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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REPORT 2000 UPDATES

**Selected events covering the period
from January to May 2000**

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Africa Update

Selected events in Africa from January to May 2000

Sierra Leone -- Killing, rape and abduction of civilians by RUF rebel forces continued into 2000, in particular in Port Loko District in Northern Province. The political and security situation in Sierra Leone deteriorated further in early May as rebel forces captured 500 UN peace-keeping troops and made advances towards Freetown. Hostilities between rebel forces and government allied forces resumed. The renewed insecurity resulted in further abuses against civilians with reports of killing, rape, mutilation and abduction emerging from the areas around Masiaka and Port Loko District. Rape remained systematic in areas under the control of rebel forces, including the town of Makeni. Thousands of people fled their homes to escape the violence, adding significantly to the already very large number of internally displaced people.

Amnesty International called on the international community to ensure that the protection of human rights was at the centre of its efforts to respond to the crisis. In a letter to the UN Security Council on 18 May it called for UNAMSIL peace-keeping forces to be provided with a clearer mandate to protect the human rights of all civilians at all times. It also again called on the Security Council to act decisively to end impunity. The Security Council was urged to enforce the existing arms embargo on rebel forces in order to prevent military assistance reaching them and Amnesty International called on the Security Council Sanctions Committee on Sierra Leone to investigate how diamonds from rebel-controlled areas are traded internationally to buy weapons for rebel forces.

Following the arrest of RUF leader Foday Sankoh in Freetown on 17 May, Amnesty International reiterated its call for all those responsible for committing human rights abuses to be brought to justice, adding that any trial must conform to international fair trial standards and not impose the death penalty.

Amnesty International delegates visited Sierra Leone in both March and May. They undertook research into continuing human rights abuses and met a

wide range of government and UN officials as well as non-governmental organizations.

Cameroon -- In February, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, who visited Cameroon in May 1999, published a report which confirmed that torture and ill-treatment were systematic and widespread in police and gendarmery cells. The report included a lengthy catalogue of individual cases of torture and ill-treatment. In many places visited by the Special Rapporteur, he met detainees who had wounds and injuries which could only have been the result of recently inflicted torture. The Special Rapporteur's report reinforced many of the recommendations made by Amnesty International for ending the practice of torture and Amnesty International called on the government to respond by taking decisive and immediate action to end torture.

Rwanda -- Political tension increased after a number of senior political figures resigned or were forced from office. They included Célestin Rwigema, who resigned as Prime Minister in February, and Pasteur Bizimungu who resigned as President in March (he was replaced in April by Paul Kagame, formerly Vice President and long regarded as the true political authority in Rwanda). In January Joseph Sebarenzi Kabuye was forced to resign as Speaker of the National Assembly and fled abroad, fearing for his safety.

In February five Rwandan men who had sought refuge in Burundi and Tanzania were forcibly returned to Rwanda, apparently at the request of the Rwandan authorities. Some, if not all, were apparently suspected by the Rwandan authorities of having helped Joseph Kabuye to flee. Amnesty International expressed concern at this violation of international standards governing refugee protection by the Tanzanian and Burundian authorities, and called on the Rwandan authorities to guarantee the safety of the five men who are still being held in military custody.

In April Amnesty International published *Rwanda: The troubled course of justice*, a report which detailed the organization's concerns on a range of justice and detention-related issues, including prolonged detention without trial, inhuman conditions of detention, torture and ill-treatment, arbitrary arrests and unlawful detentions. Around 125,000 people are held in Rwanda's prisons and detention centres, the vast majority of whom are accused of acts of genocide.

Democratic Republic of Congo -- Killings of civilians continued to be perpetrated by all parties involved in the DRC conflict. Most of the killings reported were attributed to armed groups and forces of the governments of Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda in eastern DRC. Several dozen civilians were killed during fighting in May and June between Rwandan and Ugandan troops in Kisangani. Torture and ill treatment were common in detention centres. Those tortured by DRC government forces included journalist Freddy Loseke who was sentenced by a military court to three years' imprisonment in May and is a prisoner of conscience. Torture by Congolese and foreign government forces opposed to President Kabila was systematic and widespread. Reports of detainees "disappearing" in the custody of DRC government forces and of their armed opponents continued. Some of the "disappeared" were detained by Rwandan troops in eastern DRC and were reportedly moved to Rwanda. The death penalty was applied, with a 14-year-old child soldier amongst at least 20 people executed by the DRC Government in January. The RCD-Goma armed opposition group also executed people found guilty by its court-martial of violent offences, including a 15-year-old child soldier.

Zimbabwe -- The human rights situation deteriorated rapidly after a new, government-supported constitution was defeated in a referendum on 12 and 13 February. Politically-motivated violence escalated from March, especially in the countryside. The violence was led by "war veterans" and other supporters of the ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), as well as unemployed youth paid by it. The violence started at commercial farms where farmers and farm workers were assaulted, harassed and in some cases murdered. Despite court rulings that these "farm invasions" were unlawful, they went ahead with clear support by senior government officials. The next victims were human rights defenders, opposition party

activists, journalists, voter education workers and others who appeared to be targeted because of real or perceived support for opposition parties, particularly the MDC. The police failed to intervene to prevent abuses and protect victims. By early June some 30 people, primarily opposition party supporters, had been killed in incidents of politically motivated violence. These abuses caused a pervasive atmosphere of fear and intimidation, hampering the rights to freedom of assembly, association, movement and expression and posing a serious threat to prospects for free and fair parliamentary elections scheduled to take place on 24-25 June.

Horn of Africa -- The border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea resumed in May when peace talks collapsed. There were heavy casualties and massive displacement and flight of Eritrean civilians as Ethiopia attacked and pushed back Eritrean forces beyond the border. Elsewhere in the Horn there were further human rights abuses linked to the armed conflicts within Ethiopia, where there was also a new major famine, and to the civil war in Sudan. A new Somali peace conference opened in Djibouti and there was a peace agreement in February between the Djibouti government and its armed opposition, which led to the release of political detainees and prisoners of war and a promise of democratic reform. Ethiopia held elections in May, with opposition parties gaining a few seats.

In Sudan, the war deteriorated in the areas of oil extraction in western Upper Nile and massive human rights violations against the civilian population were reported. Riek Machar, one of the key figures of the Khartoum Peace agreement of 1997 and Minister for the Southern States, resigned from his post in January and returned to the south to fight the government forces. The State of Emergency of December was extended and the National Council dissolved.

Burundi -- Further abuses were committed in the context of the armed conflict by both government forces and its armed opponents. Fighting intensified in the south leading to further population displacement. At least four people were reportedly beaten to death by soldiers and gendarmes during a search operation at Kavumu "regroupment" (forced relocation) camp on 7 May, and one other person "disappeared" after being taken to a nearby military post. The camp inhabitants had tried to stop soldiers stealing their possessions. Several people arrested during the same incident were reportedly ill-treated at a gendarmery centre in Bujumbura.

Angola/Namibia -- The spilling over of the Angolan civil war into Namibia led to a marked escalation of human rights abuses in border areas. Angolan and Namibian troops committed widespread human rights violations in the border area following the Namibian government's decision to allow Angolan troops to operate from Namibia against the Angolan armed opposition, UNITA. Amnesty International's researchers received eyewitness accounts and reports of extrajudicial executions carried out in Angola by the *Forças Armadas de Angola* (FAA), Angolan Armed Forces. The Namibian security forces, including the *Namibian Special Field Force* (SFF), also committed human rights violations against the population. Detainees are reported to have been beaten and tortured, and SFF personnel routinely beat civilians stopped for identity checks.

Liberia -- In March the Government of Liberia closed down the independent broadcasting *Star Radio* station and the Catholic-sponsored *Radio Veritas* -- both of which play a key role in reporting human rights violations in Liberia. This crackdown on the media signalled further repression of human rights defenders.

Togo -- The systematic silencing of those who speak out for human rights continued. In April Hippolyte Agboh, director of an independent Togolese weekly paper, *l'Exilé*, was imprisoned and Lucien Messan, director of *Le Combat du Peuple*, was forced into hiding to escape arrest. Other journalists, including Roland Kpagli Comlan, director of *L'Aurore*, and Vigno Koffi Hounkanly, director of *Crocodile*, went into hiding due to a well-founded fear of persecution. Two leaders of a students' organization, the *Conseil des Etudiants de l'Université du Bénin* (CEUB - Council of the University of Benin), Koumoyi Kpelafia and Hanif Tchadjobo, were arbitrarily arrested on 3 and 10 April 2000 respectively. They are detained in the civil prison of Lomé on criminal charges but Amnesty International considers them prisoners of conscience. The other CEUB leaders are in hiding or have fled the country.

Nigeria -- In March the first judicial amputation took place following the extension in January of the jurisdiction of *Sharia* (Islamic law) courts and the introduction of harsher punishments in Zamfara State in the northern. In April as many as seven people were reportedly killed by police and homes burned down when police raided a village in Ogoniland and several police officers were injured. Ledum Mitee, head of the *Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni*

People (MOSOP), who was acquitted in the trial which resulted in the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni in 1995, was briefly detained with about 15 others but released to await trial on charges ranging from attempted murder to arson. No independent investigations were carried out into allegations of extrajudicial executions and ill-treatment by the security forces in a number of incidents in 1999 and 2000.

Americas Update

Selected events in the Americas from January to May 2000

Argentina -- *The use of excessive police force during demonstrations in Buenos Aires (19 April) and in Salta Province (12 May) resulted in dozens of people being wounded with rubber bullets, beaten and suffering the after-effects of tear-gas. At least one person received a serious gunfire wound. Amnesty International has repeatedly requested that investigation initiated in such cases be thorough, independent and conclusive and should determine whether international standards have been upheld by law enforcement officials.*

Threats have been received by those working on behalf of children who "disappeared" during the military government, including the judge conducting the investigations and members of her team.

Bahamas -- David Mitchell was executed on 6 January. Death row inmate John Higgs committed suicide the day before his hanging was scheduled. Haitian refugees continued to be forcibly returned without adequate undertakings to ensure that they did not face human rights abuses upon return.

Bolivia -- Following demonstrations in several cities, a state of siege was declared on 8 April, during which human rights violations committed by the security forces were reported. This includes the detention of trade unionists in internal exile; the illegal detention of four minors, three of whom were tortured; and police harassment of union and community leaders and their families. Five people were killed and at least 40 wounded during violent confrontations in Cochabamba and La Paz. Journalists reporting the incidents received death threats. After the lifting of the state of siege on 20 April the authorities announced the opening of investigations into complaints of human rights. *Amnesty International is following closely the progress of the investigations.*

Chile -- On 2 March 2000 Augusto Pinochet returned to Chile after the UK home Secretary Jack Straw decided to halt the proceedings for his extradition to Spain on health grounds. On the day of his return, seven human rights lawyers submitted a judicial request to the civilian justice to initiate proceedings to lift his immunity as a Senator for life. Judicial hearings on the question of immunity took place before the Santiago Court of Appeals in Santiago in April. A ruling is expected between 24 May and the first week of June.

President Ricardo Lagos, who took office in March 2000, has repeatedly stated that the independence of the judiciary will be guaranteed during his administration.

Colombia -- *The human rights crisis deepened, with an increase in the forced displacement of communities and abuses at the hands of army-backed paramilitary organizations and armed opposition groups continuing in a climate*

of impunity. The killing, apparently by paramilitaries, of human rights activist Ramiro Zapata in May signalled how human rights defenders continue to be at risk. The Colombian government has continued to fail to implement United Nations recommendations to tackle the human rights situation, which included decisive measures to end impunity, dismantle paramilitary structures and guarantee the safety of human rights defenders.

Cuba -- Prisoners of conscience Felix A. Bonne Carcasés and Marta Roque -- who were serving sentences on charges of "sedition"-- were released in May.

Ecuador -- In January mass demonstrations by indigenous groups, grassroots organizations and trade unions resulted in the ousting of President Jamil Mahuad and in a three-member Junta being established. The Junta was dissolved after a few hours and the then Vice President, Gustavo Noboa, took office. Following these events, over 200 military officers are awaiting trial in military courts on charges of -- among other things -- attempting against national security, rebellion and insubordination. By mid-May, the Congress had not deliberated on a presidential draft bill asking for an amnesty for all officers. Four civilians -- including two former Junta members and two ex-Congressmen -- and three policemen are also facing charges in civilian and police courts respectively for supporting the uprising.

Guatemala -- Ongoing impunity for massive-scale past human rights violations has at last begun to be addressed with unprecedented initiatives at international level and in Guatemalan courts. In March the Spanish Audiencia Nacional admitted a law suit lodged by Nobel prize laureate Rigoberta Menchú against high ranking Guatemalan officials for crimes under international law, including genocide. Menchú was later charged with treason in connection with the law suit. In May, members of indigenous communities which suffered massive human rights violations under the government of Fernando Romeo Lucas García (1978-1982) filed a law suit against him and other officials from his administration in the Guatemalan courts. The law suit was introduced at a conference on impunity endorsed, among others, by Amnesty International.

Haiti -- Violence has escalated in the run-up to elections, now scheduled for 21 May. Recent incidents include the 12-day kidnapping of an electoral candidate, and the assassination of a party official (25 April) and of one of Haiti's most

prominent journalists (3 April) whose funeral was followed by serious disturbances. In March at least six people were reportedly killed during disturbances sparked by street demonstrations.

Peru -- The first round of presidential elections was held on 9 April amidst widespread allegations of fraud against President Alberto Fujimori and his government. As none of the presidential candidates won an overall majority in this first round, a second round between President Fujimori and Alejandro Toledo is scheduled for 28 May. During the electoral process Amnesty International received reports of intimidation and harassment to opposition leaders and journalists.

Uruguay -- President Jorge Batlle, who took office in March, has pledged to solve the cases of those "disappeared" under military governments between 1973 and 1985. During his first weeks in office the Argentine poet, Juan Gelman, was able to meet his granddaughter who was born in 1976 and "disappeared" the same year with her mother who was detained in Uruguay. In May Amnesty International welcomed these initial steps and urged President Batlle to ensure that the fate of all the victims is clarified, that those responsible are brought to justice, and that victims and their families are compensated.

USA -- Three prisoners were executed in January 2000 for crimes committed when they were under 18, in violation of international law. So far these are the only executions of child offenders known in the world this century. Another such prisoner, Gary Graham, is scheduled to be executed on 22 June in Texas for a murder committed when he was 17.

In May the UN Committee against Torture examined the USA's first periodic report under the Convention against Torture and highlighted concerns including torture and ill-treatment by police and prison guards; the sexual abuse of female prisoners by guards; prisoner chain gangs; and the "excessively harsh regime" of supermaximum security prisons. In its recommendations, the Committee called upon the US government, among other things, to withdraw its reservations to the Convention which effectively limit its scope in the USA; to ban the use of electro-shock stun belts and restraint chairs; and to cease holding juveniles with adults in prisons.

Asia/Pacific Update

Selected events in Asia/Pacific from January to May 2000

China -- Falun Gong followers continued to peacefully protest the ban on the group. Hundreds were detained since January after silent protests and demonstrations in Tiananmen Square. Arrests and trials of pro-democracy and labour rights activists also continued, with at least four members of the China Democracy Party sentenced to prison terms of up to ten years for "subversion".

China once again escaped censure at the UN Commission for Human Rights in April, despite a deterioration in human rights on the ground, by blocking debate of a US-sponsored resolution critical of its human rights record. The following month, the UN Committee on Torture made welcome recommendations to China. However the Committee failed to address the widespread practice of torture in incommunicado or secret detention, and torture in custody leading to death

Pakistan -- In April 2000, former prime minister Nawaz Sharif was sentenced to life imprisonment on charges of hijacking. His six co-accused were acquitted but four of them continued to be held on corruption charges, the others under one-month detention orders under the Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance. Nawaz Sharif appealed his conviction and sentence.

The new government presented its human rights policy at a Convention on Human Rights and Dignity in Islamabad in late April. It included police and jail reforms, ending bonded labour, the setting up of a human rights commission, a women=s commission, procedural changes in the application of the blasphemy law to prevent its abuse and assurances that honour killings would be treated in the criminal justice system as murder. In May the procedural changes in the registration of blasphemy charges were withdrawn following protests by Islamist groups.

Bhutan/Nepal -- The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mrs Sadako Ogata, announced in May that the governments of Bhutan and Nepal have agreed to start a process of verification leading to the repatriation of tens

of thousands of Bhutanese refugees who have been living in refugee camps in eastern Nepal for the best part of a decade.

Indonesia -- Human rights activists in Aceh were increasingly targeted in attacks which prevented them from carrying out their work and caused some to go into hiding. Their human rights work made them targets for Adisappearances@, arbitrary detention, harassment and intimidation.

In May the Indonesian government signed an agreement with the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), hopefully paving the way for peace talks and an end to the violence. In a landmark case, 23 soldiers and one civilian were implicated in the killing of a Muslim cleric and 56 of his followers. It is the first of five such cases into violations by the military. Despite these efforts toward justice, senior military personnel who ordered the killings were not on trial.

Despite UN recommendations for an international tribunal to bring to trial those responsible for the human rights crisis in East Timor last year, Indonesia is continuing with its own investigations in a weak and corrupt judicial system. East Timorese refugees continue to be at risk of intimidation and harassment from militia groups in camps in West Timor, undermining the prospects for voluntary repatriation.

Viet Nam -- At least two prisoners of conscience were released in a major amnesty at the end of April. Death sentences and executions continued to be imposed and carried out, in spite of the recent reduction in the number of capital offenses.

Myanmar -- The military government stepped up its suppression of the National League for Democracy (NLD). Scores of members were arrested, reportedly in anticipation of increased political activity marking the 10th anniversary of the NLD's 1990 election victory on 27 May.

Solomon Islands -- Violent ethnic tension has been increasing between local militants on the main island, Guadalcanal, and settlers from neighbouring Malaita Province, with more than 50 deaths reported in the past 12 months. In May, two beheadings were reported in Honiara -- each an apparent revenge killing attributed to the Isatabu (Guadalcanal) Freedom Movement and the

Malaita Eagle Force, an unauthorized paramilitary group supported by elements in the police service.

In peace talks also in May, all sides agreed that the unconditional surrender of arms by all militant groups is a precondition for peace and for compensation demands to be addressed by the government.

Philippines -- Armed conflict escalated in Mindanao, southern Philippines. In March the Abu Sayyaf, one of the armed Islamic separatist groups active in the region, took hostage a group of 50 Filipino schoolchildren, teachers and a priest on the island of Basilan. Over 20 hostages were released, but 27 were held until May when army assaults on Abu Sayyaf hideouts led to the rescue of 15 of the hostages. Six of the hostages, including the priest, were killed by the Abu Sayyaf as the army approached. Nine hostages remain unaccounted for.

In April, another Abu Sayyaf unit took 21 foreign tourists and workers hostage from the Malaysian holiday resort island of Sipadan and transported by boat to the Philippine island of Jolo. Amnesty International appealed to the Abu Sayyaf to release all the hostages.

Meanwhile armed conflict in central Mindanao between government forces and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) intensified and in late April the MILF announced it was withdrawing from peace negotiations. Over 200,000 civilians are estimated to have been internally displaced since fighting flared in March.

In a welcome development, President Joseph Estrada announced in April that no one would be executed for the rest of the year. Amnesty International expressed hope that this moratorium on executions would lead to Congress to legislate to abolish the death penalty.

Malaysia -- The Malaysian government continued its selective and politically-motivated use of restrictive laws, to charge journalists, publishers and leading members of opposition parties, including former deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's defence lawyer Karpal Singh.

In March the former Inspector-General of Police Abdul Rahim Noor was convicted of the beating of former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim while in police custody in 1998. Abdul Rahim Noor was given a two-month sentence but released on bail pending an appeal. Amnesty International reiterated its concern that scores of other incidents of Malaysian police brutality had not been investigated or those responsible brought to justice.

Peaceful demonstrators, protesting the imprisonment of Anwar Ibrahim and calling for political reform in Malaysia, continued to be subjected to violent assaults by the police both at the moment of arrest and while in police 'lock-ups'.

Australia -- *The Australian government announced in March that it would review its participation in the UN Committee system. The announcement reflected a political unwillingness to confront domestic human rights issues in accordance with international standards.*

Europe Update

Selected events in Europe from January to May 2000

Chechnya -- From a mission held in March, the organization documented reports of the following methods of torture being used in the 'filtration camps' during the conflict: rape of male and female detainees, including children; the use of electric shocks and tear gas; beatings with hammers and clubs, and other torture methods including sawing off detainees' teeth and simultaneous beating around both ears to burst the ear-drums.

In April Amnesty International asked for an international Commission of Investigation to be established by the United Nations to provide the necessary resources and strong guarantees for a thorough, independent and transparent process of systematic collection of evidence.

Turkey -- The Turkish government coalition decided on 12 January 2000 to abide by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) request by halting the file of Abdullah Öcalan in the Office of the Prime Minister, instead of forwarding it to Parliament and the latter's Judicial Commission for a final decision on his execution. The Turkish government announced that they would review this decision should there be a renewal of violence by the PKK. Abdullah Öcalan's death sentence had been upheld by the Appeal Court on 25 November.

On 28 March the former president of the Human Rights Association IHD, Akın Birdal, was re-imprisoned despite a medical report warning that his injuries are a danger to his life. Amnesty International again adopted him as a prisoner of conscience imprisoned for the peaceful expression of his views, and campaigned for his immediate and unconditional release. After having been closed for nearly three years, the IHD Diyarbakir branch could finally be re-opened on 19 April. Only 23 days later, the branch was again closed for three months.

On 19 and 20 February, three mayors of Kurdish cities were snatched in broad daylight and detained at Diyarbakir Gendarmerie Headquarters where they were tortured or ill-treated. They were released from prison on 28 February pending a trial in which they are charged with having supported the Kurdistan Worker's Party PKK.

On 17 January, Turkish security forces had an operation against the militant Islamist organization Hizbullah arresting hundreds of alleged members. Subsequently, some 60 dead bodies were excavated which were attributed to people abducted and/or killed by Hizbullah. Amnesty International called for comprehensive investigation into these killings. Reports show that Hizbullah acted in collusion with parts of the Turkish security forces in their fight against PKK. Amnesty International was concerned that some of those detained in the raid against Hizbullah were held in illegal detention for prolonged periods in which they were at risk of torture and ill-treatment.

Spain -- The end of ETA's indefinite cease-fire, which the Basque armed group had already declared the previous November, was marked in blood by the killing in January of a military officer, Pedro Antonio Blanco García. It was followed by three more murders, including that of José Luis López de Lacalle, a journalist, pacifist and former political prisoner under General Franco as ETA pursued a mounting campaign against journalists. Amnesty International has repeatedly and unreservedly condemned the human rights abuses committed by the armed group. In April the National Court sentenced former Civil Guard general Enrique Rodríguez Galindo and former civil governor of Guipúzcoa Julen Elgorriaga to 71 years= imprisonment each in connection with the abduction and murder of two ETA members, José Antonio Lasa and José Ignacio Zabala in 1983. Three others were sentenced to prison terms between 67 and 69 years= imprisonment.

Portugal -- In May the UN Committee against Torture expressed concern at the "continuing number of deaths and ill-treatment arising out of contact by members of the public with the police" following an examination of Portugal's third periodic report. This was highlighted by the deaths of two men, Álvaro Rosa Cardoso and Paulo Silva, allegedly as a result of brutal police beatings. The

decision by a judge to detain two officers in relation to the death of Cardoso, a Romani, was met with vociferous street protests by police officers throughout Portugal. Amnesty International was concerned by reports that some of the officers made death threats to the judge.

Italy -- In April 2000 the first sentences were issued in connection with the allegations that members of the Italian armed forces tortured, ill-treated and unlawfully killed Somalis in 1993 and 1994, while participating in a multinational peace-keeping operation. One former paratrooper was sentenced to 18 months' suspended imprisonment for abusing his authority and is potentially liable to pay 30 million lire to the victim, a Somali man who had been photographed while soldiers were in the act of attaching electrodes to his body. A second accused received a lower sentence after plea-bargaining.

Switzerland -- The appeal of convicted war criminal Fulgence Niyonteze came under examination in May. Niyonteze, a former local government official in Rwanda, was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1999 after a military court in Lausanne found him guilty of a number of crimes, including murder, incitement to murder and war crimes, in the context of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

Kyrgyzstan -- In March the US State Department called into question Kyrgyzstan's commitment to democracy after law enforcement officers reportedly used excessive force to break up peaceful demonstrations over irregularities in the February and March parliamentary elections. The elections were heavily criticized by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The allegedly politically motivated arrest of Felix Kulov -- the chairman of the opposition Ar-Namys party and former Minister of National Security -- led to further demonstrations and confrontations with law enforcement authorities.

Tajikistan -- 21-year old Dilfuza Numonova was sentenced to death on 18 January, as was 22-year old Khakimbek Khomidov on 30 March. Dilfuza Numonova stated that her confession to murder was extracted under duress. She also claimed that in prison she was forced to have an abortion. Under Tajik law pregnant women may not be executed.

Turkmenistan -- On 25 February Nurberdi Nurmamedov, co-chair of the opposition movement Agzybirlik, was arrested and sentenced to five years imprisonment for what Amnesty International believes to be solely for his peaceful criticism of the President.

Uzbekistan -- Six men sentenced to death for their part in the February 1999 bombings in Tashkent were executed January 2000. Conversely, the death sentences of the two young musicians, Arsen Arutyunyan and Danis Sirazhev, were reversed to 15 years' imprisonment.

Middle East and North Africa Update

Selected events in the Middle East and North Africa from January to May 2000

Saudi Arabia -- On 28 March 2000 Amnesty International launched a global campaign on human rights violations in Saudi Arabia. Since then the human rights situation there has witnessed two significant developments.

The Saudi Arabian government announced during the March April session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) that it was committed to A...the protection and promotion of human rights through carefully studied measures within the context of a comprehensive human rights strategy.@ Prince Turki bin Muhammad bin Sa=ud al-Kabeer, Deputy Foreign Minister, informed the UNCHR of steps taken by the government to carry forward its human rights strategy including an invitation issued to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers to visit Saudi Arabia. They also included plans to introduce new legislation to regulate the legal profession and legal counsel, and the creation of governmental and national bodies for the protection and promotion of human rights. No terms of reference or time scale regarding the implementation of these plans have been disclosed.

Saudi Arabia=s national and international media has been involved in an unprecedented and very encouraging debate on the issue of human rights. The scope of the debate ranged from fierce attacks on Amnesty International to serious constructive discussions for the protection and promotion of human rights in the Saudi Arabia.

Israel/Occupied Territories -- Israel released Lebanese national Ghassan al-Dirani in April on humanitarian grounds. In a decision believed to be unprecedented, the Supreme Court endorsed the detention of these hostages in 1997. In April the court reversed this decision and ruled that keeping hostages is illegal. As a result 13 Lebanese nationals held in administrative detention were released and transferred to

Lebanon later in the month. However, two Lebanese administrative detainees, Shaykh 'Abd al-Karim 'Ubayd and Mustafa al-Dirani remain in detention. Amnesty International continues to regard them as hostages and calls for their immediate release.

Palestinian Authority -- In May, a State Security Court sentenced 'Usama Hamad to three years= imprisonment (which he had already served) and found Karima Hamad Anot guilty@. They had been charged with unintentionally causing the death of Hamas member Yahya =Ayyash in Jan 1996, with a mobile telephone booby-trapped by the Israeli General Security Service. Both were released in March and April respectively.

Iran -- Majles (parliament) elections were completed in April. "Reform" candidates won the majority of the seats.

In February, the former head of the Law Enforcement Forces (LEF) in Tehran and 19 police officers went on trial in connection with allegations of LEF mistreatment of students during the raid on student dormitories made in July 1999. The death sentences imposed on four students in connection with demonstrations in July 1999 were overturned and prison sentences were imposed.

The trial of 13 Iranian Jews accused of Aspying for Israel@ began on 2 May. Amnesty International expressed concern regarding the fairness of the trial, calling for it to be held in public and noting that such trials in Aspecial@ Revolutionary and Press Courts along with the Special for the Clergy courts consistently fail to meet minimum international standards for fair trial.

Following the closure of 17 newspapers, a large number of journalists, publishers and intellectuals were interrogated and at least five detained, including the journalist Akbar Ganji and human rights activist, and lawyer, Mehrangiz Kar [f].

Kuwait -- Following a decision by the parliament in November 1999 rejecting an Amiri Decree granting women the right to vote, a group of women challenged the constitutionality of the Electoral Law, which forbids women from voting.

In March, the Misdemeanours Appeal Court upheld charges of breaching public decency made against the writer Leila al-Othman for her book, *al-Raheel* (The Immigrant), converting the two months prison sentence handed down in February to a fine. Her publisher, Yahya Ruba=yan, was fined in connection with similar charges. The poet Alia Shuaib [f] was acquitted of all substantive charges except those relating to procedural breaches of the press code.

Ala Hussein, head of state for one week during Iraq=s occupation of Kuwait in 1991 was sentenced to death on charges of treason by the Court of First Instance. Following the withdrawal of Iraqi forces he was sentenced to death in absentia but returned voluntarily in January to Kuwait from Norway to face trial. The case is now under appeal.

Algeria -- In May, Amnesty International and other international human rights organizations were allowed to visit Algeria after a four-year ban. The amnesty granted by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika to an undisclosed number of members of the ArmJ islamique du salut, AIS (Islamic Salvation Army) and other groups, on the basis of a secret agreement, raised serious concerns that individuals responsible for killings, rape and other serious crimes may be granted impunity. In May, Amnesty International said that peace cannot be achieved at the expense of truth and justice and on the basis of impunity. The organization acknowledged the improvements in the human rights situation to date and called on the Algerian authorities to take prompt and effective measures to ensure that investigations are carried out and that all those responsible for human rights abuses are brought to justice.

Tunisia -- Human rights defenders came under further attack and restrictions. In April several human rights activists, including women and elderly men, were physically assaulted and detained by security forces as they protested peacefully against such attacks and restrictions. Also in April, the authorities banned public meetings organized by Tunisian human rights groups, as well as public meetings organized by the Tunisian Section of Amnesty International about the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia.

Lebanon -- In January the Lebanese Government set up a commission of inquiry to investigate "disappearances" during the war between 1975 and 1991. Its time frame

has been extended from three to six months. In February the Council of Ministers granted Amnesty International authorization to set up an office for the Middle East based in Beirut.

Until May Lebanese civilians continued to be unlawfully killed by deliberate or indiscriminate attacks by Israel; Hizbullah targeted civilians in northern Israel. In the light of Israel's unilateral withdrawal, Amnesty International issued a 13-point program of respect for international human rights standards addressed to all parties in the conflict. During the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon seven civilians were killed by Israel Defence Force (IDF) or South Lebanon Army (SLA) fire. The gates of Khiam Detention Centre were broken open by a crowd of about 100 villagers and all the detainees were released. At least 2,000 members of the SLA and their families sought refuge in Israel; about 1,500 SLA soldiers surrendered to the Lebanese army.

A number of students who demonstrated against the Syrian presence in Lebanon were beaten by police and taken before the military court where trials are summary and the rights to defence are not respected.

Jordan --A number of arrests of members of Islamist groups took place in the first quarter of the year; including some prisoners of conscience. Many were released after up to 35 days in incommunicado detention, others were brought to trial charged with distributing leaflets or plotting terrorist acts.

Syria -- Prime Minister Mahmud al-Zu=bi was removed from office in March and was replaced by Dr Muhammad Mustafa Miro. Mahmud al-Zu=bi was referred to court on charges of corruption, but was reported to have committed suicide on 21 May 2000.

Seven prisoners of conscience including five who had been held beyond the expiry of their sentences were released. Among them were Basel Hurani and Isam Dimashqi, who had been imprisoned for their involvement with the Party for Communist Action; and Bassam al-Sheikh and Thabit Murad who had been imprisoned for the distribution of a leaflet marking the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Also released were >Abdallah Ahmad Muhammad, a 71-year-old Iraqi

Kurd, and Ali Hussein Muhaimid, an Iraqi national. Both men were arrested at Damascus airport on 31 July and 22 August 1999 respectively.

>Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout, a Palestinian political prisoner, who had been held since an unfair trial in 1966, died at Teshrin Military Hospital in Damascus.

Libya -- On 1 March, the General People's Congress appointed a new government.

Several Libyan opposition activists who were forcibly returned to Libya on separate occasions since the beginning of the year were reportedly arrested on arrival and their whereabouts remain unknown.

On 3 May the trial of two Libyans charged with the bombing of an aeroplane over Lockerbie in 1988 opened before a Scottish court convened in the Netherlands.

Egypt -- On 13 February the Egyptian General Prosecution Office announced the referral of the case of Hafez Abu Sa'ada, Secretary General of the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights, to the (Emergency) Supreme State Security Court (ESSSC), under a military decree which carries a minimum of seven years imprisonment. Subsequently Hafez Abu Sa'ada, who was abroad when the referral was made public, received oral assurances from the authorities that his case would not be pursued and he returned to Egypt on 10 March.

In March, Amnesty International delegates observed hearings in the trial of 20 alleged members of the Muslim Brothers before the Supreme Military Court. Amnesty International considers the 20 men, the majority of whom hold leading positions in professional bodies, to be prisoners of conscience and calls for their immediate and unconditional release. The verdict is expected in June.

Morocco -- >Abdessalam Yassine, the spiritual leader of the banned Islamist association *al-Adl wal Ihsan*, Justice and Charity, who was held under administratively imposed house arrest for 10 years, was released in May. Throughout his detention he was never charged with any offence nor given the possibility to challenge his house arrest order before a court of law. Amnesty International considered him a prisoner of conscience