
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 165/93

TO: PRESS OFFICERS
FROM: IS PRESS OFFICE
DATE: 9 DECEMBER 1993

AI INDEX: NWS 11/165/93
DISTR: SC/PO
NO OF WORDS: 631

NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - MOROCCO

NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

PLEASE NOTE: The France RAN office has moved to EFAL. Their new numbers are Tel: +44 59 29 96, Fax: +44 59 29 94.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

India - 15 December - PLEASE SEE NEWS SERVICE 159

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

South Africa - 9 December - SEE NEWS SERVICE 165

Human Rights Day Speech - 9 December - SEE NEWS SERVICE 162

Bahrain - 16 December - SEE NEWS SERVICE 163/164

FORTHCOMING NEWS INITIATIVES 1994

Children - 7 January - SEE NEWS SERVICE 161

Tunisia - 12 January

USA death penalty - 26 January - SEE NEWS SERVICE 161

South Africa - 16 February SEE NEWS SERVICE 159

Women - 8 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 161

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

AI INDEX: MDE 29/WU 05/93
10 DECEMBER 1993

MOROCCO: IMPRISONMENT OF PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE AND "DISAPPEARANCE" OF OPPONENTS IN SECRET DETENTION CONTINUE DESPITE IMPROVEMENTS IN PRE-TRIAL DETENTION

Amnesty International delegates who visited Morocco in November confirmed that improvements in aspects of the human rights situation had taken place, especially during the period of pre-trial detention. However, they stressed that Morocco's failure to free prisoners of conscience and to release or resolve the cases of those who have "disappeared" for years in secret detention remained an open sore on its human rights record.

The delegates found that the legal limits of *garde à vue* detention are now generally respected and some methods of torture - such as suspending people in contorted positions, stifling them with cloths soaked in chemicals and subjecting them to electric shocks - which were formerly used systematically on political detainees, are no longer reported. However, beating or ill-treatment of detainees in police stations still continues and at least four detainees have died in custody in 1993, allegedly by suicide, in circumstances which strongly suggest that police violence played a part in their death. One of them was Mounir Azaage who died in the central Tangiers Police Station on 11 October.

Moreover, the rule of law is still denied in Western Sahara, the former Spanish colony under Moroccan rule since 1975. The legal limit of *garde à vue* detention is frequently exceeded and at least 15 of those arrested recently, who include former "disappeared" released in 1991 after up to 16 years detention in secret centres, have been held for four months or more. Cases of severe torture have also been reported there.

"Improvements in pre-trial detention in Morocco are positive but fragile", said Amnesty International. "Practices in Western Sahara are still unacceptable. And until prisoners of conscience and those who 'disappeared' in secret detention are released or accounted for, Morocco's human rights record remains irrevocably scarred".

Amnesty International's delegates held a positive discussion about their concerns with Morocco's new Human Rights Minister, Omer Azziman, and handed him a list of over 500 political prisoners, including over 150 prisoners of conscience, and of 80 Moroccan and 485 Sahrawis who "disappeared" after arrest, many of whom are believed to be still alive in secret detention.

The delegates also held two meetings with the Moroccan *Conseil consultatif des droits de l'homme* (CCDH), Human Rights Advisory Council, a state-appointed council which includes representatives from political parties and professional organizations. The CCDH promised that lawyers collaborating with it would help to obtain compensation for former "disappeared" persons and detainees released in 1991 after 18 years in the secret detention centre of Tazmamert. Amnesty International expressed regret that very little progress had been made since its earlier discussions with the CCDH in May this year to resolve the longstanding cases of prisoners of conscience and the "disappeared".

"People who should not have been held for one day have now been detained for up to ten years in prison solely because of their non-violent beliefs", said Amnesty International. "Families have waited for 30 years for information on relatives who have 'disappeared' after arrest. These cases should all now be resolved".

ENDS/