

AI Index: NWS 11/30/93
Distr: SC/PO

No. of words:

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TO: PRESS OFFICERS

FROM: PRESS AND PUBLICATIONS

DATE: 2 APRIL 1993

WEEKLY UPDATE SERVICE 30/93

Contained in this weekly update is an external item on a statement released by Amnesty International at the Bangkok Conference.

NEWS INITIATIVES

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Chad - 21 April

Please Note

The document to go with this campaign has been sent out to sections dated February. Please inform your section campaign coordinators and anyone else who may receive it that it is EMBARGOED FOR 21 APRIL.

Chad Campaign, document, news release, Q&A and ENR. The news release should be with you by 2 April, the Q&A shortly afterward.

Bangladesh - 28 April

Document on serious human rights violations in Bangladesh, accompanied either by a news release or an embargoed weekly update item.

Tadzhikistan - 5 May

Publication and news release on killings in the context of civil war - with striking similarities to Bosnia-Herzegovina.

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

Morocco - 14 April

Document and weekly update item - the IS will be sending this only to selected media (largely Arabic speaking).

China - 16 April

Document and embargoed weekly update item on torture, timed to coincide with China reporting to the UN Committee Against Torture (CAT). China is scheduled to appear on 23 April - media are entitled to attend and we will be encouraging contacts to do so.

Brazil - 7 May

Please note new embargo date. Document on prison massacre, including new forensic information. Weekly update item to go with it. Sections are also being asked to carry out campaign work in connection with this document.

Unconfirmed news initiatives

News releases or embargoed weekly update items are being considered on the following subjects:

Malawi (May)

Indigenous people (to go with May Focus article)

Guatemala (May)

Egypt (late May)

World Conference (early June)

Nagorno-Karabakh (to go with possible action, May)

Aceh, Indonesia (July)

Section Initiatives

French Section - European Press Officers' Meeting

The second European Press Officers' meeting will take place in Paris this year. The date of this meeting is now fixed for 15 and 16 May as the majority of you asked for. It will be focused on two themes: Audiovisual work (production and TV experiences) and how to improve it; and the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna.

European World Conference Press Briefing in June

The British Section Press Office has been talking to the EC project office and the Francophone Belgium Press Officer about holding a European press briefing in Brussels for MEPs and for journalists who will be covering the World Conference. The date will probably be Tuesday, June 8th in the morning. The aim will be to look at the EC's role as a whole in terms of its internal shortcomings (Asylum issues, etc), external policies - aid/development, etc, and also to look at Europe's role within the UN.

Although the idea has been suggested by the British Section, it is hoped that all European Section Press Officers will be interested in being involved. For further information please contact either Daphne Davies, in the British Section Press Office or Johannes in the EC project office.

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2. IOR41/WU 03/93 EXTERNAL

2 April 1993

This statement was released in Bangkok late last night (1 April)

ASIAN GOVERNMENTS DEFENSIVE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

.....FINAL DECLARATION OF BANGKOK REGIONAL MEETING RISKS BEING STEP BACKWARDS

"Some governments of the Asia Region are adopting a defensive and restrictive position on international human rights protection," Amnesty International said today as the Bangkok Regional Meeting draws to a close.

"They appear far more concerned about protecting themselves against so-called outside interference in their internal affairs, directing criticism against the UN system for an over-emphasis on civil and political rights and complaining about politicization, selectivity and manipulation in the field of human rights." These themes have been repeated in several statements made by government participating in the Regional Meeting for Asia in preparation for the UN World Conference on Human Rights to be held in Vienna in June this year.

Some governments have been more positive and constructive - underlining the importance of ratification of international human rights treaties, of co-operation with the UN investigative and monitoring bodies and calling for a regional human rights mechanism to be established. However, these views have hardly been reflected in the first working draft of a Declaration which is currently under discussion in a closed drafting group. The Final Declaration is due to be adopted on Friday afternoon at the closing session of the meeting. It will be one of the documents to be taken into account when the final document of the World Conference itself is prepared.

Amnesty International is concerned that the Declaration will have a negative and restrictive tone and will represent a step backwards for human rights protection. If the defensive views prevail, it is unlikely to include any strong commitment to the fundamental principle of the universality of human rights nor reaffirm that human rights are indivisible and interdependent and must be promoted concurrently without giving undue emphasis to any one set of rights. It appears that the governments may refuse to make any pledge to ratify international human rights treaties - yet the record of adherence to these treaties in the Asia region is very poor. More than half of the countries in this region have not ratified either of the two most basic human rights instruments - the International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and on Civil and Political Rights. Only nine countries in the entire region have ratified the convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

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Amnesty International is also concerned that the Declaration may actually undermine fundamental human rights concepts by, for example, stressing that priority should be given to regional, historical, cultural or religious specificities in the implementation of human rights instead of a strong commitment to apply the basic minimum internationally- accepted standards, which may then be enhanced by regional diversity and different traditions. Giving priority to regional particularities means that governments could decide that some basic human rights are not applicable to their citizens and need not be fully implemented in some countries. In addition, far from strengthening international mechanisms for the protection of human rights, such as those of the UN, these governments seem inclined to limit and narrow these activities.

NGOs, too, have been criticized and their crucial role in human rights protection risks being further restricted. In fact, the NGO contribution to this regional meeting has been one of its most positive aspects. NGOs have attempted to establish a real dialogue with government delegates on issues of mutual interest and concern. The Bangkok NGO Declaration presented to the meeting makes a wide range of specific, constructive and forward-looking recommendations that, if adopted, would mark real advances for human rights. It is in sharp contrast to the working draft that the governments are currently considering.

The attitude of many of the Asian governments is deeply disappointing, especially when compared with that of the governments of Latin America and the Caribbean and of Africa. The declarations already adopted at their regional meetings set some clear directions for strengthening human rights protection. While they stressed the need for greater international attention to development and to economic, social and cultural rights, these regions also expressed concrete commitments in support of international human rights standards and for ways of reinforcing the implementation of these in practice. For example, the Latin American governments supported further study of the establishment within the UN of a Commissioner for Human Rights and the African Regional Meeting emphasized the crucial role of human rights in the administration of justice and the need for strong independent judicial institutions.

As the Asian governments conclude their meeting, Amnesty International appeals to them to adopt a strong Declaration reaffirming and not weakening existing human rights principles and committing themselves to specific forward-looking measures, including the ratification of international human rights standards, to improve the protection of human rights in this region.

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