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Amnesty International
International Secretariat
1 Easton Street
London WC1X 8DJ
United Kingdom

TO: PRESS OFFICERS

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WEEKLY UPDATE SERVICE 16/91

Contained in this weekly update are external items on South Africa, Syria and AI missions to Iraq and Turkey, and internal "for response" statements on the mission to Turkey and on Israel.

1a) NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

9 May - Bahrain

A targeted news release for Middle East media was sent to press officers last week, based on the external document Bahrain: Violations of human rights (MDE 11/01/91).

10 May - India

The international news release was sent to press officers on 1 May, based on the report Human rights violations in Punjab: Use and abuse of the law (ASA 20/11/91). The questions and answers paper was sent yesterday.

28 May - 30th Anniversary

An advice to editors will be sent to the international news agencies highlighting the campaign theme and 30 cases and referring news agencies to sections for information about section activity.

4 June - China

A news release to mark the continuing trials of people arrested during the 1989 pro-democracy movement. The two documents accompanying the release are The People's Republic of China: Trials and Punishments since 1989 (ASA 17/34/91) and Violations of Human Rights in China: A summary of Amnesty International's concerns (ASA 17/31/91). They were sent in the weekly mailing of 8 May.

11 June - United Kingdom

The first comprehensive report for some time on our concerns in the UK is being released. Given the recent release of the Birmingham Six and the detention of Iraqis and Palestinians during the Gulf War, we expect this report to receive a high profile. The international news release will highlight the common thread in all the abuses - the government's secrecy surrounding the violations and/or investigations and the widening crisis of confidence in human rights safeguards.

10 July - Annual Report

Materials to accompany the annual report include an international news release, the annual report summary (with regional updates for 1991), an overall fact sheet and regional fact sheets and a questions and answers paper. The tentative dates for this material to be sent to sections are:

Annual report summary: 17 May

Overall and regional fact sheets: 29 May

News release: 29 May

Regional updates for annual report summary: 7 June (revised date)

10) FORTHCOMING NEWSLETTER FOCUSES

May - 30th anniversary

June - Prisoners of the month update

July - Amnesty International - a worldwide campaign

August - Amnesty International's work in the Americas

NOTE TO PRESS OFFICERS:

Publicity file:

Material from the publicity file was sent in advance to sections on 24 April. The complete publicity file with photos, further campaign stories and other extracts of letters will be sent to sections in the weekly mailing of 22 May.

2. AFR 53/WU 02/91 EXTERNAL
9 May 1991

SOUTH AFRICA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL OBSERVER AT APPEAL HEARING

An Amnesty International observer is in South Africa attending the appeal hearing in a murder case where 14 people, known as the "Uppington 14", are under sentence of death.

The hearing before the appellate division of South Africa's Supreme Court in Bloemfontein started on 6 May.

The case concerns 25 people convicted of the murder in November 1985 of a municipal policeman in the township of Pabellelo, near Uppington in the Northern Cape. One of the accused who pleaded not guilty was convicted of murder because the court found that he had struck the fatal blows which killed the deceased. Twenty-four others were convicted of murder on the grounds of having shared a "common purpose" to carry out the killing. The court held that there were no extenuating circumstances in 14 of the 25 defendants' cases and imposed the mandatory death sentence in accordance with the law then in force. The trial court refused leave to appeal but this was then granted following a petition to the Chief Justice.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all circumstances, considering it the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. The organization is also concerned that the pre-trial proceedings and trial hearings in this case were unfair in various ways. In particular, the use of the "common purpose" legal doctrine as grounds for conviction was controversial and led to 24 of the defendants being convicted on murder charges. This was an extreme example of South African courts finding large numbers of people guilty of involvement in single murders at a time when the country was shaken by violence and a state of emergency was in force. Since the conclusion of this trial in May 1989, the provision making the imposition of the death penalty mandatory in murder cases where the court finds no extenuating circumstances was repealed by South Africa's parliament in June 1990.

In February 1991, the South African authorities announced that a moratorium on executions introduced in February 1990 was coming to an end. No executions have been reported in Pretoria this year, although two prisoners were hanged in the nominally independent "homeland" of Venda in February 1991.

Amnesty International's observer in the appeal hearings is Geoffrey Robertson, an Australian barrister practising in the United Kingdom.

3. MDE 24/WU 01/91 EXTERNAL
9 May 1991

SYRIA: POLITICAL PRISONERS REPORTEDLY RELEASED

Eighty political prisoners in Syria were reported to have been released from untried detention on 28 April.

There is no indication of the reasons for or circumstances surrounding the releases. As yet Amnesty International knows the identity of seven of those freed, six of whom were prisoners of conscience adopted by the organization. Initial reports received indicated that all those released were suspected of being members of the prohibited Party for Communist Action, hundreds of whom are detained without trial, some since 1980. However, some reports suggest that members of the prohibited Communist Party Political Bureau may also be among those released.

Amnesty International is still trying to obtain a complete list of the names of those released.

The organization remains concerned about thousands of suspected opponents of the government, including hundreds of prisoners of conscience, who continue to be detained under state of emergency legislation in force since 1963. The majority are held without charge or trial, some having been held for over 20 years. Some have been held incommunicado for long periods and others remain in prison even though their sentences have expired.

**4. MDE 14/WU 02/91 EXTERNAL
9 May 1991**

IRAQ: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL TEAM TO VISIT IRAN TO INTERVIEW IRAQI REFUGEES

An Amnesty International fact-finding team will visit Iran from 5 to 25 May to interview people there who have fled Iraq since the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait in February.

The purpose of the visit is to gather information on human rights violations falling within the organization's mandate which are reported to have occurred on a large scale in Iraq. The three-member team will visit southern Iran to interview mainly Shi'a Iraqis and then go north to interview Iraqi Kurds.

The scope of this visit does not include research work on Amnesty International's long-standing human rights concerns in Iran, which have been documented in published reports and papers over many years. Members of the team will, however, discuss with Iranian officials Amnesty International's repeated requests to be allowed to visit Iran to discuss its concerns in Iran with the authorities.

In line with Amnesty International's working practices, the team members will report on their findings to the organization's governing body, the International Executive Committee following their return from Iran.

5. MDE 14/WU 03/91 EXTERNAL
9 May 1991

The following statement on a fact-finding visit to Turkey is external but should not be publicized or handed out to the media.

IRAQ: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL FACT-FINDING VISIT TO TURKEY

An Amnesty International fact-finding team will visit eastern Turkey from 8 May 1991 to interview refugees who have fled Iraq in the past month. They are likely to include Kurds, as well as Assyrian and Turcoman refugees.

The main purpose of the visit is to gather information about reported human rights violations committed by the Iraqi security forces in Iraq since the uprising that began on 1 March. These violations include widespread arbitrary arrests, torture, the use of the death penalty and mass extrajudicial executions in the northern Kurdish provinces of Iraq.

In line with Amnesty International's working practices, the team will report on its findings to the organization's governing body, the International Executive Committee.

6. MDE 14/WU 04/91 INTERNAL (for response only)
9 May 1991

IRAQ: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON FACT-FINDING VISIT TO TURKEY

The following questions and answers should only be used by press officers in response to queries about Amnesty International's visit to Turkey.

Q1: Will the team be investigating Amnesty International's human rights concerns in Turkey?

The scope of this visit does not include research work on Amnesty International's long-standing human rights concerns in Turkey, which have been documented in published reports and papers over many years.

Q2: But will the team investigate reports of abuses against Kurdish refugees by Turkish forces?

The main purpose of this visit is as stated: to gather information about violations committed in Iraq since 1 March. However, if in the course of its work the team comes across other information of relevance to Amnesty International's concerns, this will naturally be recorded and brought back for assessment to the International Secretariat in London.

Q3: But your team doesn't plan to raise with the Turkish authorities concerns about reported human rights violations by Turkish forces against refugees from Iraq?

Amnesty International has already raised with the Turkish authorities its concerns about the protection of those fleeing Iraq and has been monitoring the situation of the refugees. As concerns arise we will address them in the usual way. The task of this team is very specific and is as stated above.

Q4: Will the team be meeting the Turkish authorities?

Yes. The team plans to meet officials to discuss its visit and Amnesty International's general concerns about refugees, namely that they should not be sent against their will to countries where they risk becoming prisoners of conscience, or risk torture or execution.

Q5: Have the Turkish authorities been sending Kurds back into Iraq to face these abuses?

We have received no reports that this has been happening in the present crisis - we last received reports about such refoulement in 1988 and documented these in our report of June 1990, Iraq/Turkey - Iraqis Kurds: At risk of forcible repatriation from Turkey and human rights violations in Iraq (MDE 14/06/90).

Q6: What is Amnesty International's position on the "safe havens"? Do you consider that they are an effective guarantee that the Kurds will not be subjected to human rights violations?

One of our concerns is that no refugees should be sent back to a place where they risk the human rights violations referred to above. As far as the "safe havens" are concerned it is too early yet to say how or whether they will guarantee the long-term safety of refugees who may be sent there.

Q7: Will your team visit the "safe haven" zone in Iraq?

This will depend on the team's assessment after it has interviewed refugees in Turkey. If valuable relevant information is in prospect and the team is able to go into the areas controlled by the UN and coalition forces, it will do so.

Q8: Will you be assessing the safety of the 'safe havens' in northern Iraq in general as far as protection against human rights violations are concerned?

No. This is outside the scope of the team's brief.

**7. ACT 50/WU 01/91 EXTERNAL
9 May 1991**

PROTOCOL ON DEATH PENALTY ENTERS INTO FORCE IN JULY

The world's first pact of universal scope aimed at abolishing the death penalty will come into force on 11 July now that 10 countries have ratified it.

Amnesty International welcomes the coming into force of the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which it sees as a positive step towards the worldwide abolition of the death penalty.

The Second Optional Protocol was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1989. States that become parties to it are bound not to carry out executions. Only a limited exception is permitted: states may make reservations when accepting the protocol which allows them to use the death penalty "in times of war pursuant to a conviction for a most serious crime of a military nature committed during wartime."

The 10 countries which have ratified the protocol are Australia, Finland, the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), Iceland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Sweden. The ratification by the GDR remains valid even though the country is now part of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG).

Other countries which have signed the protocol indicating their intention to ratify it at a later date are Austria, Belgium, Costa Rica, Denmark, the FRG, Honduras, Italy, Luxembourg, Nicaragua, Norway, Uruguay and Venezuela.

7. INTERNAL - FOR RESPONSE ONLY

ISRAEL AND THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL APPEALS

Amnesty International appealed to the Yemeni authorities on 16 April to intervene to prevent the announced execution of a Palestinian accused of assassinating Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) officials in February.

PLO forces stationed in Yemen are due to carry out the execution of Hamza Abu Zeid, who is believed to have been responsible for the assassination in Tunis of PLO officials Salah Khalaf, Hayel 'Abd al-Hamid and Fakhri al-'Umari. Hamza Abu Zeid was arrested and handed over by the Tunisian authorities to the PLO, who took him to Yemen. He was reportedly sentenced to death there by a PLO military tribunal and is apparently being held in a camp near Sana'a awaiting execution.

Amnesty International has appealed to the Tunisian authorities to intervene in this case, and has informed the PLO of its absolute opposition to the death penalty (Malcolm: see Siyamend's comment on this). The organization has asked the United Nations Special Rapporteur on summary or arbitrary executions to intervene with the Yemeni authorities.

Amnesty International believes it is the responsibility of the Yemeni authorities to exercise their jurisdiction in this case and not allow an execution on their own territory by foreign forces. In line with its present mandate which confines the organization to take action with governments and quasi-governmental entities, Amnesty International cannot appeal to the PLO. Selected Amnesty International sections, however, have been asked to contact political or other personalities who have good contacts with the PLO to inform them about this impending summary execution in case they may be willing to take action.