

0600 hrs gmt Wednesday 20 October 1993

Distr-SC/PO

@GETTING AWAY WITH MURDER: THE LIVES BEHIND THE LIES

Political killings and "disappearances" worldwide now pose the greatest threat to human rights in the 1990s -- and the international community is failing to stop them, Amnesty International said today as it launched a major campaign to end the bloodshed and terror.

"Hopes that human rights would be respected in the much-heralded 'new world order' have been shot down," said the organization. "Instead, old regimes, newly-formed governments and armed opposition groups are turning their streets into killing grounds or causing their opponents to vanish without trace."

While military dictatorships and authoritarian regimes were once the main culprits, increasingly governments supposedly committed to human rights are gunning down or abducting their opponents as part of deliberate policies of repression.

"The power of the state is increasingly being turned to cold-blooded murder, its officials trained in the skills of the assassin and the kidnapper," said Amnesty International. "These acts -- sometimes secret, but often brazen killings and kidnappings with no pretence at legality -- fly in the face of international standards and are outlawed even in war."

And the 1990s have seen horrific levels of this killing and cruelty in countries struggling to achieve political reform, such as South Africa or Cambodia, in ethnic or nationalist conflicts such as in former Yugoslavia and in countries facing massive unrest such as Somalia and Zaire.

But there can be change -- international pressure led to the release of over 300 "disappeared" people in Morocco in 1991 after up to 18 years, for example, although many people remain unaccounted for in that country.

Yet too often the international community turns a blind eye to these violations. And governments guilty of mass killings and "disappearances" are repeatedly supported or shielded from criticism by powerful allies more interested in protecting strategic or economic interests than human rights.

In the 1980s, for example, the governments of France and the United States, among others, armed, trained and financed the Chadian security forces while those same forces systematically butchered thousands of defenceless civilians.

Amnesty International's report *Getting Away With Murder: political killings and "disappearances" in the 1990s* says that people from all walks of life and all regions of the world -- including young children and even babies -- have been deliberately targeted for "disappearance" or death by governments and armed opposition groups.

Governments such as those of Iraq and Myanmar make no attempt to hide their brutality. Others, for example India or Turkey, pay lip-service to human rights on the one hand but kill on the other, relying on cover-ups or blatant lies, or -- as in Colombia and the Philippines -- covert operations involving "death squads" or armed paramilitary groups.

From Peru and Togo to Sri Lanka and Tadjikistan, governments allow security forces to violate human rights with impunity.

Armed political groups such as the Communist Party of Peru (Shining Path), the Kurdish Workers' Party in Turkey and the Sudan People's Liberation Army have committed gross atrocities and claimed thousands of lives. In India, hundreds have been the victims of such killings.

And rising armed opposition in countries such as Egypt and Algeria has in turn coincided with dramatic increases in killings by government forces.

"Bringing an end to political killings and "disappearances" demands concerted and effective international action, but the member governments of the United Nations remain painfully inconsistent and selective in their response to human rights crises," said Amnesty International.

The organization is stepping up its call on the UN to appoint a High Commissioner for Human Rights with the authority to take urgent action, for increased resources to the UN's human rights program and for the establishment of an impartial, independent international court.

Amnesty International is also calling on all governments to implement its 14-point programs for preventing "disappearances" and political killings.

"The world must wake up to the continuing mass slaughter," said the organization. "Unless both individual governments and the international community take action soon to end political killings and "disappearances", the rising tide of carnage could overwhelm the institutions set up to protect international human rights after the horrors of the Second World War." /ends