

AI INDEX: POL 10/04/97

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE: 0001 HRS GMT 18 JUNE 1997

**INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY FAILING TO PROVIDE SOLUTIONS FOR
MASSIVE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN 1996**
**Amnesty International's Annual Report details human rights abuses in 151 countries and
territories**

Human rights abuses and the global refugee crisis are inextricably linked, Amnesty International said today as it released its 1997 Annual Report.

The report -- covering human rights abuses in 151 countries and territories during 1996 -- details atrocities committed by governments and armed opposition groups including unlawful killings, torture, "disappearances" and the jailing of prisoners of conscience.

"It was not just the governments directly responsible for human rights violations in their own countries that caused the massive refugee flows we witnessed in 1996," said Pierre Sané, Secretary General of Amnesty International. "Other governments directly or indirectly fuelled the conflicts in places such as Central Africa, Afghanistan and Colombia which cause human rights abuses -- and then they failed to take responsibility for the tragic situation they caused."

"Increasing numbers of governments also refused to carry out their responsibility to protect the millions of men, women and children who have been forced to flee as a result. They closed their borders and forcibly returned thousands of refugees to dangerous situations where their safety was at risk."

The refugee crisis in the African Great Lakes region was the most visible illustration of the effects of human rights abuses causing people to flee during the year. However, violations took place in police stations, prison cells and streets from Colombia to Afghanistan causing innocent men, women and children to fear for their lives.

During 1996, Amnesty International documented thousands of extrajudicial executions or possible extrajudicial executions in at least 69 countries and thousands of judicial executions in at least 41 countries. Several thousand prisoners of conscience or possible prisoners of conscience were in detention in at least 94 countries. The organization recorded cases of torture or ill-treatment in at least 124 countries and "disappearances" in at least 39 countries, although Amnesty International believes the true figures for all these statistics to be much higher.

"Yet again, during 1996, the standard government response has been to treat the symptoms, not the cause," Mr Sané said. "There can be no long term solution to refugee flows until the underlying reason -- the fear of human rights abuses -- is tackled."

"1998 marks the 50th anniversary of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. When our next annual report is released in the anniversary year, we want to see a real sea change in governments' policies to reflect a new commitment to human rights for the next fifty years."

AFRICA REGIONAL SUMMARY

During 1996, the refugee and internally displaced persons crisis worsened in Africa and particularly in the **Great Lakes Region**. Mass killings, torture, political unrest and violent conflicts forced hundreds of thousands of people to leave their homes in search of safety.

In **Burundi**, tens of thousands of unarmed civilians were killed by the security forces, by armed Tutsi groups acting in collusion with government forces and by armed Hutu opposition groups. Many were massacred solely because of their ethnic origins. After a military coup in July, Major Pierre Buyoya suspended political rights, and in the following two months at least 10,000 people were reportedly killed and new refugees fled to neighbouring countries.

In **Rwanda**, the army unlawfully killed hundreds of civilians, while armed opposition groups continued to deliberately and arbitrarily kill unarmed civilians, including children and infants. By the end of the year, nearly 100,000 people were detained, many of them without charge, in overcrowded conditions which led to scores of deaths. Despite some progress made in rebuilding the judicial system, judges and prosecutors were not adequately trained and, there were only 16 defence lawyers. The conduct of the first trials of those accused of participation in the genocide were largely unfair.

In September and October, when fighting broke out in eastern **Zaire** more than one million Rwandese and Burundi refugees found themselves trapped between armed conflict and starvation. Contingents of the Zairian Armed Forces took part in widespread looting and human rights abuses. Thousands of unarmed refugees and Zairians were reportedly killed by members of the Alliance of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL) armed group. Amnesty International called for an international presence in eastern **Zaire, Burundi** and **Rwanda** to protect civilians at risk, and for world governments to prevent supplies of weapons to the region.

In July and August, around 75,000 Rwandese refugees in **Burundi** were forced back to **Rwanda**. In November and December, some 700,000 refugees returned to **Rwanda** and thousands to **Burundi** for fear of being killed by Zairian armed groups and other armed factions. In December, most of the estimated 540,000 Rwandese refugees in **Tanzania** were also forced to return to **Rwanda**, following a joint statement issued by the Tanzanian Government and the UN High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR). Hundreds of returnees to **Burundi** were massacred by government forces.

The continuing conflict in **Liberia** led to gross human rights abuses committed by all parties to the conflict. Despite progress towards a political settlement to internal armed conflict in **Sierra Leone**, defenceless civilians continued to be tortured and killed. In **South Africa**, at least 500 people were killed as a result of political violence in KwaZulu Natal and in April, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission began public hearings into past human rights violations.

In **Nigeria**, several prisoners of conscience and key human rights defenders remained in prison and subjected to harsh conditions of detention. Despite the international outcry following the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogonis in November 1995, the government failed to stop human rights violations or to reinstate the rule of law.

Following the UN Committee Against Torture's recommendations, **Senegal** introduced the prohibition of torture in its national legislation. In **Kenya**, the leader of a human rights organization was killed in suspicious circumstances. At least 63 people were sentenced to death and over 739 were under sentence of death, but there were no reports of executions. In **Sudan's** long-running civil war government forces extrajudicially executed hundreds of civilians and abducted scores of children. Outside the war-zones hundreds of political opponents were detained and there were reports of torture.

AMERICAS REGIONAL SUMMARY

Serious human rights violations were reported throughout the Americas, and thousands of past and present cases of human rights violations remained unpunished. Human rights defenders faced growing harassment, intimidation and assaults in several countries in the region.

In **Argentina**, investigations into past "disappearances" made little progress, despite new evidence pointing to military responsibility for the torture and execution of thousands of "disappeared" during the last military government. Dozens of possible extrajudicial executions by police were reported during the year.

Hundreds of people were killed by police and police-backed death squads in **Brazil** in circumstances suggesting extrajudicial executions. Torture was reported to be widespread in police stations, and detention and jail conditions remained harsh. Land reform activists continued to be arrested under the charge of "forming a criminal band".

More than 1,000 civilians, including human rights defenders, were extrajudicially executed by the security forces and their paramilitary allies in **Colombia**, and more than 120 civilians "disappeared". Death-squad style killings of people regarded as "disposable" continued in urban areas. Armed opposition groups were responsible for numerous human rights abuses, including scores of arbitrary killings and the taking of hostages.

Scores of dissidents, including human rights defenders, were arbitrarily detained for short periods or subjected to persistent harassment in **Cuba**. Several were tried and imprisoned as prisoners of conscience or confined to specific areas of the country, and at least nine people were forced into exile. Some 600 other prisoners of conscience and several hundred political prisoners remained in prison.

Security forces and government-backed groups in **Guatemala** were allegedly responsible for more than 100 extrajudicial executions, and scores of cases of torture, ill-treatment and arbitrary detention. Little progress was made in clarifying the extrajudicial execution of tens of thousands of Guatemalans in the previous two decades, or in bringing human rights violators to justice. The death penalty was applied in the country for the first time in 13 years.

In **Mexico**, a large number of civil rights activists, including human rights defenders and journalists, suffered death threats, assaults and other serious human rights violations such as abductions and torture. Torture was widespread, scores of people were extrajudicially executed, and dozens "disappeared" following their arrest by the security forces. At least one person was arbitrarily killed after detention by an armed opposition group.

Thousands of prisoners accused of terrorism-related offences in **Peru** experienced delays in being brought to trial or were serving sentences under procedures which fell short of international fair trial standards. Abuses by the armed opposition continued.

The death penalty continued to be used extensively in the **United States of America**, where a total of 45 people were executed and more than 3,150 were under death sentence. There were reports of deaths in custody, killings and wounding by the police in disputed circumstances, and torture and ill-treatment of prisoners. The use of chain-gangs was introduced for women for the first time.

Scores of people, including children, were extrajudicially executed in **Venezuela** during police operations ostensibly aimed at combatting crime. Prison conditions remained extremely harsh, and at least 25 prisoners were burned to death by wardens in a Caracas prison. Torture and ill-treatment was widespread, and some people died as a result of torture.

ASIA PACIFIC REGIONAL SUMMARY

Serious human rights violations were committed in virtually every country of the Asia Pacific region during 1996. Security forces and armed opposition groups were responsible for widespread extrajudicial executions and “disappearances”, while torture and ill-treatment was commonplace in police stations and prison cells. Thousands of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience languished in jails with or without often unfair trials.

In **Sri Lanka**, “disappearances” hit the highest level since 1992 as hostilities continued between the government and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam forces. By the end of the year Amnesty International had documented more than 220 cases, mostly in the Jaffna peninsula.

Governments across the region severely curtailed freedom of expression and association to suppress dissenting opinions. In July, the **Indonesian** government launched the most severe crackdown on pro-democracy activists for 20 years. Members of unofficial opposition parties and trade unionists were among those detained and currently facing unfair trials for subversion.

Last year was the worst year for human rights in **Myanmar** since 1990. More than 2,000 people were arrested for calling for human rights reforms and members of the opposition were attacked by organized mobs, with the apparent encouragement of the government.

In **India**, security forces and armed opposition groups both violently attacked and abducted journalists covering the elections in Jammu and Kashmir. Journalists have been jailed in **Pakistan** for exposing human rights abuses, and journalists were harassed and killed in **Cambodia**, allegedly with the involvement of the security forces.

Non-governmental organizations were also the targets of restrictions on freedom of expression and association. The leader of a **Malaysian** women’s non-governmental organization was put on trial for exposing allegations of human rights abuses, and in **South Korea** the government introduced new legislation which maintained restrictions on the basic rights of trades unionists.

In **Nepal**, around 100 Amnesty International members and Tibetan activists were detained for up to two days for peacefully calling for human rights reform in China. In February, Albert Langer became the first prisoner of conscience in **Australia** since the Viet Nam war.

In Taleban-controlled areas of **Afghanistan**, women and girls found their freedom of movement and association severely restricted. Some were beaten with chains for being outside their homes or not wearing the *burqua*, others were banned from attending work and schools.

Governments throughout the region often used repressive state security laws to imprison and silence their critics. In **China**, the authorities continued to jail human rights activists and others brave enough to voice a dissenting opinion, while thousands more remained in prison. In the Xinjiang and Tibet Autonomous Regions, the authorities harshly repressed people calling for more religious and political freedoms.

Amnesty International remained concerned that the right to freedom of expression and association could be severely curtailed in **Hong Kong** following its return to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, particularly in the light of proposals to change human rights safeguards.

Amnesty International remained seriously concerned about the use of the death penalty throughout the Asia Pacific region. The **Philippines** government sentenced at least 127 people to death, while reports of police brutality and possible forced confessions continued. As a result of its “Strike Hard” campaign

China sentenced at least 6,000 people to death, more than 3,500 of whom were confirmed to have been executed, although the true figure is probably much higher.

EUROPE REGIONAL SUMMARY

In Europe, reports of torture, ill-treatment and police brutality continued, with members of ethnic minorities being particularly vulnerable in many cases. Legal protection for refugees and asylum-seekers continued to be inadequate in some countries in the region.

In the run-up to the elections in **Albania** in May, many of the several hundred opposition activists or supporters who were briefly detained by police were ill-treated. In many cases, they had been engaged in peaceful activities such as attending party rallies, writing slogans or putting up posters. Many journalists were also detained and beaten or threatened with legal proceedings.

In **Bosnia-Herzegovina**, dozens of prisoners of conscience were detained for weeks or months on account of their nationality. Displaced people and refugees were deliberately prevented from visiting or returning to their homes by violent attacks and the damage or destruction of houses.

At least six political prisoners were sentenced in **Georgia** after proceedings which appeared to fall short of international fair trial standards. Reportedly, some 200,000 ethnic Georgians displaced by the conflict in the disputed region of Abkhazia continued to face obstacles to their return on grounds of their ethnicity and suspected political sympathies.

Conscientious objectors continued to be imprisoned in the **Russian Federation**, and there were numerous allegations of torture and ill-treatment in detention – ethnic minorities were particularly affected. Prisoners awaiting trial were held in conditions amounting to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, sometimes resulting in deaths.

Torture continued to be widespread in police stations and gendarmeries in **Turkey**, resulting in at least 11 deaths in custody. Scores of people were killed in the mainly **Kurdish** southeastern provinces in circumstances suggesting they had been extrajudicially executed. Armed opposition groups were responsible for more than 40 deliberate and arbitrary killings.

There were widespread reports of torture and ill-treatment by law enforcement officials in **Bulgaria**; many of the victims were Roma. At least five people died as a result of ill-treatment or torture. Shootings by police officers in disputed circumstances resulted in at least three deaths.

In **Germany**, there were further allegations of police ill-treatment of foreigners, and a study commissioned by the internal affairs ministers of the 16 federal states concluded that the problem of police abuse of foreign nationals concerned more than a "just a few isolated incidents". A similar conclusion reached by Amnesty International in a 1995 report had been rejected by the German authorities.

A few deaths in custody took place in disputed circumstances in the **United Kingdom**, and no prosecutions were brought against police or prison officers in connection with cases from previous years – including two cases where inquest juries brought in verdicts of unlawful killings. Amnesty International expressed concern to the government about various provisions in the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act.

In **Yugoslavia**, torture and ill-treatment by police were widespread; most victims were ethnic Albanians in **Kosovo** province. Between April and October, nine Serbs, including five police officers, were shot dead, and an organization calling itself the Liberation Army of Kosovo claimed

responsibility. The authorities responded with mass, indiscriminate arrests of ethnic Albanians, many of whom were ill-treated and later released without charge.

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA REGIONAL SUMMARY

In 1996, administrative detention and unfair trials, torture and executions were carried out in most countries in the Middle East and North Africa, while armed opposition groups continued to kill civilians and commit other serious human rights abuses.

However, a number of positive steps occurred in some countries. **Kuwait** ratified, with reservations, the UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, although over 150 prisoners, including prisoners of conscience remained held after unfair trials. In **Morocco/ Western Sahara**, Kelthoum Ahmed Labid El-Ouanat and five youths, all Sahrawi prisoners of conscience, were released by royal pardon.

In **Egypt**, thousands of suspected members or sympathizers of banned Islamist groups continued to be held in administrative detention and dozens of political detainees were sentenced to prison terms after unfair trials. In **Bahrain**, where hundreds of political opponents remain administratively detained, at least 150 people received unfair trials. In **Syria**, hundreds of political prisoners remained held, some without charge or trial while others are serving lengthy prison terms after unfair trials.

Under the jurisdiction of the **Palestinian Authority**, at least 18 people received grossly unfair trials before State Security Courts. In **Israel** and **the Occupied Territories**, at least 300 Palestinians were administratively detained, and at least 600 received unfair trials. In **Lebanon**, security forces arrested scores of possible prisoners of conscience, including human rights defenders.

The use of torture was widely recorded in almost every country in the Middle East region. In **Israel** and **the Occupied Territories**, torture and ill-treatment of Palestinians during interrogation continued to be systematic and officially sanctioned. Under the jurisdiction of the **Palestinian Authority**, at least three people died in prison after torture. In **Iraq**, physical and psychological torture of detainees remained widespread and serious human rights abuses were carried out in the **Kurdish-controlled** provinces by the **Kurdish** groups.

In **Bahrain**, women and female students arrested were reportedly threatened with rape by male officers. In **Tunisia**, torture and ill-treatment remained widespread during secret detention, often in the Ministry of Interior. The UN Committee Against Torture publicly stated that torture was practised systematically in **Egypt**. Moreover, the judicial punishments of flogging and amputation were implemented for a wide range of offences in **Iran**, and in **Saudi Arabia** where at least 27 individuals, including two young students, were sentenced to 120 to 200 lashes.

There was a significant rise in the number of executions in many countries. In **Iran**, at least 110 people were executed, more than twice as many as reported in 1995. In **Iraq**, hundreds of people were executed, including political prisoners and army officers. At least 69 people were executed in **Saudi Arabia**. In **Egypt**, at least 45 people were sentenced to death and 14 executed. In **Jordan**, nine people were executed including, for the first time, two convicted for raping minors.

In **Algeria**, thousands of people were killed. Many of them were extrajudicially executed by the security forces or deliberately and arbitrarily killed by government-backed militias and armed opposition groups, defining themselves as "Islamic groups". In **Lebanon**, at least 154 civilians sheltered in a UN compound were killed by the Israeli artillery.

Many states showed a blatant contempt for the rights of asylum-seekers. Around 20 Saudi Arabian political or religious opponents of their government were forcibly returned from **Yemen** to **Saudi Arabia**, apparently without being offered access to asylum procedures. The **United Arab Emirates** deported at least nine Bahraini nationals, all possible asylum-seekers to **Bahrain** where most of them

were detained upon arrival, as possible prisoners of conscience. In **Algeria**, Bouasria Ben Othman, an asylum-seeker deported from Belgium, died in secret detention, allegedly as a result of torture.
ENDS\