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WEEKLY UPDATE SERVICE 56/93

Contained in this weekly update are external items on China and Tibet (x2), Mauritania and Afghanistan and an internal for response only item on Uruguay.

NEWS INITIATIVES

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

UN WORLD CONFERENCE-RELATED NEWS INITIATIVES ONLY THROUGHOUT JUNE

WORLD CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS NEWS(New Information)

Amnesty International's press office in Vienna will be based at AI's tent outside the Austria Centre and will be open for 24 hours each day. Telephone: +43 1 219 3572/3573. Fax/E-Mail: +43 1 219 3574. These will be installed on 11 June.

AI's press team will be staying at Pension Dr Geissler, Postgasse 14, 1010 Vienna. Telephone: +43 1 533 2803.

The strategy team in Vienna will report developments to sections via the IS press office to section press officers. Can press officers ensure that this information is circulated to the relevant people in their section.

General enquiries from press officers should go to Paula and James at the IS Press Office, on Tel: +44 71 413 5562/5810.

Annual Report - 0006 hrs gmt, 8 July(New Information)

Please note that the embargo time has been changed to 0006 hrs gmt, 8 July 1993. Annual Report publication, Worldwide Summary, Regional Summaries, Regional Updates, news release. All these materials, except the news release have been e-mailed/faxed/telexed to you and hard copies of the formatted version are being swift-aired to you. The news release should be ready to send next week.

Indonesia (Aceh) - 28 July

Document and news release to go with action on massive numbers of political killings.

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

Saudi Arabia - 1 July

A weekly update item is being written to go with the document: Saudi Arabia: An Upsurge in Public Executions, AI Index: MDE 23/04/93. The document and weekly update item will be embargoed for 1 July and will be sent out to selected international media by the IS Press Office. Please note that the document has been sent out in the weekly mailing.

Section Initiatives

British Section - Update on European World Conference Press Briefing in June

Please note the time, date and place of this press conference.

The Press Conference will be held on Thursday, June 10th, at 11am at the International Press Centre, Boulevard de Charlemagne 1, 1040 Bruxelles.

The two speakers are:

Ken Coates - MEP and chairman of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human rights

Daphne Davies - Amnesty International British Section

We will also be asking someone from a Brussels-based NGO.

A press release will accompany the press conference.

The conference will call on the EC and its member states to adopt a coordinated and focused approach at the World Conference with a view to adapting and improving the UN human rights mechanisms and to promote the proposal to appoint a Special Commissioner on Human rights. In addition the Press Conference will provide journalists with a critique of the EC's own human rights record.

Please will Press Officers in EC Sections contact their media who have contacts in Brussels to let them know about the Press Conference

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2. ASA 17/WU 06/93 EXTERNAL

4 June 1993

CHINA: CRACK DOWN ON PROTESTS IN TIBET

A series of demonstrations and arrests took place in late May 1993 in Lhasa, capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region, following the visit to Tibet of a delegation of European Community (EC) diplomats on a fact finding tour focusing on human rights.

The EC visit had been preceded by the arrest of two Tibetans involved in monitoring human rights. Gendun Rinchen, a 46 year old travel agency employee, and Lobsang Yonten, a former monk in his mid-sixties, were arrested on 13 May 1993, three days before the arrival in Lhasa of the EC delegation. The two Tibetans are known to have been planning to contact the delegation during its week-long visit and were involved in monitoring human rights. This is believed to be the reason for their arrest, though they have been officially accused of "stealing state secrets" and engaging in "separatist activities". An unknown number of Tibetans were also reported to have been detained in connection with the EC delegation visit.

On 24 and 25 May 1993 major protests involving up to 2,000 people took place in Lhasa, during which some demonstrators stoned government buildings, including the Lhasa police headquarters, and police fired tear-gas at the protesters. The unrest reportedly started in protest at sharp price rises and rent increases, but turned into a pro-independence protest. According to various sources, several factors contributed to the building up of discontent, including the arrests preceding the EC visit, the ending of price controls for oil and grain, and the anniversary on 23 May of the 1951 annexation of Tibet by China. Unconfirmed reports said that some Tibetan monks were arrested on 23 May 1993 for briefly raising the Tibetan flag.

Foreign residents in Lhasa said the demonstration on 24 May began peacefully, but police started firing tear-gas when rocks were thrown by the protesters and slogans were changed into calls for Tibetan independence. According to unconfirmed reports, a Tibetan boy died from inhaling large amounts of the gas and some protesters were injured by exploding tear-gas canisters. Official sources said that a number of police officers had been injured. Foreign residents claimed to have seen a number of arrests and casualties on both sides.

A Chinese government spokesman stated on 27 May that what happened in Lhasa was an internal affair of China and that it was "absolutely justified to stop law-breaking acts and maintain law and order".

Further arrests were reportedly carried out during the following days when small groups of Tibetans attempted to stage peaceful protests. On 28 May up to nine people, including three monks, were reportedly detained by police after demonstrating in the Tibetan quarter of Lhasa, and on 1 June between seven and thirteen Tibetans were reportedly arrested in pro-independence protests. According to some sources, tension may mount during the festival of Saga Dawa to be held on 4 June, one of the holiest days of the Buddhist calendar, when thousands of Tibetan Buddhists are expected to circumambulate the outer circuit of Lhasa.

Amnesty International has urged the authorities to release immediately and unconditionally any Tibetans who took part peacefully in these demonstrations. It is concerned that further arbitrary arrests may be carried out as a result of these protests and that those held may be ill-treated in detention. The organization has documented numerous cases of Tibetan political prisoners tortured in detention, including those of three prisoners who died in jail. Amnesty International is particularly concerned about the health of Lobsang Yonten, who suffers from tuberculosis and requires regular medication. It has urged the authorities to ensure that all those detained, including Lobsang Yonten and Gendun Rinchen, are protected from all forms of torture and ill-treatment.

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3. ASA 17/WU 07/93 EXTERNAL

4 June 1993

CHINA: PROMINENT DISSIDENT RELEASED IN BEIJING

Xu Wenli, a prominent dissident who spent 12 years in solitary confinement in a Beijing jail, was released on parole on 26 May 1993, three years before his 15-year prison sentence was due to expire. The release was an apparent concession to international pressure before the renewal of China's Most Favoured Nation trade status by the USA and the fourth anniversary of the 4 June 1989 massacre in Beijing.

According to foreign correspondents in Beijing, who witnessed his emotional reunion with his wife and daughter, Xu Wenli said he had heard of his parole only a few hours before his release. Chinese official sources said he was granted parole because of his "performance" in prison.

Xu Wenli's release is the latest gesture made by the Chinese authorities in reaction to international pressure and criticism of China's human rights record. Since the beginning of the year, the authorities have announced the release on parole of a few prisoners of conscience. They included Wang Xizhe, a former worker who had been imprisoned in south China at the same time as Xu Wenli for his activities during the Democracy Wall movement. Both were featured in Amnesty International's report, Torture in China, issued in December 1992, in which the organisation expressed concern at their continued imprisonment in solitary confinement.

Amnesty International had campaigned for the release of Xu Wenli since his arrest in 1981. A former electrician, now aged 49, Xu Wenli was arrested for publishing an unofficial journal during the "Democracy Wall" movement of the late 1970s and because of his contacts with other pro-democracy activists, most of whom were arrested at the same time in 1981. He was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment on "counter-revolutionary" charges and jailed at Beijing Prison No.1, where prison authorities referred to him as "Special Prisoner No.1".

Xu Wenli was held in solitary confinement throughout his imprisonment and subjected to other punishments which constitute cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. In 1985, he was punished for smuggling out of prison an account of his case by being placed under "strict regime" in a small, damp, windowless cell, which had no bed and was infected with insects, with reduced food rations and denial of reading and family visits. His punishment ended in April 1989, when the first family visit in four years was allowed and his wife reported that Xu Wenli was in very poor mental and physical health. His health somewhat improved during the following years, though he continued to be held in solitary confinement and subjected to various restrictions.

Amnesty International welcomes the release of Xu Wenli, but is concerned that thousands of other political prisoners remain held throughout China, often in harsh conditions of detention. The organisation will continue to press for the release of all prisoners of conscience.

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4. AFR 38/WU 01/93 EXTERNAL

4 June 1993

INTERNAL

The following item may be used to raise publicity in any way you wish now. It may also be highlighted during the UN World Conference on Human Rights, if appropriate.

EXTERNAL

MAURITANIA: PERPETRATORS OF HUMAN RIGHTS ATROCITIES GIVEN LEGAL IMMUNITY

In an apparent attempt to avoid criticism of the Mauritanian Government during the United Nations (UN) World Conference on Human Rights, the Mauritanian parliament passed a bill on 29 May granting total amnesty to security force members for all offences during a 3-year period from 1989 to 1992. During that time, more than 400 black Mauritians were executed extrajudicially, thousands were detained for lengthy periods without charge or trial and dozens more "disappeared".

Between April 1989 and the end of 1990, thousands of black Mauritians were expelled from Mauritania along with many Senegalese following inter-communal violence between Mauritanian and Senegalese. In the context of these mass expulsions at least 100 black Mauritians were extrajudicially executed by government forces or by pro-government militia and thousands were detained without charge, 15 of whom died as a result of torture. For more details, see: Mauritania - Human Rights Violations in the Senegal River Valley (AI Index: AFR 38/10/90).

Following further widespread arrests in late 1990, members of the Mauritanian security forces reportedly killed more than 300 possible prisoners of conscience in custody over a period of five months. The authorities claimed they had uncovered a plot to overthrow the government, but no evidence was ever produced to support this claim and in reality it appears that those detained were picked up simply because of their ethnic origin.

Most of the deaths appear to have been caused by torture or other forms of ill-treatment, including extremely harsh prison conditions. Former prisoners have reported that detainees were subjected to the "jaguar" torture, where victims are hung upside down and beaten on the soles of their feet. Others had electric shocks applied to their genitals or had their skin and flesh burnt all over their bodies; many were buried up to their necks in sand for up to three hours at a time.

Most of the prisoners who died from ill-treatment or were executed extrajudicially were army officers or civil servants belonging to black ethnic groups from the south. They were rounded up in mass arrests in the country's two largest cities of Nouakchott and Nouadhibou. Relatives of those who have died or been killed in detention have persistently demanded government clarification of the fate of the victims. However, despite the first multi-party elections in 1992 and other political reforms, no official investigation into the human rights violations has been carried.

Amnesty International and other human rights organizations have repeatedly called for an independent and impartial inquiry into these human rights violations, whose findings and methods of investigations should be made public. The organization believes the inquiry should establish what has happened to everyone who was arrested and the cause and responsibility for the death of each of those who died - so that everyone responsible for ordering or carrying out torture, extrajudicial executions and other human rights violations can be brought to justice. The authorities have ignored these appeals. A complaint by lawyers on behalf of the widows of those killed in detention was rejected by the Ministry of Justice.

The Mauritanian authorities have said that the recent amnesty was announced as a sign of national

harmony. However, the real reason appears to be fear that local human rights groups, including one representing the widows of those killed in detention, might try to publicise their demands in Vienna at the UN World Conference on Human Rights. There is also concern that a similar reason may be behind the recent refusal of the French embassy in Mauritania's capital, Nouakchott, to grant visas to members of a Mauritanian human rights groups who had been invited to France by a French human rights group. The French authorities have not explained the visa denial.

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5. ASA 11/WU 02/93 EXTERNAL

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AFGHANISTAN: WIDESPREAD HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS COMMITTED AS CIVIL WAR CONTINUES

Amnesty International is gravely concerned about widespread human rights violations committed in the context of the continuing civil war in Afghanistan. The fundamental rights to life and security of the person are being disregarded by all parties to the conflict, which include government troops, militias, Mujahideen groups aligned to the government of President Rabbani and those opposed to it.

Deliberate and indiscriminate bombings of homes of unarmed civilians, hospitals and mosques have killed hundreds of people and left thousands injured, since fighting between government forces and the forces of an alliance between Hesb-i-Islami and Hesb-i-Wahdat, two Mujahideen groups, escalated on 12 May 1993 in and around the capital, Kabul. Among the dead and wounded were children, old people and women.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said on 20 May that Kabul's five main hospitals had treated over 4,500 injured; it estimated at least 1,000 people were killed in nine days of fighting. As the dead were mostly buried quickly, the exact toll is difficult to assess and may be considerably higher. Many of the injured were unable to get to hospitals because of continuing fighting along the roads. Doctors report that women who have been wounded are rarely taken to hospitals due to cultural constraints: many are believed to have died in their damaged homes due to lack of medical attention.

Kabul's hospitals are not safe either: all of them have been targets of rocket attacks which have killed scores of staff and patients and destroyed operating theatres and badly needed medical supplies. An ICRC spokesman reportedly said that one of the hospitals it supports in south Kabul appeared to have come under deliberate attack on 12 May when heavy artillery fire injured 11 patients and killed one.

More than a third of Kabul's 1.5 million inhabitants have fled the city in the last year and hundreds more are leaving now in search of safety, adding to the thousands of internally displaced persons in Afghanistan.

In spite of yet another agreement reached by rival Mujahideen groups on 20 May, fighting in Kabul has continued unabated. On 20 May Radio Kabul reported 16 dead and 86 injured in rocket attacks on residential areas. One rocket reportedly killed a thirteen-year old boy playing in the street. Another rocket reportedly hit a mosque, killing one man and injuring four. The 200-bed Military Hospital was hit twice in two days, injuring two people. A hospital official was quoted in the international press as saying, "we have had 34 rockets in the hospital compound in the past week", and that most patients had fled and two of the hospital's operating theatres had been destroyed. On 22 May rocket and artillery fire reportedly continued to pound Kabul - though this reportedly reduced on 23 May.

Amnesty International has received many reports of torture, including rape; unlawful detention; hostage-taking and deliberate and arbitrary killings perpetrated by every group involved in the Afghan civil war. In one case, inmates of a mental asylum were reported to have been raped repeatedly by Mujahideen soldiers. Several Mujahideen groups are reported to continue holding hostages. Government troops are said to have been given orders to shoot to kill looters rather than to arrest them.

The large scale of human rights abuses inflicted on the civilian population of Afghanistan is a matter of grave concern to Amnesty International. The organization urges the government in Kabul to ensure that its forces refrain from deliberate and indiscriminate bomb attacks on the civilian population and to enforce firm safeguards against torture and extrajudicial executions.

Amnesty International is also urging opposition Mujahideen groups, at the very least, to observe basic

humanitarian standards and to refrain from deliberate and arbitrary killings and torture.

"The desperate suffering of the civilian population of Afghanistan is something that the international community cannot ignore", Amnesty International said. "We appeal to governments around the world to respond to their plight and to use whatever influence they may have to ensure a restoration of respect for human lives and fundamental civil and political rights there."

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6. AMR 52/WU 01/93 INTERNAL FOR RESPONSE ONLY

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URUGUAY: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL WRITES TO MINISTER OF INTERIOR

Amnesty International wrote to the Minister of the Interior on 17 May, regarding two cases. Ronald Scarzella, a member of the **Movimiento por la Tierra** (Movement for Land), was found shot dead on 23 April 1993. Although the motive is not clear and although there is no evidence of government involvement, Amnesty International was concerned that full investigations should be carried out to clarify the full circumstances of the killing. It also noted that the killing had occurred in the context of a series of threats and other acts of intimidation against the Movimiento por la Tierra.

Amnesty International also asked to be kept informed about judicial investigations into allegations that in March a group of children held in the Miguelete Remand Home, in Montevideo, had been beaten. It was noted that the director of the home and the guards accused of carrying out the beatings had been arrested and that the judge investigating the case had ordered the centre to be closed.