
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL NETWORK

Human rights information and web links for health professionals

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-----RECENT AI STATEMENTS & REPORTS

Socialist Republic of Viet Nam: A step forward for human rights? [AI Index: ASA 14/10/98, 7 January 1999]. The report provides details on the prisoners of conscience [among them Dr Nguyen Dan Que] who were released under two recent amnesties, and on selected prisoners of conscience and possible prisoners of conscience who are still imprisoned. It also includes recommendations to the Vietnamese authorities which Amnesty International believes would, if implemented, ensure lasting improvements in the human rights situation in Viet Nam. For the news service, see <http://www.amnesty.org/news/1999/34100199.htm> ; the full report is accessible via AI Sweden's website <http://www2.amnesty.se/>

-----DEATH PENALTY NEWS

Just three hours before he was scheduled to be executed by lethal injection, the Philippine Supreme Court on 4 January 1999 granted Leo Echegaray a stay of execution until 15 June 1999 by issuing a temporary restraining order in order to allow further debate on the law that restored capital punishment in the country. Echegaray had been sentenced to death for raping his then eleven-year old stepdaughter in 1994. The ruling led to celebrations among human rights activists who had been campaigning for Leo Echegaray, but also to very angry reactions. President Estrada said he was "very much dismayed by the decision" and would veto any amendment to the death penalty law. The Philippine government said it would ask the Supreme Court to reverse its order and that it was preparing a motion of reconsideration. Philippines state lawyers also said the Court had exceeded its authority, and demonstrators in Manila pressed for early execution of Echegaray. [Reuters and AFP, 4-8 January 1999]

See <http://www.amnesty.org/news/199/33500299.htm>

For more background information, also see

http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/asia-pacific/newsid_248000/248007.stm

or <http://www.cnn.com/cnn/WORLD/asiapcf/9901/04/philippines.execution.01/>

In his traditional "Urbi et Orbi" [to the city and the world] address, Pope John Paul II on 25 December 1998 called for an end to the death penalty, genocide and weapons production. The address was considered one of the pope's most unequivocal and unqualified calls ever for an end to the death penalty, just a month before he is due to travel to the United States. See <http://cnn.com/WORLD/europe/9812/25/pope.christmas/01>

A Pakistani military tribunal in Karachi has set aside the death sentence handed down by a summary summary military court to a 13-year-old boy charged with murdering three policemen, court officials said on 7 January. Mohammad Saleem was among four people condemned to death on December 19 for killing three policemen in Karachi last year. In his appeal, Saleem has now been acquitted and his release has been ordered. Pakistan is one of six countries [Pakistan, Iran, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and the United States of America] known to have executed juvenile offenders in the 1990s in breach of international law. [AFP, 7 January 1999]. Also see http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/south_asia/newsid_250000/250635.stm

Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus on 29 December 1998 signed a decree authorizing the Lithuanian ambassador to the Council of Europe to sign the sixth protocol of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms on the abolition of the death penalty. The decision follows a ruling by the Lithuanian Constitutional Court that the death penalty contradicted the constitution and a vote in the Parliament [Seimas] approving amendments to the country's criminal code. The ambassador is expected to sign the protocol in early 1999, but it will take effect in Lithuania only after it has been ratified by the Seimas [Reuters/AFP, 30 December 1998].

-----MYANMAR REOPENS MEDICAL INSTITUTES

A statement by the defence ministry's Office of Strategic Studies, which acts as a spokesman for the ruling State Peace and Development Council in Myanmar, said on 5 January 1999 it had reopened four medical institutes that had been closed down in December 1996 amid anti-government demonstrations by thousands of students. Political analysts in Yangon believe the reopening of the institutes could be an experiment to test the atmosphere for reopening other institutes of higher learning. [Reuters, 5 January 1999]

-----JAMAICA ABOLISHES FLOGGING.....

The Jamaica Court of Appeal issued a ruling on 18 December 1998 abolishing flogging as part of the country's penal system. Flogging had been used as a punishment in Jamaica since the days of slavery, and corporal punishment was revived four years ago when a defendant was sentenced to four years imprisonment at hard labour and six strokes of the tamarind switch for causing grievous bodily harm. [Reuters, 18 December 1998]

-----.....BUT KUWAIT MIGHT INTRODUCE IT!

A group of MPs in Kuwait has proposed a 280-article bill that would provide for the introduction of flogging, amputation and stoning in Kuwait. Adultery, rape, sodomy, drinking alcohol and defamation would be punished with lashes. Thieves could have their right hand amputated, whereas abortion and converting from Islam would be punishable by death. The draft bill follows a concerted campaign by Islamist MPs aimed at "cleanin[ing] up" Kuwait. [AFP, 6 January 1999]

-----JORDANIAN DOCTORS TO VISIT PRISONERS IN ISRAELI JAILS

According to a report in the Jordanian newspaper Jordan Times, the Jordan Medical Association [JMA] in principle accepted on 26 December 1998 to send physicians on a "purely humanitarian mission" to examine 14 Jordanian prisoners held in Israeli jails. The JMA, a stronghold of anti-normalization with Israel, had formerly threatened to expel any of its members who visits Israel or is involved in deals with the Jewish state. [BBC World Service, 27 December 1998]

-----FORCED STERILISATIONS IN PERU

According to a report by the Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defence of Women's Rights [CLADEM], up to 250,000 women have undergone forced sterilisation in Peru in the last three years. The group alleges that doctors in poor areas of the country have been put under pressure to achieve sterilisation quotas issued by Peru's Ministry of Health, and that women have been sterilised without their knowledge and consent or after threats made against their families. See http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/americas/newsid_239000/239406.stm and for further info http://www.oneworld.org/ips2/june98/04_24_013.htm

-----GENDER IMBALANCE IN CHINA ON THE INCREASE

According to the Qilu Evening Post, the eastern Chinese province of Shandong has become the latest in a series of provinces to outlaw ultrasound scanning to determine the sex of a foetus as of 1 January 1999 amidst reports that the tests have frequently led to abortions, sometimes as late as in the fifth and sixth months of pregnancy. According to research by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, the male-female ratio has now hit 120-100 in China [compared to a "natural rate" of about 106-100]. Doctors and health care institutions have been reported to take advantage of additional fees for ultrasound examinations. [AFP, 28 December 1998]. Also see http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/asia-pacific/newsid_250000/250557.stm

-----NEWS FROM KOSOVO

Investigation into alleged mass grave: A team from the Kosovo Verification Mission set up by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe opened an investigation on 5 January 1999 into allegations that a mass grave containing the bodies of 11 women and children has been found in the Serbian province of Kosovo. A spokesman said the action was very much still part of an initial assessment phase of what is in effect a scene of a crime. [Reuters, 5 January]

PHR accuses Serbs of targeting Albanian doctors: In a letter to Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosovic, Physicians for Human Rights on 23 December 1998 accused Serbian forces of systematically killing, torturing and abusing Albanian doctors and their patients in Kosovo. A spokesperson for PHR said that after interviewing more than 100 medical colleagues in Kosovo

from October to December 1998, the organization felt "the pattern of abuse has to be one at least countenanced and probably directed at the highest levels in Belgrade". [Reuters, 23 December]. See <http://www.phrusa.org/research/kosovo4.html>

-----ALLEGED TORTURER ON TRIAL IN EDINBURGH [UK]

In the week beginning 11 January 1999, the first trial for torture to be heard in the UK will commence at the High Court in Edinburgh. The defendant, a Sudanese national, is charged with committing torture in Sudan while acting as a public official. This will be the first case where the UK is implementing its obligations as a party to the UN Convention Against Torture. For more information contact Fiona McKay at REDRESS, <mailto:redresstrust@gn.apc.org>, tel: +44.171.278.9502, fax: +44.171.278.9410

-----PUBLICATIONS

Punishment and Society: The International Journal of Penology. This new journal providing a forum for research and scholarship dealing with punishment, penal institutions and penal control will be edited by David Garland at New York University and Andrew Coyle at Kings College London together with several other co-editors. The first issue will be published in July 1999. For subscription details <mailto:subscription@sagepub.co.uk> or contact SAGE Publications, 6 Bonhill Street, London, EC2A 4PU, Tel: +44.171.374.0645, Fax: +44.171.374.8741

Berk JH. Trauma and resilience during war: a look at the children and humanitarian aid workers of Bosnia. *Psychoanalytical Review* 1998 Aug;85(4):640-58. [Abstract available via PubMed (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/PubMed/>) or your normal Medline point.]

Orsillo SM, Roemer L, Litz BT, Ehlich P, Friedman MJ. Psychiatric symptomatology associated with contemporary peacekeeping: an examination of post-mission functioning among peacekeepers in Somalia. *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 1998 Oct;11(4):611-25. The study examines the types of stressors encountered by peacekeepers in Somalia, their current psychiatric functioning as measured by the Brief Symptom Inventory, and the relationship between exposure to various stressors and adjustment. [Abstract available via PubMed (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/PubMed/>) or your normal Medline point.]

McCall M, Salama P. Selection, training, and support of relief workers: an occupational health issue. *British Medical Journal* 1999;318:113-116 [9 January]. The article examines stress related illness as a result of relief work in complex humanitarian emergencies. In a survey and interviews with 12 of the leading humanitarian relief organisations based in Europe and the USA, the authors found that the lack of preparation for traumatic conditions and counselling not only harms the workers, but also the populations they seek to serve. See <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/318/7176/113>

Call for papers: Human Rights Review. New quarterly journal on human rights to be published by Transaction Publishers commencing in the fall of 1999 that will seek a new level of integration of social-scientific information, theory, history, and critical perspectives in the study of human rights. Founding editor is Thomas Cushman of the Department of Sociology at Wellesley College. For more information contact T Cushman on Tel: +1.781.283-2142, Fax: +1.781.283-3664.

-----CONFERENCES

First African Trauma Conference: Traumatic Stress in South Africa - Working Towards Solutions [see Bulletin no. 16, 2 October 1998]. Due to the large numbers of replies received by the organizers after their first call for papers, it has now been decided to have a two-part conference. The first part of the meeting will still take place as scheduled on 27-29 January 1999. Part two will be in late 1999. For more details see <http://www.wits.ac.za/csvr> or <mailto:csvrtrau@wn.apc.org> [Tel: +27.11.403.5102, Fax: +27.11.403.7532]

International Congress of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology & Annual Conference of the Indian Academy of Forensic Medicine. 6-8 February 1999, New Delhi, India. For further information <mailto:rksharmal@hotmail.com> [Dr R.K. Sharma, Organizing Secretary] or mailto:dr_anil@hotmail.com

Symposium on psycho-social effects of complex emergencies. 18-19 March 1999, Washington, USA. The symposium is being co-organized by Relief International, the American Red Cross, Tulane University, Columbia University, and the Congressional Hunger Center. For more information, <mailto:lsnider@mailhost.tcs.tulane.edu> [Dr Leslie Snider] or <mailto:sh@intr.net> [Steve Hansch, Congressional Hunger Center]. After 20 January 1999, information is available from <mailto:mwf15@columbia.edu> [Dr Martina Frank, Columbia University]

The Hague Appeal for Peace. 11-15 May 1999, The Hague, The Netherlands. The Hague Appeal for Peace is a campaign and conference to delegitimize armed conflict and create a culture of peace for the 21st Century. For more information see <http://www.haguepeace.org> or contact The Hague Appeal for Peace at <mailto:hap99@igc.org> [New York, Fax: +1.212.599.1332], <mailto:ialana@antenna.nl> [The Hague, Fax: +31.70.345.5951] or <mailto:mailbox@ipb.org> [Geneva, Fax: +41.22.738.9419]

VIII International Symposium on Torture: Torture as a Challenge to the Health, Legal and other Professions. 22-25 September 1999, New Delhi, India. Organized by the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims and the National Human Rights Commission of India in collaboration with the Indian Law Institute and the Indian Medical Association. For more details see <http://www.irct.org/conferen.htm> or <mailto:irct@irct.org> [Symposium Secretariat, IRCT, Tel: 45.33.76.06.00, Fax: +45.33.76.05.00]

-----JOB VACANCY AT MEDECINS SANS FRONTIERES

MSF is recruiting an international campaigner based in Paris or Geneva to launch, plan and implement a long term campaign on the need for accessible and appropriate medicines for tropical diseases. Skills required include fluency in English and a minimum of three-year experience as campaigner for an international organization. For further details <mailto:office@london.msf.org> or call +44.171.713.5600, fax +44.171.713.5004

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