

NEWS RELEASE

30 August 1994

AI Index: AMR 14/01/94

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL TEAM VISITS THE BAHAMAS TO INVESTIGATE THE SITUATION OF HAITIAN REFUGEES

A four-person Amnesty International team is currently travelling to several countries and territories in the Caribbean region to research into matters relating to the human rights situation in Haiti and the protection of Haitian refugees.

The team arrives in the Bahamas on Wednesday 31 August and expects to stay for five or six days. The team comprises Wesley Gryk, a US citizen working as a lawyer in the UK; Marta Fotsch of Amnesty International's Swiss Section; Patrick Delouvin, head of the refugee department in Amnesty International's French Section, and T. Muthukumaraswamy, a lawyer and board member of Amnesty International in the USA.

Amnesty International is deeply concerned about the current human rights situation in Haiti, a concern which has been intensified by the forced withdrawal of the OAS/UN International Civilian Mission (MICIVIH) in July this year. This means that human rights violations in Haiti are more likely than before to go unreported, and deprives the Haitian population of an international monitoring presence which might have helped to prevent further excesses. The organization is also concerned about the refugees who have fled from Haiti to seek protection in other countries, and it vociferously opposed the US Government's policy of summary return of all Haitian asylum-seekers intercepted at sea, which prevailed until May this year.

Amnesty International is aware of some of the problems that have arisen with regard to protection of Haitian refugees in the Bahamas and the team will seek clarification on these matters, as well as looking into more recent developments. In carrying out this work they plan to interview refugees about the human rights violations which they fled from in Haiti and the situation they find themselves in in the Bahamas, as well as holding discussions with non-governmental agencies and relevant Bahamian Government officials.

In the course of their visit the team will, as well as seeking information on matters relating specifically to refugee protection, seek to gain an understanding of other factors which may be relevant in the Bahamian context.

The Bahamas has, by its recent accession to the 1951 Convention and Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, made an express commitment to uphold essential principles of refugee protection. Accordingly, it is most important to find ways in which the Bahamas can ensure the future protection of refugees and the effective fulfilment of its obligations under international law.

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