
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 88/94

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NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: INTERNAL - UN FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN
EXTERNAL - SWITZERLAND, ETHIOPIA

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TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

China - 5 May - SEE NEWS SERVICE 81/94
News service item enclosed is embargoed for 5 May to go with document: "China: Death Penalty Figures recorded for 1993", AI Index: ASA 17/15/94.

FORTHCOMING NEWS INITIATIVES

Annual Report - 7 July - SEE NEWS SERVICE 51/94

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FOR VERBAL RESPONSE ONLY

FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN

The following information may be used in response to queries from other organizations or media, but should not be issued as a public statement.

The International Secretariat has received queries from several women's organizations about whether Amnesty International will be attending or boycotting the 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women to be held in Beijing. Some organizations are apparently considering boycotting the conference because of its location in China.

The conference is a UN, and not a Chinese Government, event; therefore, Amnesty International will be participating in the conference as a UN event, as we participate in other UN conferences or committees, regardless of location.

The responsibility for hosting the UN's conferences on women rotate between the different UN regional groups. Past women's conferences have been held in Mexico City (1975 - Latin American Group), Copenhagen (1980 - Western European and Others Group), and Nairobi (1985 - African Group). On this occasion the conference was scheduled to be held in Asia and the Chinese government was the only government in the region to offer to host the conference.

At its April meeting, the International Executive Committee decided that the focus of AI's major theme campaign in 1995 would be women. Discussions are currently under way about the scale and nature of the campaign, including how we use the opportunity to highlight our concerns in China.

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**AI INDEX: EUR 43/WU 02/94
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SWITZERLAND: UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE AGAINST TORTURE RECOMMENDS REFORM OF LEGISLATION ON POLICE CUSTODY FOLLOWING REPORTS OF ILL-TREATMENT BY POLICE

Amnesty International welcomes the United Nations (UN) Committee against Torture's call for Switzerland to make legislative reforms to safeguard people against possible ill-treatment when in police custody.

After examining Switzerland's implementation of the UN Convention against Torture on 20 April, the Committee stated that it was aware of ill-treatment suffered by people arrested by police. It therefore recommended reforms in the legislation and procedures governing initial police custody (garde à vue) and preventive detention (détention provisoire).

In particular, it recommended the introduction of the right for detainees to contact their families, to have immediate access to a lawyer and to a medical visit by a doctor of their own choice or chosen from a standing list drawn up by the Medical Council.

During the examination of Switzerland's report several members of the Committee commented critically on the apparent failure of the Swiss cantons to keep statistics on the number of complaints of ill-treatment made against the police. The representatives of the Federal authorities stated that the government was looking into this important omission.

Amnesty International had submitted a report to the Committee which detailed its concerns regarding allegations of police ill-treatment of detainees in Switzerland over a period of several years. The allegations came from several cantons including Geneva. They originated from a variety of sources and their nature and content were largely consistent.

Amnesty International cited individual cases to illustrate the organization's concerns and described the most common types of ill-treatment alleged such as: repeated slaps, kicks and punches, heavy pressure on the windpipe causing near-asphyxiation and enforced stripping for no apparent reason except to cause humiliation.

The organization concluded that the number of allegations of ill-treatment it had received, taken together with the findings of other reputable international, governmental and non-governmental organizations, indicated a substantial cause for concern.

During its examination of Switzerland's report the UN Committee against Torture sought information from the Federal authorities on the cases of alleged ill-treatment described in the Amnesty International document.

The representatives of the Swiss Federal authorities stated that they considered the allegations made in Amnesty International's report to be "a source of deep concern". They announced that the Federal Department of Justice and Police would be contacting the relevant cantonal authorities for further details on all the cases of alleged ill-treatment raised in the organization's report.

Amnesty International report submitted to the UN Committee against Torture: Switzerland - Allegations of ill-treatment in police custody (AI Index: EUR 43/02/94). Copies of the document, published in April 1994, are available in English, French, German and Spanish.

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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REPRESENTATIVES VISITING ETHIOPIA

Two representatives of Amnesty International are visiting Ethiopia from 30 April to 15 May.

Dr Martin Hill, a staff member at the organization's International Secretariat in London, and Mr Chris Mburu, a Kenyan lawyer and a staff member at the US section of Amnesty International, will attend a Human Rights Institution-Building Workshop in Addis Ababa from 2 to 4 May.

The workshop is being organized by the Ethiopian Congress for Democracy and the US-based Fund for Peace and is for human rights organizations in the Horn of Africa, including groups from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somaliland, Somalia and Sudan.

Amnesty International's representatives also hope to meet certain government officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations and others, to discuss human rights issues in Ethiopia which are of concern to Amnesty International.

These concerns include the detention and forthcoming trials of officials of the Mengistu government - where Amnesty International has called for those responsible for gross human rights violations, such as extrajudicial executions and torture, to be brought to justice as soon as possible in circumstances in which their human rights are fully respected - and also cases of current violations of human rights, including detentions of certain government critics and suspected members of particular opposition groups.

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