
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 25/95

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NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - **PAKISTAN** (this item will be sent to Asia media by the research team, as well as given out at the US Commission), **SUDAN** - for response only

Please Note Correction - India (NS 23/95, 31 JANUARY 1995)

The total number of custodial cases is **706** and not 715 as stated in the 5th paragraph.

This amendment also applies to the report, "Torture and deaths in custody in Jammu and Kashmir" ASA 20/01/95 - 1 February 1995, which the news release refers to.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

UN Commission on Human Rights - 31 January - SEE NEWS SERVICE 06/95

Turkey - 8 February - SEE NEWS SERVICE 261

Northern Iraq - 28 February - SEE NEWS SERVICE 266

Campaign on Women - 8 March

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

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SUDAN: GOVERNMENT'S INVITATION TO MEET AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REPORTEDLY
WITHDRAWN

According to reports on Sudanese radio today, the Sudanese government has withdrawn its invitation to meet with Amnesty International in March. The invitation was issued in Geneva on 20 January.

The organization is currently trying to confirm these reports with government representatives.

If the reports are correct, Amnesty International would regret the government's decision to cancel the meeting, which would have provided an opportunity to discuss the human rights situation in Sudan, and concrete proposals for protecting those rights both in the north and south of the country.

The organization said it is disappointed by the government's dismissal of its 132-page report as an attack on Islam. The government has apparently decided to continue to ignore the long-standing and substantial evidence of human rights violations by the government and by armed factions in the south.

Amnesty International will continue to campaign internationally for action to protect human rights in the country.

The organization has been seeking a meeting to discuss its concerns and recommendations with the government in Khartoum since December 1993. Visiting dates had been proposed for June and November 1994 and the Sudanese Government even announced that the Amnesty International delegation will visit Sudan in late November 1994, but subsequently withdrew the agreement for this date. Amnesty International's most recent proposal was for a visit in February or March this year.

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PAKISTAN: ACQUITTAL OF A MUSLIM SENTENCED TO DEATH FOR BLASPHEMY

The acquittal two weeks ago of a Muslim man in Pakistan sentenced to death on blasphemy charges points to problems with the abuse of the law and unfair trials for those accused, Amnesty International said today.

In commenting on the acquittal of Arshad Javed on 14 January, the human rights organization said the government needs to introduce legislation to prevent people being charged with blasphemy simply because their views are unpopular.

It also needs to make sure that judges and others don't let their religious prejudices distort blasphemy trials -- which has happened in trials that have been interrupted by local clergy and Islamists shouting slogans and demanding that the defendants be hanged.

In the case of Arshad Javed, a mentally disturbed Muslim man who was held for five years and sentenced to death in February 1993 for blasphemy, Amnesty International believes that he should not have been tried at all, as he was twice certified insane but the court consistently ignored the medical evidence.

"Arshad Javed spent almost five years in jail, two of them in solitary confinement on death row. The government should now treat, compensate and rehabilitate him," Amnesty International said.

Arshad Javed, a Muslim shopkeeper in his early fifties, was arrested in February 1989 after he stood in front of a procession of Bahawalpur University students who were protesting against Salman Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses* and addressed them, saying the book was right. He then claimed to be Jesus Christ. The students seized him, beat him and dragged him to the local police station where he was arrested and charged with blasphemy.

Although Arshad Javed is mentally disturbed and has a record of mental illness in his family, the trial, nevertheless, proceeded. When the death sentence was announced he danced and sang in the courtroom. Arshad Javed did not file an appeal; the Lahore High Court when considering the confirmation of his death sentence, acquitted him on the ground that his mental derangement rendered him incapable of criminal liability. Arshad Javed is only the second person acquitted in Pakistan on the charge of blasphemy.

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