

October 2000 WWAs - Final text

INDIA - Fate of “disappeared” schoolboy remains unknown

The fate of 15-year-old Manipuri schoolboy Yumlembam Sanamacha remains unknown two and a half years after his arrest by the Indian army. Having admitted to detaining him with two other boys, the army has claimed that Yumlembam Sanamacha subsequently escaped from their custody. This contradicts the testimonies of eyewitnesses, including those detained with the schoolboy, who claim that he was taken to a nearby camp where they heard him being tortured.

Yumlembam Sanamacha’s arrest and “disappearance” in February 1998 led to public outcry in the state of Manipur. Five separate inquiries were ordered but none has led to action being taken against those responsible. AI is concerned that the Indian government and members of the armed forces have been instrumental in obstructing justice in the case – inquiry findings published in April 1999, which said that the army had failed to provide adequate proof that Yumlembam Sanamacha had escaped from their custody, have not been pursued.

The Indian government also challenged the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry in March 1998 by the Manipur state government. The scope of the Commission was subsequently limited on the orders of the Manipur High Court in August 1998. An interim report submitted to the Manipur state government in September 1999 has still not been made public.

+Please write, urging that an independent and impartial investigation into the “disappearance” of Yumlembam Sanamacha be allowed to take place without hindrance, and calling for the findings to be made public and those found responsible brought to justice. Request also that the Manipur state government publish the interim report of the Commission of Inquiry. Send appeals to: Mr Nipamacha, Chief Minister of Manipur, Office of the Chief Minister, Imphal, Manipur, India, and to: George Fernandes, Minister of Defence, Ministry of Defence, South Block, New Delhi 110 001, India.

MOROCCO/WESTERN SAHARA - Three Sahrawis held as prisoners of conscience

On 6 December 1999 three Sahrawis, Brahim Laghzal, Cheikh Khaya and Laarbi Massoudi, were arrested in separate incidents in Tan Tan, Laayoune and Agadir. Two days later they were transported to military barracks where they allege they were tortured: these allegations have never been investigated.

They were interrogated about material they had been carrying linking them to the Polisario Front, a movement working for the independence of Western Sahara. The material, which was subsequently confiscated, included a video cassette of the Polisario’s 10th Congress and the constitution of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic – the self-proclaimed state of the Polisario. The men were then detained for over five months in Inezgane Prison, near Agadir, during which time they went on hunger strike in protest at their conditions of detention.

On 2 June 2000 the Court of First Instance in Agadir sentenced Brahim Laghzal and Cheikh Khaya to four years’ imprisonment and Laarbi Massoudi to three years’ imprisonment for “threatening state security”. In addition, they were fined 10,000 dirhams (US\$930) each. The men’s defence lawyers appealed against the verdict, but on 3 July the Court of Appeal rejected the appeal and increased Laarbi Massoudi’s sentence to four years’ imprisonment.

+Please write, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Brahim Laghzal, Cheikh Khaya and Laarbi Massoudi as prisoners of conscience. Send appeals to: M Omar Azziman, Minister of Justice, Ministère de la Justice, Place Mamounia, Rabat, Morocco (fax: + 212 7 72 37 10 or + 212 7 73 07 72).

GUATEMALA - Murder of indigenous rights workers

José Alfredo Quino and María Elena Mejía, director and secretary of Coordinación Regional de Cooperativas Integrales, Regional Coordination of Integral Cooperatives – an organization that deals with land disputes within indigenous communities – were murdered on 21 July. AI fears that other

members of organizations working for the social welfare of indigenous communities are in grave danger.

José Alfredo Quino and María Elena Mejía were setting off for work from San Andrés Semetabaj, in Sololá region, when they were attacked by a group of 10 hooded men armed with Israeli-made Galil assault rifles (commonly used by the Guatemalan army during the civil war). The men forced them out of their car, shot them in the head, took some of their belongings, split up into two groups and escaped on foot.

Local human rights groups believe this to be a well-planned extrajudicial execution, and part of a wider strategy to intimidate those who campaign for the defence of human rights in Guatemala into giving up their work. These killings come at a time of renewed threats and harassment of human rights workers and journalists – several non-governmental organization workers received death threats in May, a trade union leader has been murdered and an academic has “disappeared”.

+Please write, calling for an immediate and thorough investigation into the murders of José Alfredo Quino and María Elena Mejía, and for those responsible to be brought to justice, and expressing concern for the safety of all those involved in the protection of human rights. Send appeals to: Attorney General, Lic. Adolfo González Rodas, Fiscal General de la República, Ministerio Público, 8a Avenida 10-67, Zona 1, Tercer Nivel, Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala (fax: + 502 221 27 18).