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WEEKLY UPDATE SERVICE 21/93

Contained in this weekly update is an external item on El Salvador.

NEWS INITIATIVES

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Chad - 21 April

Please Note

The document to go with this campaign has been sent out to sections dated February. Please inform your section campaign coordinators and anyone else who may receive it that it is EMBARGOED FOR 21 APRIL.

Chad Campaign, document, news release, Q&A and ENR. The news release should be with you by 2 April, the Q&A shortly afterward.

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

US Juvenile Death Penalty - NEXT WEEK

A weekly update item about executions of juveniles scheduled in both Texas and Missouri, will be sent out shortly, and will be embargoed for some time next week. The IS will be sending it to media.

Baltic States Death Penalty Action - 1 April

Weekly update enclosed in WU NWS 11/20/93, embargoed for 1 April to coincide with the action launch. The IS press office is not proactively sending this out to media, though it will be used in response to media enquiries. It is mainly to assist sections who are planning media initiatives to go with the action.

Morocco - 14 April

Document and weekly update item - more info soon.

Brazil - 7 May

Please note new embargo date. Document on prison massacre, including new forensic information. Weekly update item to go with it. Sections are also being asked to carry out campaign work in connection with this document.

Section Initiatives**French Section - European Press Officers' Meeting**

The second European Press Officers' meeting will take place in Paris this year. The date of this meeting is now fixed for 15 and 16 May as the majority of you asked for. It will be focused on two themes: Audiovisual work (production and TV experiences) and how to improve it; and the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna.

2. AMR 29/WU 01/93 EXTERNAL
16 March 1993

INTERNAL

The IS press office will be releasing this item to international media and sections are encouraged to consider media publicity in their countries. Citizens of several countries (eg US, Spain, France, Netherlands) are mentioned in the Truth Commission report and we would ask in particular for them to seek publicity.

Please also draw this to the attention of your CASA Coordinators - an Urgent Action, a Rapid Response action and a copy of the letter being sent to the government of El Salvador are also being sent out from the IS tonight - the letter is available in Spanish from the IS research team.

For more information on the case of the six Jesuit priests mentioned in the text, please refer to the following weekly update items: NWS 11/30/91, AMR 29/WU 04/91; NWS 11/37/91, AMR 29/ WU 06/91; NWS 11/06/92, AMR 29/WU 01/92.

EL SALVADOR: AI FEARS SWEEPING AMNESTY LAW AFTER TRUTH COMMISSION REPORT

Amnesty International is deeply concerned by reports that the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador is considering introducing a second sweeping amnesty law to cover past human rights abuses - just days after the publication of a damning report by the UN-appointed Truth Commission.

The draft law offers a "broad, absolute and unconditional" amnesty to those responsible for abuses before 1992 and extends immunity even to those not covered by the 1992 amnesty, the National Reconciliation Law.

"Amnesty laws such as this, which effectively block any further investigation into past abuses, can only be bad news for human rights," said Amnesty International. "Time and again we have seen the cycle of violence perpetuated when governments have failed to bring those responsible to justice."

The Truth Commission spent eight months looking into the grave human rights abuses which plagued El Salvador during the civil war from 1980 to 1992. Its report, released on Monday 15 March, produced overwhelming evidence that former or current high-ranking army officers and other officials ordered, participated in and covered up massacres and other extrajudicial executions, "disappearances" and torture. It also established that the FMLN was responsible for a number of arbitrary killings in breach of international humanitarian law.

Said Amnesty International: "To allow those responsible for such brutal crimes to evade accountability and escape prosecution shows a blatant disregard for the rights of victims and their relatives, and for international law." Only recently, the Inter-American Commission ruled that amnesty laws which blocked investigations into human rights abuses are contrary to the right to justice and to the American Convention on Human Rights.

The Truth Commission's report named those responsible for 30 cases, including the killings of Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero and of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter, which illustrated patterns of human rights abuses. In addition, it contained a list of thousands of cases of killings, "disappearances" and torture which it was not able to examine in depth.

Amnesty International believes that the important and unprecedented work of the Commission could be seriously undermined if the government immediately amnesties those identified by the Commission as being responsible for serious human rights violations, instead of bringing them to justice. It is also unacceptable that such a law should be passed without any mechanism having been set up to investigate those cases which the commission was unable to investigate. It is particularly disturbing that the law is likely to prevent any investigation to establish the whereabouts of the "disappeared."

Amnesty International is therefore urging the government to block the passing of any law which grants a broad amnesty to those responsible for human rights abuses. The organization is also calling on the government to implement as soon as possible the other recommendations included in the Truth Commission's report, including rapid and urgent reforms to the judiciary, a full investigation into "death squad" operations and a programme of moral and material reparation for the victims of human rights abuses and their families.

Amnesty International recognises the unprecedented initiatives related to human rights which emerged from the peace accords. The Truth Commission was an initial essential step towards establishing the full truth. Amnesty International is aware of the difficult circumstances facing El Salvador but it believes that real peace can only be achieved by adhering to the principles of truth and justice.

Said Amnesty International: "It is now the government's responsibility to show its commitment to national reconciliation by allowing the uncovering of the full truth and bringing to justice those responsible."