

**EXTERNAL (for general distribution)**

**AI Index: ACT 73/02/92**

**Distr: SC/PO**

**No. of words: 1071**

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**21 April 1992**

### **TRADE UNIONISTS TARGETTED FOR HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS**

**An envelope slipped under a door is enough to cause acute anxiety for some trade unionists. At the headquarters of a Colombian teaching union, for instance, an envelope delivered last October contained death threats against the union's general secretary and four other officials.**

**Threats sent to trade unionists are commonly in the form of invitations to their own funeral masses. And real funerals often follow. According to the national teacher's union, 53 teachers were killed in Colombia in 1991, and more than 400 received death threats.**

**One of them was Juan Alberto Garay. He was found dead on the morning of 24 October, his hands bound and his body marked by gunshot wounds.**

**Colombia, of course, is not the only dangerous place for workers and trade unionists. Throughout the world, trade unionists are threatened, detained, tortured and killed for peaceful trade union activities. Some are prominent figures, but the majority are ordinary workers who face repression because of their ideals, or just because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time.**

**Amnesty International was created to prevent such people being forgotten. It began with an appeal for six prisoners of conscience - one was a trade union activist. Trade unionists in the international labour movement campaigned on his behalf, and he was later released. Since then, Amnesty International has worked for thousands of trade unionists held as prisoners of conscience, denied a fair trial or at risk of torture or execution.**

**Every year, around International Labour Day on 1 May, Amnesty International reaches out particularly to trade unionists all over the world to enlist their help. It asks local union branches and national and international trade union bodies to mobilize their members. It calls on them to join in its appeals for other trade unionists facing torture, death or unfair political imprisonment.**

One such prisoner is a Chinese man sentenced to three years for what the authorities in his country describe as "spreading rumours, putting together an organization and inciting people to overthrow the government". Accused of being a "key member" of the Autonomous Union of Shanghai Workers, it appears that Zhang Qiwan has been jailed for his involvement in the 1989 pro-democracy protests.

For many trade unionists working in the Philippines, the penalties have been even more severe. Unidentified gunmen, believed to be members of the army, arrived at the house of union activists Edilberto and Haydee Bensen on 28 August last year.

They ordered Edilberto out and shot him. Then they blew off Haydee's head, and killed the Bensens' 10-year-old daughter. The military often claims that such victims are involved with armed insurgent groups, or are members of communist front organizations. But many of them are unarmed at the time they are killed, posing no threat to anyone.

The Bensens were not the only trade unionists to be killed in the Philippines last year, and scores more were found dead in other parts of the world. In some countries, activists simply "disappear". A 34-year-old mother of two in Peru, for instance, has not been seen for 12 months. Marcela Valdez de la Cruz, a teacher and trade union member, was reportedly detained by the army last May, and was later thought to have been taken to a military barracks.

Her union had gone on strike for higher wages the week before she "disappeared", a strike which the Minister of Labour declared illegal. After the strike began, there were reports from different parts of the country that union members were being detained, tortured and killed by the police and army.

Houcine el Manouzi, a Moroccan trade unionist, first "disappeared" 20 years ago. An activist in the Moroccan Labour Union, he was dismissed from his apprenticeship as an aeroplane mechanic for his trade union activities.

He emigrated to Belgium, where he worked for Sabena, the national airline, and in 1971 a Moroccan court sentenced him to death in his absence after a grossly unfair trial. On a visit to Tunisia in 1972, he was reportedly abducted by Moroccan agents and put in a secret detention camp. His name joined the hundreds of "disappeared" in Amnesty International's files.

Then, three years later, his face appeared on "wanted" posters in Moroccan police stations: he had escaped from a secret detention centre with several other detainees. Within a week he had apparently been recaptured. No definite news of him has been received since then.

The fate of prisoners like Houcine el Manouzi, who was last seen alive in 1975, is difficult to establish. Conditions in secret detention centres in Morocco are known to be extremely harsh. In one such centre, Tazmamert, half the detainees died as a result of harsh conditions, including isolation, lack of medication and insufficient food and clothing.

In Sudanese secret detention centres, known as "ghost houses", torture is routine. Beatings are a regular part of interrogations and prisoners, including many trade unionists, have had their testicles crushed and been subjected to mock executions. A foundry worker and president of the banned Sudan Mint Workers' trade union, Ali al-Mahi al-Sakhi, is being held without charge or trial in a "ghost house". He was arrested last November, only five months after being released from prison - he had been detained as a prisoner of conscience from November 1989 to May 1991.

Amnesty International, like with trade unions, believes that "an injury to one is an injury to all" and that repression is not inevitable but can be combatted through concerted efforts. Despite harassment, threats and physical violence, trade unionists all over the world are joining with Amnesty International to fight for the human rights of their colleagues.