

AUGUST 1997 WORLDWIDE APPEALS - FINAL TEXT

LEBANON: Torture and unfair trial

On 7 January 1997, Antoinette Yusuf Chahin, a Lebanese student born in 1971, was sentenced to death—commuted to life imprisonment with hard labour—on charges of involvement in the assassination of Father Sam'an Boutros al-Khoury in May 1992. According to the prosecution and court verdict, the killing of Father Sam'an Boutros al-Khoury was planned and carried out by the Lebanese Forces (LF); Antoinette Chahin was alleged to have been a member of the LF. The LF were the main Christian militia during the Lebanese civil war, which lasted from 1975 to 1990, and were banned by the Lebanese Government in 1994.

The primary evidence brought against Antoinette Chahin was the confessions of two co-defendants, who later retracted these confessions claiming that they had been extracted under torture. The two co-defendants now claim that they never even knew Antoinette Chahin. During her detention she was hospitalized several times. A medical examination carried out eight days after her arrest in June 1994 found injuries consistent with her claims that she had been tortured. No adequate judicial investigation appears to have been ordered into the allegations of torture.

- Please write, expressing concern that the trial of Antoinette Chahin and her co-defendants appears to have been deeply flawed; calling for a retrial in accordance with international fair trial standards; and urging an impartial investigation into the allegations of torture of Antoinette Chahin and her co-defendants; to: His Excellency Rafiq al-Hariri /Prime Minister/ Office of the Prime Minister/ Grand Sérail/ Rue des Arts et Métiers/ Sanayeh/ Beirut/ Lebanon.

INDIA: Fears for safety of human rights defenders

The lives of human rights defenders in India are increasingly under threat. There is an urgent need to protect all those defending fundamental human rights from harassment and threats by the state. On 27 May 1997, Mr T. Puroshotham, a lawyer and joint secretary of the Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee, was assaulted in front of a police station by four men. The men beat him on the head with an iron rod causing serious head injuries. The assault on Mr Puroshotham was the latest in a series of threats and attacks against human rights defenders in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

A group calling themselves the “Green Tigers” have claimed responsibility for this attack and a number of earlier attacks on human rights defenders in Andhra Pradesh. It is alleged that the group was set up in early 1997 with the backing of the state government to counter the activities of armed left-wing opposition groups, known as naxalites.

Human rights organizations in Andhra Pradesh have played a prominent role in protesting against violations by police, including the widespread extrajudicial executions of suspected members of naxalites. Human rights activists have often been branded as naxalite sympathizers, despite their consistent condemnation of abuses by armed opposition groups.

-Please write, calling for an immediate and impartial investigation into the attack on Mr T. Puroshotham; expressing concern about threats made against other human rights activists in Andhra Pradesh; and urging the authorities to ensure their safety, and the safety of all those defending human rights in India, to: Mr Indrajit Gupta/ Minister of Home Affairs/ Ministry of Home Affairs/ North Block/ New Delhi 110 001/India.

MEXICO: Prisoner of conscience

Prisoner of conscience Brigadier General José Francisco Gallardo Rodríguez has been under military arrest since November 1993. He was arrested following the publication in October 1993 of an article in the magazine Forum. In the article he criticized human rights violations against civilians and soldiers by members of the armed forces, and called for the appointment of an ombudsman for the armed forces.

Brigadier General Gallardo has been charged with a series of offences since his arrest, including “damaging, libelling and slandering the Mexican army”, damaging property belonging to the nation, abuse of authority and abandoning his post. The military and civil courts have instituted at least 15 preliminary investigations and nine criminal proceedings against him, some relating to charges on which the relevant courts had already ruled. The two outstanding charges against him are of “unjust enrichment” and embezzlement; he is appealing against the charges before a military court. Despite the lack of evidence in support of the charges against him, he has been remanded in custody since his arrest.

In June 1996 Marco Vinicio Gallardo Enríquez, the Brigadier General's son, was assaulted by two men apparently connected with the security forces. Members of the family and others campaigning for Brigadier General Gallardo's release have been subjected to a campaign of harassment and intimidation, including threatening telephone calls.

In October 1996 the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights made recommendations to the Mexican Government to release Brigadier General Gallardo and investigate threats made against him and his family. These recommendations were made public in January 1997, but have not been implemented.

+Please write, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Brigadier General Gallardo; urging the authorities to investigate the threats and attacks against him, his family and supporters; and to bring those responsible to justice, to: President Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León/ Palacio Nacional/ 06067 México D.F./ Mexico.