

AI Index: NWS 11/14/93
Distr: SC/PO

No. of words: 1082

Amnesty International
International Secretariat
1 Easton Street

United Kingdom

London WC1X 8DJ

TO: PRESS OFFICERS

FROM: PRESS AND PUBLICATIONS

DATE: 25 FEBRUARY 1993

WEEKLY UPDATE SERVICE 14/93

Contained in this weekly update is an external item on Brazil.

War Crimes Tribunals

Please refer to Weekly Update NWS 11/42/92, item index: EUR 63/WU 03/92, to answer queries about War Crimes tribunals of criminals in former Yugoslavia. We are preparing a weekly update item with AI's response to the UN Security Council announcement and hope to get it out to you today. The issue is a difficult one and has involved much discussion between Geneva and here - so apologies for the delay.

NEWS INITIATIVES

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Japan - 0500 hrs gmt, 17 March

(New Information)

Please note the embargo is confirmed for 0500 hrs gmt, 17 March for this document on refugee issues and we anticipate a high level of media interest in this news release.

The Japanese Section is holding a press conference in Tokyo to launch the report on 17 March. IS staff member, David Petrasak, who wrote the report, is going to Tokyo to help with media there. The Japanese Section will be inviting international media to attend the press conference and the IS will also inform international media of the launch. Details of the conference will shortly be available from the IS press office if you need them.

An Electronic News Release (ENR) is being prepared at the last minute to go with the report. Unfortunately, resources and time will not allow the IS to distribute it to sections. However, it will be given to Japanese TV at the press launch and the IS is giving it to WTN, VISNEWS, BBC World Service TV and CNN - so please refer your media to these. The master copy is held at Dubbs, 25-26 Poland Street, London W1V 3DB - Tel: +44 71 629 0055. Media who urgently require the full ENR may order copies direct from Dubbs, paying the copying costs only.

Chad - 21 April

(New Information)

Please Note

The document to go with this campaign has been sent out to sections dated February. Please inform your section campaign coordinators and anyone else who may receive it that it is EMBARGOED FOR 21 APRIL.

Campaign, document, news release, Q&A and ENR. More details to follow shortly.

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

Algeria - 2 March

An embargoed document on human rights violations under the state of emergency has been sent to section press officers by the Research Department. To go with this is item: MDE 28/WU 01/93, in weekly update NWS 11/10/93.

Section Initiatives**French Section - European Press Officers' Meeting**

The second European Press Officers' meeting will take place in Paris this year. The registration forms have not arrived yet, but when they do please send them to Luisa de Soriano or Josette Debord at the French Section Press Office before the end of February. The date of this meeting is now fixed for 15 and 16 May as the majority of you asked for. It will be focused on two themes: Audiovisual work (production and TV experiences) and how to improve it; and the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna. The French Section Press Office will send the program to all participants during the last week of February. Many thanks.

Weekly Update NWS 11/14/93

2. AMR 19/WU 01/93 EXTERNAL

25 February 1993

BRAZIL: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CONCERNED BY ESCAPE OF CHICO MENDES' KILLERS

Amnesty International is gravely concerned by the escape of Darci Alves da Silva and Darli Alves da Silva, respectively convicted and accused of the murder of "Chico Mendes", from jail in Rio Branco, state of Acre, Brazil.

Francisco Alves Mendes Filho, known as "Chico Mendes", was shot dead on the evening of Thursday 22 December 1988, going into his backyard to take a shower. A founding member of the National Council of Rubber Tappers, Chico Mendes was known nationally and internationally for his work in defence of the forest of Acre. His killing was not unexpected - he had survived six previous attempts on his life.

Local, state and federal authorities moved quickly to investigate the crime and make arrests amidst intense international pressure and publicity. Investigations focused on the Alves family, which had been repeatedly accused of acts of violence against rural workers in three states. Darli Alves da Silva and his son, Darci Alves da Silva, were arrested and charged with the crime.

Darci and Darli Alves da Silva were convicted and sentenced in December 1990 to 19 years' imprisonment; Darci for having carried out the assassination and Darli for having ordered it. Darli Alves' conviction marked the first time that a Brazilian court had convicted a landowner for ordering the murder of a rural trade unionist.

However, in February 1992, an Appeal Court ordered a retrial of Darli on the grounds that his conviction was based on insufficient evidence. He remained in jail awaiting the retrial.

Commenting on the Appeal Court's decision, an aide to Brazil's then Environment Secretary was quoted as saying that "this shows that jail [in Brazil] is just for poor people who steal chickens. Very few landowners even end up there and those who do, don't stay long."

Amnesty International notes that similar cases have occurred where state authorities appear unwilling or unable to prevent jail escapes by people accused of assassinating union leaders and human rights workers in rural areas.

Hundreds of peasants and rural trade union leaders have been killed in Brazil in the context of land disputes. Amnesty International takes no position on competing claims in land disputes. However, the organization is concerned that gunmen - including off-duty policemen - have killed and intimidated peasants, their leaders and advisers allegedly on behalf of landowners. It is also concerned that these brutal activities have been carried out with a high degree of impunity and, in some cases, with the complicity of local authorities.

Brazilian authorities on all levels have in the vast majority of cases failed to take effective action to prevent or investigate the killings or bring those responsible to justice. Out of 1,684 cases of such killings between 1964 and 1991, only 25 cases came to trial, and in only 14 cases were people convicted.

Amnesty International has written to the Brazilian authorities requesting them to investigate the circumstances of the escape of Darci and Darli Alves de Souza. The organization also urged that if collusion by law enforcement officers is found to have occurred, those responsible should be brought to justice.

Amnesty International believes that to prevent similar human rights abuses in future, impunity must not be allowed to prevail in cases such as Chico Mendes' killing.