
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 01/94

TO: PRESS OFFICERS
FROM: IS PRESS OFFICE
DATE: 5 JANUARY 1994

AI INDEX: NWS 11/01/94
DISTR: SC/PO
NO OF WORDS: 1003

NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - LEBANON

PLEASE NOTE: The holding of a press officers' meeting on 11-13 or 18-20 February is dependent on numbers - we need at least ten press officers to come to make it worthwhile. Please let Paula know by early next week whether you can attend and which dates you prefer. To help with your budgets - the AI discount rates at two local hotels are as follows: Royal Scott Hotel - £47 single, £59 double and the Holiday Inn is £49 single B&B. The following sections have so far responded positively: Tunisian, German, French, UK and Belgian (FI).

NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

****Children - 7 January**** - SEE NEWS SERVICE 161/170

PLEASE NOTE: It has been pointed out to us that one part of the news release on children, embargoed for this Friday, is ambiguous. Although the text of the news release does not necessarily need changing, press officers should be aware of the risk of misunderstanding.

In paragraph 8, beginning "Street children often turn to petty crime...", the final sentence reads: "In 1991 alone, some 2,800 children were murdered in Colombia." Please note that this figure is for the TOTAL number of child murders, not for "death squad" killings. The vast majority of those murders were NOT by death squads. I hope this clarifies things for you.

Tunisia - 12 January

UN Peacekeeping operations - 4 February - SEE NEWS SERVICE 170

UK - 9 February - SEE NEWS SERVICE 170

South Africa - 16 February SEE NEWS SERVICE 159

Kuwait - 24 February - SEE NEWS SERVICE 170

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

Jamaica - 5 January - SEE NEWS SERVICE 172/173

USA death penalty - 14 January - SEE NEWS SERVICE 161/170

Zaire - 2 February - SEE NEWS SERVICE 170

FORTHCOMING NEWS INITIATIVES

Women - 8 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 161

Saudi Arabia - 10 March more details to follow

Colombia - 16 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 123 + UAs AMR 23/56-57/93

INTERNAL

News Service 01/94

Audio-visual News

The Media Unit is currently making a video compilation tape of TV and cinema spots produced by sections during 1993. The intention is to circulate viewing copies of this tape to all sections in due course as a means of sharing information and video ideas throughout the movement. If your section has produced video advertisements or other short promotional items recently which you would like to have included in this compilation, please send a VHS viewing copy to Anne Jenkins at the IS.

AI INDEX: MDE 18/WU 01/94
5 JANUARY 1994

LEBANON: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CONCERNED AT DETENTION OF POSSIBLE PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE

Amnesty International has expressed concern to the Lebanese authorities about the arrest of Samir Philip Nasr and is calling for a full and impartial investigation into allegations that he was ill-treated during interrogation. The organization believes he may be a prisoner of conscience, in which case he should be immediately and unconditionally released.

Samir Nasr, a computer programmer from Antelias, was arrested at his home on 3 November 1993 by four armed men in civilian clothes. He was held in the Ministry of Defence Buildings in Yarzeh. He is a supporter of the Guardians of the Cedar, a political party in Lebanon which advocates the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon and peace with Israel. The party's leader, Etienne Saqr, is his neighbour in the southern village of Sabbah.

During his detention, Samir Nasr was interrogated about his links with the Guardians of the Cedar and about his relationship with Etienne Saqr. Samir Nasr has alleged that he was ill-treated during his detention, by being beaten, particularly on the face, and by threats made against him and his family. He was apparently forced to state that Etienne Saqr had delegated him to travel to France to carry a sealed letter to General 'Aoun, the former Lebanese leader ousted in October 1990, which Samir Nasr understood to contain suggestions that General 'Aoun should contact Israel, and also Jewish groups in the USA. He was also reportedly forced to state that Etienne Saqr is known to collaborate with the Israelis. However, he said he did not know any of the activities Etienne Saqr had been involved in nor had he been present at any meetings between Etienne Saqr and Israelis.

On 23 November Samir Nasr told his lawyer that his confession had been extracted under duress and that he wished to retract it. On 24 November his lawyer advised the Military Investigating Magistrate of this fact, and requested a judicial hearing, but the magistrate refused, apparently stating that Samir Nasr could retract his confession during his trial.

Apparently on the basis of this confession, on 12 November, the Military Investigating Magistrate issued arrest warrants for Samir Nasr and Etienne Saqr. On 26 November, both men were reportedly charged with violating Article 278 of the Penal Code, which forbids contact with, or support for, spies, soldiers on reconnaissance or agents. There is apparently no evidence other than Samir Nasr's statement. According to reports, no attempt has been made to arrest Etienne Saqr, while Samir Nasr remains in detention.

On 17 December, a preliminary court hearing was held and the next session is due to take place on 11 March 1994. The Military Investigating Magistrate has rejected two applications for Samir Nasr's release, most recently on 24 December 1993.

Amnesty International believes that Samir Nasr may be a prisoner of conscience, held solely for the non-violent expression of his internationally-recognized rights to freedom of expression and association, in which case he should be released immediately and unconditionally.

Amnesty International is also concerned that Samir Nasr appears to have been charged solely on the basis of a statement he claims was extracted under duress. If this is found to have been the case, the charges against him should be dropped and he should be released.

Amnesty International is also concerned that the charges brought against Etienne Saqr also appear to be based solely on Samir Nasr's confession. If so, and if the confession is found to have been given as a result of coercion, the charges against Etienne Saqr should be dropped. The organization is also concerned that, if arrested, Etienne Saqr may become a prisoner of conscience.

ENDS/