

AI Index: NWS 11/26/93
Distr: SC/PO

No. of words:

Amnesty International
International Secretariat
1 Easton Street
United Kingdom

London WC1X 8DJ

TO: PRESS OFFICERS

FROM: PRESS AND PUBLICATIONS

DATE: 2 MARCH 1993

WEEKLY UPDATE SERVICE 26/93

Contained in this weekly update are external items on Brazil and El Salvador.

NEWS INITIATIVES

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Chad - 21 April

Please Note

The document to go with this campaign has been sent out to sections dated February. Please inform your section campaign coordinators and anyone else who may receive it that it is EMBARGOED FOR 21 APRIL.

Chad Campaign, document, news release, Q&A and ENR. The news release should be with you by 2 April, the Q&A shortly afterward.

Bangladesh - 28 April

Document on serious human rights violations in Bangladesh, accompanied either by a news release or an embargoed weekly update item.

Tadzhikistan - 5 May

Publication and news release on killings in the context of civil war - with striking similarities to Bosnia-Herzegovina.

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

US Juvenile Death Penalty - 26 March 1993

A weekly update item about executions of juveniles scheduled in both Texas and Missouri, was sent out in Weekly Update NWS 11/25/93. The IS will be sending it to media on Friday 26 March.

Baltic States Death Penalty Action - 1 April

Weekly update enclosed in WU NWS 11/20/93, embargoed for 1 April to coincide with the action launch. The IS press office is not proactively sending this out to media, though it will be used in response to media enquiries. It is mainly to assist sections who are planning media initiatives to go with the action.

Morocco - 14 April

Document and weekly update item - the IS will be sending this only to selected media (largely Arabic speaking).

China - 16 April

Document and embargoed weekly update item on torture, timed to coincide with China reporting to the UN Committee Against Torture (CAT). China is scheduled to appear on 23 April - media are entitled to attend and we will be encouraging contacts to do so.

Brazil - 7 May

Please note new embargo date. Document on prison massacre, including new forensic information. Weekly update item to go with it. Sections are also being asked to carry out campaign work in connection with this document.

Unconfirmed news initiatives

News releases or embargoed weekly update items are being considered on the following subjects:

Malawi (May)

Indigenous people (to go with May Focus article)

Guatemala (May)

Egypt (late May)

World Conference (early June)

Nagorno-Karabakh (to go with possible action, May)

Aceh, Indonesia (July)

Section Initiatives

French Section - European Press Officers' Meeting

The second European Press Officers' meeting will take place in Paris this year. The date of this meeting is now fixed for 15 and 16 May as the majority of you asked for. It will be focused on two themes: Audiovisual work (production and TV experiences) and how to improve it; and the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna.

European World Conference Press Briefing in June

The British Section Press Office has been talking to the EC project office and the Francophone Belgium Press Officer about holding a European press briefing in Brussels for MEPs and for journalists who will be covering the World Conference. The date will probably be Tuesday, June 8th in the morning. The aim will be to look at the EC's role as a whole in terms of its internal shortcomings (Asylum issues, etc), external policies - aid/development, etc, and also to look at Europe's role within the UN.

Although the idea has been suggested by the British Section, it is hoped that all European Section Press Officers will be interested in being involved. For further information please contact either Daphne Davies, in the British Section Press Office or Johannes in the EC project office.

Weekly Update 11/26/93

2. AMR 19/WU 02/93 EXTERNAL
25 March 1993

BRAZIL: AI CONCERNED AT KILLING OF HOMOSEXUAL POLITICIAN

Amnesty International is deeply concerned about the abduction and killing of Renildo José dos Santos, a homosexual local councillor from Coqueiro Sêco in North East Brazil. The organization fears that his death may have been connected with his sexual orientation.

According to information received by Amnesty International, on the evening of Sunday 14 March 1993, Renildo José dos Santos was violently abducted from his home in Coqueiro Sêco, in the state of Alagoas, by a group of unidentified heavily armed men. Relatives of Renildo José dos Santos who witnessed the abduction reportedly believe that some of the men were plain clothes police officers.

Renildo José dos Santos' head was found the following day on waste ground bearing apparent marks of torture. His body was found two days later in another area of waste ground also bearing apparent marks of torture.

Renildo José dos Santos had repeatedly denounced death threats which he had been receiving since 1989, allegedly from the local mayor and the mayor's father, also a local political leader. He also accused a local police officer of making an attempt on his life. According to a written testimony which he made in January 1993, in September 1991 José Renildo dos Santos reported the death threats to a local judge but no steps were reportedly taken to ensure his physical safety. On 27 November 1991 Renildo José dos Santos was shot and wounded three times, allegedly by a local police officer whom he named in the testimony.

Renildo José dos Santos attributed the death threats and the attempt against his life to political differences with the mayor and the mayor's father and to his homosexuality which he had publicly acknowledged. He claimed that the local police had not conducted a proper investigation into the attempt against his life and that the state Secretary of Public Security had refused his request to suspend the police officer from duty, pending the outcome of the investigation.

In January 1993 the local council of Coqueiro Sêco set up a parliamentary commission of inquiry to investigate the conduct of councillor Dos Santos under accusations of him committing acts "incompatible with Parliamentary (i.e. the local council) decorum and bringing the House into disrepute.", "atos incompatíveis com o decôro Parlamentar, o que está denegrindo a reputação desta Casa Legislativa." Among the reasons given for the accusation was that councillor dos Santos had publicly admitted his homosexuality in a radio program. As a result of the inquiry councillor dos Santos was stripped of his local council seat by the Council. He was subsequently reinstated pending a judicial appeal.

On 25 February 1993 several human rights organizations in Alagoas wrote to the State Secretary for Public Security denouncing the death threats and attempts against the life of councillor dos Santos and the alleged involvement of military police officers in the attempts. The organizations also denounced a smear campaign against him. To Amnesty International's knowledge no protection was granted to councillor Dos Santos.

In a statement to the newspaper "Jornal de Alagoas", a few days before his assassination councillor dos Santos reiterated his denunciations of death threats and [sexual] discrimination against him from the local mayor, and attributed the smear campaign to his public acknowledgment of his homosexuality. He said that he was frightened and desperate and that he feared a new attempt on his life or an abduction.

To Amnesty International's knowledge, nobody has been detained in relation to the abduction and killing of councillor dos Santos.

Amnesty International members have written to the Alagoas state authorities demanding a thorough and impartial investigation into the abduction, torture and killing of councillor Renildo José dos Santos and urging that the perpetrators be brought to justice.

3. AMR 29/WU 04/93 EXTERNAL
25 March 1993

INTERNAL

Following is the text of a letter sent by the IS to the president of El Salvador, Alfredo Cristiani Burkard, on 25 March 1993. You may use it in any publicity work you are doing around the amnesty law, which is now awaiting sanction by the president (see weekly update NWS 11/21/93, Item AMR 29/WU 03/93, 17 March 1993, and Urgent Actions AMR 29/04/93, 29/05/93 and 29/06/93).

EXTERNAL

It was with great dismay and indignation that Amnesty International learned that the General Amnesty Law for the Consolidation of Peace (Ley de Amnistía General para la Consolidación de la Paz) had been passed by the Legislative Assembly, in violation of the principles set forth in the peace accords, the Salvadorian Constitution and international law.

We understand the need for national reconciliation after the long years of internal conflict. However, such a sweeping law, promulgated so rapidly as to prevent the Salvadorian people from having time to absorb the contents of the Truth Commission's report and decide what would truly be in the interest of national reconciliation, can only be interpreted as a deliberate measure intended exclusively to whitewash the atrocities of the past and protect those responsible for serious human rights abuses from prosecution. Using the excuse of national reconciliation for passing the amnesty law also rings hollow given that the pattern of impunity has persisted since the signing of the peace accords.

The victims and their families have the right, according to well-established principles of international law, to know what happened, to have those responsible identified and brought to justice. Only then is it possible to begin to talk of pardon and for the wounds of the past to begin to heal.

We urge you therefore not to sanction the amnesty law to allow both for full investigations into past human rights abuses and for the prosecution of those responsible for committing or covering up serious human rights violations.

A copy of this letter is being sent, for information, to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.