
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 122/93

TO: PRESS OFFICERS
FROM: IS PRESS OFFICE
DATE: 29 SEPTEMBER 1993

AI INDEX: NWS 11/122/93
DISTR: SC/PO
NO OF WORDS: 1436

NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - COUNCIL OF EUROPE, MEXICO (GOODNEWS)

NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Sudan - 29 September - SEE NEWS SERVICE 88
Myanmar - 8 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 111
Yugoslavia/Kosovo - 12 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 117
EJEs and "Disappearances" - 20 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 113

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

Refugees - 1 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 117/119
Togo - 5 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 111

****Council of Europe Summit - 7 October****

News service item on Council of Europe Summit enclosed. European section press officers are encouraged to try for opinion pieces/features in national newspapers. The open letter to go with this item, Old and news challenges: Open Letter to Governments at the Council of Europe Summit, AI Index: IOR 61/03/93, has been posted to sections today. If you require it more urgently, please contact Charlotte Bouchier (LIG00 at IS - 5678) or myself (Paula - 5562) and we can fax/e-mail it.

Francophone Summit - 11 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 111

****North Korea - 15 October**** - SEE NEWS SERVICE 88/119

Please note that the lead story in the October Newsletter is this North Korea story - the report was delayed, hence the embargo change to a date after the Newsletter release. Please try to reduce embargo breaks by not sending the Newsletter story to journalists.

FORTHCOMING NEWS INITIATIVES

Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting - 21-25 October (undecided)
Iran - 3 November (international)
Venezuela - 10 November - SEE NEWS SERVICE 121
Papua New Guinea - 19 November (targeted)

AI INDEX: IOR 61/WU 01/93
EMBARGOED FOR 7 OCTOBER 1993

CHALLENGES OLD AND NEW: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL URGES HISTORIC COUNCIL OF EUROPE SUMMIT TO LIVE UP TO 44-YEAR-OLD PLEDGE

Amnesty International is calling on the Council of Europe, holding their first heads of state summit in Vienna on 8 and 9 October, to live up to their promise made 44 years ago that the protection of human rights in all member states would be a primary role of the organization.

This historic summit will focus on new challenges for the Council in post-Cold War Europe, such as the admission of countries from eastern and central Europe, protection of minorities and the upsurge of intolerance, racism, anti-semitism and xenophobia.

"These challenges must be met," said Amnesty International, "but what about the old challenges that still have not been tackled after so many decades?" The Committee of (Foreign) Ministers - the Council's highest decision-making body - has shunned its duty to take political action in respect of member states who commit ongoing and grave violations of human rights. "It's no use being complacent and leaving it to the other organs of the Council to act," said Amnesty International.

"What if the same country is repeatedly brought before the European Commission and Court of Human Rights to answer for the same type of human rights violation? What if the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture, normally deliberating in secrecy, feels it must say publicly that torture is continuing unchecked in a member state - as it did ten months ago about Turkey?"

Amnesty International believes governments, speaking collectively through the Council of Europe, must take up these issues where the expert bodies are forced to stop. Even in respect of incidents or situations of grave violations that may not have been tackled by the expert bodies, member states should never ignore reliable information from their own sources or from non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

"By failing to act, member states make a mockery of their solemn pledge in the Council's Statute to accept 'the principles of the rule of law and of the enjoyment by all persons within [their] jurisdiction of human rights and fundamental freedoms...'," said Amnesty International.

The organization believes the Council of Europe is also weakened by its habit of secrecy. New human rights standards which will affect the lives of millions of people, for example, are discussed behind closed doors.

"It is difficult to see why issues which in other organizations such as the United Nations are discussed publicly and openly should be shrouded in secrecy in Strasbourg. This can hardly inspire public confidence or understanding of the Council's work and ignores the wealth of practical experience offered by NGOs, big and small, throughout the region," said Amnesty International.

Most NGOs are marginalised from the substantive work of the Council. Amnesty International, along with only two other NGOs, is in the privileged position of being able to participate in the work of the Council's main human rights body. But this is no substitute for developing a real partnership with the wider NGO community.

"The Council of Europe prides itself on its human rights treaties and standards which are often a model for the rest of the world. However, its recent record belies this claim; the Council has started drawing up human rights standards which ignore the development of international law and practice over the last 40 years," said Amnesty International. Most recently, a draft Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights on the rights of detainees is seriously flawed after more than two years of negotiations.

In the past the Council has also worked positively to strengthen the protection of refugees. Alarming, however, the Council has recently failed to challenge restrictive measures being adopted in Europe as the European Community (EC) moves rapidly to "harmonize" asylum policies. In some cases the common positions established by the EC - and by some other governments - contravene international standards.

"The refugee crisis in Europe demands a truly international response," said Amnesty International. "The EC states, and increasingly the affected non-EC states, are all members of the Council of Europe, yet the Council has stayed silent. Because of its primary role as protector of human rights it should be providing a forum for all these states to discuss the issues - within a strong human rights framework."

Amnesty International believes existing members of the Council of Europe should also be at pains to ensure that potential and new members from eastern and central Europe comply with the highest human rights standards. The investigations should be thorough and identify specific problems to be addressed. Most importantly, there must be a system for regular and rigorous scrutiny of the human rights record of member countries and it is up to the Committee of Ministers to take whatever political action is needed to ensure that both old and new members of the Council comply with human rights standards.

The Council of Europe is going through the painful process of readjusting to post-Cold War Europe, though the challenges it faces are not merely the product of the collapse of communism - they are often the result of the failure of political will by member states over the last four decades. Amnesty International believes the Council of Europe could win the confidence of the European public, particularly victims of human rights violations, if the changes really do result in a more effective and open system for protecting the human rights of people in *all* member states.

ENDS/

AI INDEX: AMR 41/WU 01/93 - GOODNEWS
28 SEPTEMBER 1993

MEXICO: LETTER FROM PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE

Manuel Manríquez San Agustín, a non-Spanish speaking Otomí Indian musician, was sentenced to 24 years imprisonment in July 1991 in Mexico despite not being able to understand both his initial questioning by police and his subsequent trial because an interpreter was not provided. His conviction for murder was based on a confession "signed" after he was brutally tortured during four days in incommunicado detention.

Since his arrest Manuel Manríquez has learnt to read and speak Spanish and in September 1991 he and other indigenous prisoners founded a human rights organisation which has campaigned on behalf of the rights of Indians and peasants imprisoned in Mexico.

Amnesty International adopted Manuel Manríquez as a prisoner of conscience in 1992, and despite public outcry for his release, he remains in prison today. However, his morale remains high and following is an extract from a letter he wrote from prison to an Amnesty member in December 1992:

"I would like to say that it is good to know that I can count on your friendship and support; it allows me to have faith in humanity and in God, despite all the injustices in this world. To date I have received a total of 86 letters from Europe, which have helped strengthen my morale and optimism, and have made firmer my resolve to continue the struggle for the defence of human rights in my country. This past year has been very encouraging for me, as I have been appointed president of the "Ricardo López Juárez" Committee for the Defence of the Human Rights of Inmates, in the context of the "500 years of indigenous and popular resistance" commemoration, because 1993 has been designated the Year of Indigenous Peoples, and because the Guatemalan indigenous woman Rigoberta Menchú has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize; unmistakable signs that the world is beginning to devote attention to the misery and marginalisation that we, the indigenous minorities of the Americas, suffer...

"I hope that one day, if I am released, I will be in a position to travel to your country and visit you, to express in person my gratitude and friendship. Words cannot express how grateful I am, for however much I write I am not happy with what I say. All I can add is that you have shown me signs of your noble humane spirit and that of your people. Thank you."

ENDS/