
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 127/93

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NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: SWAZILAND, ETHIOPIA

NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

PLEASE NOTE: An evaluation questionnaire on the World Conference is being sent out to the whole movement in the Weekly Mailing. It would be invaluable if press officers fill in one from their own perspective, so please look out for it.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Myanmar - 8 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 111

Yugoslavia/Kosovo - 12 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 117/126

Please note that we have today been refused visas to enter Kosovo. Sorry for the delay with the news release, it should be sent out to sections by Friday this week. We will launch it from sections and IS in the usual way.

EJEs and "Disappearances" - 20 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 124/126

India & Pakistan - 7 December

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

Council of Europe Summit - 7 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 122

Francophone Summit - 11 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 111/126

North Korea - 15 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 88/119/124

Afghanistan - 26 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 124

Algeria - 28 October

News service item to go with document on hundreds of executions after unfair trials, AI MDE 28/15/93, which will be sent in the Weekly Mailing of 20 October. If you need the document earlier, please contact us - it is very short and can be faxed to you.

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 - 18 November (targeted)

Colombia - 16 March 1993 - SEE NEWS SERVICE 123 + UAs AMR 23/56+57/93

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SWAZILAND: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL WELCOMES COMMUTATION OF DEATH SENTENCES

Amnesty International welcomes the commutation of three death sentences on 1 October to mark the 25th birthday of King Mswati III and the 25th anniversary of Swaziland's independence from the United Kingdom.

The three sentences, which had all been confirmed by the Court of Appeal, were commuted by King Mswati III to life imprisonment, which is set at 20 years by Swaziland's Prisons Act. Seven other prisoners remain under sentence of death whose sentences have yet to be confirmed by the Appeal Court. Amnesty International is calling on the authorities to commute their sentences also.

On 27 September the government announced the repeal of the 60-day detention without trial law. Since its introduction in 1973, this has been used to detain critics and opponents of the government, including prisoners of conscience, for lengthy periods without charge or trial. It provided for the imposition of successive 60-day detention orders against which there was no legal redress.

In contrast to these positive steps, the government has recently introduced two new laws which there is concern may lead to new human rights violations. These new laws have been brought in at a time when national elections are scheduled for 16 October. All political parties have been illegal in Swaziland since the King's Proclamation No. 12 of 1973. Scores of people have been arrested and tried under the 1973 legislation this year, with at least 62 already convicted.

The new laws introduced include a new electoral law which regulates campaigning for political office and carries a penalty of five years' imprisonment for its violation. This law has already been used to arrest people and charge them with "interfering with the elections", solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of assembly and to expression.

The other new law defines certain crimes as "non-bailable offences": it states that once the police have arrested an individual for one of the offences listed in the law, there is no possibility for a bail application to be made. One of the non-bailable offences named is broadly defined as "instigating violence". Concern has been expressed by human rights lawyers and others in Swaziland that this could, in fact, be misused to hold peaceful critics of opponents of the government for long periods without bringing them to trial. The Swaziland Law Society, which is carrying out a review of all repressive laws, has called upon the government to repeal the "non-bailable offences" law immediately.

Amnesty International is calling for the commutation of the remaining death sentences, abolition of the death penalty and the repeal or amendment of all laws to bring them into full conformity with the requirements of international human rights standards.

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ETHIOPIA: CONCERN ABOUT SHOOTINGS OF DEMONSTRATORS AND THE ARRESTS

Amnesty International is concerned about killings of demonstrators by the security forces in Gondar town, Ethiopia, on 6 September, which may have been extrajudicial executions. The police have stated that 13 people, including three members of the security forces, were shot dead and 24 others wounded in front of the Eyesus Orthodox Church. Unofficial reports, however, claim that many more civilians suffered bullet wounds and that the number of deaths may be higher.

A huge demonstration, summoned by church bells, was protesting at attempts by the police and security forces to arrest a dissident preacher, Amha-Yesus, in the Eyesus church in Gondar after he had given a sermon. Described as a "hermit" (batawi in the Amharic language) and not officially licensed to preach by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church authorities, he had apparently voiced criticisms of the government, both in this sermon and on previous occasions.

Amha-Yesus is said to have criticized Eritrea's recent independence from Ethiopia and policies decreasing the influence of the Orthodox Church and the Amhara ethnic group (or "nationality"). Police justified the attempts to arrest him by claiming that he was instigating inter-ethnic clashes and religious conflicts. Details of the incident are still unclear. Police said that members of the crowd opposing his arrest threw stones and grenades at the security forces. Unofficial sources say the demonstration started peacefully.

Amnesty International is urging the Ethiopian authorities to set up an independent and impartial inquiry to investigate the incident in order to establish exactly what happened and why the security forces used lethal force against the demonstrators. To be consistent with international standards for such inquiries, the inquiry should have full powers to interview witnesses and protect them from reprisals, and should publish its findings and recommendations as soon as possible.

The security forces arrested large numbers of people after the demonstration and killings. Amha-Yesus was arrested in Addis Ababa on 13 September and he is held along with over 30 others, including several priests, in various police stations there. It is not yet known if any of those arrested have been brought to court and charged with any criminal offence.

Amnesty International is asking for assurances that the detainees in Gondar and Addis Ababa are being treated humanely in custody, and that they are allowed access to their families, legal representatives and medical doctors if needed, and to representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Ethiopian law requires that they should be brought before a magistrate within 48 hours and that grounds should be provided for any further detention permitted by the court for a 14-day period for investigation into a specific criminal charge. Otherwise, they should be released. Amnesty International is investigating whether Amha-Yesus and others are held solely on account of their peaceful opinions.

Amnesty International's concerns about the Gondar incident are heightened by the considerable number of shooting deaths by the security forces in the past two years, including those of peaceful demonstrators. Official investigations into the incidents by a previous special inquiry or committee of the Council of Representatives (parliament) have also had serious shortcomings; the terms of reference and procedures of these investigations have fallen short of relevant international standards for such inquiries, and several of the inquiries have not made their conclusions public. The findings of the inquiry into the shootings at the Addis Ababa University on 5 January 1993, for example, when police acknowledged that one student was shot dead and others wounded by the security forces, have not yet been announced.

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