
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 78/94

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INTERNAL

MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE LAUNCH OF THE COLOMBIA CAMPAIGNCOL3

International Launch - Bogotá

Despite an embargo break on 14 March, which apparently started with the agencies AFP, EFE and AP, which jeopardized the whole launch and could have completely ruined the press conference in Bogotá, the press conference was a huge success. About 50 journalists attended, including most Colombian media, most international agencies and many other foreign correspondents. Media coverage in Colombia was sustained for more than a week, including press, tv and radio news coverage and some good opinion pieces. The only Colombian Government response was in the form of media interviews with the Minister of Defence, who could not refute the balance or accuracy of AI's report.

The IS Press Office would like to thank Lovisa Stannow, Press Officer of AI Sweden, who organized the launch. It was due to her hard work, particularly identifying and contacting all possible journalists before the event and organizing dozens of interviews for the AI delegation that the launch was so successful. Also, many thanks to the Colombian Section, notably Luis Alfonso, Monica, Juan Carlos, and Germán, who helped Lovisa with numerous practical things. Lovisa says that the launch would have been much more difficult and surely not as successful without the concrete help and constant moral support from the section staff and board members.

Norwegian Section

The coverage received in the Norwegian media was quite disappointing as, on the day of the launch, the Norwegian government was finalizing their negotiations on entry into the European Union and thus everybody's eyes were directed at Brussels. Apparently, the only coverage received in Norway was a 3½ minute long news item on the 15 March. The item was aired on the 7pm news programme of the main TV station and was edited from the ENR. In addition, the item included an interview with a representative of the Colombian opposition party Patriotic Union (UP) who was visiting Norway at the time. Though this item was the only coverage received, it covered all our main concerns in Colombia.

Canadian (Anglophone) Section

All the major Canadian reporters who cover foreign policy received the news release, and many of them also the Colombia report and briefing. However, for some unknown reason the interest in the campaign in English Canada was quite low. The only article that appeared on the morning of the 16th was a short Reuters story in The Globe and Mail, Canada's national newspaper. CBC Radio News covered the campaign launch in news bulletins throughout the day, making use of the above mentioned wire service. Also El Popular, a Spanish language newspaper in Toronto ran a Reuters piece.

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18 MARCH 1994

HUNGARY: VIOLATION OF RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The prosecution of Mátyás Eörsi and László Lengyel for defamation of public authority or officials is a contravention of the international and European human rights standards which Hungary has ratified, according to Amnesty International.

The two men have been charged under Article 232 of the Hungarian Penal Code, which states that: "Any person who by stating or spreading a fact or using any expression referring to a fact which is likely to violate the honour of a public official or through the violation of a public official's honour likely to damage the honour of a public authority, commits a criminal offence and shall be liable to imprisonment not exceeding two years or community service order or fine."

In a letter to Árpád Göncz, President of the Republic, Amnesty International expressed its concern that this legal provision may be used in violation of the right to freedom of expression set out in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), both of which Hungary has ratified and is legally bound to observe.

Limited restrictions on the right to freedom of expression are permitted by both the ECHR and the ICCPR, but only within strictly defined circumstances. "Even if there are legitimate interests which Article 232 seeks to protect, the law is so broad that it threatens the very basis of freedom of expression in Hungary," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International considers that legal provisions in Hungary, other than Article 232 are quite sufficient to protect legitimate interests of the state such as national security, territorial integrity or public safety, or maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary. In these cases, under the European Convention, restrictions may be placed on freedom of expression.

The rights or reputations of public officials are protected by other criminal or civil actions, which anyone, regardless of status or function can take in order to protect his or her reputation.

Amnesty International is concerned that the enforcement of Article 232 has resulted in the prosecution of people who have exercised their right to the free expression of political or other beliefs without resorting to or advocating the use of violence. If imprisoned, they would be considered by Amnesty International as prisoners of conscience.

Eörsi Mátyás was charged under Article 232 in October 1992 for a statement made in a television program which the Hungarian Government considered as defamatory to Horvath Balazs, then Minister of Interior. Eörsi Mátyás was initially acquitted but this judgment was revoked by the Court of Appeal, which reprimanded him. In September 1993, the Supreme Court ruled for a retrial on the grounds that the statement under examination was a factual statement and that Eörsi Mátyás should be allowed to prove the truth of his statement.

Lengyel László was charged under Article 232 following a lecture made on 10 June 1993 on the state of the Hungarian economy, which was considered as defamatory to the Hungarian Government. In December 1993, he was sentenced, by the Court of Appeal, to a fine of 75,000 forints suspended for one year. Lengyel László has filed an extraordinary appeal to the Supreme Court.

Amnesty International is urging President Göncz to initiate a process for a judicial review of Article 232 by the Constitutional Court of Hungary.

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18 MARCH 1994

UKRAINE: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL APPEALS AGAINST IMMINENT EXECUTION

Vasily Mikhaylovich Krivonos, aged 19, is facing imminent execution. Charged with premeditated aggravated murder, he was sentenced to death by Vinitsky Regional Court on 18 November 1993. His appeal against the death sentence was rejected by the Supreme Court of Ukraine on 24 February.

A petition for clemency, lodged with the President of the Ukraine, Leonid Kravchuk, on 10 March is still pending. Amnesty International is urging President Kravchuk to exercise his constitutional authority to commute Vasily Krivonos' death sentence.

Vasily Krivonos, who had just turned 18 at the time of the crime, claims that his confession was obtained under duress and denies the charge brought against him.

Amnesty International is concerned by reports that Vasily Krivonos was not granted access to a lawyer or to his mother until after the prosecution had completed its investigation and compiled the indictment. He is said to have learning difficulties and a history of nervous and psychiatric problems.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases and without reservation, on the grounds that it is a violation of the right to life and the right not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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