
Amnesty International

Statements to the 44th session of the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities

SEPTEMBER 1992

SUMMARY

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Amnesty International gave four statements to last August's 44th session of the United Nations Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities.

In its statement under item 6 on the question of the violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all countries, Amnesty International drew attention to the need for the United Nations, through the international community, to maintain close and constant scrutiny of situations of serious human rights violations, and to take decisive action if this is needed. The statement highlighted some situations of long term patterns of human rights abuses which Amnesty International has repeatedly brought to the attention of the UN, and where speedy implementation of human rights standards is needed to protect fundamental rights, as in Chad, China, Guatemala and Iraq.

Amnesty International's statement under item 10 on the administration of justice and the human rights of detainees, focussed on grave human rights violations which have occurred in a number of countries during states of emergency, for example the Commonwealth of Independent States, Egypt, India, Myanmar, Peru, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Syria. While it welcomed steps which have been already been taken by the United Nations' Special Rapporteur to safeguard basic human rights in these situations, Amnesty

International pointed out that governments remain bound by the rule of law during states of emergency and are never justified in violating standards for the protection of fundamental human rights.

In its statement under item 13 on encouragement of universal acceptance of human rights instruments, Amnesty International urged the Sub-Commission to explore new initiatives to hasten the universal ratification of the International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and on Civil and Political Rights, its Optional Protocols, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and other important human rights instruments. It reiterated its belief that ratification of human rights instruments is a basic but essential step which every government can take to demonstrate its commitment to protecting human rights, and expressed its concern about states, for example the USA, which ratify international human rights instruments with limiting reservations, declarations or understandings.

At the Sub-Commission's pre-sessional meeting of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, Amnesty International made a statement about persistent human rights abuses – including torture and ill-treatment, sometimes leading to deaths in custody; extrajudicial executions; arbitrary arrest and "disappearance" – directed against indigenous peoples in a number of countries.

KEYWORDS: MINORITIES¹ / INDIGENOUS PEOPLES¹ / EMERGENCY LEGISLATION¹ / HUMAN RIGHTS INSTRUMENTS¹ / CHAD / CHINA / GUATEMALA / IRAQ / MYANMAR / SUDAN / EGYPT / SYRIA / PERU / INDIA / SIERRA LEONE / ETHNIC GROUPS / INVESTIGATION OF ABUSES / EXTRAJUDICIAL EXECUTION / DISAPPEARANCES / TORTURE/ILL-TREATMENT / PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE / POLITICAL PRISONERS / INCOMMUNICADO DETENTION / HABEAS CORPUS / TRIALS / ARBITRARY ARREST / HARASSMENT / IMPUNITY / POLITICAL VIOLENCE / COUPS /

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AI's statements to the 44th session of the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities

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UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination
and Protection of Minorities

44th Session
Agenda Item 6

Delivered: 12 August 1992

Oral statement by Amnesty International

Mr Chairman,

Human rights violations are the responsibility of the government involved and the legitimate concern of the international community. Since the promulgation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the international community has evolved a wide range of standards and procedures for dealing with violations of fundamental rights. Yet, serious human rights violations persist, in every region of the world. Close and constant scrutiny must be maintained so that further action is taken, if this is needed. The Sub-Commission has a vital role to play in this process. It should continue to bring the latest information about serious human rights violations to the attention of the Commission on Human Rights - whether or not the Commission has already acted in respect of that country - and to make recommendations for further action which needs to be taken to safeguard human rights and protect the victims.

Amnesty International has repeatedly submitted information to the UN Secretary-General about grave and systematic violations of human rights in **Chad** in the hope that these will be addressed. Nevertheless, Amnesty International knows of no effective action by the international community to halt violations under the previous or present governments. The government of President Idriss Déby, which came to power in December 1990, has criticized massive violations of human rights committed by the previous government and the Commission of Inquiry it set up attributed some 40,000 killings to the previous government in a May 1992 report. Yet the government appears to have taken no steps up to now to restrict the use of lethal force against unarmed civilians by its own security forces who apparently act with impunity. Since October 1991 a pattern has re-emerged of extrajudicial executions, "disappearances", torture and incommunicado detention without charge or trial. The victims are suspected opponents of the government, particularly members of certain ethnic groups. Amnesty International has noted the

dismissal of four senior police and security officials following killings in the capital in January and February 1992, but otherwise few, if any, measures have been taken to curb abuses. Some of those arrested, for example, after forcible repatriation from neighbouring Nigeria in February 1992, are believed to have been deliberately killed the following month. Action taken so far by the UN has been woefully inadequate to deal with these long term violations.

In the **People's Republic of China** there is a long term pattern of serious violations of fundamental and internationally accepted rights. Thousands of political prisoners are still detained. They include political and religious dissidents, Tibetan nationalists, and members of Muslim and other ethnic groups, many of whom are detained arbitrarily or convicted after trials that fall far short of internationally accepted standards. Many are held solely for the peaceful exercise of fundamental rights. Torture and arbitrary executions after unfair trials continue. There has been no change to laws under which such violations are perpetrated nor any attempt to introduce basic safeguards to prevent some violations from occurring. The incidence of torture and ill-treatment is far higher than that officially recorded and little has been done by the authorities to lessen the risk of detainees being tortured or to ensure that alleged abuses are rigorously and impartially investigated. In 1989 and 1991, the Sub-Commission endeavoured to bring the situations in China and Tibet respectively to the attention of the Commission on Human Rights but that body took no action. There remains a pressing need for a clear message that continued gross violations of human rights in China will not be tolerated by the international community.

Last year, the Sub-Commission's resolution on **Guatemala** urged the government to intensify its efforts to ensure that human rights and fundamental freedoms are respected by all its authorities and security forces, to adopt energetic measures to prevent violations, to protect and promote the organizations which safeguard human rights and to investigate violations. However, extrajudicial executions, "disappearances", and serious intimidation, including death threats, continue. The vast majority of human rights violations are not investigated - although investigations are announced, the proceedings are usually flawed and those responsible go unpunished. The victims have included human rights activists, trade unionists, students and members of popular movements. Other victims are indigenous peasants who refused to serve in the ostensibly voluntary civil patrols, street children and those working on their behalf. The situation in Guatemala has been under discussion in the UN for more than 13 years, but little has been achieved in that time in preventing persistent and serious violations of human rights. The international community needs to act decisively by calling for immediate, concrete measures to stop violations and to investigate effectively past abuses.

The situation in **Iraq** is one which Amnesty International has repeatedly brought to the attention of the UN. After five years of appeals to the international community, only in 1990, after the invasion of Kuwait, did the Sub-Commission adopt a resolution which included a request for the Commission on Human Rights to study the situation. The Commission responded by appointing a Special Rapporteur - a welcome development but one that Amnesty International fears is, by itself, insufficient to deal with a government that continues to sanction atrocities as a matter of policy. Reports of the arrest and summary execution of suspected government opponents continue, particularly in recent months, of

members of the armed forces. The government's military campaign in the southern marshes, aimed at capturing opponents taking refuge there, goes on unabated resulting in the extrajudicial execution of scores of unarmed civilians. In addition, the fate of hundreds of Kurds and Arabs who "disappeared" in the aftermath of the March 1991 uprising remains unknown, as well as that of over two hundred thousand who "disappeared" in previous years. Constant scrutiny must be maintained, taking account of all the Special Rapporteur's recommendations, until real protection for victims of human rights violations in Iraq has been firmly established. But Amnesty International remains concerned that so much time will have elapsed - and so many more victims will have been tortured, "disappeared" or killed - before adequate mechanisms are put in place.

Mr Chairman,

Day by day, and year by year, the toll of victims grows. If governments cannot, or will not, implement the standards which they have developed through the UN, then the international community must take decisive action. Amnesty International believes that the Sub-Commission has a special role and responsibility in identifying and alerting the Commission on Human Rights to such situations, wherever they occur, to urge the international community to take action to achieve the effective and speedy implementation of those standards that are the cornerstone of the UN's work for the protection and promotion of human rights. For countless victims, it is already too late. Decisive action is needed now if others are not to share their fate.

Thank you, Mr Chairman

United Nations Sub-Commission on Prevention
of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities
44th Session
Agenda item 10

Delivered: 18 August 1992

Oral statement by Amnesty International

THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DURING STATES OF EMERGENCY

Mr. Chairman,

At least 30 countries are today under a proclaimed or de facto state of emergency, according to the latest report of the Special Rapporteur on states of emergency¹. His report shows that at least 80 states - almost half the membership of the UN - have resorted to emergency measures at some time since 1 January 1985. These are disturbing figures. Governments often justify such drastic action on the grounds that they are protecting national security, the rule of law, or even fundamental human rights. But it is a tragic irony that the worst violations of human rights, including torture, "disappearances", summary or arbitrary executions and arbitrary detentions, occur frequently during a state of emergency.

In proclaiming a state of emergency a government is still bound by the rule of law and should not become a law unto itself. Too often governments ignore limits laid down in national and international law on when a state of emergency can be proclaimed and the permissible scope of emergency powers. The procedural formalities become a convenient facade for the indiscriminate suppression of dissent and fundamental human rights.

In **Myanmar**, on the pretext of maintaining public order, vague and sweeping martial law decrees have resulted in hundreds of people being extrajudicially executed, thousands arbitrarily detained and tortured. The only crime of many was advocating a peaceful transfer of power. But in the words of Senior General Saw Maung, "Martial law means the will of the ruler. He can do anything he wishes to do".

The granting of wide, discretionary powers to the executive and security forces during a state of emergency makes it all the more important that the judiciary remains independent and enjoys unhindered authority to act according to national and international law.

¹. UN Doc: E/CN.4/Sub.2/1992/23.

Unfortunately, this is often not the case.

In **Sudan**, the state of emergency declared after a military coup in June 1989 heralded a purge of the judiciary and the supplanting of normal courts by military tribunals which have convicted people after unfair trials.

Remedies such as habeas corpus, amparo or similar mechanisms² are essential to protect detainees' fundamental human rights. Unfortunately, emergency measures sometimes severely curtail judicial authority and access to the courts.

In **Egypt**, emergency measures delay access to a court for at least 30 days after arrest, facilitating the torture of many detainees. Courts frequently order release but are often opposed by the Interior Ministry, until a second court can confirm the release, weeks or months later.

A state of emergency is by definition a temporary legal response to an exceptional and grave threat to the nation. A perpetual state of emergency is a contradiction in terms. It is, therefore, disturbing when a state of emergency becomes virtually permanent because it is proclaimed once and never lifted, or repeatedly renewed, or because special measures are entrenched in ordinary law which survive after the emergency ends. In such situations human rights violations may also become a permanent state of affairs.

This is the case in **Syria** where, despite the recent release of up to 2,000 political prisoners, the practice of arbitrarily detaining thousands of people without charge or trial - often incommunicado, sometimes for more than two decades - has continued under a state of emergency declared nearly 30 years ago.

Even if human rights treaties³ permit the suspension of some rights during a state of emergency, it is well established in these treaties, and in customary international law, that some rights may never be suspended. In Amnesty International's experience, violations of the non-derogable rights to life and freedom from torture occur most frequently during an emergency when security forces are given licence to maintain public order with no effective executive, legislative or judicial control.

In **Peru** there is a causal link between sweeping powers given to the military in areas under emergency control and gross human rights violations - committed with impunity - including "disappearances", mass killings and torture. Amnesty International is concerned that the executive decrees issued since the dissolution of Congress in April this year have seriously undermined further the protection of human rights, including fair trial, and have helped to perpetuate the cycle of human rights violations.

². These remedies enable a detainee to be brought before a court to challenge the legality of the detention, and to be released if it is unlawful.

³. i.e., the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the American Convention on Human Rights.

In **India**, security forces have been given extraordinary powers in those states where the government faces increasingly violent opposition. These include broadly defined powers to shoot to kill with immunity from prosecution and powers of detention without charge or trial which facilitate torture.

The existence of some non-derogable rights does not implicitly authorize the indiscriminate suppression of other rights. In international law governments may suspend other rights only to the extent strictly required by the exigencies of the situation⁴. Every emergency measure must be proportionate to the immediate danger being confronted. Furthermore, a right cannot be suspended unless other, ordinary measures are inadequate to deal with the crisis. A temporary suspension can only be justified if it will, in the words of the Special Rapporteur, "defuse the emergency and open the way to a return to normalcy"⁵.

One of the most widely abused rights is the right to liberty. Government opponents are often arrested on the basis of vague and broad emergency provisions which have little to do with legitimate ways of tackling a crisis.

In **Sierra Leone**, where a state of emergency was declared after a military coup in April this year, people associated with the former government are being held without charge or trial, under a proclamation giving the National Provisional Ruling Council virtually unrestricted powers of detention which cannot be challenged in any court.

Mr. Chairman,

All national constitutions and legislation should include detailed provisions shaping emergency powers in accordance with international standards and limiting their impact on human rights. Amnesty International has therefore noted with interest the Special Rapporteur's draft guidelines for the development of national legislation on states of emergency and we look forward to their further elaboration. Such guidelines would be useful, for example, in countries of the **Commonwealth of Independent States**, where we have been concerned about the possible impact on human rights of the many states of emergency being proclaimed with few adequate controls in national law.

Amnesty International welcomes the expansion in the guidelines of a core set of rights which may never be suspended, in particular, steps taken towards making non-derogable the safeguards necessary to ensure a fair trial.

Amnesty International has welcomed the recent Commission on Human Rights resolution⁶ passed on the recommendation of the Sub-Commission, which calls on states to

⁴. As set out, for example, in article 4(1) International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

⁵. UN Doc: E/CN.4/Sub.2/1991/28, Annex 1, section 6.

⁶. Resolution 1992/35 of the Commission on Human Rights.

introduce the vital safeguard of habeas corpus, amparo or similar mechanism and to ensure that it may never be suspended. We hope the Special Rapporteur will monitor closely, and report on, the implementation of this resolution.

We have noted the Special Rapporteur's intention to give both governments and non-governmental organizations the opportunity to comment on information supplied by the other. It is unclear to what extent this valuable working method has been implemented by the Special Rapporteur. We encourage him to develop this procedure, as well as his innovative "emergency communication system", and to include full details in his annual reports.

Amnesty International also considers that a deeper understanding of the impact on human rights of states of emergency and possible solutions could be achieved if the Special Rapporteur reinstated the practice, started in his Third Annual Report, of analyzing each year the relevant law and practice of one or more countries.

Mr. Chairman,

Political turmoil, violent uprising or abuses committed by armed opposition groups can never justify the violation by governments of standards for the protection of fundamental human rights, including controls on emergency powers. If national security is achieved at the expense of respect for human rights, Mr. Chairman, it becomes a parody of itself.

Thank you.

Encouragement of universal ratification of human rights instruments
Oral statement by Amnesty International

Mr Chairman,

In 1948 the governments of the United Nations proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as "a common standard of achievement for all people and all nations". The rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration have since been codified and further elaborated in the International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and on Civil and Political Rights, its Optional Protocols, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and other important human rights instruments.

The rights set out in the two Covenants are interdependent and related. Amnesty International seeks the ratification of both, although the specific rights which it is mandated to protect are to be found in the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The ratification of human rights instruments is a basic but essential step which every government can take to demonstrate its commitment to protecting human rights. As the UN World Conference on Human Rights draws closer, Amnesty International believes that it should be a primary goal for all member states of the UN to ratify those fundamental human rights treaties which form the core of the UN system for the protection and promotion of human rights. Those states which have already done so should carefully examine any limiting reservations which were made at the time of ratification, with a view to their withdrawal.

Amnesty International has welcomed a steady increase in the number of ratifications and accessions during 1991 and the first part of 1992. As of early July this year there were 115 States Parties to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 112 to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and 68 to the Convention against Torture. Sixty-six countries have ratified or acceded to the first Optional Protocol and 11 to the Second Optional Protocol of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Overall these figures represent a significant improvement but, on the eve of the World Conference, it is a matter of considerable regret that international human rights standards are still not universally accepted. For example, no permanent member of the UN Security Council is a party to all five of the instruments referred to above, although France and the Russian Federation have ratified or acceded to all but the Second Optional Protocol. Of the current members of the UN Commission on Human Rights, only four of its 53 members - Australia, Finland, the Netherlands and Portugal - are parties to all five of these instruments. Ratifications during this year of one or more of these instruments by Angola, Brazil, Bulgaria, Chile, Cyprus, Guinea-Bissau and the United States of America - are a welcome step but Amnesty International considers it particularly important that **every** member of these bodies gives priority attention to becoming a

State Party to all these treaties in the very near future.

Ratification of international human rights treaties should be an occasion for a state to review its own legislation and practice, to ensure that these are in full conformity with the standards set by the international community. Amnesty International therefore believes that states should ratify international human rights instruments without limiting reservations, declarations or understandings. These undermine the guarantees contained in the treaties and call into question the willingness of a state to comply fully with the international obligations contained in the treaties.

Consequently, while Amnesty International has long urged the ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights by the United States of America, it is concerned by the unusually large number of limiting reservations, understandings and declarations which accompanied the ratification. We are particularly concerned by the reservation to Article 6 of the Covenant which guarantees the fundamental right to life and prohibits the execution of juvenile offenders, from which no derogation is ever permitted.¹ Other legally binding international standards, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, state - and resolutions adopted in this Sub-Commission and by the UN General Assembly confirm - that the application of the death penalty for crimes committed by persons under 18 years of age violates minimum international standards for the protection of human rights applicable to all member states.

In addition, States Parties should take all necessary steps to cooperate fully with the monitoring bodies established under these treaties, which have an essential role in ensuring a common standard of implementation. To achieve this, States Parties should accord high priority to the prompt compliance with all reporting obligations and to implementing the recommendations of those bodies.

Mr Chairman,

The promise of a common standard for all people has yet to be achieved. The basic rights to food, housing and security are denied to millions. Throughout the world, people are imprisoned, tortured, "disappeared" or killed in violation of fundamental standards. After all this time, we should have achieved the aim, which so many share, of universal ratification. We should be seeing the benefits that can ensue when a government summons up the will to implement internationally accepted standards for the protection and promotion of all human rights. Amnesty International would urge the Sub-Commission to look carefully at this question and explore new initiatives to hasten the universal acceptance of human rights instruments.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Word count: 924

¹Since September 1985, five prisoners have been executed in three US states for crimes committed when they were 17 years old and more than 30 other juvenile offenders are currently under sentence of death in 13 states.

UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination
and Protection of Minorities
44th Session
Working Group on Indigenous Populations

Delivered: 30 July 1992

Oral statement by Amnesty International

Madam Chairman,

Throughout the world, indigenous peoples are deprived of internationally recognized human rights – civil, political, economic, social and cultural. Even in countries with laws which are formally protective of the rights of indigenous peoples, they may still be subjected to massive and persistent violations.

This Working Group is one of the bodies which strives to promote and protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples throughout the world. The Group's important work includes documenting and suggesting measures to redress a wide range of abuses, including violations of the right to life and physical security, deprivation and discrimination in areas such as health care, education, housing and land. Amnesty International, under its more limited mandate, directs its efforts toward exposing and ending certain violations, such as extrajudicial execution and the judicial death penalty, "disappearance", torture and ill-treatment (including rape and sexual abuse), the unfair trial of political prisoners, and their imprisonment as prisoners of conscience - persistent abuses which have been directed against indigenous peoples on a massive scale in a number of countries.

Amnesty International's efforts toward this end since the Working Group last met have included campaigns against torture, rape and death in custody in India, where many of the victims were tribal people, and against political killings in the Philippines, where several members of tribal communities in the Cordillera region were killed in circumstances strongly suggesting official involvement. In Australia, where there is a high incidence of Aboriginal deaths in custody, Amnesty International has called on the government to fully investigate these deaths and to bring to justice officials implicated in any abuses.

In the context of 1992, being marked throughout the world as the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Europeans in the region now known as the Americas, Amnesty International initiated a special program of action to draw attention to human rights abuses

suffered by indigenous peoples of the Americas. In April, it produced a statement highlighting illustrative examples of arbitrary arrest, torture and ill-treatment, "disappearance," extrajudicial execution and judicial death sentences directed against indigenous peoples in a number of countries in the region, including Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico and the United States.

In the course of more than thirty years of work directed at halting human rights abuses, Amnesty International has found certain similarities in the contexts and conflicts which give rise to violations directed against indigenous peoples. They may be singled out for such abuses because of their ethnic or national origins, or because they were working to promote indigenous rights. The discrimination and economic deprivation which indigenous peoples suffer can render them particularly vulnerable to the human rights abuses Amnesty International works against; some sectors, such as indigenous people who have become refugees, or been internally displaced and isolated indigenous groups, can be more vulnerable still.

No one is safe: victims reported to Amnesty International in the course of 1992 have included indigenous political, religious, and community leaders, women, children and old people. Those who work with indigenous peoples or support their cause, relatives of indigenous activists and those who have witnessed abuses have also become the victims of human rights violations.

Sometimes indigenous peoples are in danger merely because of where they live. In situations of internal conflict, such as currently facing Peru and Colombia, indigenous people resident in contested areas may be subjected to abuses by both sides. In other contexts, simply to be resident in areas where the official security forces are engaged in anti-drugs operations, as in Bolivia, or where governments favour non-indigenous settlement in order to secure frontiers for reasons of "national security," as in Brazil, may render indigenous people vulnerable to abuses.

Throughout the world, many violations directed against indigenous peoples stem from the struggle for land and resources; often their lands and resources, or lands and resources they claim, may be wanted by the state or private commercial interests for economic exploitation. In such situations, indigenous peoples may become vulnerable to abuses by state agents, or, as has been repeatedly documented by Amnesty International in Brazil, may find that the state does not effectively investigate or prosecute abuses carried out by non-state agents.

The discrimination and social and economic deprivation which indigenous peoples suffer in many countries throughout the world, including for example, Mexico, the USA and Canada, may contribute to discriminatory practices in policy and prosecution and limit their access to adequate legal representation, and can make it more difficult for indigenous peoples to seek redress when their rights are violated.

Often, violations against indigenous peoples are carried out by members of the security forces, acting sometimes in uniform and sometimes in plain clothes in the guise of the so-called "death squads". In countries such as Guatemala, civil defence patrols, formed

at military behest and acting under military orders, have also been responsible for human rights violations against indigenous peoples. In a number of countries including Peru, both military forces and armed opposition groups have committed abuses against indigenous peoples. In some countries, such as Mexico, the authorities appear to have colluded or acquiesced in abuses carried out against indigenous peoples by private individuals, including hired gunmen. In many countries, those responsible for abuses against indigenous peoples, whether state or private agents, appear to benefit from virtual impunity for their deeds. This may be the case even where some form of official inquiry into past abuses did take place, but the courts have still not brought any perpetrators to justice, as is the case for example in Chile.

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of indigenous organization in many areas of the world: groups have been formed at community, national, regional and international level to protect indigenous rights and to bring their demands to public attention. A growing international awareness of environmental and ecological issues coincides in some cases with indigenous peoples' traditional beliefs and practices concerning protection of the environment and has gained indigenous organizations new understanding and allies at the international level. Some governments and intergovernmental bodies are in turn devoting increased attention to the demands and needs of indigenous peoples.

Although much has been accomplished, principally by indigenous peoples themselves, the human rights of indigenous peoples continue to be massively abused in many parts of the world and much remains to be done at national and international level to redress the situation. This October Amnesty International will publish a major report on human rights violations suffered by indigenous peoples throughout the Americas, including a series of recommendations as to how it believes governments, inter-governmental bodies and other agencies should help ensure that indigenous peoples enjoy the full range of rights guaranteed them under international standards. These include for example those rights set out in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and the two International Covenants on human rights, the international conventions dealing with refugees and children's rights, the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination and discrimination against women and the International Labour Organisation's Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (No. 169).

In the early 1980s, at the height of the army counter-insurgency campaign which claimed the lives of tens of thousands of non-combatant Indians in Guatemala, a leader of a Guatemalan indigenous campesino organization wrote to Amnesty International concerning the work of international human rights organizations:

"Your work has supported and renewed our conviction that no matter how poor or ill-treated we are, we have the right to life and to respect, that to kill a new-born baby or an old person bowed down by the persecution of the army constitutes the gravest of crimes that deserves the most energetic condemnation.

"I believe that it is on this point that your work and our own as a peasant organization converge: the defence of the right to life in all of its aspects, the rights to physical integrity, to security ... to a simple but fully human life, the end to all of the threats that have weighed so heavily on our people, both Indian and *ladino* [non-indigenous] for so many centuries."

It is in this spirit that Amnesty International hopes to contribute throughout 1992 and beyond, to the efforts of indigenous peoples to attain full respect for their rights. In the same spirit it wishes the Working Group every success in its vitally important efforts to assure full protection for the rights of indigenous peoples. During the UN's 1993 Year of Indigenous Populations, Amnesty International will continue to draw attention to abuses against indigenous peoples throughout the world.

Thank you, Madam Chairman