
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 26/95

TO: PRESS OFFICERS
FROM: IS PRESS OFFICE
DATE: 2 FEBRUARY 1995

AI INDEX: NWS 11/26/95
DISTR: SC/PO
NO OF WORDS: 1234

NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - **SRI LANKA** (this item is being distributed to local and foreign media by the delegation in Sri Lanka), **INDIA** (being sent to India media by the research team), **CHECHNYA** (being sent to Russia media by the research team)

SECTION NEWS

· **AI-USA** is pleased to announce the appointment of Betsy Aaron, formerly of CBS News, as the new Deputy Executive Director for Communications. Please direct all media/communications queries affecting the US Section to Betsy's attention effective immediately.

· Within the last week the **Danish Section** had organised a national petition which calls on Boris Yeltsin to stop the deliberate murder of innocent civilians and ensure a respect for human rights in Chechnya with great success.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Turkey - 8 February - SEE NEWS SERVICE 261

Northern Iraq - 28 February - SEE NEWS SERVICE 266

Campaign on Women - 8 March

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

AI INDEX: ASA 37/WU 01/95
3 FEBRUARY 1995

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL DELEGATION VISITS SRI LANKA

An Amnesty International delegation is visiting Sri Lanka to discuss the current human rights situation in the country with government officials, including President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga.

During the visit, the three delegates headed by the organization's Deputy Secretary General, Derek Evans, also hope to meet members of the newly-established commissions of inquiry investigating "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions since 1 January 1988. They also intend to meet the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Involuntary Removal of Persons and the Human Rights Task Force set up by the former government. In addition, they plan to meet parliamentarians, members of the Bar Association of Sri Lanka, representatives of local human rights groups and victims of human rights violations and their relatives.

During the period of their meetings with government officials, they will not make public statements. However, they hope to meet representatives of the local and international media at the end of their stay to report on their visit.

A further notice will be sent with details of a press conference scheduled to be held in Colombo on 10 February. At the press conference, a press release will be made available and the delegates will be available for interview.

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AI INDEX: ASA 20/WU 02/95
2 FEBRUARY 1995

INDIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL FALSELY ACCUSED OF INACCURACY AND COVER UP

The reaction of the Indian media to Amnesty International's report on torture and deaths in custody in Jammu and Kashmir is simply detracting attention from the serious human rights violations taking place in the state, Amnesty International said today.

"The energy put into discrediting the report, and Amnesty International, should be put into highlighting the issue of the widespread use of torture and hundreds of deaths in custody in Jammu and Kashmir," the organization said.

The organization also said the government's response mixes up the report released on 31 January on Jammu and Kashmir, and one released in June 1994 describing 36 cases of deaths in custody in the rest of India which occurred during 1993. The government continues to dodge the call for impartial investigations into past human rights violations and concrete action to prevent violations in future.

The government has wrongly accused Amnesty International of not waiting for its response, or verifying allegations before publishing the report. The Jammu and Kashmir report was sent to the High Commission in London in advance of the publication date, and there was never any suggestion that publication would be delayed until a government response was received.

Amnesty International refused to base its report on questionable sources and specifically excluded any that have vested interest. The organization has therefore based the entire report from sources within India, including testimony from victims, signed statements from eye witnesses, legal affidavits and medical reports.

The report also extensively covers serious human rights abuses by armed militant groups in Jammu and Kashmir, such as kidnapping civilians, torturing captives, and in some cases even killing those people.

The focus in the press on the use of a photograph on the cover of the Campaign Journal of Amnesty International's British Section both deflects attention from the real issue of violations in Jammu and Kashmir, and distorts the facts of the case.

Articles and editorials have claimed "conclusive proof" that Amnesty International "wilfully sought to fudge the facts" and that the organization went through an "elaborate charade" to prove its innocence in the use of the photo.

They have also falsely quoted the Director of Amnesty International's British Section, David Bull, as saying that "it is better that a photographer lie than Amnesty". Mr. Bull has never made such a statement.

We have to question why the press is resurrecting the issue of the cover photograph now, and why Amnesty International's impartial and public response to the issue is dismissed out of hand. Amnesty International's actions show clearly that the organization has never tried to shirk its responsibility in this matter.

The investigation commissioned by the International Secretariat of Amnesty International into the British Section's use of the photo was carried out independently by a senior media expert, and led to the British Section issuing an apology and a correction in the Journal. It has also led to recommendations about how such errors can be avoided in future.

The correction clarified that the picture used on the cover of the Journal was in fact of a Tamil Muslim woman in Tamil Nadu, and not of a Kashmiri woman as stated in the original photo caption.

Amnesty International made the finding of the investigation available to the government and to the public through a news release. The organization has also accepted full responsibility for the error, and in its apology and correction has never named the photographer nor laid the blame for the error on him.

In the same spirit of openness, Amnesty International is again calling on the Indian government to carry out full, impartial investigations into torture and deaths in Jammu and Kashmir and to make the findings public.

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AI INDEX: EUR 46/WU 03/95
2 FEBRUARY 1995

RUSSIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION ON ALLEGATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN THE CHECHEN REPUBLIC

In the face of recent reports that Russian forces have beaten and ill-treated people detained during the conflict in the Chechen Republic, Amnesty International is calling on the authorities to investigate the allegations, make the findings public and bring any perpetrators to justice.

The Russian authorities should take immediate steps to facilitate all appropriate access by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to prisoners held in connection with the conflict in the Chechen Republic. Information gathered by, among others, the Russian human rights group Memorial and the parliamentary human rights commission includes reports that some detainees have been subjected to beatings and mock executions to extract confessions. Other reports indicate that prisoners have even suffocated during transport owing to overcrowding.

The Russian authorities have refused to release figures on the number of people detained by their forces, and the ICRC - the organization mandated to work for the observance of humanitarian law - has still not received permission for full access to all prisoners held by Russian officials.

The work of the ICRC in visiting and registering prisoners is an important step in ensuring the respect and observance of the safeguards envisaged under humanitarian law. Amnesty International calls for the Russian authorities to facilitate full and appropriate access by the ICRC.

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