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WEEKLY UPDATE SERVICE 27/93

Contained in this weekly update are external items on UN World Conference on Human Rights and Israel and Occupied Territories.

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.

Bangladesh - 28 April

Document on serious human rights violations in Bangladesh, accompanied either by a news release or an embargoed weekly update item.

Tadzhikistan - 5 May

Publication and news release on killings in the context of civil war - with striking similarities to Bosnia-Herzegovina.

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

US Juvenile Death Penalty - 26 March 1993

A weekly update item about executions of juveniles scheduled in both Texas and Missouri, was sent out in Weekly Update NWS 11/25/93. The IS will be sending it to media on Friday 26 March.

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 - the IS will be sending this only to selected media (largely Arabic speaking).

China - 16 April

Document and embargoed weekly update item on torture, timed to coincide with China reporting to the UN Committee Against Torture (CAT). China is scheduled to appear on 23 April - media are entitled to attend and we will be encouraging contacts to do so.

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.

Unconfirmed news initiatives

News releases or embargoed weekly update items are being considered on the following subjects:

Malawi (May)

Indigenous people (to go with May Focus article)

Guatemala (May)

Egypt (late May)

World Conference (early June)

Nagorno-Karabakh (to go with possible action, May)

Aceh, Indonesia (July)

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.

European World Conference Press Briefing in June

The British Section Press Office has been talking to the EC project office and the Francophone Belgium Press Officer about holding a European press briefing in Brussels for MEPs and for journalists who will be covering the World Conference. The date will probably be Tuesday, June 8th in the morning. The aim will be to look at the EC's role as a whole in terms of its internal shortcomings (Asylum issues, etc), external policies - aid/development, etc, and also to look at Europe's role within the UN.

Although the idea has been suggested by the British Section, it is hoped that all European Section Press Officers will be interested in being involved. For further information please contact either Daphne Davies, in the British Section Press Office or Johannes in the EC project office.

2. IOR 41/WU 02/93 EXTERNAL
29 March 1993

INTERNAL

Following is a general statement summarizing the issues surrounding the UN World Conference on Human Rights which sections can use in their media work.

EXTERNAL

ISSUES AT THE UN WORLD CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

The UN World Conference on Human Rights -- to be held in Vienna from Monday 14 June to Friday 25 June -- will be one of the largest meetings of governments to discuss human rights since 1968 when the previous World Conference took place in Teheran. In addition, the parallel activities and NGO Forum will probably be one of the largest ever gatherings of the human rights movement.

The World Conference is not the result of a great desire by governments to improve the protection and promotion of human rights. The preparations for the World Conference have been hampered by deep divisions between regional groups of governments about human rights. It is quite likely that the inter-governmental meeting will fail to agree anything significant and will merely demonstrate that many governments are not prepared to make a serious commitment to promoting or protecting human rights nationally or internationally.

The agenda for the World Conference is very broad. It was only finalized at the UN General Assembly in December. The main agenda points are:

- commemoration of the International Year of the World's Indigenous People;
- general debate on the progress made in the field of human rights since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and on the identification of obstacles to further progress in this area and ways in which they can be overcome;
- consideration of the relationship between development, democracy and the universal enjoyment of all human rights, keeping in view the interrelationship and indivisibility of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights;
- consideration of contemporary trends and new challenges to the full realization of all human rights of women and men, including those of persons belonging to vulnerable groups.

The conference will be similar to the Rio Summit dealing with the environment. It is being convened by the United Nations. There will be an official conference to which all governments are invited to send representatives. Non-governmental organizations may also attend. The conference will be held in Vienna in the Austria Centre. The official conference will have up to 4,000 participants. A special Media Centre is being constructed to house over 1,000 journalists.

As well as the official conference, there will be an NGO forum on the three days before the conference opens. This is being organized at the same conference site and will enable representatives of national, regional and international human rights organizations to discuss issues they want addressed by the official conference. Many NGOs will be making specific recommendations to the official conference on ways to make the UN human rights mechanisms more effective. AI's own recommendations for reform of the UN, including the establishment of a Special Commissioner for Human Rights, are contained in a major public paper which has been submitted to the preparatory process.

Despite the imposing agenda, preparation of the conference has been seriously delayed. So far there has been practically no serious discussion among governments of any substantive issues. The three sessions of the Preparatory Committee have only discussed procedural matters. A series of regional preparatory meetings are being held. The declarations from the African and Latin American regional meetings are available to journalists from the UN or AD but the views expressed by governments vary sharply and the official preparatory committee of the UN was unable to agree an agenda for the conference. Instead it had to refer the matter to the General Assembly for decision as late as December of last year.

The divergences of opinion cover a number of crucial matters. The following questions summarize the issues in a very general way:

- Are human rights really universal or should different cultures and regions be allowed to set their own standards? Who is to say, for example, what standards should apply to the rights of women, or the rights of minorities or to the right to religious freedom?

- Are human rights really indivisible? What is the point of talking about the establishment of democratic electoral procedures or legal protection against ill-treatment if the pressing issue in a poverty-stricken country is ending starvation or seeking relief from the crippling burden of foreign debt?
 - Why do the countries of the North focus on the protection of civil and political rights (such as freedom from torture), when their economic policies produce massive violations of the economic, social and cultural rights of the people who live in the countries of the South?
 - What about the international hypocrisy surrounding human rights? Why do governments criticize the abuses of their adversaries and shield their allies from similar investigation?
- Why do the countries of the North seem to focus on violations in the South, at the same time as their own policies, for example on asylum seekers, are often grossly deficient?
- Why, despite the lip service paid to human rights in international meetings, is less than one per cent of the United Nations budget devoted to human rights protection?

Debates among government representatives on these and other issues is taking place against a deeply disturbing background. Human rights lie at the heart of many of the most pressing challenges facing the world today. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed the right of every person to basic economic and social protection and yet millions of people have been condemned to extreme poverty, disease and exploitation. The Declaration also promised respect for the civil and political rights of everyone without discrimination and yet arbitrary arrest, political imprisonment, torture and death at the hands of the state have claimed countless victims.

There is a very deep sense of unease in the human rights community about this conference. There is a very real and urgent need to get governments to take practical steps that will extend human rights protection to people who are under threat. Reforms are desperately needed in the international machinery to investigate and deal with human rights violations wherever they occur. Instead, there are fears that conference will result in promises but no action. Some think diplomatic negotiations could lead either to an open North/South split over human rights standards, or to some sort of backtracking on the ideals of universality and indivisibility -- both of which would be a real setback to international efforts to promote worldwide protection for human rights. There are also fears that if the inadequate preparation for the conference leads to a disappointing outcome it will serve only to reinforce cynicism about the prospects for international human rights protection.

FURTHER UNITED NATIONS INFORMATION

If journalists want further information about the conference and arrangements for it, including arrangements for media reporting, they should contact the United Nations:

**World Conference on Human Rights
Centre for Human Rights
United Nations
CN-1211 Geneva 10
Switzerland**

**World Conference on Human Rights
Department of Public Information
Room S-1040
United Nations
New York, NY 10017
USA**

**World Conference on Human Rights
Centre for Human Rights
New York Office
Room S-2914
United Nations
New York, NY 10017
USA**

MDE 15/WU 03/93 EXTERNAL

30 March 1993

ISRAEL AND THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CONCERNED ABOUT HOUSE DESTRUCTIONS

Amnesty International is concerned about recent measures used by the Israeli armed forces in the Gaza Strip involving the use of massive firepower against houses in which people sought for arrest are suspected to be hiding. It expressed such concern on 17 March 1993 in a letter to Prime Minister and Minister of Defence Yitzhak Rabin. On 20 March 1993 in Deir al-Balah up to 19 houses were destroyed or severely damaged, with four people arrested, and on 26 March in Rafah six to nine more houses were attacked.

The attacks in Deir al-Balah and Rafah in previous days were the latest instances of a practice which appears to have started in July 1992. A total of three people were reported killed and a dozen arrested, although Amnesty International does not know whether those killed or arrested were the people against whom the operations were aimed. About 100 houses are said to have been heavily damaged or fully destroyed, with hundreds of people made homeless and now living in tents provided by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

Typically, houses in which the Israeli authorities believe that suspects may be hiding are surrounded and their inhabitants ordered out, leaving doors and windows open. Those who come out are then detained in nearby houses for the duration of the operation, which may last several hours. The men are hand-cuffed, blind-folded and separated from the women and children. Some are interrogated and taken into detention centres afterwards. The houses are then attacked with heavy fire, including machine gun fire, grenades and anti-tank missiles, causing extensive damage to structures and furniture. Soldiers subsequently enter the houses firing at any place where survivors may be hiding. The inhabitants are then let free to return to what remains of their houses.

It appears that no attempts are first made to use less severe measures to secure the arrest of suspects. In some cases reports suggest that no adequate warning was given to those who may have been still hiding in houses before they were attacked and destroyed.

Some of the people removed from houses have later been held for interrogation or under administrative detention orders, although it is not clear that any of them were being sought for arrest prior to the operations.

On 13 November 1992 in Khan Yunes, in an operation which started at dawn and continued for several hours, eight houses were systematically attacked, causing extensive damage to all of them. Some of the inhabitants said they were beaten while held by Israeli forces. It appears that none of the people being sought by the authorities were found in the houses.

On 11 and 22 December 1992, three similar attacks on 12 other homes were reported in Khan Yunes and Deir al-Balah, resulting in extensive damage. One person was reportedly arrested in the context of these attacks.

In January 1993, four similar attacks were reported in Deir al-Balah and Khan Yunes on different dates. Two people apparently being sought for arrest were reportedly apprehended in the course of the attacks.

On 11 February, one of the largest operations of this kind took place in Khan Yunes, lasting most of the day. Up to 19 houses were systematically attacked and at least nine are now said to be uninhabitable. Reports suggest that some houses were dynamited by soldiers after they had been fully searched. A few individuals who were being sought by the authorities were apparently arrested.

The Israeli authorities have adopted these tactics apparently in order to protect their forces from surprise attacks by armed people hiding inside homes. The Israeli authorities, it is clear, are entitled to protect their personnel. However, Amnesty International is concerned that the current wave of house destruction appears to constitute excessive use of military force to carry out what are essentially law enforcement duties. Indeed, in many cases it appears that none of the people ostensibly being sought for arrest were found. These tactics, Amnesty International fears, may endanger life unnecessarily and may amount to destroying houses of innocent people as a form of collective punishment.

The Israeli authorities maintain a policy of house destruction or sealing as a punitive measure for security offences, based on British Mandate emergency legislation and including the possibility of judicial review by the High Court of Justice. The new tactics in the Gaza Strip appear to be an expansion of such policy without even the possibility of judicial review. Given the number of people being sought for arrest in the Gaza Strip, such tactics may result in further massive destruction of houses and countless people being made homeless regardless of any connection with alleged offences.

Amnesty International believes that the measures adopted by the Israeli authorities in the Occupied Territories should be consistent with the principles of necessity and proportionality embodied in the United Nations (UN) Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials and the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials.

In its letter to Prime Minister and Minister of Defence Yitzhak Rabin of 17 March, Amnesty International sought clarification of the criteria for the use of these tactics, including the type of offences those sought for arrest are suspected of; what level of evidence that a suspect may be in hiding in a house is required; what means short of an all-out military attack on the houses are considered; and what measures are taken to ensure that no unnecessary loss of life or injury occurs. It also asked to be informed of the number and identity of people whose arrest was being sought and who were actually arrested, any who were killed or injured, and details of any compensation policy for those whose houses have been damaged or destroyed.

Amnesty International opposes the destruction or sealing of houses when it is used as a punishment by governments in order to suppress political opposition or to punish or intimidate individuals, their families or entire communities on account of their alleged connection with offences.