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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REPORT 1999 UPDATES

**Selected events covering the period
from January to June 1999**

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Africa Update

Selected events in Africa from January to June 1999

Eritrea/Ethiopia

Mass deportations from Ethiopia continued up to February, when the resumption of the conflict resulted in the closing of borders. 54,000 people of Eritrean origin -- including pregnant women, children, the elderly and even hospital patients -- have been forcibly expelled since June 1998. Meanwhile, at least 22,000 Ethiopians have returned to Ethiopia from Eritrea.

Amnesty International welcomed the Ethiopian government's release of 38 Eritrean students from an internment camp in Bilattein on 15 February 1999. However, there are still fears for 1,200 remaining civilian internees. At least four civilians and one prisoner of war are known to have died as a result of harsh conditions in the camp. Ethiopia has allowed the International Committee of the Red Cross access to its prisoners of war in Bilattein camp, but Eritrea has not yet granted access.

The Great Lakes region

The horrific catalogue of persistent, widespread and gross human rights violations continues to be part of the everyday reality in the Great Lakes region. At least 600,000 people are internally displaced within Burundi and hundreds of thousands have fled the country. More than 50,000 people have fled the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to neighbouring countries since August 1998. In early 1999, an estimated 500,000 people were internally displaced in Rwanda.

In the DRC more than 1,000 civilians were massacred between January and April by armed opposition forces in the east, and several hundred more were killed by government forces in Equateur province. In Burundi in early January at least 55 unarmed civilians were reportedly killed by government soldiers in Mubone, Rural Bujumbura and scores more died in separate incidents. More than 300 civilians -- including women and children -- were reportedly killed in Rwanda in January 1999 by soldiers of the Rwandese Patriotic Army in Rubavu commune in Gisenyi. Members of an armed opposition group reportedly killed around 40 people -- some of whom were burned alive -- travelling on a bus in Gisenyi.

Liberia

Sporadic insecurity and fighting continued, amidst fears of killings and torture of civilians by government forces and armed opposition groups as in 1998. On 21 April 1999 a group of armed men attacked the town of Voinjama in Lofa county, near the border with Guinea. Foreign diplomats and humanitarian workers visiting the area were briefly abducted by the attackers and later crossed into Guinea for safety. Government forces were engaged in exchange of gunfire with the attackers for a few days in what the government defined as a "mopping-up" operation. Hundreds of civilians from the area fled into Guinea or the Liberian town of Gbarnga, 160 kilometres north of Monrovia. The attackers are believed to have belonged to ULIMO-K and ULIMO-J, two factions active during the 1990-97 civil war. The Liberian government has lodged an official complaint against the government of

Guinea, where they claim the attack originated. The Guinean government denies any responsibility for the attack.

In April, 13 possible prisoners of conscience were convicted of treason and sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment in connection with fighting which erupted in Monrovia in September 1998. Both the prosecution and the defence have announced that they will be appealing. Military personnel charged with sedition in connection with the same events are being tried by Court Martial.

Nigeria

In March 1999 a further 39 political prisoners were released, bringing to more than 140 the number of political prisoners released since the death of General Sani Abacha in June 1998. Under a new "transition to civil rule", elections have been held and a civilian government headed by former prisoner of conscience General Olusegun Obasanjo is due to take power in May 1999.

At least three political prisoners are reported to remain in detention, including a former senior government doctor, Lieutenant-Colonel Ibrahim Yakassai, who has alleged deliberate government involvement in the unexplained death in custody of prisoner of conscience, retired Major-General Shehu Musa Yar'Adua in December 1997.

Sierra Leone

Following their attack on Freetown on 6 January 1999, rebel forces committed gross human rights abuses against civilians, before being forced to retreat. Liberia was widely accused of providing military support to rebel forces.

Up to 6,000 people -- the majority believed to have been civilians -- were estimated to have died in Freetown. Many hundreds of civilians, including women and children, suffered amputation of their limbs or other forms of mutilation. Rape and sexual abuse of women and girls were systematic. Rebel forces abducted large numbers of civilians, including children, from Freetown. Some were forcibly recruited to fight, others used as porters, and women and girls forced into sexual slavery. By mid-February some 1,750 children, most believed to have been abducted, had been reported missing by their families.

The West African force deployed in Sierra Leone, ECOMOG, and the civilian militia supporting President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah were also responsible for human rights violations -- although on a significantly smaller scale than rebel forces. There were many reports of killings of captured rebels or suspected rebels after the rebel incursion into Freetown.

Zimbabwe

The first months of 1999 have seen an increase in attacks on freedom of expression and the independent media. In January Mark Chavhunduka and Ray Choto, respectively editor and journalist of *The Standard* newspaper, were detained by military police in connection with an alleged coup plot. Military interrogators subjected them to beatings, electric shocks and suffocation. Eventually the two were charged with publishing false reports and released on bail.

In February four other journalists were arrested on the same charges, after publishing an article about the deaths of Zimbabwean soldiers deployed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They were later released on bail, to await trial. These prosecutions occurred in the context

of verbal attacks by President Robert Mugabe on senior judges, journalists and human rights activists, which seriously risked undermining the rule of law in the country.

Americas Update

Selected events in the Americas from January to June 1999

Chile -- Pinochet case

The international fight against impunity reached a defining moment with the second ruling by the United Kingdom House of Lords' appeals committee denying former general Augusto Pinochet immunity as a former head of state. Augusto Pinochet was sought for charges of torture and conspiracy to torture amounting to crimes against humanity which were brought against him by the Spanish judiciary.

On 24 March 1999 the panel ruled -- in a 6-1 decision -- that the former general had no immunity for acts of torture and conspiracy to torture committed after 8 December 1988 -- the date on which the UK ratified the UN Convention against Torture and incorporated it into national legislation. Despite this cut-off date reducing the number of charges that could be taken into account for extradition purposes, on 15 April 1999 the UK Home Secretary signed a new authority to allow the extradition proceedings to continue.

Meanwhile, Spain submitted to the UK authorities additional evidence of cases of torture after 8 December 1988, including 1,198 cases of "disappearance" which are still unresolved. Under international law, "disappearance" constitutes continuing torture both for the victims and for their families. The UK courts will now have to decide whether to authorize the former general's extradition to Spain. However, the final decision on whether to let the extradition proceed -- if the courts decide it should -- lies with the Home Secretary, Jack Straw.

Colombia

Human rights defenders have continued to be the target of attacks -- primarily at the hands of paramilitary groups -- in a climate of growing fear and insecurity. At the end of January four members of the *Instituto de Capacitación Popular* were abducted by paramilitaries in Medellín. They were subsequently released, but two more human rights defenders of the *Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos* were killed by paramilitaries in February.

Across the country several offices of human rights organizations -- including the office in Trujillo of the *Comisión Intercongregacional de Derechos Humanos de Justicia y Paz* and that of the *Asociación de Familiares de Víctimas de Trujillo* -- have closed because of threats. These episodes illustrate how much remains to be done to put in practice the commitment to human rights defence repeatedly expressed by the Colombian authorities in international fora.

As a first step towards breaking the links between the military and paramilitaries, two senior army generals were dismissed for their connections with illegal paramilitary groups.

Armed opposition groups also committed serious human rights abuses, most notably the abduction and killing of three indigenous rights activists by a group of the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, and the taking hostage of the crew and passengers of a hijacked internal flight by the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional*.

Cuba

On 16 February the new “Law for the Protection of the National Independence and Economy of Cuba” was passed, under which dissidents and journalists found to be working against the state may face up to 20 years in jail and substantial fines. Other legislation passed in February imposes the death penalty for serious cases of drug-trafficking, corruption of minors and armed robbery.

On 1 March four prisoners of conscience who had been in detention since July 1997 were tried on a charge of “sedition”. They were eventually sentenced to prison terms ranging from three and a half to five years. In the days preceding the trial some 100 dissidents were arrested, apparently in order to stop their journalistic and human rights work or to prevent them from attending the trial. According to reports, they were all subsequently released.

Ecuador

The first two months of 1999 saw a deterioration in the country’s human rights situation, following the declaration of a state of emergency in January. Joint police and military operations across the country resulted in hundreds of people being arrested, held in overcrowded prisons and then released without charge. Some of them have been ill-treated, and at least two people were shot dead by security forces.

Two parliamentarians of the opposition party *Movimiento Popular Democrático* (MPD) were murdered in February and reports indicate the possible implication of the authorities in their killings.

Guatemala

The Historical Clarification Commission set up under the 1996 Peace Accords published its findings and recommendations in February. Among other things, the Commission recognized the overwhelming responsibility of the military and its agents in the atrocities committed during the country’s long-term civil conflict and recognised that the Guatemalan army had perpetrated genocide against Guatemala’s indigenous peoples as a part of its counter-insurgency strategy. The Commission also acknowledged the major role played by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in the conflict. During a visit to Guatemala in March 1999, President Clinton formally apologised for the involvement of the USA in Guatemala’s tragedy.

In February, an appeals court overturned the death sentence against three members of the Civil Defence Patrol who had been found guilty at the end of 1998 for their participation in the 1982 massacres at Río Negro, Baja Verapaz and Agua Fría, El Quiché in which 177 indigenous women and children were killed. The imposition of the death penalty raised concerns among local and international human rights groups. This was the first case in which participants in any of the estimated 400-500 army led and instigated massacres of the 1980s were found guilty.

One year after the murder of Bishop Juan José Gerardi, a prominent human rights supporter, his killers are still at large. Meanwhile, incidents of intimidation directed at two high-profile human rights activists appeared to be linked with his death. On 16 April, masked

gunmen raided the home of Ronalth Ochaeta, the director of the Archbishopric Human Rights Office. They threatened a maid, put a gun to the head of Ochaeta's four year old child and left behind a block of stone, an apparent reference to the cement block which was used to batter Bishop Gerardi to death. On 26 April, the exact anniversary of the Bishop's death, a stone wrapped in a plastic bag was left outside the doors of a church in Guatemala City, where human rights activist Helen Mack was attending the funeral of her father. Helen Mack is Director of the Myrna Mack Foundation, named after her sister, extrajudicially executed in 1990.

Mexico

Manuel Manríquez San Agustín, a prisoner of conscience, was released on 29 March 1999 after nearly nine years' detention. In a historic ruling, the High Court of the Federal District in Mexico City absolved him of the murder charges for which he had been convicted, based on a confession obtained under torture. Manuel Manríquez, an Otomí Indian and a musician by trade, was detained in June 1990 and sentenced to 24 years in prison. Despite the conviction of a police officer in 1995 for his torture, his case had not been reopened.

This ruling -- apparently based on information contained in a report by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) -- sets an important precedent as it is the first time the Mexican authorities have complied with a recommendation from the IACHR.

Paraguay

The assassination on 23 March of Paraguay's Vice-President Luis María Argaña, a vocal opponent of President Raul Cubas, sparked off violent clashes between government supporters, opponents and police. The clashes culminated in the death of six anti-government demonstrators and the injury of at least 100 people. In the ensuing political crisis, President Raul Cubas resigned and subsequently fled to Brazil.

United States of America

The USA has again confirmed its position as world leader in the executions of child offenders. On 4 February Sean Sellers was executed by lethal injection in Oklahoma for crimes he had committed when he was only 16. His death brought to 10 the number of people executed since 1990 in the USA for crimes committed when under 18 years of age. In the same lapse of time, nine such executions took place in the rest of the world combined.

In the first three months of 1999, 30 people were executed, including three foreign nationals whose right to consular access had been violated. The International Court of Justice's appeal for a stay of execution for German national Walter LaGrand was ignored by the authorities in Arizona, who executed him in March 1999.

Meanwhile, Amnesty International's campaign "Rights for all" began to bear some results. In January a Californian judge banned the use of stun belts in courtrooms in Los Angeles and the New York Corrections Department cancelled its order for the devices. Several states -- including Pennsylvania, Washington and Virginia -- have initiated or enacted legislation criminalizing sexual contact between male guards and female prisoners in a bid to curb sexual abuse in prisons and jails.

Venezuela

Individual rights, which had been suspended since 1995 in the municipalities on the border with Colombia in the states of Zulia, Táchira, Apure and Amazonas, were restored in February 1999 by the new government of

President Hugo Chávez. There were allegations that the armed forces in that region frequently used torture against civilians suspected of sympathizing with Colombian armed opposition groups.

Asia/Pacific Update

Selected events in Asia/Pacific from January to June 1999

Indonesia and East Timor

In the first months of the year the Indonesian government made some legislative changes, but failed to repeal legislation punishing with prison terms "hatred" and "insulting" speech towards the government and president, the spreading of Marxism and undermining the state ideology.

In March the government announced the release of 52 prisoners of conscience and political prisoners, including 10 elderly men imprisoned for three decades. Eight members of the People's Democratic Party and its affiliated organizations, all of whom are prisoners of conscience, remained in custody although their party is scheduled to take part in the June national parliamentary election.

In the province of Irian Jaya, the authorities maintained tight control on political activities. Ten people were still on trial for "rebellion" in the town of Wamena for their involvement in peaceful pro-independence activities. In April the authorities announced a ban on discussions about the province's political status following talks held in February between representatives from the province and President Habibie. Youth and other organizations in favour of independence were also banned.

In Aceh, four soldiers were jailed for the deaths in custody of five men arrested following an outbreak of violence in the province. The soldiers received prison sentences ranging from two to two and a half years. The government took no other measures to address human rights violations in Aceh other than these sentences and a public apology by President Habibie to the people of Aceh. Unlawful killings by the Armed Forces continued. At least seven people were killed when the security forces opened fire on a crowd making their way home from a meeting in Idi Cut in February.

As UN sponsored talks discussed the holding of a ballot for the East Timorese on the territory's status, the human rights situation on the ground deteriorated. Violent attacks by armed paramilitary units -- supported by the Indonesian Armed Forces (ABRI) -- against pro-independence supporters resulted in dozens of unlawful killings. ABRI took no action to prevent the attacks and in many cases was directly involved in arbitrary detentions, unlawful killings and "disappearances". Human rights monitors and journalists were threatened and intimidated.

Malaysia

The High Court trial of former Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim ended on 14 April with his sentencing to six years imprisonment for "corrupt practices". The conduct of the case fell short of international fair trial standards and raised serious concerns about the administration of justice. In particular, following his arrest in September 1999, Anwar was held incommunicado and beaten by the former chief of police. Subsequently his right to be presumed innocent was undermined by statements by the Prime Minister, and his counsel was prevented from presenting a full defence by threats of contempt of court proceedings.

Following the verdict, demonstrations -- some of which were violent -- broke out in Kuala Lumpur. Police reportedly beat and kicked peaceful demonstrators both during and after arrest and whilst in detention.

People's Republic of China (PRC)

A crackdown on Uighur nationalists and independent Muslim leaders continued in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR), where at least 33 people were reported to have been executed in January and February 1999. Most of those executed were Uighurs convicted of subversive activities after unfair or summary trials. In April Amnesty International published a major report documenting a pattern of gross human rights violations in the XUAR, including torture, arbitrary and summary executions, and unfair trials. The XUAR is the only region of the PRC where political prisoners are known to have been executed in recent years.

Arbitrary arrests and torture of prisoners continued to be reported in Tibet, where a "patriotic education" campaign has resulted in the closure of monasteries and the expulsion of "unpatriotic" monks and nuns.

China blocked debate of its human rights record at the UN Commission on Human Rights by successfully using a procedural "motion of no action" to prevent discussion of a draft resolution criticising China's human rights situation, which had been tabled by the USA.

South Korea

The government released 43 more political prisoners were released in an amnesty in February. These included 19 long-term political prisoners who had been held for up to 40 years. However, arrests of prisoners of conscience under the National Security Law continued.

In March the government presented to the National Assembly its draft law to establish a national human rights commission, amidst protests from non-governmental organizations over inadequate consultation and the lack of independence of the proposed commission.

Europe Update

Selected events in Europe from January to June 1999

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY)

Despite a decrease in the level of violence in Kosovo province following the October 1998 cease fire, armed clashes between Serbian and FRY security forces and the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) continued. In the first months of 1999, Amnesty International received many reports of serious human rights violations at the hands of Serbian security forces. After attempts to reach a political settlement for the province failed, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) began a campaign of air strikes against Yugoslav targets on 24 March.

In the following weeks hundreds of thousands of people were forcibly expelled from their homes or fled fearing for their safety. Refugees from Kosovo have given harrowing accounts of violent and forcible expulsions accompanied by killings, rapes, beatings, arbitrary detention and house burnings carried out by members of the Serbian police, the Yugoslav Army and paramilitaries.

The KLA was also reported to have been responsible for violations -- although on a far smaller scale -- including the deliberate and arbitrary killing of civilians and hostage-taking .

Amnesty International appealed to all parties to the conflict -- the Federal Yugoslav government, NATO and the KLA -- reminding them of their obligations to protect civilian lives and give proper treatment to prisoners and others not taking part in the hostilities. The organization has also sought explanations from NATO about attacks resulting in civilian casualties.

By the beginning of May over 800,000 people had fled Kosovo, mainly to Macedonia and Albania. *The massive influx of refugees in these countries put a strain on local structures and created potentially dangerous tensions.* Hundreds of thousands remained internally displaced within Kosovo and *another 60,000* fled to Montenegro. *Amnesty International called on the international community to share responsibility for the welfare of the refugees.*

The Serbian independent media virtually ceased to exist as a result of increasing pressure, with the three remaining Albanian language newspapers being forced to cease publication and Radio B-92, the main independent radio station in Belgrade, being closed by police in March. On 11 April journalist Slavko _uruvija -- harshly critical of the government -- was shot and killed outside his home. *Attacks on the independent media are increasing in Montenegro as well. Foreign journalists reporting on the armed conflict in*

FRY have also been harassed and a number of them were arrested by the Yugoslav Army and detained for short periods. A German and a Croatian reporter remained in pre-trial detention on charges of spying at the beginning of May.

The Republic of Montenegro refused to recognize the state of emergency, announced by the Federal Yugoslav government following the start of NATO air strikes. On 19 April the Montenegrin deputy Prime Minister, Novak Kilibarda, refused to appear before a military court on charges of "undermining the military defence capacity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia" after publicly stating that Montenegrins should refuse to be mobilized in the Yugoslav Army.

International agencies have expressed concern for the safety of ethnic Albanian displaced persons in certain areas of Montenegro. This followed an attack by the Yugoslav Army on a village near Ro_aje on 18 April. The Montenegrin authorities claimed that those killed in the attack included women and internally displaced persons. According to the Yugoslav Army the attack was aimed at dispersing a KLA group.

Turkey

The trial against 10 executives of the Diyarbakir branch of the Turkish Human Rights Association (HRA) -- which was founded in October 1998 -- continued in the first months of 1999. Amnesty International observed the hearings on 9 February and 6 April 1999. The organization believes that the 10 human rights defenders should not be standing trial and, should they be convicted, would consider them prisoners of conscience.

Legal remedies were exhausted in the cases of the former mayor of Istanbul Recep Tayy_p Erdo_an and of the human rights defenders Ak_n Birdal, Eren Keskin and Zeynep Baran, who were sentenced to varying prison terms for the expression of their non-violent opinions. Recep Tayy_p Erdo_an was imprisoned in March to serve a 10-month sentence for a speech he had delivered in December 1997. Ak_n Birdal, president of the Human Rights Association, is due to be imprisoned on 3 June in spite of concern about his state of health.

The apparently unlawful arrest of the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in Kenya on 15 February raised fair trial concerns, especially about his incommunicado detention for 10 days. At the end of April 1999, Öcalan had only restricted access to legal counsel. Two prison guards were present during the lawyers' visits, thus violating his right to confidential communication. Amnesty International appealed to the Turkish authorities to ensure the trial of Abdullah Öcalan complies with internationally recognized fair trial standards. In a series of alarming episodes, lawyers representing Abdullah Öcalan were harassed and threatened. One of them, Osman Baydemir, was arrested on unclear charges on 26

February, after issuing a press statement calling for his client to be given a fair trial. He was released the following day. After the trial session on 24 March, Öcalan's lawyers had to leave the court through a window because of threats from an angry crowd.

On 7 March trade unionist Süleyman Yeter died in custody apparently as a result of torture. According to a journalist who had been detained with him on 5 March, Süleyman Yeter said that he had been stripped naked, severely beaten, sprayed with cold water and forced to lie on ice while interrogated at the Anti-Terror Branch of Istanbul Police Headquarters.

United Kingdom

In Northern Ireland, the murder on 15 March of human rights lawyer Rosemary Nelson by Loyalist paramilitaries dramatically brought back to the world's attention the problem of the systematic harassment and threats faced by lawyers. Rosemary Nelson had repeatedly reported intimidation at the hands of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and the Royal Irish Regiment, as well as anonymous death threats. Given these circumstances, Amnesty International is asking that the inquiry into Rosemary Nelson's death not to be conducted by the RUC, because it could not guarantee the necessary degree of impartiality.

Middle East and North Africa Update

**Selected events in the Middle East and North Africa
from January to June 1999**

Bahrain

After being held without charges or trial for more than three years, Shaikh 'Abd al-Amir Mansur al-Jamri -- considered by AI to be a prisoner of conscience -- appeared before the state security court on 21 February 1999. He was charged with, among other things, incitement to violence and acts of sabotage. The trial was adjourned and it is not known when the next session will take place.

Iran

In January the Ministry of Information announced that 10 of its employees had been arrested in connection with the deaths of prominent intellectuals and opposition figures Dariyush Foruhar, Parvaneh Foruhar, Mohammad Mokhtari and Mohammad Ja'far Pouyandeh. The arrests reportedly followed the establishment of a special committee to investigate the killings. It is believed that some of those arrested are to face trial before a military court.

In March it was announced that Brigadier-General Mohammad Reza Naqdi, chief of police intelligence, and 10 of his subordinates were to be tried in May by a military court. The charges against them are believed to include "unlawful arrest" and "using torture to elicit confessions".

This followed allegations reportedly made by a number of Tehran sub-district mayors detained during 1998 in connection with trial of Gholam-Hussain Karbaschi.

In April Helmut Hofer -- the German national sentenced to death in January 1998 for having sexual relations with an Iranian Muslim woman -- was released on bail pending the final hearing of his case. Unconfirmed reports suggest that the sentence of 100 lashes passed against his co-accused, Vahideh Ghassemi, may have been carried out. There were no further details.

On 21 April Hojjatoleslam val Moslemin Mohsen Kadivar, arrested in March on charges of "propaganda against the sacred system of the Islamic Republic", "publishing lies" and "confusing public opinion", was sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment by the Special Court for the Clergy. Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience.

Iraq

The killing of Iraq's highest Shi'a Muslim authority, Ayatollah Mohammad Sadeq al-Sadr , and of two of his sons -- shot dead on 19 February in the town of al-Najaf -- raised fears for the safety of other Shi'a leaders in the country.

Ayatollah Mohammad Sadeq al-Sadr was the third prominent Shi'a Muslim leader to be killed in suspicious circumstances in less than one year. The mass protests sparked off by Ayatollah Mohammad Sadeq al-Sadr's killing across the country resulted in the deaths of dozens of protesters and in the arrest of several hundred people.

Four people accused of the murder of Ayatollah Mohammed Sadeq al-Sadr and his two sons appeared on Iraqi television and confessed to the killing. It is feared that these confessions may have been extracted under duress. Amnesty International also believes that the televised confessions are contrary to the defendants' right to be presumed innocent.

Israel/Occupied Territories/ Palestinian Authority

- **Israel and the Occupied Territories**

In what was seen as a lost opportunity to improve Israel's human rights record, the Israeli High Court adjourned in January postponing the hearing of a case which challenged interrogation methods amounting to torture which are used systematically on Palestinian and Lebanese suspects.

- 1) **Palestinian Authority**

On 26 February Colonel Ahmad 'Atiya Abu Mustafa was executed in Gaza on charges of "causing public disorder" after being accused of raping a six-year-old boy. His trial by a Palestinian court was not publicly announced and lasted for just one hour, giving the court no opportunity to evaluate the evidence against him. Amnesty International expressed concern that public pressure had induced the Palestinian Authority to try Colonel Abu Mustafa without due process and to execute him.

Jordan

A series of arrests of members of Islamist opposition groups -- including the illegal Islamist party *Hizb al-Tahrir* , the more mainstream Islamic Action Front (IAF) and the Muslim Brotherhood -- characterised the time of political transition following King Hussein's death in February. The authorities released 25 of the detained IAF members in March following talks between King 'Abdallah and the leader of the Jordanian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood.

In late March, King 'Abdallah signed an amnesty for more than 500 prisoners. Among these were 25 political prisoners, including Ata Abu' Rushta and other *Hizb al-Tahrir* members sentenced over the past year for distributing leaflets. Amnesty International considered them possible prisoners of conscience.

