
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 71/94

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NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - AFGHANISTAN

PLEASE NOTE: There is a short external document to accompany the news service item on Afghanistan. It is entitled Afghanistan: Incommunicado detention and disappearances, AI INDEX: ASA 11/01/94.

NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Hong Kong - 0600 hrs gmt, 21 April - The embargo time for the Hong Kong news service item is confirmed as 0600 hrs gmt, Thursday 21 April 1994. The news item was enclosed in News Service 54/94, AI Index: ASA 19/WU 01/94, to go with the document Hong Kong and human rights: flaws in the system, AI Index: ASA 19/01/94. This report will be launched at a press conference in Hong Kong, at 11.00am Hong Kong time (0400 hrs gmt), at The Mariners Club, 11 Middle Road, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon, Hong Kong. Pierre Robert and Chris Avery of the IS will be speaking on the panel. Robyn Kilpatrick is the contact person of the Hong Kong Section organizing the launch, Tel: +852 300 1250/1. If your national media has correspondents in Hong Kong that you would like to attend the press conference, please inform them of the details, giving Robyn's name and number as contact. SEE NEWS SERVICE 36/94

Trade Unionists - 29 April - SEE NEWS SERVICE 62

Saudi Arabia - 10 May - SEE NEWS SERVICE 62

Burundi - 16 May - SEE NEWS SERVICES 53/94 and 36/94

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

Switzerland CAT - 19 April - SEE NEWS SERVICE 53/94

Israel & OT CAT - 25 April - SEE NEWS SERVICE 53/94

FORTHCOMING NEWS INITIATIVES

Annual Report - 7 July - SEE NEWS SERVICE 51/94

Media coverage of the launch of the Colombia campaign 2

This is the second in our series of summaries based on section feedback about the Colombia campaign.

Australian Section - The section distributed their own media release focusing on the local angle of their national campaign, targeting the Australian Catholic Church, trade unions and the business community, who were urged to sign a joint declaration expressing concern about political killings and "disappearances" in Colombia. Apart from mainstream media coverage, the section aimed their material at specialist media with considerable success.

Among others, the launch was covered in Australia's national Catholic newspaper, *The Catholic Weekly* in an article blending general information about the human rights situation in Colombia, case studies of Catholic personnel killed, and the section's local angle. Several radio stations covered the campaign; either in morning news bulletins or as lengthy news items including interviews with the section's Colombia Campaign Coordinator, Alison Gibbs, and Prof. Rodney Maddock, an academic who has worked in Colombia for many years. Two TV channels covered the launch, one of them in a long news item making extensive use of our Colombia ENR.

Dutch Section - During the days immediately before the campaign launch, the section contacted different journalists and reporters, asking them to cover the launch. One TV channel was interested in making a news item on the launch, but required footage with the personal testimonies of human rights victims, instead of Amnesty spokespersons. However, this was not possible so they did not cover the launch. The coverage received on both TV and radio was disappointing. On the 16 March there was a six-minute interview on the radio and in the evening, a short news item on the eight o'clock TV-news. The newspaper coverage on the other hand, was excellent. Some papers published long articles smashing the myth that most killings in Colombia are drug-related, others covered the campaign launch in shorter, but good articles.

Finally, the section has made complaints about the ENR, suggesting that the poor quality be improved, as more TV channels might then be inclined to use the footage and cover Amnesty's news releases and campaigns.

Danish Section - The Colombia campaign launch received very little coverage in the Danish media. The two national TV stations did receive a copy of the campaign ENR but none of them covered the launch. As is the case at the Dutch section, the Danish Press Officer suggests that the lack of TV coverage might result from the poor quality of the ENR. Also, there was no radio coverage and only a few newspapers published articles on the campaign. One of them, however, mentions the section's initiative urging the Folketing (The Danish Parliament) to take part in sending a clear message to the Colombian government that Denmark does not accept Colombia's present human rights situation.

Many thanks to those sections who have sent us feedback, we would still like to hear from other sections who haven't yet had a chance to send us any information.

News Service 71/94

AI INDEX: ASA 71/WU 04/94

11 April 1994

AFGHANISTAN: INCOMMUNICADO DETENTION OF GOVERNMENT EMISSARY AND "DISAPPEARANCE" OF DOZENS OF OTHER AFGHANS

Najmuddin Musleh, an Uzbek employed as a personal assistant of President Rabbani, was arrested and detained on 31 December 1993 in Kabul. Sent to negotiate with General Dostum, he was arrested by the allied forces of the General and Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Members of the alliance have reportedly publicly admitted to detaining him, but his family has not been able to establish his whereabouts or to contact him.

In a report released this month, Amnesty International documents the case of Najmuddin Musleh and others who are among the dozens, perhaps scores, of people in Afghanistan reported to have either "disappeared" or to be held in incommunicado detention at the hands of both government and opposition forces during the country's civil war.

The victims include not only members of the former government and the army but also ordinary civilians. Amnesty International considers many of them to be prisoners of conscience and is gravely concerned about their safety.

Afghanistan was plunged into civil war following the fall of the government of President Najubullah in April 1992. Much of the conflict has revolved round a struggle for power between Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar of the Hesb-e Islami (Party of Islam) and President Rabbani, leader of the Jamiat-e Islami (Society of Islam).

Renewed intense fighting broke out on 1 January 1994, when Prime Minister Hekmatyar, in a new alliance with Uzbek General Abdul Rashid Dostum, who heads his own National Islamic Movement in northern Afghanistan, attempted to force President Rabbani from office.

Since the beginning of the civil war, human rights violations on a large scale have reportedly been committed, including unlawful arrests, torture, rape and extrajudicial executions.

All Mujahideen groups and the central government are reported to have imprisoned political rivals, frequently in private jails in undisclosed locations, both as political hostages or to extract ransom money from relatives. Repeated cease-fire agreements have referred to releases of prisoners, but few releases appear to have taken place.

Some of the most recent cases of "disappearances" reported to Amnesty International include the following:

On 19 May 1993, government forces entered the Kabul home of Ajmal Sahak and arrested him. He had voluntarily retired from army service in February 1991, he was not politically active but was running a vegetable shop in Kabul. His family has not been able to trace him since his arrest.

Assadullah Wakilzadeh's house was raided on 20 November 1993 by a group belonging to the Jamiat-e Islami. He resisted and was beaten unconscious. When he regained consciousness, his son Rahmatullah, aged 15, had been abducted. Two days later in a similar raid two other sons Ahmadreza, aged 13 and Mustafa, aged 11 were also abducted. After negotiations with the abductors about a bribe to release the children failed, the family fled Kabul. The whereabouts of the two boys are still not known.

The children of Mohammad Yar reported that their father, a former army officer, and six of their brothers and sisters, the youngest of whom was eight years old, were arrested and taken away by forces of the Hesb-e Wahdat Islami (Party of Islamic Unity) during a raid on their home in Kabul. The remaining children could not trace the arrested family members and left Kabul days later.

On 2 October 1992, Zia Nassry, a journalist, who had returned from the USA to Afghanistan to help internally displaced persons, was arrested by forces allegedly of the Jamiat-e Islami in Kabul. His family has not been able to trace him.

Amnesty International is gravely concerned about these "disappearances" and once again urges the government and all the Mujahideen parties in Afghanistan to respect human rights, to observe minimum international humanitarian standards and to respect the right to life and security of the person.

"Under no circumstances must prisoners be held in secret detention centres where they are particularly at risk of torture and extrajudicial execution", said Amnesty International. "All prisoners of conscience should be immediately and unconditionally released and all fighters must be clearly and decisively instructed that they may not take hostages or arrest people to extract bribes."

Amnesty International is also calling on the international community to undertake every possible effort and to exert whatever influence its members may have to bring to an end the present widespread human rights abuses in Afghanistan.

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