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TO: PRESS OFFICERS

FROM: PRESS AND PUBLICATIONS

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WEEKLY UPDATE SERVICE 01/91

Contained in this weekly update are external items on the
Argentina, the Maldives, Bangladesh and Rwanda.

1a) NEW INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

24 January - Japan

A targetted news release based on an external document about the
death penalty and ill-treatment in Japan. The 15-page document
looks at legal provisions and detention procedures in Japan. No
cases are contained in it but the news release will highlight cases
of alleged ill-treatment in recent years.

A bilingual book is being printed in Japan. Sections will receive
several copies of this directly from Japan. The English-only
external document will be sent in the weekly mailing of 16 January.
Any section which would like the document sooner should get in
touch with the press office.

February - Mexico

News release based on an external document on torture.

1b) FORTHCOMING NEWSLETTER FOCUSES

January - AI's work in Asia
February - Women
March - AI's work in Europe
April - Morocco
May - AI's work in the Americas
June - 30th anniversary

NOTE TO PRESS OFFICERS:

Iraq/Kuwait report and release -

The press office would still like any newspaper clippings or details of radio and television interviews given on this report.

TV Task Force -

We'd like to thank all sections that have sent us information on their work on television for the TV Task Force. We've had quite a good response but would still like to hear from more sections.

Publicity file -

The press office would still like sections to send it any "good news" stories, plus photos to accompany them. This could include news about released prisoners or any success stories arising from AI work and campaigns. Any material should be sent to Serena Lim.

3. ASA 20/WU 01/91 EXTERNAL
9 January 1991

MALDIVES: GOVERNMENT EXTENDS DEATH PENALTY

The government of the Republic of Maldives extended the death penalty in December 1990 to include crimes associated with terrorism.

In an appeal to President Gayoom, Amnesty International pointed out that the death penalty had not been shown to have any special power in reducing crime or political violence. The organization said it was nearly 40 years since an execution was carried out in the Maldives and urged the president to maintain his practice of commuting death sentences and to consider abolishing the death penalty.

4. ASA 13//WU 01/91 EXTERNAL
9 January 1991

BANGLADESH: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL URGES STEPS TO PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS

Amnesty International has urged Bangladesh's interim government to ratify international human rights instruments and limit powers of administrative detention as two initial steps to protect human rights.

Acting President Shahabuddin Ahmed was sworn in on 6 December 1990 after two months of anti-government protests led to the resignation of President Hossain Mohammad Ershad. Parliamentary elections are scheduled for 27 February 1991.

In a letter to the acting president, Amnesty International said ratification would demonstrate the government's resolve to uphold and respect human rights by ensuring future administrations were under international obligation to guarantee specific and fundamental human rights.

Amnesty International also called for an urgent review of powers of administrative detention, which it said should only be used as an exceptional measure and not to bypass safeguards in the judicial framework.

5. AFR 47/WU 01/91 EXTERNAL
9 January 1991

RWANDA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL SENDS TRIAL OBSERVER

The following information was sent to selected sections on 29 December 1990 and is accurate as of that date. More trials have since been held and a further update will follow shortly.

An Amnesty International representative arrived in the Rwandese capital, Kigali, on 28 December 1990 to observe the first in a series of trials of some 1,566 people charged with offences arising out of a violent attack on northeast Rwanda by Uganda-based Rwandese exiles in early October.

The trials are being held before the State Security Court. The first trial of 12 people on 28 December 1990 was reportedly adjourned until 9 January 1991 to give defendants and their lawyers time to prepare for the trial. They were only given details of the charges on 27 December.

Amnesty International is concerned at reports that most of those being brought to trial have not had access to legal counsel during their detention. Previous political trials have occurred in the absence of lawyers. The prisoners at the hearings on 28 December were only able to contact lawyers one week earlier.

Amnesty International is also concerned at reports that the Rwandese authorities are not allowing detainees to be defended by lawyers from outside Rwanda, although the country has few lawyers of its own. The authorities have frequently cited this shortage as an explanation for the absence of defence counsel at trials.

The State Security Court hearing the present cases tried more than 20 people last year. At previous trials, the court was composed of five judges, including two soldiers and an official of the President's office, so raising doubts about the court's independence.

Trials have occurred sporadically before the State Security Court since the first trials in 1979 - in 1981, 1983, 1986 and 1990. Amnesty International is concerned that all these trials have not met international standards for fair trial.

Trials have often been summary, with defendants given an inadequate opportunity to present their defence and the court failing to investigate claims by defendants that statements used as prosecution evidence were made under duress. Many of those convicted by the State Security Court have been prisoners of conscience, including people imprisoned for circulating documents criticizing the government (1981 and 1983), members of minority

religious denominations such as Jehovah's Witnesses (1986 and 1990) and individuals who have formed opposition political parties (1983 and 1990), an action which remains prohibited in Rwanda's one-party state.

Amnesty International's representative will report on his findings to the organization's International Executive Committee.

