
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 29/94

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NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - GABON, PERU

NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

****Indonesia Campaign - end September****

Please note that the Indonesia Campaign has unfortunately had to be delayed until the end of September. A fax explaining why has been sent out to you by Hilary Payne in the Campaigns Unit. From a news perspective, it will make the launch timing far better because 1 October is the anniversary of the 1965 coup - the most important anniversary in Indonesia - and the campaign launch date will be as close to this as possible. I hope this does not cause too much inconvenience - we will go ahead and discuss the campaign at the press officers meeting on 19, 20 & 21 Feb.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

UK - 9 February - SEE NEWS SERVICE 170

Kuwait - 24 February - SEE NEWS SERVICE 170

Women - 8 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 161/26

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

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

SEE NEWS SERVICE 22/94

Turkey - 10 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 26

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

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GABON: 67 DIE OVERNIGHT IN APPALLING CONDITIONS IN GABONESE DETENTION CAMP

67 detainees in Gabon have died, apparently from suffocation after being held with over 200 other detainees in one cell. Their deaths appear to be the result, at best, of gross negligence on the part of the Gabonese authorities. Amnesty International is calling on the Gabonese authorities to immediately safeguard the health and welfare of the remaining detainees and to set up an independent and impartial public commission of inquiry to investigate the deaths.

The 67 detainees, all foreign nationals from West Africa, died on 3 February 1994 in the Gros-Bouquet Gendarmerie detention centre in Libreville, the Gabonese capital. Although the government has announced that it will be setting up a commission of inquiry, Amnesty International is concerned that the inquiry either may not take place, or may fail to fulfil international standards for impartiality and competence. The human rights organization is concerned that immigrants awaiting deportation, including young children, are held in harsh detention conditions which amount to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. It is not known whether any children were among the 67 who died.

On 4 February, the Gabonese authorities said the 67 detainees came from several West African countries and were among 226 such immigrants who had been arrested as they arrived in Gabon on makeshift rafts a few days earlier. They were being held in the detention camp awaiting deportation. The authorities first said the detainees had died fighting amongst themselves but later said they may have died from suffocation. However, independent sources in Libreville who saw the bodies of the victims said that they saw no sign of injuries. It is widely believed that the detainees, already weakened from the journey to Gabon and who had reportedly not been fed since they were taken into custody, died from suffocation. Reports suggest that all 226 detainees were held in the same cell.

A guard at the detention centre reportedly told journalists in Libreville that camp authorities were unable to feed the detainees as they had no money for food or general care. The Minister for Defence, Security and Immigration, General Martin-Fidèle Magnaga, admitted that cells designed to hold only a few detainees often held up to 100. Prison conditions in Gabon are generally harsh, and Amnesty International is concerned that conditions for immigrants in the Gros-Bouquet Gendarmerie detention camp are particularly severe. More illegal immigrants are believed to have been arrested since the deaths of the 67 and are believed to be in custody at the same detention centre.

There have been reports suggesting that a delegation of French military advisors in Gabon, who were recalled to France on 9 February, may have been aware of the situation in Gros-Bouquet detention centre. A French government spokesman has denied any involvement by the delegation in decisions which might have led to the deaths of the 67 detainees. He also expressed scepticism at the claim that they had died as a result of fighting.

Reports state that Nigeria's military government has asked its ambassador in Gabon to investigate the deaths of the 23 Nigerians who were thought to be among the 67. Gabon's Bar Association has reportedly called for an independent commission of inquiry and postmortem examinations to determine the causes of death.

Amnesty International is calling on the Gabonese government to set up an independent and impartial public inquiry into the deaths. The inquiry should be given powers not only to establish how the 67 people died, but also to identify any persons responsible with a view to bringing them to justice. The inquiry, which should be composed of people known for their impartiality and integrity, should also make recommendations to the government on how to prevent such deaths and bring an end to harsh prison conditions.

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PERU: LA CANTUTA CASE TO BE HEARD BY MILITARY TRIBUNAL

Amnesty International is profoundly dismayed by a resolution passed by Peru's Congress to hear in a military tribunal the case against the military officers implicated in the alleged extrajudicial execution, in July 1992, of one professor and nine students from La Cantuta University.

The organization fears that the resolution will inevitably mean that the full truth behind the abductions and killings in July 1992 will never be made public, and that the military and civilian officials responsible for giving and carrying out the orders to abduct and kill the victims, and subsequently conceal the crime, will not be brought to justice.

Amnesty International also fears that Congress' resolution will only serve to consolidate a feeling of almost total impunity enjoyed by the security forces in Peru. The number of cases of "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions documented by Amnesty International since early 1983 amounts to at least 5000, but in only two cases have the military responsible been brought prosecuted and convicted.

Amnesty International believes that military tribunals in Peru have neither the competence, impartiality, nor independence to investigate and bring to justice members of the security forces accused of human rights violations. Therefore Amnesty International shares the view of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary and arbitrary executions, Mr Bacre Ndiaye, who in his recent report on human rights violations in Peru concluded that "there is a clear institutionalisation of impunity (in the country)." He called on the Government of Peru to ensure that cases of extrajudicial execution, including that of La Cantuta, be clearly and explicitly excluded from military tribunals. Last month Amnesty International recommended to the authorities that all those implicated in the La Cantuta case be brought to justice before a civilian court. Despite these appeals, the authorities in Peru have persisted in having gross military abuses investigated and judged by the military.

Amnesty International condemns the grave human rights abuses by armed opposition groups in Peru. These include the execution of people held by these groups; deliberate and arbitrary killings of civilians, and killings of members of the security forces who are hors de combat, or who have been incapacitated, have surrendered or been taken prisoner by these groups. Nevertheless, such abuses can never justify violations by the authorities of fundamental human rights such as those enshrined in the International Covenant of Civil and Political rights to which Peru is party.

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