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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REPORT 1996 UPDATES

**Selected events covering the period
from January to April 1996**

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Africa Update

Selected events in Africa from January to April 1996

Burundi and Rwanda

Continuing mass human rights violations in Burundi caused thousands more people to flee the country and thousands of others to be internally displaced within Burundi, as mass fighting persisted.

On 17 January around 15,000 Rwandese refugees fled a refugee camp in northeast Burundi and crossed into Tanzania. Their flight reportedly took place following fighting around the camp, apparently between government forces and armed groups. However, on 31 March 1995, the Tanzanian authorities had closed their borders. They stated that allowing in refugees in January 1996 was only a temporary measure. It is feared that some may be returned against their will to Burundi or Rwanda.

On 20 and 21 January, a further 16,000 Rwandese and some Burundi asylum-seekers fled towards the Tanzanian border. They were initially turned back at the border by the Tanzanian authorities. Some were eventually let in; others began making their way back to Rwanda; others remain in Burundi. However, the number of Rwandese refugees in Burundi did drop significantly in early 1996 because of the violence in Burundi itself, intimidation of Rwandese refugees by the Burundi security forces and the intensive campaign to encourage repatriation to Rwanda.

Rwanda also remained the scene of serious human rights violations, even though these were not on the scale of those committed during the genocide of 1994. The situation in the prisons remained of grave concern, with almost 70,000 prisoners detained without charge or trial in intolerable conditions.

More than 200,000 Burundi refugees and about 1.7 million Rwandese are still in camps in Zaire and Tanzania; tens of thousands Rwandese are in camps in Burundi. According to reports in February and March, the Zairian authorities are planning the progressive closure of refugee camps.

Rwandese armed groups from the refugee camps in Zaire, Tanzania and Burundi have killed unarmed civilians during cross border attacks into Rwanda, in villages close to the border. Some of these incursions appear to be aimed at eliminating witnesses of massacres during 1994 for fear they might denounce those responsible.

The civil war in Burundi and related human rights abuses entered a new phase in March when the armed groups extended their attacks to the southern provinces. For most of the last two years, attacks by the Hutu-dominated army had been largely restricted to northern Burundi and around the capital, Bujumbura. In unconfirmed reports by the Burundi government and military sources hundreds of Tutsi and Hutu civilians were killed in April by armed groups since the new offensive began in southern Burundi. Other sources said that government forces killed dozens or even hundreds of unarmed civilians. An estimated 55,000 to 100,000 people were reportedly displaced. The authorities did not mention any human rights violations committed by government forces.

Equatorial Guinea

During the run up to the first presidential elections since the multi-party political system was introduced in 1992 government opponents were arrested and tortured. Repression intensified after the elections were rescheduled for February, rather than June, and scores of peaceful political opponents were arbitrarily arrested and briefly detained. Most detainees were subjected to ill-treatment or torture in police custody.

Political activists were also threatened with arrest if they used foreign media to criticize the conduct of the electoral campaign. Roman Catholic priests were amongst those targeted, and they were forbidden to travel outside their parishes to carry out their duties.

Liberia

The brutal civil war in Liberia, which began in December 1989, has been characterized by the killing of civilians and a blatant disregard for international humanitarian standards and human rights law by all parties. The peace agreement signed in Abuja, Nigeria, in August 1995 brought a reduction to the levels of violence, but the current events call into question its viability.

In March, after internal disagreement, Roosevelt Johnson, leader of a faction of one of the armed groups involved in Liberia's civil war, the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO), known as ULIMO-J, was replaced. Later that month the Council of State - a joint presidency comprising leaders of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and ULIMO-K, the other ULIMO faction, and another armed group - which organized the Abuja peace agreement, suspended him from his government post.

During April police tried to arrest Roosevelt Johnson. The reason given by the Council of State for trying to arrest him was his alleged involvement in the murder of an associate of the new leader of ULIMO-J. Roosevelt Johnson resisted arrest claiming that the police were allied to the NPFL. Police units were attacked and fighting broke out between some members of the Krahn ethnic group loyal to Roosevelt Johnson and fighters of ULIMO-K and the NPFL.

Heavy factional fighting continued sporadically in the capital Monrovia throughout April and an unknown number of civilians were killed. Armed factions also held hostages and hampered efforts to evacuate civilians from Monrovia.

Since 8 April some 200 people were held at Barclay Training Centre military barracks, the home of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) by those loyal Roosevelt Johnson. They included Liberian and other West African civilians, members of the West African peace-keeping force, known as ECOMOG, and Lebanese nationals. They were reportedly coerced to go into the barracks to act as a human shield against attack by opposing forces. They were all reportedly released by the end of April.

Nigeria

Following the unprecedented international outcry over human rights abuses in 1995, the Nigerian government came under increasing scrutiny. Violations reached a peak with the hasty and brutal execution on 10 November of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni after an unfair trial by a special tribunal.

Although a few government critics in Nigeria were released at the very end of 1995, leading members of the human rights community were reported to still be targeted, held in detention without charge or trial, or imprisoned following unfair trials last year.

The international community's focus on Nigeria was demonstrated by a visit from a United Nations delegation during March and April. Their aim was to investigate not only the Ogoni trials, but also the progress of Nigeria's transition to civilian rule. However, there were reports that members of the Ogoni community and others were detained to prevent them from meeting the delegates. At the end of April the results of this mission had not been published.

The Commonwealth, which suspended Nigeria in November 1995, has so far not been allowed to send a mission to Nigeria. The Organisation of African Unity's Commission on Human Rights is currently planning to send a mission to Nigeria, also to investigate human rights abuses.

Sierra Leone

On 16 January the Chairman of the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), Captain Valentine E. M. Strasser, was replaced as Head of State by his deputy, Brigadier Julius Maada Bio, in a "palace coup".

Presidential and parliamentary elections went ahead as scheduled in February and March. At the end of March the NPRC ceded power to the new civilian government headed by President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. Some 30 people were killed at the time of the elections. Some reports suggested that rebel forces were responsible but others indicated that government soldiers opposed to the elections may have been involved.

Preliminary talks between the members of the NPRC and representatives of the armed opposition, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), took place in Côte d'Ivoire in February and continued in March. Further talks between President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah and RUF leader Foday Sankoh are scheduled for 22 April.

A number of civilians died in attacks by rebel forces during February and March. Although a cease-fire was agreed on 17 March, there was a report of an attack on civilians on 24 March when an unspecified number of women were reported to have been shot by rebel forces.

Americas Update

Selected events in the Americas from January to April 1996

Bahamas

In March the first execution in 12 years took place. It went ahead despite the fact that Thomas Reckley, a convicted murderer, had spent more than five years on death row. This was contrary to a key judicial ruling applicable to the Bahamas and other countries in the English Speaking Caribbean. This states that the execution of a prisoner after more than five years of being on death row amounts to inhuman and degrading treatment. Another man, Dwayne McKinney, was executed shortly afterwards. He had been convicted of murder in 1992.

More execution warrants are expected to be issued in the near future as the Mercy Committee is reported to be looking at more cases. There are approximately 36 prisoners currently on death row in the Bahamas, at least 15 of whom have spent more than five years under sentence of death.

Colombia

Widespread and systematic human rights violations continued in the first four months of the year against a background of an escalating political crisis triggered by investigations into alleged financial support from drug-trafficking organizations for President Samper's 1994 election campaign. The state of emergency introduced in November 1995 was extended for a further 90 days in January and again in April after political violence escalated in April as armed opposition groups launched attacks against military and economic targets in several areas of the country. In response, the government declared several areas of the country to be under "states of alert" and introduced further emergency measures including restrictions on freedom of movement.

Paramilitary groups continued to expand their control of territory through the displacement, subjection or elimination of the civilian population. Such forces continued to be responsible for numerous human rights violations, including extrajudicial executions, "disappearances" and torture in many areas of the country.

Cuba

Starting on 15 February there was a wave of arrests of members of the non-governmental coalition, *Concilio Cubano*, Cuban Concilium, across the country. *Concilio Cubano* is a coalition of 140 non-governmental groups including political opposition groups, human rights groups, journalists, lawyers, trade unionists, women and others, which was set up in October 1995.

The Cuban government alleges that *Concilio Cubano*, whose avowed aims are entirely peaceful, is funded and supported by the US government. From the time that it was set up, its members have faced frequent short-term detention and harassment as well as threats of physical violence. There is also evidence of a deliberate campaign on the part of the authorities to try to discredit it by attempting to link it with US-based Cuban exile groups who openly advocate the violent overthrow of President Castro. However, Amnesty International has so far not received any convincing evidence to suggest that *Concilio Cubano* as such has been involved in activities that are other than peaceful.

Guatemala

Impunity and human rights violations continued into 1996 in spite of promises made by the new President who took office on 14 January that the state would fight against impunity. Following this announcement 118 members of the national police reportedly involved in corruption and human rights violations were dismissed, but none of them were placed under arrest or charged with criminal offences. In addition, the government and armed opposition groups continued the peace process and, in March, a cease-fire was agreed. MINUGUA, the United Mission for the Verification of Human Rights in Guatemala, saw its presence in Guatemala extended up until the end of the year.

Members of the security forces continued to be involved in extrajudicial executions, kidnappings and threats and intimidations of journalists, human rights defenders, politicians and trade unionists. Reportedly some of these human rights violations and threats were carried out by death squads that were very active in the early 1980s.

Vinicio Pacheco, a journalist who had reported on stories implicating members of the security forces in car thefts and kidnappings, was himself kidnapped on 28 February and then beaten, kicked and burned on the feet and chest with cigarettes before being released several hours later. In early March six other journalists were named in anonymous death threats sent to their homes and to some of the newspapers accusing them of being terrorists.

Haiti

According to an Amnesty International report published in January the situation in Haiti has dramatically improved in comparison with the pattern of gross human rights violations that characterized the military government of General Raoul Cédras. However, the country was still plagued by contradictions and confusions which risked fuelling the existing belief within large parts of the Haitian society that the only way to get justice is to take the law into their own hands.

In the space of one week in January, seven people were reportedly lynched by angry mobs. The risk of increasing violence was further aggravated by continuing social and economic problems. In addition, little effective action has been taken to disarm former members of the military and paramilitary, many of whom were suspected of being involved in ongoing criminal activities, or bring to justice those responsible for human rights violations in the past.

There were further violent incidents involving the *Police Nationale d'Haïti (PNH)*, Haitian National Police, in which they were suspected of committing human rights abuses. However, there were indications that disciplinary if not legal action was being taken against a few of the suspected perpetrators. Amnesty International was investigating allegations that at least six people may have been the victims of extrajudicial execution during an incident in Cité Soleil in early March when the PNH mounted a major operation to quell disturbances in the area involving the so-called *Armée Rouge*, Red Army, an armed group whose origins and motivations were not clear.

Peru

The number of prisoners of conscience markedly increased in the first months of the year from 26 held in 1995, to a total of 65 in April.

In March one positive amendment to the anti-terrorism laws was passed. This made provision for former prisoners of conscience who were acquitted by the High Court of terrorist-related crimes and who had their acquittal overturned by the Supreme Court of Justice to appear before the High Courts for a new trial without first being re-detained.

However, the government failed to devise a mechanism by which the cases of prisoners of conscience could be reviewed. Suspects of terrorism-related crimes continued to be detained under procedures which fell short of international fair trial standards.

Asia/Pacific Update

Selected events in Asia/Pacific from January to April 1996

Afghanistan

In January, the governments of Iran and Pakistan agreed to support efforts to bring the 16 years of conflict in Afghanistan to an end. The agreement reportedly came during a visit to Pakistan by Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati who met Pakistan's President Farooq Ahmed Leghari, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and Foreign Minister Asef Ahmed Ali.

In the few weeks between 23 December and 11 January at least 50 unarmed civilians were killed and 172 injured -- including 14 children -- in what appeared to be indiscriminate rocket and artillery attacks against residential areas of the city. The attacks were reportedly carried out by the Taleban forces, as part of their attempt to take over Kabul.

China

In March, Amnesty International launched its first ever worldwide campaign to draw attention to human rights violations in China. A major theme of Amnesty International's campaign is the arbitrary way in which Chinese officials use and abuse their country's laws. In a 110-page report, titled "No One Is Safe", the organization described the widespread human rights violations which result from repressive legislation and the arbitrary use of the law.

Ten ethnic Mongols, allegedly accused of being "nationalist separatists" were detained in mid-December 1995 and were still being held without charge in March. Their detention provoked student demonstrations in Inner Mongolia in late December and a number of students were detained for short periods. Two other people were detained in March for allegedly informing "foreign organisations" about the detention of those held since December, one of whom was reportedly charged with "counter-revolutionary" offences.

More than 50 Tibetan monks and laypeople remained detained in early 1996, apparently without charge, in connection with the disputed choice of the 10th Panchen Lama, Tibet's second most senior religious leader. The six-year-old boy at the centre of the controversy, Gendun Choekyi Nyima, and his parents were still missing from their home in early 1996. The Chinese authorities stated in March that the boy and his relatives were not detained, but they did not disclose their whereabouts.

India

In March, 188 Bhutanese people were allegedly kicked and beaten by Indian police as they were taken into custody in Jalpaiguri district, West Bengal. Ten were reported to have sustained head injuries as a result and one man was understood to have been in a serious condition. By mid-April, 792 Bhutanese people were reported to be detained in jails in West Bengal.

The Bhutanese, from refugee camps in eastern Nepal, were participating in an organized march through India to Bhutan. The march, reportedly peaceful, was intended to publicise the plight of Bhutanese people currently living in the refugee camps and the apparent lack of progress in talks between the governments of Bhutan and Nepal on the possible return of some of them to Bhutan.

During the same month, the body of Jalil Andrabi, a lawyer and prominent human rights activist in Jammu and Kashmir, was found, hands tied, in the Jhelum river in Srinagar. Jalil Andrabi, Chairman of the Kashmir Commission of Jurists, “disappeared” after he was detained on 9 March 1996 by members of the Rashtriya Rifles - a paramilitary force under the control of the Ministry of Defence - accompanied by members of armed groups.

Jalil Andrabi had recently condemned violations by the state authorities at a meeting of human rights activists in New Delhi. His detention and subsequent “disappearance” took place days before he was due to attend the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva.

Indonesia and East Timor

At the beginning of the year, female labour activist Roliati Harefa was released after 28 days in detention without charge. Four soldiers were also jailed for their involvement in the murder of three civilians in Irian Jaya. Other reported extrajudicial executions and “disappearances” in Irian Jaya remained uninvestigated.

The Indonesian government violated the rights of peaceful critics and activists in April when police arrested at least three student activists demonstrating outside the trial of opposition politician, Sri Bintang Pamunkas, and the Indonesian Supreme Court rejected the appeals of four people jailed for involvement in publishing independent magazines.

During the same month, Indonesia’s official news agency, *Antara*, reported that 39 people accused of instigating riots in the province of Irian Jaya were still in detention. They were arrested by both police and soldiers during March and some were reported to have been beaten, in some cases seriously, during arrest. The disturbances broke out on the morning of 18 March when the body of Dr Thomas Wainggai, a prisoner of conscience from Irian Jaya who had died the week before in Cipinang prison, Jakarta, arrived by plane at Jayapura airport for burial.

Amnesty International continued to express its concern for the rights of East Timorese this year. Recently, it expressed fears for the safety of eight and possibly nine East Timorese expelled from the German Embassy on 16 April 1996, directly into the hands of military officers who beat, kicked and then arrested the group. It is not known how many remained in detention, but two may have been released later the same day.

Armed opposition groups committing human rights abuses this year included the Organisasi Papua Merdeka, (*Free Papua Movement* or OPM), a group fighting for the independence of Irian Jaya. Members of the group took 26 hostages in January; 12 were released within the same month, while another, a German national, was temporarily released on the understanding that he would return to the OPM. Eleven hostages were still being held in April.

Europe Update

Selected events in Europe from January to April 1996

Bosnia-Herzegovina

Many civilians who had been arbitrarily detained by all sides were released under the Dayton Peace Agreement. However, not all were released and there were new cases of civilians being detained by all sides. Conscientious objectors detained in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina were released after an amnesty law was passed in March.

Bosnian Serb civilians who wished to remain in the areas which were transferred from the Republika Srpska to the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina were harassed by Bosnian Serb soldiers and civilians prior to the transfers in February and March. Federation police failed to give them adequate protection from harassment by Bosnian Muslim or other civilians after the transfer.

There were isolated incidents of deliberate targeting of civilians by snipers and rocket attacks from the Bosnian Serb side in January and February.

There was concern about a lack of commitment on the part of the multinational Implementation Force (IFOR) to seek out and detain individuals indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. IFOR also appeared to lack willingness to provide comprehensive protection for the sites of suspected mass graves.

Russian Federation

Human rights violations continued in the Chechen Republic. An estimated 150 civilians were seized in January and taken hostage by a group of Chechens calling itself "Lone Wolf". The group entered the southern Russian town of Kizlyar in Dagestan early on 9 January, and took over the local central hospital and an adjoining maternity home. Civilians from apartment blocks surrounding the medical complex were also forced into the hospital. The Chechen fighters eventually withdrew to the village of Pervomaiskoye taking with them around 100 hostages to guarantee their safe passage to Chechnya.

The Russian army then staged an offensive in an attempt to rescue the hostages. This led to possible indiscriminate attacks by the Russian army who claimed to free around 82 out of the 100 hostages. The remaining hostages were later freed by the Chechen fighters.

The commander who organized this hostage-taking, Shamil Basayev, also allegedly ordered a group of gunmen to seize a ferry in the Turkish port of Trabzon and threaten to blow up the

vessel in the busy Bosphorus strait. In the event the ferry was not blown up and passengers who were held hostage were released after four days.

In a separate incident in January Chechen fighters seized 30 more hostages at an electrical plant near the Chechen capital Grozny and took them to an unknown destination.

On 15 March Russian forces began attacking Samashki with rockets, grenades and from the air. Civilians who managed to escape from the settlement on 19 March reported that 3,000 - 4,000 civilians were still sheltering in cellars and basements. They estimated that up to 600 people had been killed. Civilians fleeing the village said it had been sealed off by Russian forces, disputing claims by the Russian military leadership that a “humanitarian corridor” remained open for civilians to leave Samashki.

At the end of March President Yeltsin announced his peace plan for Chechnya, in which he declared a cease-fire and the withdrawal of the Russian army. However, by mid-April no cease-fire or withdrawal was apparent and the Russian army was believed to be continuing to bomb Chechen villages.

On 26 January the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe voted to recommend that Russia become a member of the Council. A month later Russia became the 39th member state. As such the Russian Government has officially signed the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, thus committing itself to introducing a moratorium on executions and abolishing the death penalty within three years.

Turkey

During disturbances on 4 January at Ümraniye Special Type Prison in Istanbul four prisoners died of head injuries caused by beatings by security forces. On 8 January police detained hundreds of people at the funeral of two of the prisoners -- among them journalist Metin Göktepe who was beaten to death in custody at Eyüp Closed Sports Centre in Istanbul. Eleven police officers are being tried for the killing.

Sixteen people -- mostly teenage students -- detained between 26 December and 5 January on charges of membership of an illegal armed organization reported that they had been blindfolded, stripped naked, and subjected to electric shocks -- including to their genitals -- in custody at Manisa Police Headquarters.

In March a new coalition government of the True Path Party (DYP) and the Motherland Party (ANAP) was established under Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz. The post of State Minister for Human Rights was abolished.

Middle East and North Africa Update

Selected events in the Middle East and North Africa
from January to April 1996

Bahrain

Mass arrests were reported since the beginning of the year as clashes between security forces and protestors continued. Protestors were demonstrating against the closure by security forces of a number of mosques where prominent Muslim Shi'a clerics had been calling on the government to restore democratic rights. The authorities rounded up hundreds of people, including women and children, and held many for prolonged periods in incommunicado detention. There were reports of torture during investigation. At least 24 people, including two schoolgirls, were sentenced to prison terms of up to seven years by the State Security Courts in trials which did not meet international standards for fair trial.

A new wave of violence broke out early this year, with attackers throwing home-made firebombs on restaurants, hotels, and a state-run newspaper office. Seven Bangladeshi workers were killed in a restaurant blast and a Bahraini died when a bomb he was preparing outside a bank exploded, according to official sources. The authorities have reacted by rounding up scores of young people, often using excessive force in raiding homes after midnight, and reportedly beating young men in front of their families while arresting them.

At the end of March, Bahrain's first execution in nearly 20 years was carried out, despite repeated appeals to Bahrain's ruler to commute the death sentence. 'Issa Ahmad Qambar was sentenced to death after a trial which fell short of internationally accepted standards for fair trial. He was denied access to a lawyer throughout his pre-trial detention and saw his lawyer for the first time only when he appeared in court for trial on charges of the murder of a police sergeant. Trial sessions were held *in camera*.

Egypt

In April, three alleged members of al-Gama'a al-Islamiya, the banned Islamist armed group, were sentenced to death by the (Emergency) Supreme State Security Court in Cairo, after having been charged with murdering three policemen and injuring others in Aswan in 1993.

So far this year, Amnesty International has recorded 25 death sentences passed by the military, criminal and (Emergency) State Security Courts, after trials that have fallen short of international standards. Four people sentenced to death in previous years were executed at the same time.

Against a backdrop of escalating political violence, armed men alleged to be members of al-Gama'a al-Islamiya, were reported to have deliberately killed at least 14 civilians, while security forces killed at least two alleged members of this group in circumstances suggesting that they may have been extrajudicially executed. In addition, hundreds of suspected members of armed Islamist groups have been arrested this year.

Eighteen Greek tourists, including 14 women, were deliberately killed outside a hotel in Cairo by four armed men on 18 April 1996. Al-Gama'a al-Islamiya claimed responsibility for the killings.

Israel and the Occupied Territories/Palestinian Authority

The draft Prohibition of Torture Law, which would have effectively legalized torture under its original wording, was amended to bring it into conformity with the UN Convention against Torture. Another draft law, the General Security Services (GSS) Law, which would have offered impunity to GSS officers who carried out torture, was delayed.

In February and March, armed Islamist opposition groups opposed to the peace agreement with Israel carried out attacks by suicide bombers, killing 59 people and wounding at least 80, most of whom were civilians.

After the suicide-bombings the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority carried out large-scale arrests of about 1,000 Palestinians. Torture of detainees was frequently reported. More than 150 of the detainees held by Israeli authorities were placed in administrative detention; they included minors. Most of the detainees held by the Palestinian Authority were detained without any legal process; only one is known to have been tried and sentenced to life imprisonment in a grossly unfair trial held at night by a State Security Court. The Israeli government destroyed or sealed at least eight houses as a punishment against the families of suicide bombers or their alleged supporters.

In April, *Hizbullah* (Party of God), an Islamist armed group fighting against the Israeli presence in south Lebanon, escalated Katyusha rocket attacks on populated areas of northern Israel in reprisal for deaths of civilians from Israeli attacks in South Lebanon. About 400,000 Lebanese fled to the north after Israeli warnings to the population to leave their homes. Israeli planes and artillery bombed or shelled targets in south Lebanon, Beirut and the Bekaa valley, killing more than 170 civilians and wounding about 350 in attacks some of which appeared to be direct or indiscriminate. In one such attack Israeli artillery shells hit a United Nations compound sheltering refugees and killed more than 100 civilians.

Several thousand Israelis left their homes and more than 30 were reportedly wounded in *Hizbullah's* attacks on civilian areas. A cease-fire understanding which took effect on 27 April said that civilians should not be the target of attacks and set up a mobilizing force.