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WEEKLY UPDATE SERVICE 38/93

Contained in this weekly update is an external item on Venezuela.

NEWS INITIATIVES

USA - Juvenile Death Penalty

Please note that Gary Graham is scheduled to be executed in Texas on 29 April. Details of his case, which was based on very weak evidence, are included in UA, AI Index: AMR 51/22/93, UA AI Index: AMR 51/29/93, as well as documents: USA: Imminent execution of juvenile offender, AI Index: AMR 51/23/93, and USA: Imminent execution of juvenile offender (update), AI Index: AMR 51/28/93.

We are preparing a weekly update item about the case, which should be with you tomorrow - his will be 200th execution in the USA since the resumption of the Death Penalty in the country in 1976. The weekly update will be sent out to sections tomorrow, or Monday at the latest, and will be sent out to international media by the IS Press Office for immediate release.

The IS Press Office has only just been alerted to this case and about the request for action (including demonstrations) that was sent out from the IS today, so apologies for the late notice.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Bangladesh - 28 April

Document on serious human rights violations in Bangladesh, accompanied by a news release which has already been sent to you.

Tadzhikistan - 5 May

Publication and news release on killings in the context of civil war - with striking similarities to Bosnia-Herzegovina. The news release was sent out to you on Friday.

Indigenous People - 12 May

News release planned to accompany Focus article on Human rights violations against indigenous people worldwide. Indigenous people will be one of the main themes of our work on the World Conference.

Guatemala - 19 May

A document or publication with a news release on a full range of recent human rights violations (in the past year or so) in Guatemala. Unfortunately, the document is running behind schedule and will not be in the Weekly Mailing from the IS until 12 May, one week before the embargo. Please get in touch with the IS if you need a copy earlier.

Egypt - 26 May

A document or publication and news release on all our concerns in Egypt. These include very high numbers of prisoners and torture.

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES**Somalia - 30 April**

A 10-page document with AI's recommendations on human rights connected with UN talks and urging Somali political groups to stop human rights abuses, and a weekly update item are currently being written. They will be sent out to you by fax/e-mail/telex early next week as the document is being released on Friday 30 April. The IS press office is not sending this out to media, though you may wish to - either way, there may be media enquiries about it, so the weekly update will help deal with them.

Brazil - 7 May, 1600 hrs gmt

PLEASE NOTE - The document has been sent out in this week's Weekly Mailing dated simply May 1993. Please make sure that anyone who is likely to see it in your section knows that it is embargoed for 7 May.

Document on prison massacre, including new forensic information. Weekly update item to go with it will be sent out early next week. Sections are also being asked to carry out campaign work in connection with this document.

Malawi - 20 May

Document on human rights violations and the referendum and weekly update item to go with it, which will be sent to international media by the IS Press Office.

Unconfirmed news initiatives

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

Nagorno-Karabakh (to go with section-level action, late May)

Aceh, Indonesia (14 July)

Section Initiatives**Europe - Peter Gabriel fundraising opportunity**

PLEASE PASS THIS INFORMATION ON TO YOUR FUNDRAISING DEPARTMENT.

The Swedish Section have sent us a fax saying that they approached Peter Gabriel and his manager about collecting money and handing out information at his concert in Stockholm. Twenty AI members were able to attend the concert for free and collected around £1,000 sterling.

The Swedish Section have spoken to Peter Gabriel's manager about other sections being able to do the same thing during his tour in Europe, which takes in venues in France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Germany and the UK between now and early June. They have also provided the following contact number: Probono Management, attention Adrian Irvine, fax number +44 71 700 1846.

We have sent details of the tour, provided by the Swedish Section, to John Baguley at the British Section (who is involved in the international fundraising working group). The original fax was from Maria Mirsch at the Swedish Section. Hopefully, this information should help your fundraisers - thanks for making sure it gets to the right people in your section.

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, is it 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.

2. AMR 53/WU 02/93 EXTERNAL
22 April 1993

VENEZUELA: FOREIGN MINISTRY DELEGATION VISITS AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

A delegation led by the Venezuelan Foreign Minister Fernando Ochoa Antich visited Amnesty International's International Secretariat in London on 19 April 1993 to meet the Deputy Secretary General and members of staff.

The visit had been requested by the Venezuelan authorities to discuss the current human rights situation in Venezuela. The delegation was welcomed by the Deputy Secretary General of Amnesty International.

Although admitting the existence of some human rights violations in Venezuela, the minister said that these were not sponsored in any way by the government and that the authorities were committed to ensuring an end to such abuses. He recognized that the military justice system required changes since there were frequent conflicts of competence between the civilian and military courts and raised the example of recent cases where the Supreme Court had ruled in favour of a human rights case being heard by a civilian rather than military court. With regard to the "law of vagrants and crooks" he admitted that it was abusive of rights enshrined in the Venezuelan Constitution and by human rights instruments ratified by Venezuela, and explained that there were proposals in Congress for its reform. Finally, the minister said that investigations were carried out whenever possible to bring those responsible to justice and that the Venezuelan Government has always shown its firm commitment to human rights.

The Deputy Secretary General conveyed to the minister the organization's concerns about Venezuela. These included the unresolved investigations into a number of gross human rights violations, such as extra-judicial executions and torture, and the failure to bring those responsible to justice. For example, those officials responsible for at least nine extrajudicial executions in the wake of a coup attempt on 4 February 1992 have reportedly still not been brought to trial.

More recently, at least 63 prisoners were killed by the security forces during an attempted escape from the *Retén e Internado Judicial Los Flores de Catia*, a prison in Caracas, during a second coup attempt on 27 November 1992. According to information obtained by an Amnesty International delegation which visited the country in January and February 1993, several of the prisoners were killed at close range after having surrendered to the security forces. Despite substantial documentation about such killings, including forensic evidence, none of those allegedly responsible have been brought to justice nor suspended pending investigation.

The Deputy Secretary General explained that the organization is also seriously concerned about the unresolved investigations in the military courts into hundreds of killings by members of the security forces during widespread disturbances in February and March 1989. As a further example of the military court's failure to carry out full and impartial investigations into human rights violations, he mentioned the recent ruling on the investigation into the 1988 killings by the security forces of 14 fishermen in the rural area of El Amparo. The military court ruled that the killings had taken place during an armed confrontation with the victims, despite forensic and testimonial evidence to the contrary.

Amnesty International's Deputy Secretary General also raised the organization's deep concerns about continuing reports of torture and ill-treatment in the context of criminal investigations. Such practices appear to be widespread in some regions.

The organization's other concerns in Venezuela which were mentioned in the meeting include poor or extremely bad prison conditions, and the continuing application of the *Ley de vagos y maleantes*, law of vagrants and crooks - which infringes Venezuela's obligations as a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Under this law, hundreds are arrested every year without trial, and are frequently subjected to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

Amnesty International's Deputy Secretary General explained that the organization would continue to carry out thorough research into reports about human rights violations in Venezuela. He thanked the Venezuelan authorities for their offer to provide the corresponding information, although he expressed concerns about the Venezuelan Government's frequent failure to reply to communications sent by Amnesty International.

2. EUR 63/WU 03/93 INTERNAL
22 April 1993

BOSNIA HERZEGOVINA: CLARIFICATION OF AFP REPORT

An Agence France Press (AFP) report today referred to comments made by the secretary general Pierre Sane on sanctions against Serbia.

The report may give the impression that Amnesty International supports sanctions against Serbia. In fact, the secretary general made no statement for or against sanctions, but said that it was offensive for decisions on international action to help victims of human rights violations to be subject to political considerations such as elections in Russia.

If press officers receive any calls from journalists based on the AFP report, please clarify our position based on the above.