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WEEKLY UPDATE SERVICE 44/91

Contained in this weekly update are external items on Morocco, Bhutan, Austria and UK hostage Terry Waite and an internal item about the International Newsletter.

1. NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

27 November - Refugee concerns in Europe

You have been sent a report on our concerns about the treatment of asylum seekers in Europe in the context of European political and economic harmonization. Could you please also ensure that your section refugee coordinators are aware of this news release and publication date.

Uganda - 4 December (New information)
Uganda - The National Resistance Army and human rights violations
AFR 59/20/91

Targeted news release on abuses by the national army. This has now been confirmed, although is a bit late being approved. It should come to you this week.

Myanmar - 10 December

International news release on abuses in Myanmar, timed to coincide with both Human Rights Day and Aung San Suu Kyi receiving the Nobel Peace Prize.

Ghana - 18 December
Ghana - Political imprisonment and the death penalty

Targeted news release for African media to go with our first major report on Ghana in recent times.

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2. MDE 29/WU 13/91 EXTERNAL
21 November 1991

INTERNAL

Abraham Serfaty, one of AI's 30th anniversary cases, visited London 20 - 22 October. He spoke at the Service of the Dedication of Amnesty International's 30th Anniversary held at Southwark Cathedral on 21 October and visited the International Secretariat on 22 October. The following contains quotes taken from his speech to IS staff. More information about Abraham Serfaty can be found in Weekly Update NWS 11/29/91.

His comments were both audio and video taped: it is not possible to distribute copies to all sections but if you have a special project and could use this material, please contact the IS press office.

EXTERNAL

MOROCCO - RELEASED PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE TALKS TO AI

Abraham Serfaty, one of the longest-serving prisoners of conscience in Morocco, was released from prison on 13 September 1991, after 17 years' imprisonment. He was immediately expelled to France, where he now lives.

On 22 October 1991 he told Amnesty International how he was held in a secret torture camp for 14 months before being brought to trial. "I suffered very hard torture for the first two months and after that I suffered harassment. Sometimes they put me under a very strong light, because they knew I had sensitive eyes.

"I can tell you that on the day of 4 January 1975, almost two months after my arrest, I only wanted suicide."

After his trial, Abraham Serfaty was held in total isolation for 22 months, seeing his family for only half an hour each week and being deprived of political news.

"The first Amnesty International letters that came to me were from Austria in 1977 when I was held in complete isolation, which means total darkness. Into this darkness these letters finally came and there was light - the light of life - and this is the most important thing that Amnesty is doing all over the world.

"You are human beings, and we do not talk about human rights, we just exchange human letters. By this exchange, the concept itself of human rights becomes part of our flesh and of our hearts. I have seen this very concretely in Morocco.

"I am in a Marxist organization and the tendency in Marxist organizations all over the world is to say human rights is a bourgeois concept. Well, for us the concept of human rights struck, it became concrete and living through Amnesty's letters. This did not come from theory, but from life -- life through Amnesty's letters -- and I have to thank you for that. Thank you."

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3. MDE 02/WU 01/91 EXTERNAL
21 November 1991

INTERNAL

The Anglican church envoy Terry Waite, held hostage in Lebanon for nearly five years, made the following statement during a speech upon his arrival in the United Kingdom on 19 November. If you want to use this comment you should keep in mind that his remarks are about the impact of letters in general, and do not refer to any specific AI action on his behalf.

EXTERNAL

RELEASED HOSTAGE TALKS ABOUT POWER OF LETTERS

"I was kept in total and complete isolation for four years. I saw no one and spoke to no one apart from a cursory word with my guards when they brought me food.

And one day out of the blue a guard came with a postcard. It was a postcard showing a stained glass window from Bedford showing John Bunyan in jail.

And I looked at that card and I thought, "My word Bunyan you're a lucky fellow. You've got a window out of which you can look, see the sky and here am I in a dark room. You've got your own clothes and a table and a chair."

And I turned the card over and there was a message from someone whom I didn't know simply saying, "We remember, we shall not forget. We shall continue to pray for you and to work for all the people who are detained around the world."

I can tell you, that thought, that sent me back to the marvellous work of agencies like Amnesty International and their letter-writing campaigns and I would say never despise those simple actions.

Something, somewhere will get through to the people you are concerned about as it got through to my fellows eventually."

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4. ASA 14/WU 01/91 EXTERNAL
21 November 1991

BHUTAN: AI DELEGATES VISIT NEPAL TO INTERVIEW REFUGEES

Two delegates from Amnesty International are visiting Nepal during the last two weeks of November to interview Nepali-speaking Bhutanese living in refugee camps in Jhapa District, eastern Nepal. Amnesty International is concerned at reports that thousands of Nepali-speaking Bhutanese from southern Bhutan have left the country in order to escape from torture and other human rights violations committed during operations being carried out by the Royal Bhutanese army and police.

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5. EUR 13/WU 01/91 EXTERNAL
21 November 1991

INTERNAL

This Weekly Update item is embargoed for 0001 HRS GMT Thursday 5 December 1991, as it is being used as a news release by some European Sections. If you do wish to use it, please do not release it before Thursday 5 December.

EXTERNAL

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL WELCOMES MEASURES TO COMBAT ILL-TREATMENT
BY AUSTRIAN
POLICE, BUT CALLS FOR FURTHER ACTION

Amnesty International said today (Thursday 5 December) that the Austrian Government's record on combating physical violence against people held in police custody had been "mixed".

Since the human rights organization issued a report last year about a pattern of physical abuse of police detainees, the Austrian Government has announced measures to safeguard people held in custody -- such as unannounced visits by police doctors to police stations, to make on-the-spot examinations of detainees, and changes in police disciplinary procedures.

New government measures also aim to address the problem of people being deterred from complaining about ill-treatment by the practice of instituting criminal proceedings against complainants -- a particular target of Amnesty International's criticism.

"We welcome the steps taken so far to stop abuse in police custody," Amnesty International said, "but think that the measures aren't always followed or don't go far enough to protect detainees."

In a new report released today, the organization said it continued to receive allegations of ill-treatment, in some cases amounting to torture, such as beatings and burnings with lighted cigarettes.

Amnesty International is particularly concerned about the use of physical violence by the police to obtain confessions or other evidence relevant to criminal offences and at the apparent reluctance of the Austrian Government to take additional, relatively simple measures to combat this, for example the tape-recording of interrogations of police suspects. The organization is still concerned at the lack of adequate safeguards against ill-treatment, the lack of public confidence in the mechanisms by which complaints about ill-treatment can be made and at the

insufficient implementation of the provisions of the UN Convention against Torture.

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6. NWS 20/WU 01/91 INTERNAL
21 November 1991

NEWSLETTER: CHANGE TO PRISONER OF THE MONTH (POM) PAGE

Attention all Newsletter editors

The Yokohama ICM decided (decision 42) that the POM page of the Newsletter should be changed from January 1992 to reflect AI's wider mandate rather than focus on solely on prisoners of conscience. Accordingly, there will no longer be a POM page with three prisoner of conscience appeal cases. Instead, we plan to have a "Worldwide Appeals" page. The general rule will be to have one prisoner of conscience appeal and two other appeal cases reflecting other parts of the mandate. Thus for January the International Newsletter will have a prisoner of conscience case (Saudi Arabia), an extrajudicial execution case (Haiti) and a case of "disappearance" (Sri Lanka). A new logo is being designed, with a new standard text at the top of the page. Thus under the heading "Worldwide Appeals", the text will be:

"An appeal from you to the authorities can help the victims of human rights violations whose stories are told below.

"You can help free a prisoner of conscience or stop torture. Your appeal can bring liberty to a victim of 'disappearance'. You may prevent an execution.

"The victims are many, the violations wide-ranging. Every appeal counts. Who to write to is specified at the end of each story."

The cases will be sent as usual with other Newsletter material. As with the previous POM page cases we will ensure an overall geopolitical balance.

Please bring this item to the attention of all Newsletter editors, editorial boards and approvers.