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INTERNAL

Media coverage of the launch of the Colombia campaign

As you probably know by now, the IS press office is putting together an evaluation report of the media coverage received by the Colombia campaign. We have asked the sections for feedback on the coverage in their national media, and so far 13 sections have reported back to us, for which we are very grateful. The responses we have received are predominantly from sections in Europe and we hope that sections outside Europe will send us information about the coverage in their national media too. E.g. press cuttings, own campaign initiatives and an overall evaluation of the coverage. (This should be sent to Jan Marlager at the IS press office.)

Icelandic Section - Rather than holding a press conference, the Icelandic section launched the campaign by sending out the news release to their national media. It was covered in a few newspapers and the State Television channel covered the newsrelease in a very good 2 ½ minute news story. All in all the launch received fairly good coverage in the Icelandic media.

On the 17 March the section arranged a Cultural Wake focusing on the human rights situation in Colombia and EJE's in general. Also future newsletters from the section are planned to focus on Colombian human rights victims.

Finnish Section - The coverage of the launch of the Colombia campaign received in the Finnish media was quite disappointing. The section tells us that the main newspaper, Helsingin Sanomat broke the embargo by 12 hours. The paper's Foreign Editor had missed the late hour, 19.00 local time. The article was big and fully covered the contents of the Colombia report and campaign. Sadly, the result was that on the day of the launch other Finnish newspapers, national radio-news, national TV-news, and commercial TV-news did not cover the story, as it had already been published the day before. From their point of view its news value had already dropped considerably. The only positive coverage on the day of the launch was a very good news story on Swedish language TV-news. A lot of pictures from our ENR were used and our message came through loud and clear.

Belgian/Flemish Section - The section held a press conference in Brussels on 16 March together with the Belgian/French Section. At the conference, Rafael Barrios Mendivil, President of an association of Human Rights lawyers in Colombia, gave a talk about his work in Colombia and why he had to seek refuge abroad. After the conference, he also gave personal interviews. During the weeks immediately before the launch, the section contacted several journalists personally and some of them showed up at the conference. Practically all of the newspapers of the journalists that were present published an article on the campaign the next day (17 March). The campaign was also covered on 16 March by BRTN television during their 19.30 news. Moreover, to Amnesty's good fortune, Belgian television broadcasted a BBC-report about Colombia on 17 March. The section contacted the TV channel and asked them to announce the launch of the Amnesty International Colombia campaign, and they did so in the beginning of the programme. Finally, at the press conference the Belgian Sections (Flemish and French) asked the Belgian government to support independent Human Rights organizations in Colombia, a request that was mentioned in almost all the articles in the Belgian media that covered the campaign launch. Needless to say, but I will anyway, the coverage in the Belgian media was excellent.

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5 March 1994

PAKISTAN: MASS ARRESTS OF MEMBERS OF THE MOHAJIR QAUMI MOVEMENT AND THEIR RELATIVES IN SINDH PROVINCE

Amnesty International has received reports of mass arrests in major towns in Sindh province, Pakistan, since 16 March, when a van carrying law enforcement personnel was ambushed in Baldia Town, Karachi, and four of its occupants killed.

Members of the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (Refugee National Movement, MQM) were suspected of the ambush and have been targeted during the following crackdown carried out jointly by police, paramilitary Rangers and the army.

The MQM derives much of its support from Urdu-speaking refugees who migrated to Pakistan in 1947. According to the party's spokespersons, some 500 of its members have been arrested during the current operation, most without arrest warrants and without being charged.

Many MQM members have reportedly been unlawfully arrested and tortured, sometimes to death, in police and military custody since an army operation began in June 1992. The MQM itself has, in the past, been accused of responsibility for detaining and torturing political opponents and party dissidents.

During the recent spate of arrests, when MQM activists went into hiding, their relatives, friends and even neighbours were reportedly arrested. For instance, when Amir Zaki could not be found at home in Gulshan-e-Iqbal, East Karachi, on 17 March, his two brothers and a neighbour were arrested. And because many activists have gone into hiding, it is difficult to verify reports that some of them have "disappeared" in custody.

Amnesty International is concerned that relatives and associates held when MQM members could not be found may be prisoners of conscience and urges the authorities to immediately and unconditionally release any who are.

Those political prisoners against whom there are recognizable criminal charges should be tried promptly and fairly in accordance with international standards for fair trial. Under no circumstances should prisoners be held in incommunicado detention, when they would be at particular at risk of torture and extrajudicial execution.

Among those targeted in the recent crackdown was a young woman called Naheed Butt. She reported that when Rangers and police raided her home in search of her brother, MQM member Mohammad Taqi, they verbally abused her, hit her on the back with a stick, forced her to undress and threatened to kill her if she did not reveal her brother's whereabouts. Officials denied later that any sexual harassment had taken place during the raid.

Following a general strike on 27 March in protest against the ill-treatment of Naheed, sedition charges were brought against MQM leaders, including Senator Ishtiaq Azhar, who is in his seventies. Seditious carries a maximum penalty of 25 years' imprisonment.

Other reports of ill-treatment and extrajudicial executions of MQM members at the hands of law enforcement personnel were received by Amnesty International earlier this year. During the night of 16 February, a 24-year old student Tanvir Ahsan, was killed while chalking slogans on a wall near Jinnah College in Nazimabad, Karachi.

Accounts of his death vary, and the police claim to have fired in self-defence. However, Amnesty International is urging the Government of Pakistan to establish an independent and impartial inquiry into his death, to publish its results and to bring to justice any law enforcement agencies alleged to have committed human rights violations.

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