
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 59/95

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NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - **TUNISIA** (this item is being sent to Middle East media); **VENEZUELA** (this item is being sent to media in Venezuela)

INTERNAL -

FOR YOUR INFORMATION - BRAZIL MISSION

Pierre Sané will be arriving in Sao Paulo, Brazil, on 28 March to start his two-week visit to the country. We will be issuing a news release on 23 March.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Campaign on Women - 7 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 12/95, 34/95, 37/95, 42/95 & 44/95

Brazil - 27 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 29/95

RWANDA - 6 April - SEE NEWS SERVICE 37/95

SYRIA - 11 April - SEE NEWS SERVICE 32/95

** ETHIOPIA - 25 APRIL ** This item will coincide with the war crime trials

** GERMANY - 23 MAY ** The news release is scheduled to coincide with the release of a major report on the human rights situation in Germany, and a section level action. A press conference will be held in Germany on 23 May.

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

** ISRAEL AND OCCUPIED TERRITORIES - 11 May ** This item scheduled to coincide with a section-level action

** IRAN - 31 May ** This item is scheduled to coincide with a section-level action. There will also be a release of a report.

EVENTS AND MISSIONS

The details below are for your information only, and there may or may not be media work involved. Can you please not publicize anything until further notice from the IS.

MISSION TO CHECHNYA 8 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 53, 54 & 58

MISSION TO BURUNDI 13 - 27 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 37/95

MISSION TO KENYA 16 March - 2 April - SEE NEWS SERVICE 37/95

MISSION TO HAITI 18 March - 3 April - SEE NEWS SERVICE 58/95

** MISSION TO CHAD - 27 April ** This mission will coincide with a section-level action on Chad. Media will be organized via the AI Paris office.

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TUNISIA: HARASSMENT OF AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S TUNISIAN SECTION CONTINUES

The head of the worldwide Amnesty International movement today condemned the continuing harassment of the organization's Tunisian Section, which was banned by the Tunisian authorities from holding a celebration for International Women's Day on 11 March.

The section in Tunisia had organized the celebration in cooperation with the Tunisian women's democratic association, but when organizers and participants arrived at the venue, they found that the meeting hall was locked and the event was unable to take place.

"The Tunisian government prides itself on its human rights record and on the role of women in Tunisian society yet this is the latest in a series of restrictions the government has placed on human rights defenders and their activities in the country," said Pierre Sané, Secretary-General of Amnesty International.

In accordance with Amnesty International's own working rules, the Tunisian Section focuses its work on behalf of victims of human rights violations worldwide and plays no role in gathering information or writing reports on the situation in Tunisia.

Nevertheless, the authorities continue to systematically intercept correspondence to the Amnesty International section in Tunisia, block publications and other documents that are vital for their campaigning work and ban their public meetings.

Despite the human rights organization's repeated requests, the Tunisian authorities have so far failed to take the necessary measures to resolve the administrative and other impediments which have been hindering the Tunisian Section's work on behalf of victims of human rights violations worldwide.

Amnesty International's concerns regarding the level of harassment experienced by the Tunisian Section have previously been addressed in letters sent to President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and were also discussed with relevant authorities.

Most recently in July 1994, two members of the organization's International Executive Committee met with officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ministry of the Interior had also given assurances that the Tunisian Section's problems were of a technical nature and not the result of policy decisions.

Mr Sané urged the Tunisian authorities to turn their words into deeds, and take the necessary steps to ensure that members of AI in Tunisia are able to resume their human rights work fully and without restriction.

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VENEZUELA: HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS ON THE INCREASE DESPITE REASSURANCES FROM FOREIGN MINISTER

Amnesty International continues to receive reports of serious human rights violations in Venezuela, despite reassurances to the contrary from the country's Foreign Minister, Dr. Miguel Angel Burelli-Rivas.

Last week, Amnesty International's representatives met Dr. Burelli-Rivas during his visit to London to discuss the organization's concerns in Venezuela, including the prevalence of impunity for perpetrators of serious human rights violations, as well as the increasing number of reports of human rights violations.

While acknowledging Amnesty International's concerns, Dr. Burelli-Rivas told the organization that President Rafael Caldera's administration is committed to improving human rights conditions.

The day after the meeting, however, scores of people were arbitrarily arrested in several cities by members of the Directorate of Intelligence and Prevention Services -- a security force dependant on the Foreign Ministry, which has been frequently accused in the past of human rights violations, including torture.

The Venezuelan government said the arrests were carried out to prevent anti-government demonstrations announced for 16 March. While some of those detained have been released without charge, dozens remain incommunicado, and may have suffered torture.

During their meeting with the Foreign Minister Amnesty International's representatives expressed the organization's long-standing concerns about reports of arbitrary arrest and torture of prisoners by the armed forces and the police. This is particularly since constitutional guarantees -- including the right not to be arrested without a warrant -- were suspended in June 1994 and have yet to be reinstated.

The delegation called on Dr. Burelli-Rivas to abolish the so-called "Law of Vagrants and Crooks", which enables the police to imprison people without trial for up to five years. The law has been used to imprison political activists, homosexuals and anybody defined by the authorities as a "vagrant" or a "crook".

Amnesty International's representatives also expressed their deep dismay about Venezuela's appalling prison conditions, under which scores of prisoners die each year. The Venezuelan authorities have repeatedly acknowledged these serious problems but have failed to remedy them.

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