
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 185/94

TO: PRESS OFFICERS
FROM: IS PRESS OFFICE
DATE: 16 AUGUST 1994

AI INDEX: NWS 11/185/94
DISTR: SC/PO

NO OF WORDS:577

NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - BANGLADESH (This item is not being sent to international media by the IS)

PLEASE NOTE: This Friday (see news schedule below) we will be holding a press briefing on the return of the AI delegation from Rwanda. If you would like 2/3 representatives of your national media to attend please could you find out who the correspondents are in London and let us know so that we can send them an invitation. We will be sending out the invitations to journalists tomorrow so please could you send us the details as soon as possible. Sorry it's such short notice, thanks - Dina (press office telephone numbers: 44 71 413 5562/5810 fax: 44 71 413 5815)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

India - 16 August - SEE NEWS SERVICE 175/94

** Rwanda - 19 August ** - SEE NOTE ABOVE

Haiti - 24 August - SEE NEWS SERVICE 184/94

Brazil - 14 September - PLEASE NOTE THIS IS AN INTERNATIONAL RELEASE. SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

Kosovo - 19 September - SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

Algeria - first week of October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

France - 12 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 137/94

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

Thailand - 6 September - SEE NEWS SERVICE 184/94

Bhutan/Nepal - 25 August - See news service 168/94

Togo - 15 September - See news service 168/94

Indonesia - 28 September - LAUNCH OF CAMPAIGN

Turkey - 14 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 181/94

**AI INDEX: ASA 13/WU 05/94News Service 185/94
16 AUGUST 1994**

BANGLADESH: UPDATE ON TASLIMA NASRIN

Taslima Nasrin, the Bangladeshi writer charged with blasphemy, yesterday wrote to Amnesty International thanking the organization's members for their work on her behalf.

"Please accept my sincere gratitude for what you have done for me," the letter states. "Indeed, your support along with that of a few others may have been a critical factor in my being able to leave my country in safety."

Taslima Nasrin fled to Sweden last week, where the Swedish Pen Club -- an international writers' organization -- is hosting her stay with security arrangements made by the Swedish government. On arrival she reportedly said she appreciated the help extended to her from supporters around the world.

After two months in hiding, Taslima Nasrin was granted bail by the High Court in Dhaka and the warrant for her arrest was withdrawn on 5 August. Heavy police guards were also posted around her Dhaka home.

Amnesty International is reiterating its call to the Government of Bangladesh to drop the charges of blasphemy against Taslima Nasrin and at least five other journalists. They are at present free on bail, but their cases are pending. If convicted they could be sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

Islamist groups in Bangladesh are continuing to demand her death. During the last few days, thousands of demonstrators of the United Islamic Action Committee, a coalition of 13 Islamic groups, marched through Dhaka: "Taslima must be hanged, we won't spare her wherever she goes."

Sweden's Muslim Council, which represents some 70,000 Muslim in that country, publicly gave assurances that it did not intend to attack Taslima Nasrin but also said it could not protect her from the actions of individuals. The Council said that Taslima Nasrin had sought to exploit hatred of Muslims to gain popularity.

Demonstrators in Dhaka also criticized the Bangladesh Government for letting Taslima get away and threatened to continue their struggle against secular-minded people.

None of the Islamists who have made death threats against Taslima Nasrin in the past and who have attacked journalists and secular intellectuals have yet been brought to justice. Amnesty International is calling on the Bangladesh Government to take all necessary measures to do so.