
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 59/94

TO: PRESS OFFICERS
FROM: IS PRESS OFFICE
DATE: 25 MARCH 1994
INDEX: NWS 11/59/94
DISTR: SC/PO
NO OF WORDS:1043

NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - CHINA, TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

PLEASE NOTE: The Spanish translation of the item on Switzerland sent out in News Service 58/94 will be ready in time for the embargo.

PLEASE NOTE: There will be an election on Sunday 27 March 1994 for the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS). One of the candidates is Cesar Gaviria, the outgoing President of Colombia. There is some press attention to the issue of his human rights record. We should not give any comment to the press about this election or President Gaviria's candidature. Thanks.

NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Burundi - 16 May - SEE NEWS SERVICES 53/94 and 36/94
Hong Kong - 21 April - SEE NEWS SERVICE 36/94
Trade Unionists - 29 April - News release and focus article.

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

China - 29 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 54/94
Turkey - 30 March - SEE NEWS SERVICES 46/94 AND 26/94
Switzerland CAT - 19 April - SEE NEWS SERVICE 53/94
Israel & OT CAT - 25 April - SEE NEWS SERVICE 53/94

FORTHCOMING NEWS INITIATIVES

Saudi Arabia - 10 May - More details to follow
Annual Report - 7 July - SEE NEWS SERVICE 51/94

News Service 59/94

AI INDEX: ASA 17/WU 05/1994
EMBARGOED FOR 29 MARCH 1994

CHINA: PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS STEPPED UP SINCE JANUARY

On 2 February, seven police officers reportedly forced their way into the house of Pan Yiyuan, a 58-year-old protestant house-church leader, in Zhangzhou city in Fujian province and confiscated his personal letters, diaries, religious books, video and cassette tapes and bibles. Later that afternoon, Pan Yiyuan was called to the Zhangzhou public security bureau where he has been detained ever since.

Amnesty International believes that Pan Yiyuan is a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned purely for his peaceful religious activities. He is just one among more than 30 Protestant preachers and Catholic leaders who have been detained or placed under restrictions during the past few months in a stepped up pattern of religious persecution in China.

In a report published today, Amnesty International expresses fears that two new national regulations on religious activities, which came into force on 31 January, will result in further persecution of members of religious groups who do not meet official approval.

Although the new regulations include some guarantees for officially approved religious groups, they also set clear restrictions on freedom of religion; including the prohibition of evangelising and other religious activities carried out outside the control of official religious organizations.

"One of the effects of these regulations is to perpetuate the repression suffered by religious groups, such as Protestant 'house churches' and others who meet in private homes -- already the targets of police harassment," said Amnesty International.

A further six Protestants, all preachers from Anhui province, have been detained since July and August 1993 and are reportedly being administratively detained in a labour camp. They are among many others detained during the past year for their involvement in peaceful religious activities.

Amnesty International is appealing to the Chinese authorities for the immediate and unconditional release of all Christians detained or restricted solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of religion.

ENDS/

News Service 59/94

AI INDEX: AMR 49/WU 02/1994
25 March 1994

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO: AUTHORITIES THREATEN TO RESUME EXECUTIONS IN FLAGRANT VIOLATION OF INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS

Amnesty International today expressed outrage at the Trinidad and Tobago authorities' flagrant violation of international human rights standards by proposing to resume executions, which have been suspended for over 14 years.

On 24 March a warrant was issued for the execution of Lincoln Guerra and Brian Wallen to be carried out on 25 March between 6.00 and 9.00 am. They were convicted of murder in May 1989. Their appeal was dismissed in November 1993 by the Court of Appeal and the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council (JCPC) in London, Trinidad and Tobago's final court of appeal, rejected their petition for special leave to appeal on 21 March 1994.

Following the issuing of the death warrants, a constitutional motion was submitted to the High Court in Trinidad. This was dismissed in a late sitting of the court. An appeal to the Court of Appeal was successful but the State rejected the decision and a hearing is pending on this petition. In separate proceedings, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London granted a four-day stay on 25 March and a hearing is to take place within the next four days.

On 2 November the JCPC ruled, in the case of Earl Pratt and Ivan Morgan (Jamaica), that "in any case in which execution is to take place more than five years after sentence there will be strong grounds for believing that the delay is such as to constitute `inhuman or degrading punishment or other treatment'". In December 1993 the sentences of more than 50 prisoners, who had been on death row for over five years, were commuted to life imprisonment. Guerra and Wallen were two months away from the five year limit and were obviously one of the "difficult borderline decisions to be made" mentioned in the JCPC's decision.

Furthermore, the JCPC also stated that appeals to the United Nations Human Rights Committee (HRC) and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights cannot be considered as "frivolous procedures". The two prisoners may not have had the time to submit a proper petition to the HRC but had made an initial approach to it through their lawyers.

The Committee can only receive cases once all "domestic remedies" have been exhausted. In the case of Guerra and Wallen, this point was only reached on 21 March when the JCPC rejected their petition for leave to appeal.

Said Amnesty International: "And yet, the authorities are attempting to proceed regardless of their commitments under international law and are putting political gain before due process, intending to curry favour with the pro-death penalty public."

Amnesty International acknowledges that the two men have been convicted and sentenced for an extremely serious offence. However, the organization calls on the government of Trinidad and Tobago to reconsider this retrograde attempt to return to the barbaric practice of "hanging [a person] by the neck until dead".

The organization believes that Trinidad and Tobago should abide by commitments made to the international community in ratifying international instruments, like the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights, and to commute all death sentences.

ENDS/