

JUNE 2000 WORLDWIDE APPEALS

Burkina Faso - Presidential Security Force implicated in murder of journalist

Norbert Zongo, editor-in-chief of the newspaper L'Indépendant, and President of the Société des éditeurs de la presse privée, Association of Independent Newspaper Editors, was killed in December 1998. His badly burned body was found with those of his three companions in a vehicle about 100km from Ouagadougou. His death sparked off widespread social unrest and calls for an end to impunity for human rights violations in Burkina Faso.

Renowned for his criticism of the government, Norbert Zongo had vigorously pursued the case of David Ouédraogo, who had died in custody in January 1998 apparently as a result of being tortured by members of the presidential security force. He had been arrested a month earlier with two others, all accused of having stolen a large amount of money from their employer, François Compaoré, the brother of President Blaise Compaoré.

An independent commission of inquiry, established by the government to investigate the deaths of Norbert Zongo and his three companions, published its findings in May 1999. It concluded that Norbert Zongo's murder had been politically motivated and that the three men who died with him had been killed in order not to leave any witnesses. Six members of the presidential security force were named as serious suspects in his murder and the commission recommended that judicial proceedings be instituted against them. Although a judge was subsequently appointed to the case, there has been no further progress and no one has yet been charged with the killings. Three of the suspects were, however, subsequently arrested and charged in June 1999 with the murder of David Ouédraogo, but none has yet been tried.

+ Please write, urging the authorities to initiate judicial proceedings against those suspected of the murders of Norbert Zongo and his three companions. Send appeals (preferably in French) to: Président Blaise Compaoré, Chef de l'Etat, La Présidence, BP 24 Ouagadougou 01, Burkina Faso (fax: +226 31 49 26), and to: Monsieur Boureïma Badini, Ministre de la Justice, Ministère de la Justice, BP 526 Ouagadougou 01, Burkina Faso (fax: +226 31 71 37).

China - Student leader held for wanting to commemorate Tiananmen Square victims

Jiang Qisheng, a former student leader involved in the 1989 pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square, is being held for "inciting subversion". In April 1999, he distributed leaflets urging the Chinese people to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the June 4 massacre with symbolic non-violent acts. Shortly afterwards, Jiang Qisheng was arrested. In the years since 1989, he has been consistently critical of the authorities' actions in Tiananmen Square, and their subsequent interpretation of events.

There were serious irregularities in the way his detention and trial were conducted. He was initially detained for 39 days without charge. His lawyer was not provided with an official arrest warrant, and received only six days' prior notification of the trial, which hindered his ability to prepare a proper defence. Only the lawyer and Jiang Qisheng's wife were able to attend the trial on 1 November. At the end of the closed trial, no verdict was announced and no decision has yet been made public.

+ Please write, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Jiang Qisheng as a prisoner of conscience. Also express concern that the trial was closed and did not meet international standards of fairness. Send appeals to: President of Beijing Municipal High People's Court, Qin Zhengan Yuanzhang, Beijingshi Gaoji Renmin Fayuan, 215 Xiheyuan, Chongwenqu, Beijingshi 100051, People's Republic of China, and to: Mayor of Beijing, Liu Qi Shizhang, Beijingshi Renmin Zhengfu, 2 Zhengyilu, Dongchengqu, Beijingshi 100744, People's Republic of China.

Tajikistan - Presidential clemency is the only hope of avoiding execution

Dilfuza Numonova, a 21-year-old trainee jeweller, is believed to be in imminent danger of execution. In January she was sentenced to death for the fatal shooting in November 1999 of her lover Kamil Kurbanov. This sentence was upheld on appeal to the Supreme Court on 14 March. Her only remaining hope of avoiding execution is clemency from President Imamali Sharipovich Rakhmonov, who has the power to commute death sentences when all other appeals have been exhausted. Dilfuza Numonova stated that she did not kill Kamil Kurbanov and that her confession to his murder was extracted under duress. Observers at her trial said it was unfair and biased, and there have been allegations that Kamil Kurbanov's relatives had threatened the judge to force him to sentence Dilfuza Numonova to death. She was convicted of premeditated murder and the illegal possession of firearms.

Dilfuza Numonova claimed that in late January she was forced to have an abortion. Under Tajik law, pregnant women may not be executed. She was reportedly beaten several times in pre-trial detention, and is now being held in very harsh conditions in Dushanbe City Prison. According to reports her health is deteriorating.

+Please write, asking for a commutation of Dilfuza Numonova's death sentence. Also call for an investigation into the allegations she has made of forced abortion and ill-treatment. Send your appeals to: President Imamali Sharipovich Rakhmonov, Respublika Tajikistan, g. Dushanbe, Apparat Prezidenta Respubliki, Prezidentu Rakhmonovu I.Sh., Tajikistan (fax: +0099 2372 212520/211837).