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WEEKLY UPDATE SERVICE 17/92

Contained in this weekly update are external items on Pakistan, Myanmar, Iran, Greece and Afghanistan and internal items on Venezuela, Nicaragua and the South Africa publication.

1. NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

Israel/Lebanon - 5 May - PLEASE NOTE NEW DATE! (New information)

Please note that the embargo date of this news release has AGAIN been changed, after the Israel Section notified us of a public holiday on 6 May. The embargo date is now TUESDAY 5 APRIL 1992. Sorry about the changes.

The news release has been sent to you and the q and a will follow shortly. Because the subject matter of this report is very complex from a mandate point of view, do feel free to contact the IS press office if you have any queries.

China (Tibet) - 20 May 1992

A document and news release on repression in Tibet to go with a small-scale campaign. The document includes chapters on prisoners of conscience, torture and ill-treatment, killings and extrajudicial executions of demonstrators and the death penalty. An electronic news release has also been prepared which contains very good footage of riot scenes in Tibet, with security forces clearly beating up Buddhist monks. There is also some new footage belonging to AI, of a monk describing the torture he suffered at the hands of the security forces.

Burundi - 28 May - PLEASE NOTE NEW DATE! (New Information)

Targeted news release with short document, following recent mission to Burundi.

Pakistan - 3 June - PLEASE NOTE NEW DATE! (New Information)

A document and targeted news release on arrests in Sind.

South Africa - 10 June (New Information)

The embargo of this international news release and document is now confirmed. The document deals with security force involvement in torture and political killings over the past two years.

Annual Report - 9 July (New Information)

Thank you for your quick responses to our query about the embargo date. All responses were positive, so 9 July is the confirmed embargo date. We have now sent out a further inquiry about the timing of the embargo, suggesting 1300 hrs gmt (please see note to press officers sent out on 7 April). Thanks to all those of you who have replied so far, and if you have not yet expressed your opinions, please let us know as soon as possible. So far, more people seem to be in favour than have strong feelings against it, so if a 1300 hrs embargo will cause you significant problems, do let us know by the end of this week, Friday 1 May.

POSSIBLE NEWS INITIATIVES, STILL TO BE CONFIRMED

Greece (New Information)

The IS press office is considering the feasibility of a news release to go with a document on ill-treatment at the end of June. More information shortly.

Nepal (New Information)

There is a possibility of a news release to go with a document on Nepal. More details later.

2. ASA 33/WU 02/92 EXTERNAL
29 April 1992

PAKISTAN: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CONCERNED ABOUT EXECUTIONS

On 27 April, Amnesty International wrote to President Ghulam Ishaq Khan of Pakistan to protest about the executions of two people earlier in the month. The organization fears that these two executions might signal a resumption of executions as no death sentences were previously known to have been carried out in Pakistan since 1988.

Amnesty International learnt of over 200 death sentences imposed by courts in Pakistan in 1991, a steep increase over the 52 death sentences known by Amnesty International to have been imposed in 1990. Approximately 70 of the death sentences were imposed by Special Courts for the Suppression of Terrorist Activities and approximately 35 were passed by Special Courts for Speedy Trial. In its letter to the President, Amnesty International expressed concern that the procedures of these courts do not conform to internationally recognized minimum standards for fair trial. They violate the right of defendants to a fair hearing, denying them the right to a public trial, the right to present a full defence and the right to be presumed innocent.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty as the ultimate form of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. It urged the President to commute the death sentences of all the prisoners currently under sentence of death and to ensure that no further executions are carried out.

3. ASA 16/WU 02/92 EXTERNAL
29 April 1992

MYANMAR: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL WELCOMES THE RELEASE OF A NUMBER OF PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE

Amnesty International welcomes reports of the release of a number of prisoners of conscience by the ruling military State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) in Myanmar (Burma). The SLORC reportedly began to release some political prisoners on 25 April, and says that they will continue gradually to release those who are not deemed a threat to national security. Prisoners of conscience who have been freed include 84-year-old U Nu, the last democratically elected prime minister of Burma, who had been held under house arrest since December 1989. Five of his supporters have also reportedly been released from the terms of their house arrest. Most of the prisoners of conscience were arrested for their peaceful political activities in support of the introduction of a democratically-elected government.

Ma Theingee, a National League for Democracy (NLD) information officer, was reportedly released from Insein Prison, where hundreds of other political prisoners are still detained. Ma Theingee was arrested with scores of other NLD supporters in July 1989 when the SLORC clamped down on peaceful political opposition and dissent. In spite of the detention of most of its leadership, the NLD won the May 1990 general elections; however, the SLORC has continued to refuse to transfer power to the elected civilian government.

There is no indication that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, 1991 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and NLD leader, will be released from house arrest where she has been detained without charge or trial since July 1989. Reports state that she will now be allowed visits from her family, which she has been denied for over two years. Another NLD leader who is said to have been released is Chit Khaing, who was arrested in another massive clampdown on opposition political party activists by the SLORC in October 1990.

While Amnesty International welcomes the releases of these prisoners of conscience, it remains concerned about hundreds of other prisoners of conscience and possible prisoners of conscience who are still imprisoned. The organization has documented the arrests of over 1500 political prisoners since the September 1988 military coup d'etat. Some of them are being held without charge or trial; hundreds of others have been sentenced to long terms of imprisonment after unfair trials by military tribunals.

It is unclear from reports whether recently released prisoners of conscience have been freed unconditionally. Amnesty International calls on the SLORC to ensure that they have indeed been released without restrictions on their freedom of association and movement, and will not be subject to re-arrest for the peaceful expression of their political views.

Amnesty International also remains concerned about massive human rights violations committed by the Myanmar security forces against members of ethnic and religious minorities. In particular it is concerned about deliberate killings and ill-treatment of Burmese Muslims living in Myanmar's southwestern Rakhine (Arakan) State. Many of them were ill-treated and killed when they were forced by the Myanmar armed forces to act as porters for troops in the area. The repression of Muslims in the Rakhine State has been part of a consistent pattern of gross human rights violations by the SLORC against all forms of political opposition and against vulnerable and weak sections of the country's population.

4. MDE 13/WU 02/92 EXTERNAL
29 April 1992

IRAN: REPORTED RELEASE OF 108 PRISONERS INCLUDING EIGHT PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE

Eight prisoners of conscience were among some 108 prisoners sentenced by the Islamic Revolution Courts who have been pardoned and released, according to the Iranian News Agency IRNA (13 April 1992). They were released on the occasion of the 13th anniversary of the establishment of the Islamic Republic, 1 April.

The eight prisoners of conscience were Abdolali Bazargan, Mohammad Tavassoli Hojati, Ali Ardalan, Nezameddin Movahed, Dr Habibollah Davaran, Akbar Zarinehbaf, Abol Fazl Mir Shams Shahshahani and Hashem Sabbaghian. A ninth prisoner of conscience, Khosrow Mansourian, although not mentioned by IRNA, has also been pardoned and released according to reliable sources.

Amnesty International is currently seeking official confirmation that their release is unconditional as well as a list of the names of the other 100 prisoners who benefited from this amnesty.

The nine prisoners of conscience were arrested in June 1990 after signing an open letter addressed to President Hashemi Rafsanjani. The letter, signed by 90 people, had called for the implementation of constitutional guarantees and for freedom and justice. It had also criticized the government's handling of the economy. Some of the nine had served in the government headed by Mehdi Bazargan, the first Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and they are all members of the "Association for the Defence of Freedom and Sovereignty of the Iranian Nation".

They were tried in May and June 1991 and were given prison sentences ranging from six months to three years.

5. EUR 25/WU 01/92 EXTERNAL
29 April 1992

GREECE: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CONCERNED ABOUT FORTHCOMING TRIAL IN ATHENS

Amnesty International has expressed its concern to the Prime Minister and Minister of Justice about the forthcoming trial on 4 May in Athens of four members of the Anti-War Anti-Nationalistic movement.

Stratis Bournazos, Christina Tsamoura, Vangelis Sotiropoulos and Maria Kalogeropoulou were arrested by police in central Athens on 4 April while they were distributing leaflets. They were held overnight at the General Police Headquarters and afterwards charged with disseminating false information; inciting citizens to acts of violence or to dissension; disturbing friendly relations with another country. All these offences are punishable by terms of imprisonment under the Greek Penal Code. They were freed pending trial.

The leaflet that the four defendants were distributing in no way advocates violence. It is entitled "Our neighbouring people are not our enemies. No to war and nationalism" and among other things criticized government foreign policy and attitudes towards former Yugoslav Macedonia. If the defendants are convicted and imprisoned Amnesty International will consider them to be prisoners of conscience and will call for their immediate and unconditional release.

Amnesty International also expressed its concern about the sentencing of Irene Petropoulou, the editor of the gay and lesbian magazine Amphi to five months' imprisonment and a fine in November 1991 for an article she published in the magazine March 1991. The court found her guilty of "offending public feelings of decency and sexual morals". Irene Petropoulou is free pending appeal. Amnesty International would consider her to be a prisoner of conscience if she were imprisoned.

In its communication to the government, Amnesty International cited Article 10 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which Greece ratified in 1974:

"Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers."

Amnesty International considers that these prosecutions are in contravention of the right to freedom of expression.

6. ASA 11/WU 01/92 EXTERNAL
30 April 1992

INTERNAL

Please note that the IS press office will be sending this out to international agencies tomorrow, Thursday 30 May, as an 'Advice to Editors - For immediate release'. If any alterations need to be made, in view of the rapidly changing situation in Afghanistan, they will be sent in an urgent note to press officers tomorrow.

EXTERNAL

AFGHANISTAN: AI CALLS FOR SAFEGUARDS FOR PRISONERS

Amnesty International is appealing to the ruling council in Kabul, headed by Professor Sibghatullah Mujaddedi, and Mujahideen groups in control of other areas in Afghanistan to ensure the safety of all prisoners, whether those currently in detention or those who may yet be taken prisoner during the current upheaval in Afghanistan.

The organization is also calling for firm safeguards against torture and extrajudicial executions throughout Afghanistan, for the safety of all prisoners held by Mujahideen groups in Pakistan, and for the immediate and unconditional release of anyone detained solely on account of their political beliefs or ethnic origin.

Amnesty International's concern relates to prisoners detained under the former government who may continue to be held, as well as prisoners held by the Mujahideen groups over the past 14 years.

As of late March 1992, Amnesty International believed that between 2,000 and 3,000 political prisoners were held in Pul-e-Charkhi prison, Kabul's largest jail. They comprised political prisoners sentenced in unfair trials by special courts under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior and prisoners held without charge or trial by the Ministry of State Security for periods lasting up to 10 years.

According to the international press, the Governor of Kabul announced on 20 April that under a government decree, all prisoners held in Pul-e-Charkhi, were to be released within ten days. Hundreds of prisoners, the majority of whom were political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience, were then reported to have been released daily. So far the exact number of those released is not known, although most reports indicate that cells in Pul-e-Charkhi prison are largely unoccupied. However, it is still unclear if political prisoners held in former government jails in other towns and cities in Afghanistan have also been released. Amnesty International is concerned that, in the current political situation in Afghanistan, such prisoners may be subjected to torture or extrajudicial executions because of their political affiliation or ethnic origin.

Amnesty International is further concerned that there has been no news about the fate of hundreds of political prisoners reportedly detained by various Mujahideen groups during the past 14 years. Some of these prisoners have reportedly been held in Mujahideen bases in Afghanistan, and some in prison camps established by Mujahideen parties in border areas in Pakistan.

These political prisoners are known to have been held by Mujahideen groups without charge or trial. Scores of them have reportedly been subjected to frequent torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment. Deliberate and arbitrary killings of prisoners and others are also reported to have been carried out by the Mujahideen groups. Amnesty International is concerned that prisoners held by Mujahideen groups may continue to be subjected to torture and that in the current period of unrest, some may be executed.

Amnesty International is aware of a general amnesty for the former government and ruling

party members declared by Professor Sibghatullah Mujaddedi on 29 April 1992, but remains gravely concerned that in the present condition of uncertainty and instability the lives and safety of those that may yet be imprisoned or may become target of possible reprisal killings or ill-treatment, are not sufficiently assured. It is therefore urgently appealing to all groups exercising political control in Afghanistan to ensure that all political prisoners are treated in accordance with law and that everyone is protected from all acts of violent reprisal, including torture or summary executions.

7. AMR 53/WU 02/92 INTERNAL
29 April 1992

VENEZUELA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL FACT-FINDING MISSION VISITS VENEZUELA

Two Amnesty International delegates are going to Venezuela on 1 May for a one-week research visit. The main objectives of the visit are: to gather first-hand information about a number of cases of torture and arbitrary killings reported to the organization in the latter half of 1991 and to obtain further details about the human rights situation in the light of the attempted military coup on 4 February 1992.

8. AMR 43/WU 01/92 INTERNAL
29 April 1992

NICARAGUA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL FACT-FINDING MISSION VISITS NICARAGUA

Two AI delegates will visit Nicaragua between 4 and 13 May 1992 to carry out on-site research into the current human rights situation in the country. The two delegates include a member of Amnesty International's research team and a human rights consultant based in Chile who was formerly Amnesty International's researcher on Nicaragua. The delegates will hold meetings with representatives of Nicaraguan human rights groups, other non-governmental organizations and government officials. The last visit to the country by an AI delegation was in 1989.

9. AFR 53/WU 01/92 INTERNAL
29 April 1992

URGENT: PLEASE PASS ON TO YOUR PUBLICATIONS MANAGER

The South Africa document embargoed for 10 June will now be published as a new format report (A5). The report covers the period from January 1991 to March 1992 and chronicles human rights violations and abuses by both security forces and armed opposition groups. It contains a summary of Amnesty International's continuing concerns in South Africa since the reforms of 1990.

The report costs £4 and the usual discounts will apply. Sections will receive their standing order for this publication. Sections wishing to amend their standing order must FAX their amendment to Talat Omer at the International Secretariat immediately.

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ADDITION TO WEEKLY UPDATE SERVICE 17/92

INTERNAL

Please note that the Israel news release embargo date has been changed to Tuesday 5 May.
Apologies for the mistake in yesterday's weekly update 17/92.

1. AMR 51/WU 06/92 EXTERNAL
30 April 1992

USA: LOS ANGELES POLICE TRIAL VERDICT

Amnesty International today said there should be a full judicial inquiry into reports of routine police brutality in the Los Angeles Police Department. Amnesty International has received such reports over a period of years.

Amnesty International said it had noted the verdict in the trial of four police officers in Los Angeles, charged in connection with the beating of Rodney King in March 1991, videotaped by a witness and shown widely on television. "This widely publicized case is just one of many such cases we know of in Los Angeles," said the organization. "The outcry which followed the case underlines our belief that a judicial inquiry into the Los Angeles police is overdue.

"At first sight the verdict seems very surprising, although we will of course have to wait for full details of the verdict before we can make a full assessment."

Amnesty International is concerned, however, that whatever the basis for the acquittal, it may send out a signal to the police that strong-arm tactics are acceptable. This may in itself lead to new cases of police brutality in the US. Already, the organization has received numerous allegations of police ill-treatment across the country, including reports from Ohio, Oregon, Alabama, Connecticut and New York.

In September last year, a three-person fact-finding team went to Los Angeles to investigate allegations of routine police brutality in the city area. There they met with lawyers, police, city and county officials and civil rights groups to get information on the scale of police brutality. Amnesty International is currently working on a report following that research visit and other information received since.

Amnesty International has also been investigating allegations of police brutality in other areas of the US. In December 1990 the organization issued a report on allegations of police torture in Chicago over a period of 12 years, including reports of electric shock torture, mock executions, near suffocation and beatings. Torture is outlawed in international law and the US has ratified the United Nations Convention Against Torture.

Other matters of concern to Amnesty International in the US include the use of the death penalty - California recently used the gas chamber to execute its first prisoner for 25 years, Robert Alton Harris, amid massive adverse international publicity - and unfair trials in cases where defendants have alleged their prosecutions were politically motivated.