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Jordan - 22 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 37/94

****Turkey -30 March**** - This is the new embargo time, although this may also be subject to change, we will let you know as soon as we hear anything more. As soon as the report is printed we will do a special mailing to make sure it gets to press officers in time. SEE NEWS SERVICE 26/94

Hong Kong - 21 April - SEE NEWS SERVICE 36/94

FORTHCOMING NEWS INITIATIVES

Colombia - 15 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 41/94

South Africa - 31 March - POSTPONED INDEFINITELY

Saudi Arabia - 10 May - NOTE CHANGE OF DATE - more details to follow Burundi - 16 May - SEE NEWS SERVICE 36/94

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JORDAN: HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE EXAMINES COUNTRY'S RECORD, AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT INCREASING USE OF THE DEATH PENALTY

Jordan's human rights record is to be examined on 22 and 23 March 1994 by the Human Rights Committee meeting in New York. Amnesty International has welcomed the progress in human rights reforms in the country in recent years but stresses that serious human rights violations persist.

"We are particularly dismayed at the number of executions since 1993, after having recorded no executions for a full year in 1992", Amnesty International said. At least 12 prisoners were executed in 1993, the highest number in at least two decades. Ten were convicted of murder and two of spying, the latter after an unfair trial: they were sentenced to death by the special State Security Court before the right of appeal against its verdicts was introduced. Two more people were executed for murder in January 1994. At least three are currently under death sentence.

Prisoners on death row are not told when their execution will take place until moments before being taken to be hanged, at dawn, in Swaqa prison south of Amman. Families do not have an opportunity for a last visit and are informed of the execution only afterwards. This practice has been justified as an attempt to reduce suffering. However, Muhammad Abu Zinah, apparently under death sentence after an unfair trial since 1976, wrote to the Prime Minister in 1992 saying: "It has been 16 years, and I have been waiting for death every minute, every hour and every day throughout these 16 long years ... If it appears to you that there is one per cent (of truth) in the charge (against me), I want you to carry out the sentence immediately and without hesitation".

The Human Rights Committee has stated that countries that have not yet abolished the death penalty "are obliged to limit its use" and that "all measures of abolition should be considered as progress in the enjoyment of the right to life. The General Assembly has called for a progressive restriction of the number of capital offences "with a view to the desirability" of abolishing capital punishment. Nevertheless, the death penalty remains prescribed in Jordan for a large number of offences, including murder, spying and other crimes against state security. In 1988 its scope was expanded to punish the rape of a girl aged under 15 and many drug-related offences.

The Jordanian authorities have argued that the death penalty is a sanction required by society and Islamic law. Without holding any views on Islam or other religions, Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases as a violation of the fundamental right to life and the right not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment as recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. There is no reliable evidence that the death penalty deters crime and any judicial error cannot be redressed. No measure that may be devised can ever make it less inhumane.

Amnesty International calls on Jordan to reduce the number of capital offences with a view to abolishing the death penalty, in line with the objectives set out by the Human Rights Committee and the General Assembly. It also calls on the Jordanian Government to recommend commutation of death sentences as a matter of policy and appeals to King Hussein to exercise clemency in all cases.

An overview of Amnesty International's other concerns in Jordan is included in the report, Jordan: Human Rights Reforms: Achievements and Obstacles. The report, which was published this month and presented to the Human Rights Committee, gives an assessment of the human rights reforms in recent years and includes 10 specific recommendations for changes in areas where they are still urgently needed.

Amnesty International welcomes the public emphasis given to human rights by King Hussein and other Jordanian authorities, who have repeatedly stated that Jordan aims to set a regional example in this respect. Since the 1989 parliamentary elections, Jordan has indeed implemented a program of important political and human rights reforms. The state of emergency, in force since 1939, was fully lifted in 1992 and new laws on political parties and press and publications have been adopted, together with other reforms.

However, provisions of old and new laws are still inconsistent with international standards of freedom of expression and association. In addition to the increasing use of the death penalty, other persisting human rights violations include prolonged incommunicado detention which facilitates torture and ill-treatment and compromises the right to a fair trial; the continuing operation of the special State Security Court to try political cases; and the lack of full protection for people against expulsion to countries where they risk serious violations.

The Human Rights Committee, composed of 18 individual experts, monitors the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). States have to report to the Committee within one year of becoming a party to the ICCPR and every five years thereafter. Jordan ratified the ICCPR in 1975. It is now presenting its third periodic report and is the first of five countries to be examined by the Human Rights Committee at its current session. In the following days the Committee will examine the reports submitted by Costa Rica, Mexico, Cameroon and El Salvador.

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