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@GOVERNMENTS RISK SABOTAGING  
HOPES FOR NEW ERA OF HUMAN RIGHTS

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Amnesty International's annual report  
details abuses in 141 countries

**Governments around the world are in danger of "sabotaging the world's hopes for human rights", Amnesty International said today (Wednesday 10 July) in releasing its 1991 annual report.**

**"Some governments are flagrantly torturing and killing -- others are hypocritically condemning some abuses but ignoring others when it suits them," the worldwide human rights organization said.**

**While the 1990s opened against a background of dramatic political change that often centred on greater respect for human rights - symbolized for many by the release of Nelson Mandela in South Africa and the fall of the Berlin Wall - Amnesty International's global survey of human rights violations shows that abuses continued and often got worse in 141 countries.**

**People were jailed as prisoners of conscience in about half the countries in the world, more than 100 governments continued to torture or ill-treat prisoners, thousands of people "disappeared" or were extrajudicially executed in 29 countries, and death sentences were handed down or carried out in 90 countries.**

**The organization said the mass executions and brutal torture following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait shocked the world and showed clearly the failure of other governments to tackle serious human rights abuses in Iraq in the past.**

**"We've seen human rights often take a back seat to trade or diplomatic concerns," Amnesty International said, "and become the casualty of political expediency."**

**The organization said that while the previously ignored abuses committed by Iraqi forces made headlines and topped the international agenda, the grave violations in other countries like Chad, China, Colombia, Mali, Myanmar, Syria and Turkey detailed in the 1991 annual report were often given short shrift by governments.**

**In Africa, gross human rights violations continued despite the optimism which followed the release of political prisoners in South Africa early in the year and the abolition of the death penalty in the constitution of the newly-independent Namibia. The persecution of blacks from southern Mauritania reached disturbing new heights, with soldiers mostly from the ruling majority community arresting thousands and randomly killing unarmed villagers in virtually all parts of the south. And in Chad, the outgoing government's final act was to order the killing of at least 300 political prisoners, capping eight years of brutal repression of its suspected opponents.**

**Even though Iran was again a country where Amnesty International recorded hundreds of executions and other serious abuses, international criticism of the human rights situation was muted. In Syria thousands of political prisoners were still imprisoned without**

charge from previous years, some of them simply because they were related to suspected government critics. In Israel and the Occupied Territories, some 25,000 Palestinians were arrested, including over 4,000 who were held without charge or trial. And in Morocco over 800 suspected rioters went to prison after unfair trials during December 1990 and early 1991 - many of them said they had been tortured before their trials.

Asia too was the stage for disturbing human rights violations. In Sri Lanka thousands of civilians were extrajudicially executed or "disappeared". An unprecedented rise in violence and killings by separatist groups in several regions of India was accompanied by a similar rise in politically motivated killings by government forces in which many hundreds of people died. And in China thousands of pro-democracy protesters arrested the previous year were still detained without ever being charged or tried, and the 750 firing squad executions recorded by Amnesty International were the highest number since 1983.

In the Americas, the high rate of "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions in Colombia continued and more than 300 men, women and children "disappeared" after being arrested by security forces in Peru. Children too were gunned down by "death squads" in Guatemala and Brazil -- in Rio de Janeiro alone the majority of the 500 children who died violent deaths were killed by "death squads". In El Salvador, the killings by "death squads" -- often made up of police officers or soldiers -- doubled in the first eight months of 1990 compared to the previous year. And in the United States, more than 2,300 people were still on death row in well over half the states and 23 people were executed during the year.

"The sweeping political changes in Eastern Europe saw an end to the widespread unjust political imprisonment of the past," Amnesty International said, "but other human rights abuses in Europe continued often in a climate of growing ethnic conflict or nationalist demands."

(Approved rd teams) Over 1,000 ethnic Albanians in Yugoslavia's Kosovo province were imprisoned for up to 60 days for going on strike or peacefully expressing nationalist sentiments and at least 30 demonstrators or onlookers were killed and several hundred wounded during violent clashes with the police. At least 600 political prisoners were still held in Albania at the end of the year, the majority of them prisoners of conscience. In the USSR at least 30 Armenians were murdered in Azerbaydzhan in a reported pogrom while local police and soldiers apparently stood by and did nothing to protect them. The pattern of widespread and systematic torture which has persisted for years in Turkey continued in 1990. And in about half the countries in Europe, including France, Switzerland and Greece, conscientious objectors to military service were imprisoned as prisoners of conscience.

