

GOVERNMENTS PLAYING POLITICS WITH PEOPLE'S LIVES

Amnesty International's annual report
details abuses in 161 countries

"Governments continue to put politics before people's lives," Amnesty International said today as it released its 1993 annual report in the wake of the first United Nations World Conference on human rights for 25 years.

The World Conference has restated the human rights principles of the past, instead of dealing with the violations of today and the threats of the future," said Amnesty International.

The real yardstick of the World Conference will be action, not words. What are governments now going to do to stop the torture, the "disappearances" and the killings?

When we compare the fine speeches and final document with the damning evidence of political repression in this report it is clear that governments have yet to prove that the World Conference will make a difference to the lives of people around the world."

The Amnesty International 1993 annual report reveals that during 1992 prisoners of conscience were held in at least 62 countries; over 110 governments used torture in their prisons or police stations; and political killings were used by the state in 45 countries to exterminate opponents and "troublemakers".

In Africa, despite continuing moves towards multi-party democracy, human rights violations persisted on an appalling scale with thousands of defenceless men, women and children brutally killed by government forces.

Angola, Chad, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Zaire were among 14 countries where unarmed civilians were killed outright by soldiers or "disappeared" in their custody. In Somalia a complete breakdown of any semblance of national government allowed atrocities on a massive scale by various political groups. In South Africa, 1992 saw the continuance of a pattern of covert involvement by the security forces in the many politically motivated killings in the country.

Not only governments were responsible for human rights abuses - in several countries, including Angola and Sudan, opposition groups also committed deliberate and arbitrary killings and torture.

1992 was an appalling year for human rights in Europe. The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina led to horrific abuses. All sides in the conflict were responsible, but the majority of victims were Muslims and the main perpetrators were local Serbian armed forces. Armed conflict also led to human rights violations in little publicized wars in Azerbaydzhan, Tadjikistan and other parts of the former Soviet Union.

"In numerous other European countries, human rights saw setbacks rather than improvements," said Amnesty International. There was an increase in reports of ill-treatment at the hands of the police and security forces - in some cases racially-motivated - in countries including Bulgaria, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Romania and Spain. In Turkey, torture continued to be a very serious problem and the year also saw an upsurge in killings by the security forces in the mainly Kurdish southeast. Among Amnesty International's concerns in the United Kingdom was the revelation of evidence of collusion between Loyalist paramilitary groups and security forces in Northern Ireland.

Human rights abuses were also committed by armed political groups in some countries in the region, including Turkey, Spain and the United Kingdom.

Amnesty International had serious concerns about refugee protection in many countries in Europe, exacerbated by agreements affecting asylum-seekers adopted by the European Community in 1992.

In Asia there was little sign of any improvement in human rights, with widespread political killings, "disappearances", torture, detention of prisoners of conscience, unfair trials and use of the death penalty.

In countries such as Myanmar, the Philippines, Indonesia and East Timor and Sri Lanka, political killings were part of an enduring pattern of repression. In Cambodia high hopes for a UN-brokered peace settlement faltered as politically-motivated killings escalated in the run-up to elections. In India too, hundreds of political activists were extrajudicially executed and scores more "disappeared" in conflict zones. Throughout India, torture was rife. In China, hundreds of prisoners of conscience were held and at least 1,000 people executed: the true figure is probably higher but will never be known.

In at least eight Asian countries, particularly India and Sri Lanka, human rights abuses were committed by armed opposition groups as well as governments.

Serious human rights violations, including systematic torture, were committed by government agents throughout the Middle East during 1992. Thousands of people were detained without charge or trial in virtually every country in the region during the year, many of them held under state of emergency laws. The death penalty was widely used, particularly in Iran, where at least 330 people - including dozens of political prisoners - were executed. Hundreds of detainees "disappeared" in Iraq and killings of Shi'a Muslims in the southern marshes region claimed an unknown number of lives. New information emerged about some 100,000 Kurds, most of whom had "disappeared" from custody since 1988. At least 120 Palestinians were shot dead by Israeli forces and in December, 415 Palestinians were deported to south Lebanon after an Israeli policeman was taken hostage and killed by the Islamic Resistance Movement, *Hamas*.

Both government forces and armed opposition groups were also responsible for grave abuses in other countries, including Algeria and Egypt.

Many governments in the Americas still failed to make any serious attempt to bring those responsible for violations to justice, and government agents continued to commit crimes with impunity during 1992. Gross human rights violations, including political killings and "disappearances", continued and torture and ill-treatment by police and military personnel was endemic.

Thousands of people were killed by armed forces, paramilitary groups or semi-official "death squads" in Colombia, Peru, Brazil and Guatemala. In Haiti, at least 100 people were killed in circumstances suggesting they had been extrajudicially executed: thousands of Haitian asylum-seekers were forcibly returned to Haiti by the USA without a hearing. Thirty-one people were executed in the USA during the year - the highest number since executions were resumed in 1977. Indigenous peoples continued to be the target of human rights violations, including killings, in a number of countries in the region, including Brazil, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru and Colombia.

Armed opposition groups were also responsible for serious abuses, notably in Colombia and Peru, where the population found itself "caught between two fires".

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