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WEEKLY UPDATE SERVICE 24/92

Contained in this weekly update are external items on India, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Malawi and an internal item about the Syria publication

1. NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Greece - 24 June

International news release to go with a publication on ill-treatment. The news release has been sent to you.

USA - 26 June

(New Information)

On 12 June you were sent an addition to the weekly update which included details of the news initiative on police brutality in Los Angeles. Briefly, the report is embargoed for 26 June at 1730 hrs gmt. It will be launched after the annual general meeting of AIUSA at a news conference when Ian Martin will deliver a speech on the USA's human rights record. The speech, the report, the news release, a summary of the report and a summary of concerns in the USA are all being prepared and will be with you shortly.

Annual Report - 9 July

The embargo time is confirmed at 1300 hrs gmt. After the event we will be asking you for feedback about how the media coverage was, particularly in the light of the changed time.

The Annual Report summaries, updates and news release have now been sent to you. The questions from the Questions & Answers will be sent to Press Officers this week so that you can add any other questions you feel we need to answer.

Syria - 22 July

Our first major report in some time will be released on 22 July. We consider this to be an extremely important document, because it makes clear that despite recent amnesties in Syria hundreds of political prisoners are still held in the country. We've discussed the publicity strategy with the research team, who say that high level international publicity is a key goal of releasing the report, and we would ask press officers to do as much work on this as possible.

Indigenous People's Campaign - 7 October

Discussions are currently under way at the IS about the media strategy for the report. We are currently considering media materials, speakers, how to present the material, etc. As this is the first time we have done a report like this, we would like your input and think there should be an opportunity to discuss problems in advance. If you are interested in a conference call, please let us know.

SECTION INITIATIVES

British Section: Wanted - Women Poets from round the world!

The British Section is working with a major feminist publisher in the UK on a women's poetry book, scheduled for publication in Autumn 1993.

Please let us know if there are any women poets in your country whose work relates - roughly - to Amnesty's concerns, which has been translated into English, or perhaps have written poems which you feel are so strong that they should be translated into English.

When the book is published, the publishers will be looking for international rights sales. Please let any sympathetic publishers in your country whom you think might be interested in buying the rights for this book know about the book.

Please contact Norma Johnston, Head of Communications in the British Section, for suggestions of poets.

2. ASA 20/WU 04/92 EXTERNAL
17 June 1992

INDIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS ON ARMED GROUPS TO OBSERVE HUMANITARIAN LAW

Amnesty International said today it condemned recent deliberate and arbitrary killings by armed opposition groups in Punjab and called on these and other armed groups elsewhere in India to stop such killings of civilians, including hostages, as well as others under their control and to live up to basic humanitarian standards.

Amnesty International also urged the Indian Government to order an inquiry into the reported extrajudicial executions by the security forces of the Sikh young men whose bodies were found in the Sirhind canal in January this year, and to release Ajit Singh Bains, a former High Court judge and human rights advocate.

The human rights organization - which has taken increased action on opposition group abuses since broadening its mandate last year - said it was prompted to condemn this pattern of killings of hundreds of civilians by the spate of recent brutal murders carried out by armed groups in pursuit of their campaign for an independent Sikh homeland, which they call "Khalistan".

The beheaded body of Mohan Lal Manchanda, the Acting Director of All India Radio in Patiala, Punjab, was found in that city on 27 May, 9 days after he had been kidnapped and held hostage by an armed Sikh opposition group, the Babbar Khalsa International. The group had apparently taken him prisoner because of his professional status and threatened to kill him unless the Indian government implemented a "code of conduct for the electronic media", aimed at increasing programmes in Punjabi language on All India Radio and television.

The week before, the same group had claimed responsibility for killing two professors at Punjab University, K.L.Sharma and Bhushan Aggarwal, both of them non-Sikhs, proclaiming that only Sikhs should be allowed to work at Punjab state universities and demanding that all work there be done in Punjabi.

"These killings of civilians can never be condoned in time of peace or war," Amnesty International said. "They are forbidden by the minimum humane standards in the Geneva Conventions established for governments and opposition groups alike involved in armed conflicts within a country."

These international standards forbid all violence to life and person of people not taking part in the conflict, including murder, mutilation and torture, as well as hostage taking.

"Deliberately killing civilians simply because they belong to a particular community, as we've seen so often in Punjab, and killing defenceless hostages, as has happened in Kashmir, Assam and now in Punjab, are particularly reprehensible," said Amnesty International.

The organization stressed that abuses committed by opposition groups can never justify government forces themselves resorting to torture, extrajudicial executions or other human rights violations. The organization called on the Indian government to take immediate and effective steps to halt such abuses and protect human rights in Punjab and elsewhere in India.

Amnesty International urged the government to order a comprehensive independent and impartial inquiry into the alleged extrajudicial executions of around a dozen Sikh young men whose bodies, some with hands and feet tied together, were found in January in the Sirhind canal close to two interrogation centres of the security forces. So far only a police inquiry has been ordered into the allegations, which were reported by three Indian civil liberties groups and newspaper articles.

The organization also called on the government to release Justice Ajit Singh Bains, a retired judge of the Punjab and Haryana High Court and chairman of the Punjab Human Rights Organisation, held without formal charges since 3 April under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Act and the Indian Penal Code apparently for "sedition" after he made a speech at a Sikh temple reportedly supporting an independent Sikh homeland.

3. EUR 63/WU 01/92 EXTERNAL
17 June 1992

BOSNIA-HERCEGOVINA: NEW REPORTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND VILLAGE MASSACRE

Amnesty International has received new information about human rights abuses in Bosnia-Herzegovina, including reports of a massacre by Serbs last month in a Muslim village in the East of the country.

During a recent fact-finding mission to Croatia, a representative of Amnesty International heard reports of deliberate and arbitrary killings and of torture and mutilation from refugees who had fled the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina. They also heard eye-witness accounts of the massacre in Zaklopa_a in May. The organization fears that these reports reflect only a fraction of the true extent of human rights violations in the country.

Amnesty International interviewed witnesses of the massacre which occurred on 16 May 1992 in the Muslim village of Zaklopa_a. Serbs, who were said to include men from surrounding villages, killed 105 unarmed people including women and children.

The men, who were apparently armed with automatic weapons and wearing camouflage, arrived at around 5pm in seven non-military vehicles, some men riding on van roofs. A number were masked or wore dark glasses, apparently to hide their identities. Despite this, witnesses identified at least one of the men as a local policeman from a neighbouring village and they described the men as "reservists", although Amnesty International has no details as to how they had been mobilized.

Men from the first vehicle started to ask people at the entrance to the village for arms and the inhabitants answered that there were none to hand over. The witnesses maintain that all arms, with the exception of a small number of old hunting rifles which had been buried, had been handed over in recent weeks and that the villagers were, in effect, unarmed. A number of men from other vehicles immediately set out towards the edges of the village as if to cover all exits.

Witnesses then described how the armed men started to shoot without warning, relating how they themselves saw two unarmed men shot down at a range of two to three metres before taking cover and listening to shooting for about 15 minutes as they lay on the floor of their house. After the departure of the men, the surviving villagers counted 105 dead and two wounded. The witnesses described how they found whole families dead inside their homes including the bodies of children who had fallen on their mother.

Amnesty International has received many reports of deliberate and arbitrary killings of people taking no active part in the hostilities, ill-treatment and torture committed by all sides in the context of the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, it has experienced difficulty in obtaining confirmation of many of these reports. Many possible witnesses who have left the territory are apparently reluctant to give details because of fears for their own safety or that of their relatives, while others have been dispersed among the large numbers of refugees from the conflict. The organization recognizes that difficulty in communication with the territory itself and the lack of access for international bodies may mean that the full extent of human rights abuses occurring within Bosnia-Herzegovina is not being made known.

Amnesty International urges all sides in the conflict to uphold international humanitarian standards and to protect human rights. The organization calls for an end to extrajudicial executions and other deliberate and arbitrary killings of civilians. All parties in the conflict should also respect international standards to ensure that prisoners are treated humanely.

**4. AFR 36/WU 05/92 EXTERNAL
17 June 1992**

MALAWI: PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE RELEASED AFTER 27 YEARS

Amnesty International welcomes the release of Machipisa Munthali, a prisoner of conscience held for 27 years in Malawi. He was one of eight prisoners reported to be released on 12 July 1992. The others included a man detained apparently in reprisal for the writings of his brother, an exiled journalist.

Machipisa Munthali, a veteran of the anti-colonial struggle in Malawi, was arrested in 1965 and convicted of armed opposition to the newly independent government of Dr H. Kamuzu Banda. He completed his prison sentence in about 1975 but continued to be detained by presidential order under the Preservation of Public Security Regulations. Much of his detention was spent in solitary confinement in a tiny dark cell at Mikuyu Prison. Amnesty International concluded that he was a prisoner of conscience and campaigned for his release, as his continuing detention appeared to be a result of his political opinions rather than the original offence for which he served his sentence.

Also reported to have been released was Danny (Goodluck) Mhango, the brother of exiled journalist Mkwapatira Mhango who died in a firebomb attack on his house in Lusaka, Zambia, in 1989. It has been widely alleged that the Malawian security forces were responsible for the killing. Danny Mhango appears to have been detained in reprisal for his brother's writings, which were highly critical of the Malawian Government.

The others reported to have been released were Alidi Disi, who had been held without charge since 1972, Daniel Chunga, Alex Mataka, Edwin Taimu, Ian Chikonde and Peter Kasamba. All are believed to have been held without charge at Mikuyu Prison for political reasons.

Amnesty International has been concerned about frequent reports of new arrests of suspected government opponents in Malawi in recent weeks. These include: two elders of the presbyterian church arrested after the minister of their congregation preached a sermon considered critical of the authorities; a computer company director arrested for calling for the release of his detained father-in-law; and 22 staff members at the National Bank of Malawi who were picked up because they were suspected of circulating literature from the underground multi-party movement.

5. MDE 24/WU 04/92 INTERNAL
17 June 1992

URGENT: PLEASE PASS ON TO YOUR PUBLICATIONS MANAGER

The SYRIA document embargoed for 22 July will now be published as a new format report (A5). A copy of the report and action document will be sent to group coordinators in sections at the end of June. Groups involved in the action should receive their copies from their section office.

The report costs £4 and the usual discounts will apply. Sections will receive their standing order for this publication. Sections wishing to amend their standing order must FAX their amendment to Talat Omer at the International Secretariat immediately.