

AI Index: NWS 11/74/93
Distr: SC/PO

No. of words: 2097

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TO: PRESS OFFICERS

FROM: PRESS AND PUBLICATIONS

DATE: 29 JUNE 1993

WEEKLY UPDATE SERVICE 74/93

Contained in this weekly update are external items on Libya and Egypt.

NEWS INITIATIVES

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

SECRETARY GENERAL PRESS CONFERENCE IN CAIRO, EGYPT

PLEASE NOTE: The speech that Pierre is gave today has been altered, the new version, as revised by the team in Egypt, is enclosed. The speech was given at 1800 hrs (Cairo time), 29 June and was also issued in Cairo as a press release.

Please refer to OAU six-point appeal, AI Index: IOR 63/04/93, which was faxed/e-mailed/telexed to you as an urgent note to press officers on Friday. This document will also be handed out at the press conference on Tuesday 29 June.

Annual Report - 0600 hrs gmt, 8 July

URGENT - CHANGE TO NEWS RELEASE An urgent note was sent to press officers, advising them of the urgent change to the annual report news release, in the light of developments at the World Conference. The new version of the news release has already been sent to you, as follows.

The second and third paragraphs of the original text should be deleted, and the following text inserted in their place:

"The World Conference has restated the human rights principles of the past, instead of dealing with the violations of today and the threats of the future," said Amnesty International.

"The real yardstick of the World Conference will be action, not words. What are governments now going to do to stop the torture, the "disappearances" and the killings?

"When we compare the fine speeches and final document with the damning evidence of political repression in this report it is clear that governments have yet to prove that the World Conference will make a difference to the lives of people around the world."

The rest of the news release remains unchanged.

FORTHCOMING NEWS INITIATIVES

Indonesia (Aceh) - 28 July

Document and news release to go with action on massive numbers of political killings.

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

Saudi Arabia - 1 July

A weekly update sent out yesterday included an item to go with the document: Saudi Arabia: An Upsurge in Public Executions, AI Index: MDE 23/04/93. The document and weekly update item are embargoed for 1 July and will be sent out to selected international media by the IS Press Office. Please note that the document has been sent out in the weekly mailing.

2. MDE 19/WU 01/93 EXTERNAL
29 June 1993

LIBYA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL WRITES TO HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT OF ALL OAU MEMBERS STATES URGING THEM TO PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS

On 25 June the Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB), of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), published an entry entitled "Amnesty International head asks (Gaddafi) to protect human rights in Africa". The source quoted in the article was the official Libyan news agency, Jana, on 23 June 1993.

The SWB reported that, according to Jana, the Secretary General of Amnesty International, Pierre Sané, had sent a written message to Colonel Mu' ammar Gaddafi because of the latter's "humanitarian and noble stance on capital punishment and his call for its abolition throughout the world". It was said that Pierre Sané had called for an African initiative "under the patronage" of Colonel Gaddafi which "would lead to the protection of human rights and put an end to their violations". However, this does not accurately reflect action taken by Amnesty International.

The facts are that in May 1993, on the eve of the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), Amnesty International wrote to the Heads of State and Government of all OAU members states urging them to "demonstrate a strong political will and leadership to promote and protect human rights". It called on all OAU Heads of State and Government to adopt a "strong resolution in support of the promotion and protection of human rights in Africa." Nothing in the letter sent to Colonel Gaddafi on 17 May could be interpreted to mean that the organization saw Libya's human rights record as exemplary. In fact, in recent years Amnesty International has repeatedly expressed its concerns to the Libyan authorities about reports of grave human rights violations in the country.

In October 1992 Amnesty International published a report entitled Libya: Further information on political detention, (AI Index MDE 19/03/92), to update an earlier report published in June 1991, Libya: Amnesty International's concerns in the light of recent legal reforms, (AI Index MDE 19/02/91). In both reports Amnesty International expressed concern about the continued detention of over 550 named political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience, most of whom are held incommunicado, without charge or trial, some of them since 1974. The conditions under which these political prisoners are held facilitate torture and ill-treatment, which are known to be used in detention centres in Libya.

Amnesty International has repeatedly called on the Libyan authorities to release all prisoners of conscience and ensure prompt and fair trials for all political prisoners. It has also called for the implementation of safeguards which would protect detainees from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Amnesty International also expressed concern over the executions of six prisoners on 10 November 1992, the first officially announced executions in Libya for more than five years. Pictures of the hangings were shown on Libyan state television the following day. Protesting the executions, Amnesty International called on the Libyan authorities to commute all death sentences and abolish the death penalty without delay.

3. MDE 12/WU 04/93
GIVEN AT 1800 HRS (CAIRO TIME), TUESDAY 29 JUNE 1993

Following is the new version of Pierre Sané's speech given today.

EXTERNAL

ADDRESS TO PRESS CONFERENCE

CAIRO 29 JUNE 1993

by Pierre Sané, Secretary General, Amnesty International
(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)

Thank you for attending this press conference.

I have recently come from Vienna, from the World Conference on Human Rights.

I am deeply, deeply angry about what happened there.

A historic opportunity to improve the system of international protection of human rights has been wasted.

180 governments from all parts of the world revealed themselves unable to agree on any practical steps to address the present and future challenges of humanity's basic needs and fundamental rights.

Some of them showed that political interest and self-preservation are more important to them than the lives and well being of their peoples.

Ultimately they have now undermined the credibility of the United Nations. In the eyes of billions of people, at this dangerous and volatile time, the UN remains our best hope for achieving internationally coordinated action on human rights and this conference which took place 200 kms away from Bosnia should have done much more.

Instead some attacked the basic principle that all men, women and children are entitled to the same basic human rights: a principle not open to question.

Then, when The Conference reaffirmed what was agreed half a century ago, they tried to present it as a success.

The World Conference on Human Rights was a disgrace to the peoples of the world.

I am angry, but I have not given up hope.

Yes, the World Conference revealed the hypocrisy and cynical manoeuvrings of some governments bent on denying their people the rights and privileges they themselves enjoy.

But it also showed the vigorous growth of the worldwide human rights movement over the past 25 years.

More than 1,500 non-governmental organizations were represented in Vienna. And they showed the commitment and determination to tackle problems that the governments so sadly lacked. And let me assure you that they will.

It is our role to increase the pressure on governments until they abide by their human rights commitments and as we enter the 21st century these commitments have now to be translated into civilized behaviour.

And that is why I am here today.

I want to put pressure on the African heads of state and government who are at this very moment meeting here in Cairo at the OAU Assembly.

The OAU has made some positive achievements over the past 30 years.

It can be justly proud of its work to combat racism in southern Africa, to eliminate the last vestiges of colonialism, to protect refugees and to mediate conflicts.

Indeed Africa, although poor, has the most humane policy vis-a-vis refugees - and thus is highly commendable in a world driven more by egoism and self interest.

But now it must do more. Because Africa demands more and because the people of Africa deserve to be treated with as much dignity and respect as anywhere else. Their suffering in the hands of slave traders and colonialists cannot go on now that they are free.

The OAU must end 30 years of silence on human rights in member states.

Too many people are dying in this continent of ours at the hands of the forces who are supposed to protect them.

Governments have a responsibility to protect all lives and not to waste them.

People are dying in Somalia, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Sudan. They are dying in many other African countries as well.

In the 1990s, more than a quarter of African states have been responsible for unlawful killings, often in secret, often on a massive scale.

In most cases those responsible have escaped unpunished and even uncriticized.

This must stop.

It is time for the OAU to seize the initiative on human rights. To publicly condemn the guilty. To stand up for the victims. Like the UN the OAS (Organization of American States) or the Council of Europe the OAU must speak up publicly about the violations of human rights committed in its member states.

It must now address directly the gross human rights violations that underlie the poverty and internal conflict that ravage this continent. I have here a message for all OAU delegates that spells out six steps we regard as of the utmost importance. [COPIES AVAILABLE]

In this respect, Egypt has a special responsibility.

For the first time, both the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the OAU Assembly are being chaired by Egyptians.

Egypt has in the past proved itself unafraid of leading by example on the international stage.

This is a time when it should again take the lead and press for enlightened action.

Of course Egypt, like other countries in the region, faces serious problems of its own.

Amnesty International is deeply concerned by the escalation in violence here.

The security threat is grave. Innocent civilians are being mutilated and killed by groups who use violence to further political aims.

Amnesty International condemns these human rights abuses without reservation.

But the crimes of opposition movements can never justify governments themselves breaking the law.

A month ago Amnesty International released its report on Egypt.

It shows that the Egyptian government crackdown on Islamic militants has led to a dramatic increase in human rights abuse.

It describes dozens of brutal and unlawful killings by members of the security forces. It details mass arrests, torture, unfair political trials and death sentences.

While we welcome the Government's response to our report, we are still looking for action to end these abuses.

Since that response, two men have been hanged.

When we protest against the killings, the torture, the hangings, we are often accused of lending our support to Islamic "fundamentalists".

Over its 30-year history, Amnesty has been accused of supporting terrorists when we intervened with the colonial powers on behalf of independence fighters.

We have been accused of supporting communists when we intervened with governments on behalf of members of left-wing opposition movements, or being a CIA front when we have exposed unlawful acts in communist or Third World countries.

Today we are accused of supporting "fundamentalism".

But our position is simple and straightforward.

Human rights are universal - they belong to everyone, regardless of their beliefs. And human rights are indivisible. All people should be entitled to all the rights set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Whenever human rights violations occur we will expose them and campaign against them. And that includes countries such as Iran and Sudan.

Or countries such as Israel or the United States, as well as countries in Europe, Asia or Africa.

I hope that the OAU summit will do better than the World Conference, by implementing real safeguards to protect human rights throughout Africa.

As the OAU is celebrating its 30th anniversary, its success will not be measured in fine-sounding words, but in its impact on the lives of people across this continent. And African people do need a break.