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Amnesty International
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WEEKLY UPDATE SERVICE 47/91

Contained in this weekly update are external items on Turkey and Syria.

1. NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

Ghana - 18 December

Ghana - Political imprisonment and the death penalty

A targeted news release for African media has now been sent out to you, to go with our first major report on Ghana in recent times.

Women's Action - 5 February 1992

An international news release on rape and sexual assault in custody to follow a Focus article in the International Newsletter.

Philippines - 26 February 1992

An international news release to go with a document on extrajudicial executions. Possible questions and answers.

2. EUR 44/WU 03/91 EXTERNAL

12 December 1991

TURKEY: AI WELCOMES COMMITMENT TO END TORTURE

Amnesty International has welcomed recent announcements by the Turkish government that it is determined to end torture and specifically would allow lawyers to be present during interrogation in police custody.

"Letting lawyers sit in on interrogations - the time when people are most vulnerable to torture - would be an important step to ending this brutal treatment that has been reported for years in Turkey," Amnesty International said.

In a letter to the newly-elected prime minister Suleyman Demirel, the human rights organization also welcomed the government's plans to enhance the independence of the judiciary and to ensure freedom of expression by allowing Turkish citizens freely to publish in languages other than Turkish.

Amnesty International said that a shortening of the police detention period is essential to eliminate torture and urges that this measure be included in the planned constitutional and legislative changes. This change was mentioned in a protocol issued earlier by the True Path Party and the Social Democratic Populist Party, which formed a coalition government.

The organization also notes that no executions have taken place in Turkey since 1984, and strongly urges that abolition of the death penalty also be included among changes envisaged in the government program.

Amnesty International said it was encouraged by the new government's prompt handling of the situation at Eskisehir prison, where more than half the 200 prisoners transferred there in early November were reportedly severely beaten. Independent medical examination revealed that 119 of the 198 prisoners bore injuries and traces of ill-treatment. The new prison was intended to operate a regime of extreme isolation specified by the Anti-Terror Law of April 1991, with consequent danger to the physical and mental health of the prisoners. On 24 November, on the orders of the newly appointed Justice Minister, all the prisoners were transferred out of the prison which was then closed.

Amnesty International's main concerns in Turkey have been widespread and systematic torture and ill-treatment, the imprisonment of prisoners of conscience, and the death penalty. As well, the organization has recently

urged the government to ensure a thorough, independent and impartial investigation of 25 allegations of "disappearance" and extrajudicial execution in Turkey during 1991.

Amnesty International believes that the new government's expressions of determination to improve the human rights situation in Turkey are a positive sign and the organization awaits early practical implementation of the promised measures.

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3. MDE 24/WU 02/91 EXTERNAL

12 December 1991

SYRIA: RELEASE OF 60 WOMEN PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE

Amnesty International has welcomed the release by the Syrian authorities on 1 December of more than 60 women prisoners of conscience in Syria. None had been charged or tried and some had been detained for up to five years. Many of the women had been arrested in lieu of male relatives being sought by the authorities or in order to punish the families of people detained for membership of banned political parties. Some women were alleged to have been tortured.

AI remains concerned about the continued detention of thousands of suspected opponents of the Syrian government, including hundreds of prisoners of conscience, who continue to be held under state of emergency legislation in force in Syria since 1963.

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ADDITION TO WEEKLY UPDATE SERVICE 47/91

Contained in this addition to the weekly update are external items for response on Kenya and Sri Lanka.

Weekly Update NWS 11/47/91 add

1. AFR 32/WU 06/91 EXTERNAL (FOR RESPONSE ONLY)

13 December 1991

KENYA: THE CASE OF KOIGI WA WAMWERE

Amnesty International has received inquiries about the case of Koigi wa Wamwere, who has been imprisoned for political reasons in Kenya for the past year. Amnesty International has received insufficient information up to now to be able to determine whether or not Koigi wa Wamwere is a prisoner of conscience. It has been investigating his case, and those of seven other people arrested at the same time, in order to establish whether they are being imprisoned solely on account of their opinions, without having used or advocated violence. Amnesty International has called on the Kenyan authorities to investigate allegations that Koigi wa Wamwere was tortured after his arrest, but without response, and has expressed concern on the basis of previous political trials in Kenya that the eight might not receive a fair trial.

According to the Kenyan authorities, Koigi wa Wamwere was arrested in Nairobi on 8 October 1990 and had a cache of arms intended for use in a conspiracy to overthrow the government by force. Seven other people said to have been arrested at the same time were also accused of involvement in the conspiracy including Mirugi Kariuki and Rumba Kinuthia, two prominent lawyers and pro-democracy activists. All eight are jointly charged with treason, which carries a mandatory death penalty on conviction.

The eight have all denied the charges. Koigi wa Wamwere has alleged that he was not arrested in Nairobi at all but was abducted from a Uganda border town and then taken to Kenya where the police fabricated the find of weapons. A former member of parliament and prisoner of conscience in Kenya, Koigi wa Wamwere was resident in Norway from September 1986 to the time of his arrest.

Weekly Update NWS 11/47/91 add

2. ASA 37/WU 05/91 EXTERNAL (FOR RESPONSE)

13 December 1991

SRI LANKA: GOVERNMENT ACCEPTS MOST OF AI'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Amnesty International has welcomed the Sri Lankan government's announcement that most of the recommendations made by the organization in a report in September 1991 are to be implemented.

Amnesty International today received confirmation from the government that 30 of the 32 recommendations will be brought into effect. They include the opening of a 24-hour information service within the Human Rights Task Force, the establishment of regional offices of a commission of inquiry, independent impartial investigations into human rights abuses and prompt access to medical care, lawyers and relatives for all detainees.

Two recommendations were not accepted: the commission of inquiry will have its term extended into the future but will not be able to look at past cases of "disappearances", and the government will not repeal the Indemnity (Amendment) Act, which can prevent government agents being held accountable for certain human rights violations prior to December 1988.

The organization has not yet received details of how or when the recommendations will be implemented but expects to receive more information from the government next week.