

Briefing for Political killings campaign, 1993

TITLE: CONSPIRACY OF TERROR, political killings and "disappearances in the 1990s

AI Index: ACT 33/35/93

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Caption

A scene from the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Women watch the corpses of their husbands unloaded. Tens of thousands of civilians have been deliberately and arbitrarily killed by regular and irregular forces and thousands have "disappeared" in the regions of former Yugoslavia where armed conflict has raged since June 1991. All parties to the conflict have committed abuses.

Text

Millions of men, women and children have been slaughtered or "disappeared" since the 1960s. They were not the victims of wars between nations. They were the victims of deliberate government policies of repression, singled out because of their political views, their ethnic origin, because of where they lived, or simply because they were poor. Their killings or "disappearances" were ordered or condoned by state officials, the very people entrusted to protect them.

When Amnesty International last launched a major campaign against political killings and "disappearances" 10 years ago, the world was haunted by some of the worst human rights violations ever recorded. Half a million civilians were butchered in Indonesia during an "anti-communist" drive; General (to become President) Suharto, who masterminded the slaughter, remains in power to this day. Hundreds of thousands of people were massacred in Amin's Uganda. At least 300,000 were murdered in the "killing fields" of Pol Pot's so-called Democratic Kampuchea (Cambodia). Tens of thousands of civilians were killed during Ethiopia's "Red Terror". Over 9,000 people "disappeared" under Argentina's military juntas in the late 1970s. Mass political killings and "disappearances" did not stop in the 1980s. Hundreds of thousands of people were killed by the Iraqi security forces in the 1980s; tens of thousands "disappeared" in Sri Lanka. Thousands of indigenous peasants were summarily executed as civil conflict ravaged Guatemala in the early 1980s. Thousands were killed in Burundi.

At the end of the 1980s dramatic political change swept across continents. Democratically elected governments replaced military juntas and totalitarian regimes.

In the excitement of all this change, a "new world order" was announced, promising an era in which governments would be accountable to their people, abide by the law, and protect and promote human rights.

These turned out to be false promises. Tens of thousands of people are still murdered every year or made to "disappear" without trace by government agents.

In Tadjikistan, a human rights tragedy that largely escaped international attention left 20,000 dead in the civil war which began in 1992. Government forces and paramilitary were responsible for hundreds of political killings and "disappearances". In Sudan, gripped by a bitter civil war since 1983, government forces have been responsible for tens of thousands of political killings and "disappearances". Despite the advent of peace in El Salvador, "death squads" still dump their victims' mutilated bodies on city streets. In Turkey, the security forces have been implicated in the killings of hundreds of people, despite government promises of human rights reforms.

In South Africa, horrific levels of bloodshed have accompanied the political reform process aiming to end the era of *apartheid*. Since 1990, when political negotiations began, over 10,000 South Africans have been murdered in circumstances involving the security forces or, more often, by armed groups acting with tacit official support.

In Rwanda, more than 3,000 people were massacred by government forces, civilian groups and rebels between late 1990 and early 1993, during armed conflict in the north of the country.

The trend has not been universally for the worse. Some governments have improved their human rights records. New governments have made genuine efforts to end long-established patterns of violations.

Human rights have never had a higher profile internationally.

These developments should be a cause for celebration. But they are overshadowed by the terror that still stalks much of the world.

The proliferation of nationalist, secessionist and religious conflicts threatens all regions with violence and bloodshed. The growth of these conflicts has seen armed opposition groups adopt the methodology of state terror in pursuit of their goals. The international community has shown itself either unwilling or unable to bring about an end to injustice and brutality. Unless action is taken to stop political killings and "disappearances", the rising tide of carnage could overwhelm the institutions set up to promote international human rights standards after the horrors of the Second World War.

Human rights violations are not inevitable. They are the result of governmental decisions. Those governments must be forced to change their ways. If we act together, we can create a genuine "new world order" in which basic human rights are a reality for all, rather than a privilege for the few.

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Quote

'Predictably, when security forces have to deal with terrorist groups, who, as a matter of ideology and deliberate strategy adopt practices of the most unimaginable savagery, excesses are bound to occur.'  
The Sri Lankan Presidential Adviser on International Affairs in 1990. Government troops in Sri Lanka have been responsible for tens of thousands of political killings and "disappearances".

Quote

"The great mass murderers of our time have accounted for no more than a few hundred victims. In contrast, states that have chosen to murder their own citizens can usually count their victims by the carload. As for motive, the state has no peers, for it will kill its victim for a careless word, a fleeting thought, or even a poem. But the homicidal state shares one trait with the solitary killer -- like all murderers, it trips on its own egotism and drops a trail of clues which, when properly collected, preserved and analyzed are as damning as a signed confession left in the grave."

Dr Clyde Snow, a forensic anthropologist who analysed skeletal remains to expose atrocities committed by state officials in several Latin American countries.

Text

All over the world governments are murdering and kidnapping their citizens. Many of these governments have agreed to be bound by treaties pledging them to respect human rights. How do they get away with it? Some do not even bother to justify their actions. Some use methods of murder which attempt to conceal the crime. Killings are carried out by night, when the victims are alone. Bodies are mutilated and hidden to avoid recognition and discovery. In Afghanistan, Chad, Ethiopia, and Iraq, recently uncovered mass graves have revealed thousands of victims of previously undocumented political killings and "disappearances". But most governments lie or play down the facts. When the tanks of the Chinese army moved against the pro-democracy protesters in Beijing in June 1989, the massacre that followed became headline news around the world. Television cameras recorded it. Thousands of people witnessed it. Hundreds of bodies were traced in morgues and hospitals. Nevertheless, the government initially said no one had been killed. This version was later amended: the government said 200 civilians had been killed in Beijing in clashes between soldiers and demonstrators, a gross underestimate of the reality.

Some governments try to stifle criticism by claiming that violence is endemic in their societies, or results from ethnic tensions. Violence, of course, will be endemic in any society where human rights are violated. And intercommunal violence is not the inevitable product of ethnic or religious tensions. It often results from, or is exacerbated by, official policies.

In 1992 more than 700 people were killed in ethnic clashes in Kenya, clashes which often appeared to have been politically engineered. Evidence emerged indicating that one group responsible for many of the killings was supported and financed by senior government officials. The group was nicknamed "Kalenjin warriors", Kalenjin being the President's ethnic group.

More than 130 people were killed by the security forces in Bombay, capital of the Indian state of Maharashtra, during the violence which followed the destruction of the Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodhya in December 1992. Most of those killed belonged to the Muslim community. According to eye-witnesses, the police sided with Hindu mobs attacking Muslims, and most of those shot by the police were wounded in the head and chest, suggesting that the police had shot to kill.

The circumstances surrounding apparent political killings are often unclear. It is only the conduct of the state combined with a pattern of similar incidents that point to the probability that the killings were deliberate and unlawful.

In Northern Ireland (United Kingdom), dozens of killings by the security forces in suspicious circumstances since 1982 have led to allegations that suspected members of armed opposition groups were being deliberately killed, rather than arrested. The government's consistent refusal to hold independent inquiries into the killings has strengthened these allegations. The findings of the only detailed inquiry, led by a senior police officer from another force, were never published and although the inquiry found evidence of police misconduct, no officers were prosecuted for reasons of "national security" and "public interest".

Fear of attracting international scrutiny of their human rights records has meant that few of today's governments openly order political killings and "disappearances". More and more rely on covert operations and sophisticated cover-ups.

The "death squads" are among the most deadly of governments' secret killers -- phantoms in the night, hooded and armed to the teeth, with exotic names such as "White Hand", or "Death to Kidnappers".

In Colombia the security forces have adopted a policy of secret terror, designed to intimidate and eliminate opponents without recourse to law. The government has attributed thousands of killings and "disappearances" to "death squads" over which it claims it has no control. Yet case after case shows that the "death squads" operate with the support of the Colombian armed forces and often form an integral part of the army's counter-insurgency strategy. The fiction of the "death squad" is merely a disguise for the state's own illegal operations. In South Africa, a growing body of evidence has linked "hit squads" responsible for political killings with covert police and military operations. In most countries where killings of government opponents are blamed on "death squads", their links with the security forces have been exposed. Yet governments all over the world persist with the myth that "death squads" that are instrumental to their policies are independent groups beyond their control.

Then there are the killings and "disappearances" kept at arm's length because they are the work of civilian-based vigilante forces, such as the civil defence patrols in Guatemala, the civilian self-defence organizations in the Philippines, or the village guard militias in southeast Turkey. Such forces are formed by government decree and are usually under military command, but when they are responsible for abuses governments invariably describe these as "excesses" by over-zealous citizens' self-defence groups.

Armed conflict is frequently the pretext, as well as the context, for mass killings by official forces. Civilian deaths are justified by officials as the inevitable consequence of counter-insurgency operations. Massacres by security forces are blamed on rebels or insurgent groups or said never to have happened. In some countries, such as Peru, senior military officers have argued that entire communities are collectively responsible for the actions of insurgents and may be killed with impunity.

In some countries political killings are disguised by a parody of justice. In Iran, more than 2,500 political prisoners were summarily and arbitrarily executed in 1988, some of whom had already been sentenced to prison terms.

All over the world the armed might of the state turns peaceful protest into carnage, when law enforcement officials use grossly excessive force in response to demonstrations. Official accounts of such incidents frequently blame the protesters for starting the violence. The evidence often disputes this. In May 1992 the Indian security forces killed dozens of mourners at a funeral in Srinagar in Jammu and Kashmir state. Government ministers claimed that militants in the crowd had opened fire on the police and that civilians were killed in the "cross-fire". Numerous witnesses and journalists said the police had fired indiscriminately, without provocation.

Responsibility for these human rights violations goes beyond national governments. The international community of governments also shares the blame. Time and again self-interest rather than defence of human rights has guided the international community's response to human rights crises.

In Iraq during the 1980s human rights violations on a mass scale crushed virtually all opposition to Saddam Hussein. The international community paid little attention to this until Iraq invaded neighbouring Kuwait in August 1990. Suddenly political and strategic interests were at stake in the oil-rich Gulf. Suddenly Iraqi human rights violations became headline news and a justification for international military intervention. Iraqi abuses returned to obscurity soon after the Gulf War ended in 1991.

Governments repeatedly ignore international standards which prohibit deporting people to countries where their lives are at risk. In early 1992 the Nigerian government forcibly returned several hundred Chadian exiles in the knowledge that, as government opponents, many were at risk in Chad.

Universal revulsion at the horrors perpetrated during the Second World War inspired the formation of the UN in 1945. It was hoped that through this organization governments could resolve their

differences peacefully and work together to ensure that human rights atrocities were never again repeated. The UN set its first international standard in 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which upholds rights to life and freedom from torture. These are universal rights which all governments are obliged to protect. Since 1948, international standards for the protection of human rights have been strengthened by the adoption of more than 50 treaties and covenants by the UN.

Since Amnesty International began campaigning against political killings and "disappearances" more than a decade ago, new human rights standards and measures to prevent these violations have been developed by the UN and other intergovernmental bodies such as the Organization of American States, the Organization of African Unity. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the UN began to focus on "disappearances" and political killings by governments. The discussions have resulted in two key standards which recently came into force: the Declaration on the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance; and the Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions. Both outlaw "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions and specify how to investigate them and how to prevent them.

But these treaties and mechanisms are only effective if they are implemented. They are no substitute for determined government action to protect human rights.

In the past 10 years human rights have become something that most governments openly say they subscribe to but all too few uphold. Yet it takes just one simple decision to end political killings and "disappearances" in any particular country: the decision to stop them. Once the political will is there, a series of effective measures can be taken: pre-emptive measure to prevent these violations happening in the first place coupled, if they do occur, with proper investigation and a determination to bring the perpetrators to justice. The continuing nightmare of political killings and "disappearances" will only end if governments, both individually and collectively, have the political will to act.

#### Caption

Bodies being loaded into a Somali Red Crescent truck. In Somalia's long and merciless civil war, thousands of people have been killed by rival armed forces solely because of their clan origin. Mass murder and inter-clan violence created the conditions in which famine spread rapidly. Thousands have died as a result of starvation and disease. The deliberate assassinations of relief workers, as well as civil wars, obstructed the distribution of emergency relief to many areas devastated by famine.

#### Quote

"We are not going to be able to investigate the past. We would have to put the entire army in jail."

Guatemala's President-elect, Vinicio Cerezo Arévalo, in 1985

### Box

On a June morning in 1992 Serbian paramilitaries arrived at an apartment just a few yards from the police station in Višegrad, a town in eastern Bosnia and a famous spa resort. There were three teenage girls in the apartment: 16-year-old Mirsada, her 17-year-old sister, Azra, and one of their school friends.

The three girls were told they were going to be taken to the police station. Instead they were taken to the Vilina Vlas hotel, seven kilometres north of Višegrad. This hotel is notorious; it is one of many places in Bosnia-Herzegovina where Serb militiamen have detained and raped Muslim women, many of whom have never been seen again.

Mirsada too has not been seen since. She never returned from the hotel. Azra did return, and she remembers very clearly what happened there. When they arrived at the hotel the girls were taken off to separate rooms. Five minutes later a soldier came into the room where Azra was and locked the door. "He asked me who had weapons among the Muslims. I said I didn't know ... He said I was lying and he asked me who my father was ... Then he started to take off his clothes and ordered me to strip as well."

Azra was beaten and raped. Afterwards, she heard a long scream. "A bit later a door was unlocked and I heard a soldier cursing. A girl was crying in the hallway and it was my sister, Mirsada."

Azra was eventually released and allowed to return to Višegrad but her sister has not. Mirsada's mother tried to find her daughter but her efforts were in vain. Day after day she went to the police station, only to be told that the police could do nothing. Police officers told her that they knew what was going on in the hotel but said the situation was beyond their control. In July, Mirsada's family fled Višegrad and became refugees.

### Pages 4 and 5

#### Caption

Relatives (above) surround the body of one of the 15 people killed in Guatemala in December 1990 when soldiers fired on a crowd of unarmed civilians. The Guatemalan security forces operate with near total impunity.

Victims of the Iraqi Government (right). In March 1988 an Iraqi army drive to crush Kurdish opposition took the form of the extermination of whole communities, including the 5,000 inhabitants of Halabja who were annihilated in a chemical weapon attack.

### Box

Amnesty International uses the term "extrajudicial execution" to describe an unlawful deliberate killing carried out on the orders of a government or with its complicity. We also use the term "political killing" as it is more easily understood and includes deliberate and arbitrary killings by armed political groups.

Political killings are quite separate from killings which are within the law. If someone is killed as the result of soldiers acting in

self-defence, or of police during a riot using the minimum force strictly necessary to protect life, then the killing is not unlawful. Similarly, when someone is executed after being convicted in a fair trial, the killing is not universally recognized as unlawful – although Amnesty International believes the death penalty violates international human rights standards and should be abolished. If a soldier kills for personal reasons and is subsequently punished like any other murderer, the killing he committed is not an extrajudicial execution.

If, however, an unlawful killing was a result of official orders or government policy, or committed by government-backed forces, or if the authorities refuse to investigate the crime or bring the perpetrator to justice, then it is an extrajudicial execution, a political killing for which the government is responsible. Similarly, some killings in armed conflicts, whether by government or opposition forces, can never be justified; they are outlawed even by the laws of war. They are political killings, not legitimate acts of war.

The term "disappearance" first entered the international human rights vocabulary as a result of events in Guatemala, where the practice emerged on a mass scale in the 1960s. It has now spread across the globe and claimed hundreds of thousands of victims. All over the world people are clinging to the hope that their "disappeared" relatives and friends are still alive.

We describe people as "disappeared" when there are reasonable grounds to believe that they were taken into custody by the security forces or their agents, but the authorities deny that the victims are in detention.

The cruelty of "disappearance" is that it can be interminable. A "disappearance" punishes family and friends forever – or for as long as the "disappearance" lasts. Some of the "disappeared" have emerged alive after years in secret detention. In 1991 hundreds of people who "disappeared" in Morocco were released after being held for more than 15 years, but they and others like them are the exceptions. The ultimate tragedy is that many never reappear, or appear only in the exhumation of mass graves, or as a statistic in the secret files of a defeated regime.

In mid-May 1988 some 30 Indian peasants were rounded up and killed by the army in Cayara, a small town in Ayacucho department. General José Valdivia Dueñas, then head of the political-military command in Ayacucho, justified the massacre on the grounds that civilians in the area bore collective responsibility for an attack by the Communist Party of Peru-Shining Path (PCP) on a military convoy the previous day.

After the massacre the military hunted down and killed anyone who could testify against them.

Marta Crisóstomo, a 22-year-old nurse, had given extensive evidence to an official inquiry into the massacre. Her name was widely published in the press. She began to receive death threats and moved to another town.

In September 1989 Marta Crisóstomo became the ninth witness of the Cayara massacre to "disappear" or be killed. On the morning of 8 September an army "death squad" broke into her house and shot her



dead. Neighbours witnessed the army raid, but a police inquiry reported that it was impossible to determine who killed her. An investigation by a public prosecutor, who later left the country for his own safety, found that the army had carried out the Cayara massacre and that overall responsibility rested with General Valdivia. However, no one has been charged in connection with the case. In February 1992 the Cayara case was referred to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. The Peruvian Government challenged the case on procedural grounds. The Court ruled in favour of the government and the case was closed. However, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights decided to publish a full report on the Cayara massacre, the first time a single case has received such treatment.

#### Text

Government involvement in political killings and "disappearances" goes beyond the death or abduction of the victim. An elaborate system exists to ensure that the truth does not emerge and that the perpetrators escape justice. Known as impunity, it exempts the perpetrators of human rights violations from investigation, prosecution or punishment, in fact from any redress whatsoever for the actions. When impunity prevails human rights are in grave danger.

Impunity is officially extended by a variety of methods.

Some governments obstruct justice by passing laws which guarantee immunity from prosecution to members of the security forces who violate human rights; they legalize the illegal. In November 1992, as political killings continued in South Africa, the government enacted the Further Indemnity Act, effectively granting impunity to human rights violators. In India, special legislation in states where the government faces armed insurgency permits the security forces to shoot to kill without any fear of "prosecution, suit or other legal proceeding..."

Other governments make a pretence of investigating human rights violations, but in practice ensure the investigations lead nowhere.

In November 1991 an estimated 200 people were killed when Indonesian troops opened fired on a peaceful procession in Dili, capital of East Timor. The authorities at first tried to excuse the massacre by saying the soldiers were "provoked" and had fired when "the mob attacked them brutally". But an international outcry forced the government to set up a commission of inquiry. This proved to be little more than an attempt to appease international protest.

Sometimes impunity is extended retrospectively. When periods of gross abuse come to an end the doors are closed on the past. The decision not to punish human rights violations is justified on grounds of "national reconciliation".

In March 1993 the UN-appointed Truth Commission published its report on past human rights abuses by government and opposition forces in El Salvador. The report found government forces responsible for massive human rights violations during the 12-year civil war. Less than a week later, the government passed a sweeping amnesty law granting exemption from prosecution to those who

committed human rights crimes before 1992. In Cambodia, the 1991 peace settlement also failed to address the prosecution of those responsible for the massive violations of the past. In May 1993 the Mauritanian parliament passed a bill granting total immunity from prosecution to members of the security forces for all offences committed between 1989 and 1992, a period in which more than 400 Mauritanians were extrajudicially executed and dozens "disappeared". However impunity prevails, the effect is the same. When the security forces get away with political killings and "disappearances" on a daily basis, impunity becomes a part of a nation's life. The rule of law disintegrates. In some countries impunity has created an epidemic of casual murder and abduction, in which the urban poor, peasants, and others on the margins of society have been systematically eliminated. The authorities at national and local level have been accomplices to political killings and "disappearances" through informal partnerships with civilian vigilantes and hired gunmen. In Brazil, hundreds of people – peasant farmers, rural community and trade union leaders and Indians – have been denied the protection of the law and deliberately killed by hired gunmen in the pay of landowners. These killings are often not only sanctioned but assisted by the authorities. In all but a handful of cases the killers have escaped justice. Impunity transcends national boundaries. When governments knowingly shirk their obligation to hold other states to their international commitments, their seeming indifference becomes complicity. Governments responsible for mass killings and "disappearances" have been supported, and shielded from criticism by powerful allies who are more interested in protecting strategic and economic interests than human rights. During the 1980s, for example, the governments of France, Iraq and the United States, among others, armed, equipped, trained and financed the Chadian security forces while that same army systematically butchered thousands of defenceless citizens. In today's world, gross violations increasingly take place under elected governments with explicit human rights commitments and institutions. The gulf between commitments and practice can only be bridged if all unresolved human rights abuses are properly investigated and the perpetrators brought to justice. Victims, their relatives and society at large all have a vital interest in knowing the truth about abuses and in seeing that justice is done. As an international phenomenon, impunity demands action on an international scale. The decision to establish an international war crimes tribunal in respect of the former Yugoslavia should be one step towards creating an international criminal court, with worldwide jurisdiction, able to bring to justice those responsible for violating human rights and humanitarian law.

#### Quote

"Perhaps the single most important factor contributing to the phenomenon of disappearances may be that of impunity. [Our] experience...has confirmed the age-old adage that impunity breeds contempt for the law. Perpetrators of human rights violations, whether

civilian or military, will become all the more brazen when they are not held to account before a court of law.”

UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances

#### Box

"I was standing at the corner of a narrow street, near about 10 youths and boys. These young people were not doing anything other than watching, like me, a patrol of Israeli soldiers who were advancing towards us. When they were more than a hundred metres from us, the soldiers began firing in our direction. I heard no warning and the soldiers appeared to be in no danger. Four or five shots were fired. A bullet hit the dust near me."

This is an eye-witness account by Danish Army Major Allan Hugstad who visited Gaza as a delegate for Amnesty International in May 1993. Since December 1992, more than 100 Palestinians have been shot and killed by Israeli forces in the Occupied Territories. Many of them appear to have been the victims of extrajudicial executions. Some 30 were children, aged 16 and under. Up to 19 of them were killed in the Gaza Strip.

Eleven-year-old Rana Abu Tuyur was shot dead on her way to buy milk; 19-year-old Rizq al-Fara, who helped to carry the child's body to a car, was shot dead later that day while standing on his balcony. Najah Abu Dalal, a 34-year-old mother of six, died on 26 April 1993 after being shot in the head on 21 April by a soldier stationed on a tall building nearby while she was standing in a private courtyard; 18-month-old Fares al-Kurdi was shot in the chest and killed while his father sheltered in a doorway during clashes in Jabalia Refugee Camp. Hundreds of Palestinian civilians have been killed by Israeli forces since the Palestinian uprising known as the *intifada* began in 1987. The investigations into these killings have usually been inadequate and have rarely resulted in prosecutions.

Pages 6 and 7

#### Quote

`...[our] position is quite clear, we reject and condemn human rights because they are reactionary, counter-revolutionary, bourgeois rights.'

Extract from a PCP document

#### Caption

Chris Batan's mother says her final farewell at his funeral

#### Box

Some governments do not even try to disguise what they are doing. Myanmar's military government routinely kills members of ethnic minorities. When challenged it simply proclaims that martial law gives it the right to do as it pleases.

Rahila, a 30-year-old Muslim woman, worked as a day labourer in the rice fields surrounding Hlaingbwe Township of Kayin (Karen) state. She was single and had suffered from epilepsy since she was a child.

Rahila is not her real name. Her identity has been concealed to protect her relatives from reprisals by Myanmar's armed forces, known as the *tatmadaw*. But her case represents hundreds who have suffered the same fate as her.

For years members of the ethnic minorities living in the remote and mountainous rural areas of Myanmar have been at the mercy of the *tatmadaw*. Thousands have been deliberately killed on suspicion of supporting armed insurgents. Hundreds of thousands have been forced to work as porters or as human mine detectors for the *tatmadaw* counter-insurgency patrols.

Many have died of exhaustion or severe ill-treatment, including children and pregnant women. Others have been killed for disobeying orders or because they were too exhausted to work; some died when they were forced to walk across minefields at gunpoint.

On an April morning in 1991 a *tatmadaw* unit came to Rahila's village looking for people they could use as porters. Rahila was among those taken away. Her nephew describes what happened:

"The village head said, 'Don't take her, she is ill.' They took her anyway, saying, 'We'll only take her for a little while.' Ten days later we heard she was dead... one of the porters who was with her came back and told me... She was carrying rice on her back and exerting herself so much she had a fit. They kicked and punched her to try to make her get up, but she couldn't, and then they kicked and punched her so much she died... She died from the beatings."

Anyone who refuses to go with the *tatmadaw* risks being shot. A woman whose cousin and his two-year-old child were shot dead when he refused to join troops as a porter told Amnesty International that the family had not protested about the incident. "There is no way of complaining about anything the government does," she said.

#### Text

In May 1991 an insurgent group entered the village of Huasahuasi in Peru's Junín department. The insurgents were members of the Communist Party of Peru-Shining Path (PCP). They singled out four villagers and an Australian nun working in Huasahuasi. After a two-hour mock trial, which the entire village was forced to attend, all five were shot in the back of the neck. The nun was apparently accused of being an "American Yankee".

There are distinct types of political killings by armed political groups: the deliberate random and arbitrary killing of helpless civilians who offer no threat and are not part of the state's armed security apparatus; the deliberate killing of targeted individuals because they support the government, or are suspected of informing on the group, or of opposing it; the killing of prisoners whom the group holds, or of people who have surrendered or are *hors de combat*.

Until the 1990s Amnesty International did not address its concerns to armed political groups, although it reported on and condemned the torture or killing of prisoners held by armed opposition groups.

In 1991 Amnesty International decided to actively oppose other deliberate and arbitrary killings and hostage-taking by armed

opposition groups, a policy change which has meant increased action to protect individuals from abuses by armed political groups.

Deliberate and arbitrary killings by armed political groups are a worldwide phenomenon.

In the Americas, armed political groups have targeted unarmed civilians in pursuit of their goals, most notably in Peru, where the PCP has killed thousands of people in its campaign to overthrow the state.

In Asia, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), seeking independence for northeast Sri Lanka, began by attacking state targets.

In the mid-1980s it launched more generalized attacks and has since killed hundreds of non-combatant civilians whom it deliberately targeted, and hundreds more in random bombings.

Deliberate and arbitrary killings by armed political groups are also a concern in Europe. The Kurdish Workers' Party in Turkey and the armed Basque group ETA, in Spain, have both been responsible for the deliberate and arbitrary killing of civilians. In Northern Ireland (UK) members of the Irish Republican Army and Protestant pro-state groups such as the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Ulster Defence Association have been responsible for both selective assassinations and the random killing of civilians. In the Middle East, Kurdish forces controlling parts of northern Iraq have been responsible for scores of abductions and killings of prisoners.

Armed opposition groups in Africa have also been responsible for gross abuses. RENAMO, the Mozambique National Resistance, murdered and mutilated prisoners and attacked unarmed civilians for nearly two decades. RENAMO's leadership consistently refused to acknowledge or to prevent these abuses.

As entities with no legal status, armed political groups have no pre-established judicial system which they are obliged to uphold, nor are they incontrovertibly bound by international treaties to respect human rights. Some armed opposition groups, however, have been backed by governments, which are clearly bound by international standards. During the 1980s the United States government gave political, material and tactical support to the *contra*, an armed group operating in Nicaragua, who abducted and murdered hundreds of peasants in their battle to overthrow the *Sandinista* government. The South African security forces provided similar support to RENAMO. The opposition African National Congress was itself found responsible for torture, ill-treatment and executions in its detention camps in several African countries, notably Angola, Zambia, Tanzania and Uganda – sometimes with the active collaboration of the government concerned.

Armed political opposition groups vary widely. Some control substantial areas of territory and stand on the brink of taking power.

Others are small groups of poorly armed fighters.

Amnesty International is impartial in its approach to all such groups. It does not take a position on the legitimacy of armed rebellion.

But it is passionately concerned about the thousands of people who took no part in the conflict but have been abducted or killed by armed political groups across the world. Its new policies are aimed at

preventing these abuses by persuading armed opposition groups to abide by certain minimum standards.

No one -- whether government soldier or rebel -- has the right to take hostages or to torture or murder those in their power. This is the basic principle on which international humanitarian law is founded. When this principle is violated there is no hope of achieving justice or peace.

#### Text

Dr María Ester Restrepo Quiceno, a regional procurator working in the Urabá region of northwest Colombia, was killed by a "death squad" in July 1990. She was investigating the army's involvement in "disappearances". Four men were arrested in connection with her killing, including a police officer who claimed that a soldier from the Voltigeros Battalion had supplied the assassins with guns.

Human rights worker Chris Batan was ambushed and shot dead in February 1993 by members of one of dozens of semi-official paramilitary forces in the Philippines. He was investigating human rights violations committed before 1986 among the indigenous peoples of northern Luzon. One of his killers was arrested and charged with murder, but the five others involved are still at large.

Joseph Behidi, vice-president of the Chadian Human Rights League, was shot dead by members of the security forces in February 1992.

The murder caused an outcry and the government dismissed senior police chiefs. Although arrests were made no one was brought to justice in connection with the killing. Joseph Behidi had criticized the government and the security forces for human rights violations. This is believed to be the reason why he was killed.

Vedat Aydin, a leading member of the Turkish Human Rights Association, was abducted in July 1991 by several armed men who identified themselves as police officers. His body was found three days later. The police buried it as "unidentifiable", without a full autopsy. Information is the most essential weapon of the battle against human rights violations. Without it no action is possible. The truth of government repression would remain secret were it not for human rights activists. All know the risks they run and many have paid the ultimate price.

A remarkable panorama of worldwide activity has been generated by the rapid growth of the human rights movement. There are now hundreds of independent domestic groups and other national, regional and international bodies who promote human rights as part of their programs. Trade unions and other national organizations have made human rights a key issue. Individual journalists, lawyers, politicians, trade unionists and human rights activists have helped to bring human rights into the headlines.

This has intensified pressure on governments to respect human rights. International human rights law is being strengthened. Since Amnesty International was launched in 1961, a comprehensive framework of international human rights instruments has been established, covering all aspects of the organization's work. At least 116 nations have ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Ironically, the proliferation of international standards for the protection of human rights can provide governments with a smoke-screen: they often substitute ratifying treaties for action to protect human rights. The Brazilian government, one of the first to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, has allowed street children to be killed at random in an unofficial campaign of "social cleansing".

Some governments have adopted the language of human rights, appointed human rights ombudsmen and set up official human rights bodies. All too often this is used to deny there is a role for independent human rights activists.

But independent human rights organizations are essential, if human rights are to be respected. Unlike governments, they have an interest only in uncovering the truth, in exposing the violations and seeking redress for the victims. A culture in which the work of human rights organizations is seen as legitimate is a powerful antidote to the culture of impunity.

#### Caption

Members of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (above) display captured machine-guns. In countries racked by civil war, some armed political groups have treated civilians as legitimate targets. The SPLA is no exception. SPLA factions have killed hundreds of helpless civilians, from patients in a leprosy hospital to foreign aid workers.

In Sri Lanka, some people taken prisoner by the LTTE remain unaccounted for. Student and writer Thiagarajah Selvanithy (left) was detained by the LTTE in August 1991. Her fate and whereabouts are unknown.

#### Quote

'First they came for the Jews  
and I did not speak out --  
because I was not a Jew  
Then they came for the communists  
and I did not speak out --  
because I was not a communist  
Next they came for the trade unionists  
and I did not speak out --  
because I was not a trade unionist  
Then they came for me  
and there was no one left  
to speak out for me'

Pastor Niemoeller, victim of the Holocaust

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#### Caption

Refugee children from the Western Sahara in a camp in Algeria. After Morocco took over the Western Sahara in 1975 several hundred Sahrawis "disappeared". More than 300 were released in 1991 together

with over 30 "disappeared" Moroccans, during a worldwide campaign against human rights violations in Morocco. Hundreds of Sahrawis and Moroccans remain unaccounted for.

#### Quote

"In our efforts to build a culture of human rights, we must not forget the importance of human rights workers and non-governmental organizations, nor the courage shown by many who risk their lives and security for the rights of others."

UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali

#### Recommendations

Amnesty International calls on all governments to take the following steps towards stopping extrajudicial executions and "disappearances". The steps are based on our more detailed 14-point programs against "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions.

- 1 Extrajudicial executions and "disappearances" should be publicly condemned by the highest authorities of every country.
- 2 The authorities should ensure strict control, including a clear chain-of-command, over all officials responsible for arrests, detention and imprisonment.
- 3 Law enforcement officials should only use force when strictly required and then only to the minimum extent necessary.
- 4 "Death squads", paramilitary forces and civilian vigilantes operating outside the chain of command but with official support and acquiescence should be prohibited and disbanded.
- 5 People at risk of extrajudicial execution or "disappearance" should receive official protection.
- 6 No one should be held in secret detention.
- 7 Governments should establish mechanisms to locate and protect prisoners.
- 8 "Disappearances" and extrajudicial executions should be made criminal offences.
- 9 Prohibition of extrajudicial executions and "disappearances" should be reflected in the training of all members of the security forces, and in the instructions issued to them.
- 10 All complaints and reports of extrajudicial executions and "disappearances" should be investigated promptly by an independent body.
- 11 Those responsible for extrajudicial executions and "disappearances" should be brought to justice.
- 12 Dependents of the victims of extrajudicial executions and "disappearances" should be entitled to redress, including financial compensation.
- 13 Governments should ratify and implement international treaties containing safeguards and remedies against extrajudicial executions and "disappearances".
- 14 Governments should use all available channels to intercede with the governments of countries where extrajudicial executions and "disappearances" have been reported.



- They should ensure that transfers of equipment, knowledge and training for military, security or police use do not facilitate extrajudicial executions or "disappearances".
- No one should be forcibly returned to a country where he or she risks becoming a victim of extrajudicial execution or "disappearance".

#### Text

Human rights emergencies can occur anywhere at any time. Amnesty International is on permanent alert around the globe.

Cases of "disappearance" reported to us are flashed around the world on our Urgent Action network. Some 50,000 people in 78 countries are mobilized to write, telex, fax and phone appeals for the victims' safety.

When political killings are reported it is too late for Urgent Actions to save lives. Instead we demand prompt, impartial investigation of the killing, protection for witnesses and the victim's family, and that those responsible to be brought to justice.

We don't claim our appeals are always successful. But at the very least they remind governments that whatever human rights violations they attempt will be exposed to the harsh glare of international scrutiny.

Instant action is essential if human rights are to be protected. This is where the independent human rights organizations have a vital role to play. The official human rights bureaucracy needs far more time to move into action. In January 1992 a UN special rapporteur visited Iraq and documented mass human rights violations. His report stated that "this exceptionally grave situation demands an exceptional response". The UN Commission on Human Rights heard his report and asked him to report back in a year's time with proposals for an "exceptional response".

Urgent Actions are just the beginning of Amnesty International's work on behalf of the victims of political killings and "disappearances". Their cases are highlighted by our Regional Action Networks. Their fate becomes the focus of our country campaigns. Thousands more appeals are generated on their behalf. The international community will be pressed to intercede. The UN will be alerted.

And at the same time hundreds of Amnesty International groups of volunteers will start working on the victims' cases. Numbering more than a million, these volunteers are the activist backbone of Amnesty International's campaigns. They mobilize their communities, put pressure on governments, support the victims' families, lobby for legal reform and raise public awareness through the press and human rights education work. These are some of the techniques that will be used in our international campaign to stop political killings and "disappearances".

In this campaign, for the first time, we are demanding that armed political groups worldwide take the minimum steps to fulfil their obligation to respect basic human rights. We call on them to observe international humanitarian standards:

- stop torture and deliberate and arbitrary killings, including killings of civilians and prisoners;

- release all hostages immediately and unconditionally and desist from further hostage-taking;
- ensure that all members of their group know that hostage-taking and deliberate and arbitrary killings will not be tolerated, and that those who commit them will be held to account.

But the main focus of the campaign falls on governments. We are demanding that they implement our 14-point programs to prevent extrajudicial executions and "disappearances".

When governments across the world trample on the fundamental rights of their citizens and ignore abuses abroad, it is up to ordinary people to act. Concerted public pressure can make a difference, even to the most repressive regimes; they may have the heavy artillery, but we have the numbers. We must take action. Join our campaign today!