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WEEKLY UPDATE SERVICE 07/93

Contained in this weekly update are external items on Malawi and Israel and the Occupied Territories.

Nobel Peace Prize Winners Mission

There is currently discussion about a mission in mid- to late-February by Nobel Peace Prize winners to attempt to go to Myanmar - to protest about the imprisonment of Aung San Suu Kyi. AI, as a Nobel Peace Prize winner, may well be involved. There will be a weekly update item with more details within the next couple of weeks.

NEWS INITIATIVES

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

****Racism and ill-treatment in Europe - 3 February****

Please note that there is a correction to the news release which has been sent out in the Weekly Mailing and was sent to Press Officers by e-mail/telex/fax. The corrected news release was also faxed/ e-mailed/telexed to Press Officers last week. It is to go with the February Focus and campaign action on racist ill-treatment in Europe which has been sent out. The Campaigns Team is producing extra campaign material which should reach sections shortly.

Australia - *1301 hrs gmt 10 February*

Please note that the embargo has been confirmed for 1301 hrs gmt, Wednesday 10 February for the news release and document on Aboriginal deaths and ill-treatment in custody.

Japan - *EMBARGO DELAYED*

Please note that the embargo on this document and news release may well be changed to a later date. The Japanese Section have requested the change to allow them to translate the document in time for a press briefing they will hold in Tokyo. The document is on refugee issues and we anticipate a high level of media interest in this news release.

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

Sri Lanka - 12 February

A Weekly Update and document about the Sri Lankan government's implementation of AI's recommendations, to coincide with the Human Rights Commission in Geneva. The Research Dept feel that it would be very helpful if high profile newspapers in Europe ran pieces on it -

probably more feature based than news. The IS Press Office plans to send it to selected media. The document will be sent out in the Weekly Mailing of 3 February.

Section Initiatives

French Section - International Diary

The French Section is producing a diary which will be sold in bookshops and through their catalogue. They would appreciate it if each section sent one black and white negative or slide representing an interesting image for human rights - in order to have a really international diary. They need about 53 photographs. Please send your contribution to Dominique Dupont-Viau, Publications and Trade Officer at the Paris Section Office.

2. MDE 15/WU 01/93 EXTERNAL
29 January 1993

ISRAEL AND THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL WELCOMES REPEAL OF LAW

Amnesty International welcomes the repeal of a law forbidding unauthorized contacts between Israelis and members of organizations designated as "terrorist" by the Israeli authorities. The Israeli Knesset (Parliament) voted on 19 January to repeal the law, a 1986 amendment to the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance.

Several Israelis had been charged under the law and two had been imprisoned for meeting the Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat. Amnesty International considered Abie Nathan and David Ish Shalom to be prisoners of conscience during their imprisonment. They had been pardoned and released before the repeal of the law.

3. AFR 36/WU 01/93 EXTERNAL

29 January 1993

MALAWI: RELEASE OF AFRICA'S LONGEST SERVING KNOWN PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE

Amnesty International welcomes the release of Vera Chirwa, Africa's longest-serving known prisoner of conscience. Aged 60, she was released from prison in Malawi on January 24 1993, after 12 years' imprisonment.

According to an official statement, Vera Chirwa was pardoned by Life-President Kamuzu Banda on humanitarian grounds. Since the death of her husband, Orton Chirwa, in prison on 20 October 1992, there have been international appeals, and a resolution by the European Parliament, calling for her release.

Amnesty International adopted Vera and Orton Chirwa as prisoners of conscience while they were being detained prior to being convicted and sentenced to death for treason in a grossly unfair trial - having reportedly been abducted from Zambia. Following international appeals, their death sentences were commuted to life imprisonment. Conditions in Malawian prisons are harsh and both Vera and Orton Chirwa were kept in solitary confinement for long periods of time.

In September 1992, a delegation of British lawyers was allowed to visit the Chirwas in prison - the first visit they had received for many years, and the first time in eight years that they had been allowed to see each other. Orton Chirwa died shortly after this meeting and there still has not been an inquest into his death - which the Malawian authorities are obliged by law to carry out. Rumours that he was unlawfully killed have not been corroborated but the precise cause of death has not been made known. The question as to whether his death was due to harsh prison conditions or medical neglect remains unresolved. Amnesty International is urging the Malawian government to carry out an inquest into his death.

During 1992 there was increasing public pressure in Malawi for multi-party democracy and calls for the release of political prisoners. A referendum is due to take place on 15 March 1993 to allow voters to choose between retaining the present one-party state and moving to a multi-party political system. Amnesty International is continuing to appeal for the release of the one known prisoner of conscience, Chakufwa Chihana, an international trade unionist, who was sentenced to a two year prison term in December 1992.

Both Vera and Orton Chirwa trained as lawyers in Britain in the 1950s, returning to Malawi to play leading roles in the campaign for independence. Orton Chirwa was a founder and first President of the Malawi Congress Party - which has ruled Malawi since independence - but stepped down in favour of Dr Banda, who became Prime-Minister and then Life-President of Malawi. Orton Chirwa then continued to play a leading role in Malawian politics until a major dispute about domestic and foreign policy soon after independence in 1964 resulted in six leading ministers, including Orton Chirwa, going into exile. The Chirwas left for Tanzania, where they lived for 17 years. Vera Chirwa was a visiting lecturer in law at the University of Zambia and a leader of the opposition Malawian Freedom Movement.