

EXTERNAL

**AI Index: AMR 51/83/84
October 1994**

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA: @THE ALLEGED ABUSE OF INMATES IN KNOX COUNTY JAIL, TENNESSEE. AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL SEEKS THE OUTCOME OF OFFICIAL INQUIRIES

Amnesty International is seeking to learn the outcome of two inquiries set up in July 1994 in response to a series of disturbing articles in the *Knoxville News-Sentinel*/newspaper about the treatment of inmates in the Knox County Jail in Tennessee.

The newspaper published photographs of two inmates who, in 1993, were handcuffed spread-eagle to bars, with their feet barely touching the ground. They were reportedly left hanging for periods of between one and two hours. This form of restraint is known colloquially as "angel-cuffing." It is extremely painful and can cause permanent muscular and nerve damage to wrists and hands.

Photographs were also published of a restraining chair in use at the jail. Two inmates were shown strapped into the chair wearing a helmet with the visor blacked out and bearing the label "Be Sweet." Inmates alleged the helmet was dirty inside where other inmates had vomited while wearing it. Jailers would strike the helmet with fists, flashlights and other objects. Some inmates reportedly screamed, vomited, begged to be let out, urinated and defecated while strapped in the chair. It is also alleged some inmates were beaten while restrained in the chair.

Both the Knox County Sheriff's Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation initiated inquiries into the alleged abuse in July 1994, and Amnesty International is seeking to learn the outcome of their investigations.

The organization is concerned that the alleged abuse of jail inmates in Knox County Jail, Tennessee, if confirmed, constituted cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, very possibly amounting to torture, in violation of international standards. If, as has been suggested, the jail was following an unofficial policy of abusing inmates with restraints as punishment and in order to deter bad behaviour, this is also in clear violation of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners and US Correctional Standards, as well as other international human rights standards.