sané said that abolishing the death penalty worldwide is an ambitious goal, but pointed to the positive developments in international human rights protection as an example of concerted public pressure bringing about change.

"In July 1998 the world community agreed to establish a permanent International Criminal Court -- a historic event which only five years ago seemed impossible," Mr Sané said. "The arrest in October of former Chilean President Augusto Pinochet was another milestone towards an international system of accountability for human rights abuses. Now the struggle for human rights defenders is to ensure that governments follow up these developments with real commitment to bring about lasting improvements."

## REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

### AFRICA

In 1998, the year of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, armed conflicts, social and political unrest continued unabated leading to further appalling human rights abuses in Africa. On the positive aspect, the International Criminal Tribunal for **Rwanda** (ICTR) announced its first judgments in the cases of people accused of involvement in the 1994 genocide. **Zambia** and **South Africa** acceded to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

In areas of conflict, the **Great Lakes Region** continued to be the theatre of widespread human rights abuses. Hundreds of unarmed civilians were deliberately and arbitrarily killed by security forces in the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, in the **Republic of Congo**, in **Rwanda** and in **Burundi**. In **Sierra Leone**, large-scale and gross human rights abuses were committed throughout the year by the rebel forces of the ousted Armed Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and the armed opposition Revolutionary United Front (RUF). The territorial conflict between **Ethiopia** and **Eritrea** continued leading to human rights violations. Dozens of people were tortured and some were deliberately and arbitrarily executed in **Guinea-Bissau** during the conflict following a military revolt in June. In **Angola**, the hope of implementing the 1994 peace agreement between the government and *UNITA*, gave way to an increasing armed confrontation. As a result, hundreds of people died and thousands of others were displaced.

### AMERICAS

Torture, ill-treatment and murder by police and security forces, and armed groups acting with their support and acquiescence, continued to be rife in the Americas region, while those denouncing these and other abuses became victims themselves. Against this bleak reality, the arrest of former General Augusto Pinochet in the United Kingdom last year for human rights violations committed during his military government in **Chile**, was a defining moment in the international struggle against impunity.

Some countries took unprecedented steps to facilitate executions -- effectively cutting off recourse to international bodies for the redress of human rights violations. The Government of the **Bahamas** hanged two people ignoring requests by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to spare their lives, while **Trinidad and Tobago** decided to withdraw as a state party to the American Convention on Human Rights. The **USA** became the only country known to have executed juvenile offenders in 1998.

In October, Amnesty International launched a major campaign highlighting abuses by **USA** police and prison officials; the arbitrary, unfair and racist use of the death penalty; the growing incarceration of asylum seekers; and the USA's double standards regarding foreign policy and international human rights commitments. Despite agreements to hold peace talks in **Colombia**, armed conflict continued to ravage most areas of the country. More than 1,000 civilians were killed by security forces or paramilitary groups operating with their support or acquiescence, and by armed opposition groups. At least 150 people "disappeared" after capture by paramilitary groups. **Ecuador**, under the new government of President Jamil Mahuad Witt, faced a potential human rights crisis, while a prolonged political crisis posed a serious threat to **Paraguay's** fledgling democracy.

### ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Although serious human rights problems persisted across Asia, 1998 also saw some positive developments in the region. Political prisoners, including long-term prisoners of conscience, were released in **South Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia and East Timor**. **China** signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and **Nepal** reinforced its opposition to the death penalty by signing the (second) Optional Protocol to it. Legal and institutional reforms began in Indonesia. In a landmark judgment, five members of **Sri Lanka's** security forces were found guilty of *rape, "disappearance" and murder*.

However, flagrant abuse of security legislation to silence dissidents and political opponents continued across Asia. In **China**, new legal provisions on state security introduced in 1997 were used for the first time in the trials of high profile dissidents who were sentenced in December to prison terms of 11 to 13 years. In **Malaysia**, former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and 16 of his political associates were arrested under the Internal Security Act. In **South Korea**, hundreds of trade unionists were detained following public protests and strikes over widespread job losses.

Minority groups still suffered at the hands of the government or armed political groups -- in **Afghanistan** several thousand civilians were taken prisoner, including suspected Taliban opponents and members of non-Pashtun minorities, particularly Hazaras. In Jammu and Kashmir in northern **India**, dozens of unarmed men, women and children of the Hindu minority were deliberately killed, allegedly by armed opposition groups. In **Myanmar** members of ethnic minorities were routinely seized by the military for forced labour.

## **EUROPE**

Racial and ethnic tensions continued to play a major role in human rights violations in some parts of Europe. In a prelude of events to come, Amnesty International received hundreds of reports of human rights violations against ethnic Albanians in the Kosovo province of the **Federal Republic of Yugoslavia**, including "disappearances" at the hands of security forces. Many of the "disappeared" were deliberately and arbitrarily killed by the police, army or civilians armed by the authorities.

Racially motivated assaults by police officers were reported in countries including **Spain** and **Portugal** throughout the year, while in November, the UN Committee against Torture expressed concern about the number of deaths in police custody in the **United Kingdom** and the lack of effective mechanisms to deal with allegations of abuse, including racist verbal abuse, by police and prison authorities. Reports of ill-treatment continued in **France, Germany** and **Switzerland**, where many of the victims were members of ethnic minorities or asylum seekers.

On the positive side, **Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Estonia and Lithuania**, contributed to the global trend towards the abolition of the death penalty by abolishing this punishment for all crimes, while **Turkmenistan** and **Kyrgyzstan** both instituted moratoria on the death penalty in December.

## **MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA**

In 1998, the year that marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the death penalty continued to be widely used in many countries of the Middle East and North Africa. On the positive side, in **Syria**, hundreds of political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience, were released following presidential amnesties. In **Morocco** and **Kuwait** too scores of political prisoners were released.

In **Algeria** the level of violence remained high throughout the year, but appeared to be lower than in previous year. Thousands of civilians were killed and grave human rights abuses were

committed by security forces, paramilitary militias armed by the state and armed groups.

Executions were carried out in at least 12 countries last year, while several hundreds people were still under sentence of death in at least 16 countries, including: **Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia** and **Yemen**. Torture and ill-treatment of prisoners continued to be widespread in the region, in particular in **Egypt** and **Israel** and the **Occupied Territories**. In **Syria**, hundreds of Palestinians and Jordanians remained 'disappeared' or held incommunicado since their arrest in the 1980s in Lebanon, Syria or at the Syrian border with Jordan. Scores of Lebanese political prisoners, captured or abducted during the civil war in Lebanon between 1975 and 1990, continued to be held in Syria either without charge or after grossly unfair trials.

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**For further information or to arrange an interview, please call the Amnesty International Press Office on +44 171 413 5566/5808/5810.**

**Also available:**

**Further information:** *Annual Report Summaries and Statistics* (AI Index: POL 10/03/99) and *Annual Report Updates* (AI Index: POL 10/05/99)

**Video News Releases and B roll** in English, French, Spanish and Arabic. Available on *Reuters World Alert* on 16 June 1999, or for copies on Beta call + 44 171 413 5977.

**Audio Sound bites:** Amnesty International's Secretary General, Pierre Sané, torture victims, human rights defenders and USA death penalty activists. Available on DAT and audio cassette.

Country entries from the *Annual Report* on [www.amnesty.org/ailib/aireport](http://www.amnesty.org/ailib/aireport) ISDN line.