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# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 25/94

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NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - "DISAPPEARANCES" AND POLITICAL KILLINGS CAMPAIGN

PLEASE NOTE: SEE NEWS SERVICE 20/94 - The enclosed internal item on an AIUSA section initiative is the final and revised version of the item included in News Service 20/94.

NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

UK - 9 February - SEE NEWS SERVICE 170

Kuwait - 24 February - SEE NEWS SERVICE 170

\*\*Women - 8 March\*\* - SEE NEWS SERVICE 161

The UN Commission on Human Rights will be debating and voting on appointing the position of Special Rapporteur for violence against women. The UN decision will probably be announced on about 4 March. To make the news release on women up-to-date, it would be good to use this for a lead, however, obviously this would make the news release very last minute. Please let me know ASAP if it suits you to receive an A copy of the Women news release next week, followed by a B copy sent at the last minute with an appropriate lead. Paula. Tel: +44 71 413 5564/e-mail: pseager.

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

European Parliament & Political killings/"disapps" Handbook - 23 Feb

SEE NEWS SERVICE 22/94

\*\*Turkey - 10 March\*\* News Service item planned on protection of refugees in Turkey.

FORTHCOMING NEWS INITIATIVES

Saudi Arabia - 31 March more details to follow

Colombia - 16 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 123 + UAs AMR 23/56+57/93

South Africa - 23 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 05/94

Internal

## **SECTION INITIATIVES**

### **AIUSA**

Embargoed for Tuesday, February 8, 1994

Contact: Roger Rathman 212/633-4208

### **BREAKING THE SILENCE:**

#### **Amnesty International USA denounces human rights violations based on sexual orientation**

Homosexuals in many parts of the world live in constant fear of government persecution because of their sexual orientation, Amnesty International USA said today (Tuesday, February 8, 1994.)

In a groundbreaking report entitled *Breaking the Silence: Human Rights Violations Based on Sexual Orientation*, the organization focuses on the imprisonment, torture and execution of gay men and lesbians worldwide. Noting that lesbians and gay men face classic forms of human rights abuses, this report also documents the abuses aimed specifically at them by governments.

With the release of this report and the launch of a six-month nationwide grassroots campaign to abolish these abuses, Amnesty International USA places the government repression of gay men and lesbians squarely on the international human rights agenda.

Amnesty International USA activists around the country, by working against government legislation and practices that result in the arbitrary imprisonment, torture and execution of gay men and lesbians, will contribute in concrete areas to this struggle. They will petition governments directly, as well as conduct media and other public awareness campaigns in their communities and on their campuses and in Amnesty's special networks, to put governments on notice that homosexuals are no longer easy targets for human rights abuses.

While applauding the efforts of gay and lesbian activists worldwide who continue to work in their own countries and internationally to protect the rights of gay men and lesbians, Amnesty International said, "Protecting the human rights of gays and lesbians is an international responsibility and is a struggle to be waged by all people, just as the struggle for human rights for women, for indigenous peoples, for refugees, for the disappeared, and for the survivors of torture is an international responsibility and is waged by all people."

The report shows how in some countries, torture or ill-treatment are sometimes used to force "confessions" of homosexuality, or to elicit the names and addresses of other lesbians and gay men. Subsequently, they may be doubly victimized, as societal discrimination prevents them from seeking the legal, religious, social, or psychiatric support services available to other victims. For example, in Romania, gay men have been routinely targeted for ill-treatment and torture. Several cases have been reported of beatings, some lasting as long as 13 hours, with truncheons on the palms of the hands, soles of the feet and the torso. Reports of ill-treatment of homosexuals by police have also been received from Britain, the United States, Costa Rica and Turkey.

Lesbians and gay men have historically been persecuted and oppressed through laws that criminalize sexual behavior between consenting adults of the same sex, even when such behavior occurs in private, or in some cases, where there is little or no evidence that the individuals have engaged in sexual acts. While the language of these laws varies with regard to the specific acts which are proscribed, the common effect is to stigmatize lesbians and gay men as criminals.

In Australia, certain sections of the Criminal Code of the State of Tasmania criminalize all consensual homosexual acts between men including those in private. The United Nations Human Rights Committee is currently considering a complaint that charges that this law violates basic rights protected under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. All other states in Australia have decriminalized homosexual acts.

**Many countries, though, have repealed laws criminalizing consensual sex between adult men, these include Ireland (1993), the United Kingdom territory of the Isle of Man (1992) and several former Soviet republics including Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine and Russia.**

**Twenty-eight of the fifty United States have repealed their criminal sodomy statutes since 1962; while other statutes are still being challenged. Five states (Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Montana, Tennessee) apply these laws only to homosexuals. Amnesty International would consider an individual imprisoned under these laws a Prisoner of Conscience and would call for their immediate and unconditional release.**

**Unfortunately, the absence of laws criminalizing homosexuality does not necessarily safeguard the basic human rights of homosexuals. Lesbians and gay men continue to be harassed and arbitrarily detained solely by reason of their sexual orientation.**

**"The international human rights movement is obligated to ensure that the basic human rights of all people are protected and promoted by governments, not abused," said Amnesty International USA. "Our nationwide campaign will mobilize our membership and focus public attention on the issues. It is designed to break the deafening silence that surrounds abuses against homosexuals and allows governments to kill, torture and detain with impunity," said Amnesty International USA.**

**EMBARGOED FOR TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 1994**

**The above report is available from AIUSA, 322 Eighth Avenue, NY, NY 10001, for a cost of \$8.00, including shipping and handling.**

News Service 25/94

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EMBARGOED FOR 23 FEBRUARY 1994

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL BOOK LAUNCH: "DISAPPEARANCES" AND POLITICAL KILLINGS: HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS OF THE 1990S - A MANUAL FOR ACTION**

Amnesty International today launched its first ever handbook to help human rights activists worldwide tackle one of the gravest threats to human rights in the 1990s -- political killings and "disappearances".

The handbook documents the pattern of political killings and "disappearances" in some 40 countries, and provides human rights organizations with information on international standards and the attempts made to put those standards into practice. It presents a detailed program for the eradication of "disappearances" and political killings, to assist human rights activists in confronting these violations in their countries.

The handbook is published as part of Amnesty International's worldwide campaign on political killings and "disappearances" launched in October, and is the most thorough study of its kind ever published by the organization.

"With the publication of this handbook, we are supporting the work of human rights defenders and providing the tools to change the human rights situation in their countries," Amnesty International said.

The handbook calls on the world's governments to institute systematic programs to stem the flood of "disappearances" and killings, which have claimed over a million victims in the past 25 years.

It describes the persistent efforts of relatives of the "disappeared" to find justice for their loved ones and details the courageous role of human rights activists in unravelling the secretive methods used in extrajudicial executions - unlawful and deliberate killings carried out by order of a government or with its acquiescence. Deliberate and arbitrary killings by armed opposition groups are also singled out for condemnation.

"Governments must be made accountable for their actions - only then will they make clear to their security forces that "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions will not be tolerated under any circumstances", Amnesty International said.

"All complaints and reports of "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions should be investigated promptly, impartially and effectively. Those responsible for the abuses must be brought to justice."

The handbook describes detailed safeguards needed to prevent and abolish "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions: arrest and detention procedures must conform to international standards; relatives must be able to use habeas corpus or similar procedures to ensure the safety of those detained and the courts must have the power to protect detainees; prisoners should be released in a way that allows reliable verification of their release; and "death squads" should be disbanded, and their killers should be brought to justice.

The report names 38 countries where "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions have been reported in the 1990s. Deliberate and arbitrary killings by opposition groups are cited in 15 countries. Responses to national and international pressures for improvement are presented in case studies on six countries - Iraq, Sri Lanka, Colombia, Zimbabwe, Turkey and Morocco.

**The report assesses the results of national commissions set up to investigate human rights abuses committed under past regimes in Argentina, Chile, Chad and El Salvador. Amnesty International believes that all four commissions did valuable work, but the authorities failed to follow up by bringing the perpetrators to justice, or simply pardoned those who were convicted.**

**A more encouraging outcome was in Bolivia, where during the period of military rule between 1980 and 1981, some 22 people "disappeared" and 52 were victims of extrajudicial executions. In April 1993, a former president and 46 other officials were convicted for killings and other crimes committed under the military rule.**

**The handbook complements the report Getting Away with Murder, published in October 1993, which presented examples of "disappearances" and political killings from around the world.**

**Amnesty International hopes the handbook will provide activists around the world with tools for the eradication of "disappearances" and political killings which will remain useful for years to come.**

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