
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 137/93

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NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - INDIA, PIERRE SANÉ'S CAMPAIGN LAUNCH SPEECH

NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

EJEs and "Disappearances"*

Please will all sections send details of media coverage of the campaign launch as soon as possible - not just clippings, but descriptions of the good coverage and whether the launch was a success. We would like to do a full evaluation in several News Service editions so that everyone has an overview of how it went and how it continues throughout the campaign. The info should be send straight to Torben, IS Press Office. Thanks.

USA - 24 November - SEE NEWS SERVICE 132

Pakistan - 7 December

Please note: a high-level decision has been made not to launch the India and Pakistan documents at the same time. The Pakistan report will now be launched with a news release on 7 December - see below for India.

India - 15 December

The India document will be launched on with a news release on 15 December - see above for Pakistan.

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

Afghanistan - 26 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 124/131/132

Algeria - 28 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 127

FORTHCOMING NEWS INITIATIVES

Iran - 17 November (International)

Venezuela - 10 November - SEE NEWS SERVICE 121

Papua New Guinea - 19 November (targeted)

Colombia - 16 March 1993 - SEE NEWS SERVICE 123 + UAs AMR 23/56+57/93

AI INDEX: ASA 20/WU 08/93
21 OCTOBER 1993

INDIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CONCERNED BY BEATINGS AND ARRESTS SRINAGAR DEMONSTRATION

Amnesty International has today faxed a letter to General K.V. Krishna Rao, Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, expressing concern at reports that three political leaders of the Hurriyat group in Kashmir were beaten and injured by the Border Security Force on 19 October.

The three men, Ghulam Nabi Sumji, Abdul Gani Lone and Professor Abdul Ghani, were reportedly beaten during a demonstration in Srinagar about the siege of the Hazratbal Shrine. The men were reportedly arrested and taken away in cars to an unknown destination, although Amnesty International welcomes reports that Abdul Gani Lone, whose state of health is weak, has been flown to Delhi to receive medical treatment. None of the press reports that Amnesty International has seen suggest that any of the approximately 150 demonstrators in Srinagar resorted to violence.

In its letter, Amnesty International urged that, if reports that the men were merely arrested for peacefully exercising their non-violent political views are indeed correct, they should be immediately released. The organization also requested that all those in need of medical attention be given the necessary treatment, as the government has already arranged for Mr Lone.

Amnesty International reiterated its appeal made to General K.V. Krishna Rao on 18 October urging that he ensure that the army acts with restraint and uses force only when strictly required and only to the minimum extent necessary under the circumstances. Lethal force should not be used except when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life.

ENDS/

AI INDEX: ACT 33/WU 03/93 EXTERNAL
20 OCTOBER 1993

GETTING AWAY WITH MURDER

Opening statement by
Pierre Sané
Secretary General, Amnesty International
National Press Club
Washington, D.C.
(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)

We are here today to confront governments head on about what we see as one of the greatest threats to human rights in the 1990s. Murder and kidnapping at the hands of the state.

Today, we are confronting governments on the ever growing numbers of deaths and "disappearances".

As the forensic anthropologist Clyde Snow has said:

The great mass murderers of our time have accounted for no more than a few hundred victims. In contrast states that have chosen to murder their own citizens can usually count their victims by the carload"

We are also confronting -- and exposing -- their lies. The lies that they have nothing to do with the carnage and that they are helpless to stop it.

With the launch of our concerted worldwide campaign, we are sending a message to those governments.

We know what you are doing.

We aren't fooled by your smokescreens.

And we are going to press this issue until we see the only result that matters -- an end to the cold blooded murder and "disappearance".

Campaigning for an end to the mass killings and "disappearances" will be at the top the agenda for Amnesty's members in 150 countries for the next decade. And we are going to be working with other organizations to build up the momentum for this campaign.

We are also going to push it to the top of the agenda of individual governments and the United Nations as issues they have to tackle urgently.

We know we can get action because these violations are not inevitable and can be stopped.

Many governments throw up their hands and claim that their streets have turned into killings grounds because their societies are violent. They lay the blame on drug traffickers or terrorists.

But as our report -- Getting Away with Murder -- makes clear many governments are themselves the instruments of political killings and "disappearances".

They have policies to deliberately target their opponents for elimination, to train their officials as assassins and kidnappers, and to let the killers get away.

We know they can be forced to change their policies. Forced by public exposure of their crimes and pressure by governments and the public to end the atrocities.

So our message is not just for governments. It's for the people who feel overcome with helplessness when they hear us talk about tens of thousands of dead and "disappeared".

They are the ones who need to act. To put pressure on all governments to stop the killings everywhere or stop aiding and abetting the governments that slaughter their own citizens. Because this is the action that will make the difference.

Just look at Morocco. For decades, hundreds of people were "disappeared", languishing in remote prisons and jails. The more the government denied it the more we exposed it and put pressure on them to release the "disappeared". Our members throughout the world wrote letters, sent petitions, lobbied their governments and protested to Moroccan embassies. The result of all this pressure was that more than 300 of the "disappeared" were freed in 1991.

At the time the people in Morocco first "disappeared", military dictatorships and authoritarian regimes with no pretence of protecting human rights were the main culprits of these violations.

But increasingly, governments that are supposedly committed to human rights are turning their hands to killing.

These are governments that know a bad human rights record stains their international relations so they look for "arms length" ways of achieving their ends.

Long-standing democracies like India or emerging democracies like the Philippines talk about human rights even as their people are gunned down or abducted. Hundreds of people have been extrajudicially executed or "disappeared" in those countries. Thousands more have been gunned down or kidnapped in Brazil and Colombia.

Often these governments set up or back death squads and civilian defence forces that do their dirty work for them. Governments claim they have no control over these killers, but the trail of responsibility leads directly back to the authorities.

And as we've seen in the former Yugoslavia and republics of the old USSR, Somalia and Zaire, countries confronting ethnic or nationalist conflict or massive unrest, are often the scene for political killings by all sides. Murder is again a blunt instrument of champions of so-called racial purity, ideological zeal and national identity. And again, the toll of the dead and "disappeared" number in the thousands in these countries.

We have only seen the beginning of this political instability, with new governments taking tentative first steps and old systems collapsing. And if we don't want to see the crises in Bosnia and Somalia replayed over and over again, we have to take steps to stop the killing before it happens.

And in this world of increasing political instability, armed opposition groups are also killing and abducting their opponents, as we have seen in Algeria, Liberia, Peru, Sri Lanka, and Sudan.

This is the first major international campaign where Amnesty is clearly condemning the atrocities committed by those groups -- atrocities which are outlawed even in war and fly in the face of international humanitarian principles.

But the actual killings and "disappearances" are only half the story. The other half is impunity. Impunity has become the order of the day for governments that politically engineer the killings and the cover ups.

They put in place emergency laws that essentially let their security forces kill without fear of prosecution or get rid of the bodies without inquests, as we have seen in India, Sri Lanka, and Turkey.

They grant immunity to human rights violators or pass sweeping amnesty laws as has been done in El Salvador and South Africa. Or they set up investigations designed to go nowhere and hold trials that will let the killers off the hook. The outlaws have free reign, and there is no rule of law.

In 1985, Guatemala's President Elect Vinicio Cerezo Arevalo said simply:

We are not going to be able to investigate the past. We would have to put the entire army in jail.

But investigating the past is not impossible. The Truth Commission in El Salvador identified many perpetrators of human rights violations. The investigation into the 1988 massacre at Cayara in Peru clearly identified the perpetrators. Yet in both of those cases the perpetrators were let off, through amnesties or legal technicalities.

But some governments go even further in their windowdressing. They have learned the language of human rights and have learned to play the diplomatic game of human rights.

Indonesia set up a commission of inquiry into the massacre in a cemetery in East Timor. Colombia has a witness protection program. Turkey has a Minister of State for human rights.

But the fact that killings and "disappearances" continue in these countries make it clear these are merely human rights fronts. Public relations work is no substitute for real respect for human rights.

The very fact that governments feel compelled to set up the human rights machinery shows that they are susceptible to international pressure. We ourselves have pushed for these steps. But we want mechanisms that are more than sleight of hand.

The responsibility for letting the killings and abductions go on rests with governments from other countries as well.

Governments that have turned a blind eye to horrendous human rights violations for self-serving reasons or have blocked asylum seekers fleeing from "disappearances" and political killings.

France, the United Kingdom and the United States ignored massacres in Iraq for more than a decade until the invasion of Kuwait -- when the political tide turned and they condemned what they had previously ignored. And since the coup in Haiti, the United States has blocked the entrance of Haitian asylum seekers, sending them back to the killing fields.

And some governments have even trained the killing armies or provided military aid to countries where gross human rights violations have taken place. The French government trained Chad's army and the United States trained the forces in El Salvador -- forces that combined killed tens of thousands of people.

Our message to these governments is to stop their complicity in these violations. We are saying that we will expose you. We will ask our members and sympathizers throughout the world to publicize your deeds, to send petitions, to mount protests and to lobby -- loudly -- for change.

The message will be to keep human rights high on your agenda with other governments, push for concrete changes to prevent "disappearances" and political killings, and start condemning those violations in all countries when they can't be denied. And if you fail to do that, don't then turn your back on the victims fleeing state violence.

To those governments that send military aid or train armies in other countries, we are saying that it's your responsibility to know what the armed forces are doing with your backing. And if those armies are committing "disappearances" and political killings, it's time to stop supporting them.

The message is to governments individually, and collectively. Because the very same governments that I have just talked about are the ones that make up intergovernmental institutions like the United Nations. And if they aren't committed to protecting human rights individually, they won't have that commitment globally.

At the United Nations, the seriousness of "disappearances" and political killings has not been ignored. For more than 10 years specially appointed experts have been working to investigate hundreds -- even thousands-- of individual cases of killings and "disappearances". But the same governments which agreed to set up these bodies also frequently ignore them -- they still do not have the political backing or money or staff to make a significant difference.

At the UN World Conference on Human Rights held in June, government after government spoke about the importance of human rights.

We were looking for the some 170 governments there to back their words with a new, bold political initiative.

We called on those governments to establish a High Commissioner for Human Rights. A high level UN authority to integrate human rights issues into all the UN's work and to be able to respond rapidly to human rights situations before they reach the crisis level of Bosnia or Somalia.

The role of the UN should clearly be not just to respond to crises, but to take action to prevent massive human rights violations and to ensure investigations take place when violations have occurred.

The World Conference said that the UN General Assembly -- which is meeting in New York even as I am speaking -- must consider the establishment of a High Commissioner. This is the same session that will take decisions about funding for the human rights program.

We are calling on all member governments of the United Nations to take action in THIS General Assembly to make the High Commissioner a reality. A position with a genuinely authoritative and independent mandate, capable of taking serious steps to address human rights violations. We will be asking to meet with the UN Secretary General to tell him our concerns about "disappearances" and political killings and to ask for his support for a High Commissioner.

The message to the United Nations is that any stalling -- on the High Commissioner or on resources -- will only cost more lives.

And that is the heart of our message today. A message of action. Even as I speak people are being gunned down and abducted. They need action, and they need it now. And to get that action we are going to focus our work on five areas:

- First, we will continue to expose the human rights violations, impunity and smokescreens set up by governments, as we have done in this report, and we will mobilize our million-strong membership to increase awareness of these violations, and mount protests, lobby their governments and exert the kind of pressure which will bring about change.

- Second, we will mobilize the human rights community and the public worldwide to take action against these violations by putting pressure on their governments. What is needed is popular pressure and action from all parts of the globe -- from trade unions, churches, women's groups, student organizations and civic associations.

- Third, we will lobby for governments to take the concrete steps outlined in our 14-point program, including outlawing death squads, ending secret detention and bringing the perpetrators to justice.

- Fourth, we will pressure other governments to stop military training and aid that feeds into human rights violation and create the legislation which will commit them to do this.

- Fifth, we will pushing for change at the United Nations -- for a High Commissioner for Human Rights, a dramatic increase in the money for its human rights program, the political will to make the human rights program work, and for the establishment of an International Court of Human Rights.

My colleagues on the panel will be telling you about the action Amnesty will be taking, the real cost of impunity, and the experience of people on the ground when confronted with "disappearances" and political killings. Together, we are determined not to let governments get away with murder.