
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL NETWORK

Human rights information and web links for health professionals

AI Bulletin no. 7, 1 April 1999

AI Index: ACT 84/007/99

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This Bulletin is sent out on a Thursday due to the Easter Break in the United Kingdom starting on Good Friday.

-----RECENT AI STATEMENTS & REPORTS

Republic of Congo: An Old Generation of Leaders in New Carnage [AI Index AFR 22/01/99, 25 March 1999]. In this new report, Amnesty International accuses the government and armed opposition forces in the Republic of Congo of conducting a deliberate campaign of killing, wounding and 'disappearing' or abducting unarmed civilians in particular since 1993. Most of the victims of abuses were unarmed civilians targeted on the basis of their political or ethnic affiliation.

The report is available at <http://www.amnesty.org/ailib/aipub/1999/AFR/12200199.htm>

Indonesia: An Audit of Human Rights Reform [AI Index: ASA 21/12/99, March 1999].

In this report, Amnesty International welcomes the measures taken by the government under President BJ Habibie since May 1998, but says there remain questions about the government's commitment to human rights reform. The report is available at

<http://www.amnesty.org/ailib/aipub/1999/ASA/32101299.htm>

A recent report on East Timor [East Timor: Safeguarding the Future, AI Index: ASA 21/15/99, 9 March 1999] can be found at <http://www.amnesty.org/ailib/aipub/1999/ASA/32101599.htm>

Japan: Detention Practices Stifle Dissent [AI Index: ASA 22/04/99, 23 March 1999]

Following the prolonged detention in police cells of three Greenpeace activists who were arrested on 18 March 1999, Amnesty International accused Japan of misusing detention procedures to silence rights activists. The organization expressed concern that the Japanese authorities are embarking on an "overzealous campaign of intimidation of peaceful activists".

See <http://www.amnesty.org/news/1999/32200499.htm>

-----KOSOVO

NATO on 30 March 1999 rejected an offer by President Milosovic who, after talks with the Russian Premier Yevgeny Primakov, said he would withdraw some forces from Kosovo if NATO halted its air strikes on Yugoslavia. The US accused President Milosovic of ethnic cleansing and genocide. Hundreds of thousands of Albanian refugees from Kosovo have fled into Albania, Montenegro and Macedonia over the last few days. The International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC] and Medecins Sans Frontieres [MSF] withdrew their last teams from Kosovo earlier this week due to the deteriorating security situation in Pristina, and the humanitarian situation is worsening fast. Amnesty International documents on the conflict in Kosovo can be found at <http://www.amnesty.org/ailib/intcam/kosovo/index.html> ; for BBC reports see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/europe/> and click on relevant stories.

A Washington Post article on the situation of medical doctors in Kosovo can be found at

<http://search.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/WPlate/1999-03/29/130I-032999-idx.html>

An article on the situation faced by the refugees is at

<http://search.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/WPlate/1999-03/30/131I-033099-idx.html>

-----UN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE MEETING

The 55th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights was opened by High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson on 22 March 1999. In her opening statement, Ms Robinson called for "greater emphasis on protection and prevention". AI Secretary General Pierre Sane accused member states of the Commission of hampering its effectiveness and credibility by putting powerful political and economic interests above their obligation to protect and promote human rights. The session of the Committee will end on 30 April. For an AI news service [1999

UN Commission on Human Rights: Politics Versus Human Rights, AI Index IOR 41/03/99, March 1999], see <http://www.amnesty.org/news/1999/14100399.htm> .
More information on the meeting is at <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/2/55chr/55main.htm>

In what was interpreted as an implicit criticism of the United States' use of capital punishment, the European Union said on 23 March it would submit a resolution against the death penalty to the UN Human Rights Committee. A vote on this resolution is expected in late April. [AFR, 23 March 1999]

In a report made public on 30 March 1999, UN special rapporteur on violence against women, Radhika Coomaraswamy, criticised the large-scale shackling of female prisoners in US jails and denounced widespread sexual abuse of female inmates by male prison guards. The report, which was handed over to the Human Rights Commission in Geneva, said such practices were in breach of US law. [AFR, 30 March 1999]. For Amnesty International's report on human rights abuses against female detainees in the USA, see <http://www.amnesty-usa.org/rightsforall/women/index.html>

A report by the UN Secretary General on the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture is available at <http://www.unhchr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/TestFrame/c7cf5b27456a10f08025673c0058c142?Opendocument>

-----DEATH PENALTY NEWS

USA: 15 months after the reinstatement of the death penalty in Massachusetts was blocked by just one representative, the Massachusetts House on Representatives on 3 March 1999 defeated another bid to reinstate capital punishment. By an 80-73 tally, the House accepted the state's Criminal Justice Committee's vote last week to reject death-penalty legislation that Governor Paul Cellucci had made a top priority. Demonstrators outside the House called for reinstatement of capital punishment. See http://www.boston.com/dailyglobe2/089/metro/Mass__House_rejects_death_penalty_again+.shtml

USA: Robert Excell White, who had been on death row in Texas since 26 August 1974, was executed by lethal injection on 30 March 1999. White was sentenced to death for murdering a shopkeeper in 1974 and had his sentence confirmed in a retrial in 1987. He was the ninth person put to death in Texas this year and the oldest person to be put to death in the state since Texas resumed capital punishment in 1982. 452 inmates are currently awaiting execution in Texas, including Walter Bell who was sentenced to death 23 years ago. [Reuters, 31 March 1999]

Viet Nam: A senior Vietnamese government official said on 26 March 1999 that Viet Nam plans to cut the number of crimes which carry the death penalty by a third, with the focus on white-collar offences. Viet Nam gives no clear definition of white-collar crimes, but they are generally believed to include embezzlement and corruption. At the moment, 44 crimes are punishable by death in Viet Nam, and executions are carried out by firing squad. In 1995, the last year for which statistics are available, Viet Nam executed some 100 people. [Reuters, 26 March 1999]

-----HOUSE OF LORDS RULING ON PINOCHET

The UK House of Lords ruled in a 6-1 vote on 24 March 1999 that ex-General Augusto Pinochet did not enjoy immunity from extradition, but said he could only be pursued in court for crimes committed during the last two years of his dictatorship between 1988 and 1990 as Britain only signed the UN Torture Convention in 1988. Augusto Pinochet remains on bail while the UK Home Secretary decides whether to issue a new order allowing the Magistrate's court to consider the request to extradite Pinochet to Spain. [Reuters]
For Amnesty International documents and statements on the Pinochet case, see <http://www.amnesty.org/ailib/intcam/pinochet/index.html>

-----MENTAL ILLNESS MISSED IN UK COURTS

A study published in the Lancet on 27 March 1999 suggests that people suffering serious psychiatric disorders are passing through the UK court system unnoticed. The research was

carried out in a court serving inner-city Manchester in north England and concluded that just 14 out of 96 people who were later found to have mental disorders were identified as mentally ill by court staff. [Lancet 1999: 353:1053-1056]. The full article is available online only to subscribers; also see http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/health/newsid_304000/304067.stm

-----UK PRISON HEALTHCARE BREACHING EUROPEAN STANDARDS

A report by the Joint Prison Service / NHS Executive Working Group has found that the standard of health care provided in British jails breached rules laid down by the Council of Europe. The report criticised the lack of a consistent approach to healthcare in UK prisons and said there was particularly poor provision of services for the mentally ill. The government has backed the report and said it was working to improve the relationship between prisons and health services. See http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/health/newsid_306000/306977.stm

-----EGYPT CLEARS ORPHANAGE ACCUSED OF ORGAN TRADE

An Egyptian prosecutor on 25 March 1999 closed an investigation into an orphanage north of Cairo which was accused of trading in children's organs [see Bulletin no. 6, 19 March 1999]. The prosecutor said that in an eight-day investigation he found no crime had been committed. [Reuters, 25 March 1999].

-----INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

On 23 March 1999, Trinidad and Tobago became the latest states to sign the statute of the International Criminal Court. The total number of signatories is now 79. Senegal remains the only state to have ratified the treaty so far [see Bulletin no. 3, 5 February 1999].

-----PUBLICATIONS

Marshall SD. Hostile Elements - A Study of Political Imprisonment in Tibet 1987-1998. Tibet Information Network, London 1999. UK price: £20. The report includes research on maltreatment in detention and deaths in custody. According to TIN, one in 33 Tibetan male political prisoners held in Tibet's main Drapchi prison since 1987 has died of maltreatment including beatings and refusal to feed prisoners.

For more information see <http://www.tibetinfo.net/publications/bbp/Hostile.htm>

Allan R. Peace at all cost - the challenge of Sierra Leone. Lancet 1999; 353:991. The author of this article has managed Medical Emergency Relief International's [MERLIN] emergency medical teams in parts of Sierra Leone since 1996. The article is available on-line [if you are a registered non-subscriber] at

http://www.thelancet.com/newlancet/reg/issues/vol353no9157/news_d991.html

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