

AI News: July 1996

News

Brazil

Human rights placed in the spotlight

Brazil's human rights record will be examined before the Human Rights Committee at the United Nations in Geneva this month. This comes at a time of promised advances and serious setbacks.

On 13 May Brazil was one of the first countries to launch a National Action Plan on Human Rights, as recommended by the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993. The Brazil 168-point program includes measures to combat impunity and promote the human rights of vulnerable groups. However, any timetable for implementation is conspicuously absent. And in the very week before its launch one of the most important reforms proposed — to transfer jurisdiction for military police crimes from military to civilian courts — was thwarted in the Brazilian Senate by some of the government's own supporters.

The urgent need for independent civilian investigation of military police crimes was demonstrated by the massacre, on 17 April 1996, of at least 19 landless peasants by military police in Pará State. Military police approached peasants blocking a road in Eldorado de Carajás from two sides and began firing. Autopsies revealed that three of the 19 dead were shot at point-blank range and seven were beaten or hacked to death with their own farm implements. This followed the August 1995 killing of at least 12 peasants by military police in Corumbiára, Rondônia State, for which no one has yet been brought to court.

Prosecutions for the São Paulo military police massacre of 111 prisoners after they had surrendered at the Casa de Detenção prison in October 1992 are now paralysed while civilian and military courts decide on which has jurisdiction. Although some prisoners' families have received compensation, in May a São Paulo court ruled in one case that no compensation was due, since military police were only doing their duty.

During the launch of the National Action Plan on Human Rights, however, the first state compensation to families of those who "disappeared" in the 1960s and 1970s under military rule was awarded. A Special Commission has, since January, been examining compensation claims in relation to 136 officially recognized "disappearances" and 210 deaths in custody under military rule. The Commission is not, however, allowed to investigate the full circumstances of these violations or identify those responsible.

A small crack did appear in the wall of impunity when one military policeman was tried and convicted for his participation in the massacre of eight street children outside the Candelária Church in July 1993. On 30 April 1996 Marcos Vinícius Borges de Emmanuel was sentenced to 309 years' imprisonment, of which 30 years may be served. However, the trial of the other military police suspects has been postponed indefinitely. AI continues to monitor investigations and hopes that all those responsible will be brought to trial.

The organization remains increasingly concerned for the safety of members of indigenous communities in Brazil following a January 1996 decree which throws into doubt the demarcation of several indigenous areas. In the past such uncertainty has led to violent incursions on Indian land and to selective killings and massacres. Since January, invasions of indigenous lands have increased. In May, leaders of the Tupininkim Indians, in Espírito Santo received death threats, and 77 Tembe, Kaapor and Timbira Indians were held hostage, together with government employees, by settlers in dispute with them over land in Pará.

The National Action Plan on Human Rights may provide a framework to tackle some of these issues and increase protection for vulnerable groups, but only if the government throws its full weight behind the Plan in Congress and sets a timetable for its implementation.

Amnesty International News

We regret that as a result of reprioritization of resources, Amnesty International News will be published every two months starting with this issue. The subscription price remains at £7/US\$13 per year. This arrangement will be reviewed over the coming months and we will keep you informed.

#### United States of America

##### Olympic host state is fifth highest for executions

The state of Georgia, in the United States of America (USA), will host this year's Olympic Games. The Georgian authorities claim that Atlanta is "for many the modern capital of human rights", but behind the publicity surrounding the event an unmentioned statistic will lurk: Georgia has carried out the fifth highest number of executions in the USA since 1977. As of 31 January 1996, 20 prisoners had been executed and 103 prisoners remained under sentence of death. The method of execution is electrocution.

The death penalty in Georgia continues to be used in a manner that is racist, arbitrary and unfair. Research has shown that in many cases the ethnic origin of the victim or defendant was a key factor in the prosecutors' decision to seek the death penalty. Many of those sentenced to death in Georgia received poor legal representation.

Wilburn Dobbs, a black man, was sentenced to death in 1974 after a trial contaminated by racism. He remains on death row. At his trial Wilburn Dobbs was represented by a state-appointed attorney who is recorded as saying he believed that blacks are less intelligent than whites. Racist language was used casually throughout the trial. The judge, Judge Coker, had opposed racial integration while serving in the Georgia House of Representatives and Georgia Senate from 1953 to 1963.

The Court of Appeals rejected the claim that the trial had been marred by racism. After a reprimand from the US Supreme Court, the Federal District Court held that Wilburn Dobbs did not receive incompetent representation despite his lawyer's racism.

AI is appalled that the federal government is willing to ignore the realities in the use of the death penalty in the USA and that it has consistently refused to become involved with the application of the death penalty at state level. Although the federal government does not have a direct role in state law enforcement, AI believes that it retains a responsibility to ensure that all the laws within its territorial jurisdiction conform to the US Constitution and to minimum international standards set out in international instruments; and to promote respect for human rights.

#### Burundi

##### Death toll rises as armed attacks increase on all sides

Armed political groups and the security forces are slaughtering unarmed men, women and children in Burundi.

In March 1996 armed groups extended their attacks to the southern provinces of Bururi, Makamba and Rutana. For most of the last two years, attacks by Hutu-dominated armed groups have been largely restricted to northern Burundi and around the capital, Bujumbura. Nearly 500 people were reportedly killed during the first two weeks of April. In one reported incident on 3 April 1996, armed men, apparently members of Hutu armed groups, attacked Makamba hospital and killed a local anaesthetist, pillaged a pharmacy and burned ambulances.

In early April 1996 some officials in the Tutsi-dominated government advocated "self-defence" and the hunting down of suspects. As a result, there has been a renewed wave of political assassinations of Hutu politicians and the élite. "Disappearances", arbitrary detention and extrajudicial killings have been widely reported.

Violence against Hutu civilians prevails in Gitega province, while the Hutu governor of Cibitoke province, Sylvestre Mvuse, was assassinated, apparently by the army, for having denounced the army's role in the assassination, on May 13, of a Hutu member of parliament, Bibiane Ntamutumba, along with her entire family and at least 20 other people.

Massacres of hundreds of people in Buhoro and Kivyuka were blamed on the Hutu rebels even though there is evidence that they were perpetrated by the Burundi armed forces. Attacks on camps of displaced Tutsi by Hutu armed groups are regularly reported. An estimated 55,000 to 100,000 people were reportedly displaced and about 40 people were reported to be fleeing daily to Tanzania. Tens of thousands of defenceless people from both the majority Hutu and minority Tutsi communities have been deliberately and arbitrarily killed since the current conflict began after the assassination of Burundi's first Hutu President, Melchior Ndadaye, on 21 October 1993.

The authorities in Burundi have not acknowledged those human rights violations committed by government forces and have not taken action to bring those responsible to justice, or to prevent further violations. Negotiations to bring about a political settlement should be founded on human rights safeguards, ensuring that the rights of both Hutu and Tutsi are fully guaranteed.

### Italy

From police custody to hospital

Grace Patrick Akpan, a 32-year-old Italian citizen and the daughter of a Nigerian diplomat, needed urgent hospital treatment for injuries to her neck, mouth, head and chest immediately following her release from police custody. She subsequently lodged an official complaint with the Catanzaro Public Prosecutor.

According to her complaint, Grace Patrick Akpan was stopped for an identity check by two police officers on 20 February 1996. She said they assumed she was a prostitute simply because she was "a young coloured woman and moreover Nigerian", and that they told her that "a black woman cannot be an Italian citizen". She claims that she was verbally abused and physically ill-treated in the street, in the officers' car and at the police station.

During the 1990s there has been an increase in allegations of gratuitous and deliberate physical violence by law enforcement officers in Italy, particularly towards immigrants from outside Western Europe. AI is asking the Italian authorities to ensure that existing safeguards against ill-treatment during detention are fully respected and to introduce further measures aimed at combatting such treatment.

### Syria

Miyassar Jamil al-Issawi, a Palestinian, was arrested at her home in Yarmuk, Damascus, on 2 September 1985. Her family, who are resident in Jordan, have not seen or heard from her since. They have made numerous inquiries about her whereabouts but the Syrian authorities have denied her detention in Syria. She has "disappeared".

Miyassar Jamil al-Issawi, a graduate in economic and political science, was aged 27 at the time of her arrest. On that day, she left her home to visit her husband in prison, but did not return. Her husband was reportedly detained in connection with bombings in Damascus. He has since been released. Unconfirmed reports suggest that Miyassar Jamil al-Issawi was held in al-Mezze Prison until December 1989 and that she is currently held in Tadmur Military Prison.

+Please write, urging an immediate and impartial investigation into the "disappearance" of Miyassar Jamil al-Issawi, to: His Excellency President Hafez al-Asad/ President of the Republic/ Presidential Palace/ Abu Rumanah/ al-Rashid Street/ Damascus/ Syrian Arab Republic.

### Maldives

Mohammed Nasheed, (pictured above) a freelance journalist, was sentenced to two years' imprisonment by a court in Malé on 3 April 1996, apparently for comments he made about the 1993 presidential elections and the 1994 general elections, in an article published in a magazine in the Philippines. AI has obtained the text of this article and is deeply concerned that Mohammad

Nasheed's peacefully expressed opinions have been used as a basis for his conviction. There is no reference to incitement to violence in the article. AI considers him to be a prisoner of conscience. Mohammed Nasheed's detention contravenes his fundamental right to freedom of expression which is guaranteed under international human rights law. AI is urging the Government of Maldives to nullify his sentence and release him immediately and unconditionally.

Mohammed Nasheed has been detained several times before. After 18 months in solitary confinement, he was sentenced on 8 April 1992 to over three years' imprisonment on a variety of charges which AI believed to be politically motivated. His appeal to the High Court was rejected in May 1993. He was, however, released in June that year.

+Please write, asking for Mohammed Nasheed to be released immediately and unconditionally and for his sentence to be nullified, to President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom/ The Office of the President/ Marine Drive (North)/ Malé/ Republic of Maldives.

#### Turkmenistan

AI believes that Mukhametkuli Aymuradov and Khoshali Garayev, who are both serving long prison sentences in Turkmenistan, may be prisoners of conscience who are being detained solely because of their association with exiled opponents of the Government of Turkmenistan.

The two men were arrested on or around 28 October 1994 in Tashkent, the capital of neighbouring Uzbekistan, and were immediately deported to Turkmenistan. It is feared that they were tortured on arrival, during interrogation at the investigation-isolation prison in Ashgabat, the capital. In June 1995 they stood trial, reportedly in camera, before the Supreme Court of Turkmenistan and were found guilty of offences which included "attempted terrorism" and "organizing anti-state crimes".

Mukhametkuli Aymuradov was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment and Khoshali Garayev to 12 years. There have been persistent allegations that the charges against the men were without foundation or fabricated.

The authorities claim that Mukhametkuli Aymuradov and Khoshali Garayev were in Tashkent as part of a plot, orchestrated by other Turkmen exiles in Russia, to assassinate President Saparmurad Niyazov and senior government ministers with a view to overthrowing the government. The case against two other men arrested in Russia and accused of being ringleaders of the plot, was dropped on the basis that there was no case to answer.

Another possible explanation for their arrests is that Mukhametkuli Aymuradov and Khoshali Garayev were among Turkmen exiles who had arranged to rendezvous in Tashkent before travelling to Ashgabat to participate in a peaceful mass anti-government protest. Neither of them had previously been politically active, but they were sympathizers of the exiled opposition.

+Please write, calling for a judicial review of the case of Mukhametkuli Aymuradov and Khoshali Garayev, to: President Saparmurad Niyazov/ Office of the President/ 744000 Ashgabat/ Turkmenistan. [Add "Former USSR" to the address on the envelope, to make delivery easier.]

#### AI-Ghana's conference on Female Genital mutilation

AI-Ghana has taken a major step forward in highlighting the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM).

"Working Together for Change — Stop Female Genital Mutilation" was the theme of a two-day conference organized by AI-Ghana in April. The meeting took place in Bolgatanga, the Upper East region of Ghana, where the practice is still prevalent. Aimed at raising awareness about FGM and how to eradicate it, the seminar was attended by 41 non-governmental organizations from northern Ghana as well as AI delegates from seven African countries.

Female genital mutilation is increasingly being recognized as one of the greatest threats to the human rights of women and girls in Africa. At present it is estimated that more than 100 million women in Africa are genitally mutilated. Two million girls a year are estimated to be at risk of FGM.

Community and religious leaders who attended the Ghana conference pledged their commitment to work alongside AI with a view to finding solutions to eradicate female genital mutilation. The meeting generated extensive media interest in the country and provoked a nationwide public outcry against the practice.

#### Kuwait

Four female prisoners of conscience amnestied

AI welcomed the news at the end of April that four women prisoners of conscience, convicted of “collaborating” with the Iraqi forces during the occupation of Kuwait from August 1990 to February 1991, had been included in an amnesty leading to their release.

Balqis Hafez Fadhil, of Iraqi nationality; Zahra Muhammad ‘Adel ‘Abd al-Khaliq, Zikrayat Mahmud Harb and Wafa’ Wasfi Ahmad, all of Jordanian nationality, were among the 15 people convicted by the Martial Law Court in June 1991 in connection with the al-Nida’ trial. All were reportedly forced by the Iraqi forces to work for al-Nida’, the only newspaper allowed to be published in occupied Kuwait. Six of them, including one Kuwaiti woman, were sentenced to death, later commuted to life imprisonment; the others were sentenced to 10 years’ imprisonment. AI believes that these and other trials before the Martial Law Court, and later the State Security Court, were manifestly unfair. AI continues to call for the unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience and for a judicial review of the cases of all alleged “collaborators” convicted by either of these courts.

Zahra Muhammad ‘Abd al-Khaliq’s case was featured as a Worldwide Appeal in the AI Newsletter of June 1993. Balqis Hafez Fadhil was included in the 1996 International Women’s Day action.

#### Bulgaria

Police violence rife as lawlessness spreads

Human rights violations persist in Bulgaria: they include shootings, torture, beatings and other forms of ill-treatment of detainees, sometimes resulting in death\*. Daily accounts of such incidents reveal a pattern of casual violence and illegal acts by police officers throughout the country. These violations occur amid serious social and economic difficulties which affect most of the population, while the government appears unable to tackle growing corruption or to fight organized crime. The atmosphere of lawlessness is heightened by the apparent impunity of law enforcement officers responsible for human rights violations.

Many of the victims who have been subjected to torture and beatings in police stations were suspected of a criminal offence. Others, however, were incidentally present at the scene, or in the vicinity, of a police action to apprehend criminal suspects. In a few cases police officers reportedly ill-treated participants in non-violent demonstrations. The number of Roma victims is disproportionately high. The Roma are particularly badly affected by social and economic hardships as well as widespread racial prejudice.

In one incident 17-year-old Assen Ivanov and two other Roma were arrested near Petrich on 11 April 1995 on suspicion of rape. The following day Assen Ivanov was taken to a hospital where he died. A forensic medical examination reportedly established a fracture of the left temple and an injury to the brain. No information, however, about the results of the official investigation was made public.

In another incident, on 5 April 1995, 67-year-old Girgina Dimova Toteva was taken to the police station in Sevlievo to be questioned about a neighbour’s complaint. She was reportedly slapped, kicked and hit on the chest by police officers until she lost consciousness. She suffered concussion and was subsequently admitted to hospital several times. In September 1995, following her complaint about the beating, she was brought to trial for allegedly assaulting two officers who questioned her. Hearing her story, the judge suspended the trial and ordered an investigation which has still not been completed.

The Bulgarian authorities have consistently failed to provide AI with information about investigations into reported human rights violations or to implement AI's recommendations concerning steps to prevent such violations

\* See: Bulgaria: Shootings, deaths in custody, torture and ill-treatment (AI Index: EUR 15/07/96).

#### News in brief

AI has strongly condemned the execution of 'Issa Ahmad Qambar, the first to have been carried out in Bahrain for 20 years. 'Issa Ahmad Qambar was sentenced to death by the Bahraini High Criminal Court, on 4 July 1995, after a trial which ignored internationally accepted human rights standards. AI is calling on Bahrain's ruler, the Amir, Shaikh 'Issa bin Salman Al Khalifa, to stop any further executions.

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#### Focus

##### Egypt: the sacrifice of human rights

Gross human rights violations continue to be carried out in the name of "fighting terrorism" in Egypt. Thousands of political detainees have been held without charge or trial, some for as long as six years; systematic torture continues to be used against people suspected of belonging to or sympathizing with armed Islamist groups. Scores of civilians continue to be sent to military courts whose procedures are grossly unfair and which have handed down 70 death sentences over the last three and a half years. Some killings by the security forces bear the hallmark of extrajudicial executions.

Political violence between armed Islamist groups and the security forces has claimed the lives of at least 1,000 people since early 1992. The victims have been mostly security officers and members or suspected members of armed groups, but also some civilians caught in the crossfire. Dozens of civilians, including members of the Coptic Christian community and foreign tourists, have been deliberately killed by armed Islamist groups.

In May 1996 the United Nations (UN) Committee against Torture issued a report summarizing a confidential inquiry carried out since November 1991. It concluded that "torture is systematically practised by the Security Forces in Egypt, in particular by State Security Intelligence... the allegations of torture submitted by reliable non-governmental organizations consistently indicate that reported cases of torture are seen to be habitual, widespread and deliberate in at least a considerable part of the country".

AI and other human rights organizations have, on many occasions, made detailed recommendations to the government on measures to stop violations and to improve Egypt's human rights record, but these have been ignored. Over the last two years AI has sent numerous communications to the government regarding specific cases of human rights violations, but most of them have remained unanswered.

Instead, the government continues to claim that human rights are respected in Egypt and has accused international and local human rights organizations of "defending the rights of terrorists", and of being politically motivated

#### PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE

Fifty-four prisoners of conscience are serving prison terms of up to five years with hard labour. They are among dozens of alleged members of the Muslim Brothers organization arrested in January, July and October 1995. Most of those arrested were well-known figures in Egypt, including former members of the People's Assembly (parliament), medical doctors and university lecturers.

All those arrested and detained were tried in two separate trials by the Supreme Military Court, in Cairo, following two special presidential decrees issued on 28 August and 15 October referring them

to the military judiciary. The verdict in both trials was given on 23 November 1995, with 54 defendants sentenced to up to five years' imprisonment with hard labour and 27 others acquitted. Charges against them included "membership of a banned organization, plotting to change the present regime through the infiltration of vital institutions with a view to setting up an Islamic state, and possession of anti-government literature." However, it is widely believed that the real reason for their arrest, detention and subsequent conviction was the fact that some of them were planning to stand as independent candidates for the parliamentary elections held in November and December 1995. Among those serving prison terms are Dr 'Issam al-'Iryan, Deputy Secretary General of the Egyptian Medical Syndicate and Secretary of the Syndicate's Human Rights Committee and former member of parliament, who was sentenced to five years' imprisonment with hard labour. Others include Dr Ibrahim Khalil al-Za'farani, Secretary General of the Alexandria branch of the Medical Syndicate, who is serving a three-year prison sentence with hard labour; and Dr Mohammad al-Sayyid Ahmad Habib, a lecturer at Asyut University, and Dr 'Abd al-Mun'im Abu al-Futuh, Deputy Secretary General of the Arab Medical Union, who are both serving five-year prison sentences with hard labour. AI delegates attended sessions of both trials in November 1995. The defence lawyers in both trials withdrew after only a few sessions, because they considered it to be a politically motivated trial where the defendants had not committed any criminal offence, and because the court refused to allow them to cross-examine the only prosecution witness or obtain a complete list of the prosecution's evidence. The military court appointed new defence lawyers, all of whom were former military judges or personnel. The defendants refused to cooperate with them. The original lawyers then petitioned the Supreme Constitutional Court over President Hosni Mubarak's decision to refer civilian cases to military courts under Article 6(2) of the Code of Military Justice, arguing that the President did not have the right to refer civilians to be tried by these courts. The Supreme Constitutional Court has yet to make a ruling and the prisoners are currently held in Mazra'at Tora Prison. The Muslim Brothers, although officially banned, had been tolerated by the authorities until early 1995. Members of the organization are influential in professional associations, including the Bar Association and the Medical Syndicate. Over the last few years the Muslim Brothers have repeatedly condemned the use of violence by armed Islamist groups in Egypt.

#### ADMINISTRATIVE DETENTION

The government sanctions indefinite arbitrary detention, thus flagrantly disregarding international human rights treaties and consistently undermining the independence of its own judiciary. Thousands of sympathizers, members and suspected members of unauthorized Islamist groups have been administratively detained without charge or trial, some for as long as six years, under Article 3 of the Emergency Law, in force since 1981. Under this Article, the minister of the interior may "arrest and detain suspected persons or those who endanger public order or security". Thousands of political detainees have also been denied the basic right to be visited by lawyers and family members. At least 48 lawyers have been administratively detained. Both the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights and the Bar Association have been campaigning for their release, but to no avail. Hassan al-Gharbawi Shahhata, aged 34, is one of the longest serving administrative detainees in the country. He was arrested on 11 January 1989 and charged in connection with disturbances in 'Ain Shams, a densely populated district in Cairo. He was tried and acquitted in May 1990 but has remained in administrative detention since then, despite many court orders to release him. He is now held in al-Wadi al-Gadid Prison and is reportedly suffering from ill-health. In December 1993 the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention concluded that the detention of Hassan al-Gharbawi Shahhata was arbitrary and contravened international human rights law.

#### TORTURE

Torture continues to be used systematically against political detainees. It takes place throughout the country: in the State Security Investigations Department (SSI) headquarters in Lazoghly Square in

Cairo; in SSI branches in the country; in police stations and at Firaq al-Amn (security brigades), where detainees are held incommunicado. Torture usually occurs immediately following arrest, but also when detainees are secretly transferred to these places following release orders by courts pending their return to prison with new detention orders. The most common torture methods reported are electric shocks, beatings, suspension by the wrists or ankles, extinguishing cigarettes on the body, and various forms of psychological torture and ill-treatment, including threats of rape or sexual abuse of the detainee or of his relatives.

Over the last few years AI has received numerous reports that torture and ill-treatment are also used in prisons. Since 1993 an increasing number of detainees have died in custody, some reportedly as a result of torture, but in almost all cases the government has stated that their deaths were due to natural causes.

The following testimony, by a former detainee, is typical of hundreds of torture testimonies. The detainee stated that he was arrested on 27 April 1995 at around 2.30am. He said: "I was taken inside a building which later I knew was Lazoghly [Square - the headquarters of the SSI]. Two people started interrogating me. They handcuffed me with a tight iron handcuffs, my hands behind my back... The questions they asked were about which mosque I go to, which books I have read, who I know, etc... Then I was stripped of most of my clothes. They starting beating me and they also used electric shocks on different parts of my body, including my private parts... They also put me on a table and suspended my arms from the door and then pushed the table out from under me. I was left suspended behind the door for about 30 minutes. This torture was repeated many times during the first few days of my detention in Lazoghly, usually between 10am and 4pm, but sometimes after 10pm. I was downstairs but I could hear people screaming upstairs... I was kept there for 22 days. During the first 15 days my family did not know where I was, then someone from the Journalists' Syndicate came and visited me. I was then taken to al-Fayoum Prison. There I was beaten repeatedly with a stick by the prison guards... I was released on 24 June thanks to the efforts made by the Journalists' Syndicate... I have not made any complaint because I am afraid that they will arrest me again..."

AI has repeatedly urged the government to eradicate the use of torture and set up prompt, thorough and impartial investigations into all allegations of torture. The methods and conclusions of such investigations should be made public within a reasonable period of time. The organization welcomes recent court decisions, in three separate cases, not to accept as evidence confessions which had been made under duress.

In May 1996 the UN Committee against Torture, having concluded that torture was indeed systematically practised in Egypt, noted with concern that no investigation has ever been made and no legal action been brought against members of State Security Intelligence since the entry into force of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The Committee urged the Egyptian Government to "make particular efforts to prevent its security forces from acting as a State within a State, for they seem to escape control by superior authorities". It recommended that the government set up an "independent investigation machinery, including in its composition judges, lawyers and medical doctors, that should efficiently examine all the allegations of torture, in order to bring them expeditiously before the courts". It continued, "This independent group should also monitor the safeguards against torture guaranteed to persons deprived of their liberty under Egyptian law, in particular by having access to all the places where allegations of torture have been reported, by alerting immediately the authorities concerned whenever those safeguards are not fully respected, and by making proposals to the authorities concerned to ensure that those safeguards are respected in all places where persons are detained". The Committee urged the government to set up a "thorough investigation into the conduct of the police forces in order to establish the truth or otherwise of the many allegations of acts of torture, bring the persons responsible for those acts before the courts and issue and transmit to the police specific and clear instructions designed to prohibit any act of torture in the future".

In July 1996 AI published a report, Egypt: Indefinite detention and systematic torture — the forgotten victims. (AI Index: MDE 12/13/96).

#### THE DEATH PENALTY

In the period from January to May 1996 AI recorded 25 death sentences passed by criminal, military and (Emergency) State Security Courts in Egypt. During the same time four people who had been sentenced to death in previous years were executed.

Since October 1992, when President Mubarak started issuing special decrees referring civilian cases to be tried by military courts, 70 people charged with “terrorist” offences have been sentenced to death by these courts, including 16 in absentia, and 48 executions have been carried out. There is no right to appeal to a higher court against the verdicts or sentences of military courts. All death sentences issued by military courts are subject only to review by the Military Appeals Bureau, a non-judicial body headed by the President, which so far has confirmed all death sentences. Such procedures fall far short of international standards for fair trial.

AI has repeatedly called on the government to stop trying civilians before military courts and has, on many occasions, urged President Mubarak to commute all death sentences. The government, however, continues to claim that trials of civilians before military courts are fair and that the President is empowered to refer crimes to the military judiciary.

#### Harassment of Human Rights Defenders

Egyptian human rights groups continue to face restrictions and various forms of government harassment, including the arrest and interrogation of human rights workers and the banning of international meetings or training programs. On 14 July 1995, Sa‘eed ‘Abd al-Hafiz Sa‘eed (pictured above), a lawyer at the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR), was arrested in the village of Sahel Salim, in Asyut Governorate. He was conducting research into deaths in custody when he was arrested by SSI officers. He was detained at the SSI office in Asyut for two days, during which he was interrogated extensively about his human rights work. All his research notes and other papers were confiscated.

‘Azza Sulayman, another lawyer and researcher at EOHR, was summoned to the Gaber Bin Hayan branch office of the SSI, because of an interview she gave to the BBC Arabic Service in November 1995. In her interview she spoke about the content of a report that she had prepared for EOHR on the harassment of wives of Islamist political detainees by the security forces. Five SSI officers reportedly went to her house after the interview was broadcast and summoned her and her husband to the SSI office. They were interrogated separately at night for nearly three hours. She was asked to submit an official apology to the ministry of the interior and to disclaim what she had said in the interview. When she refused she was threatened that the matter would be referred to the Niyaba [public prosecution]. In the end she and her husband were allowed to leave without any charges being brought against them. ‘Azza Sulayman left the EOHR at the end of 1995 and, together with other women, set up a centre dealing with women’s issues.

On 26 January 1995 the Centre for the Egyptian Human Rights to Support the National Unity was planning to hold a seminar on religious violence in Egypt. The seminar was banned by the security authorities and the director of the centre temporarily went into hiding. The Centre was also due to publish a book on the situation of the Coptic community in the country, but the security forces raided the printing house and confiscated around 10,000 copies. The book was never published.

In July 1995 the authorities banned an international training seminar by the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (based in New York), planned to take place in Cairo, to which a number of local and regional human rights groups were invited. The seminar finally took place in Cyprus in September 1995. Also in July, the authorities banned a training seminar planned by the Centre for Human Rights Legal Aid, a local human rights non-governmental organization.

Human rights abuses committed by armed Islamist groups

AI is gravely concerned by the growing number of civilians targeted by armed Islamist groups. Over the last 18 months scores of civilians, including members of the Coptic community and some foreign tourists, have been deliberately killed, reportedly by these groups, in particular by al-Gama'a al-Islamiya (Islamic Group). Most of these killings have taken place in Upper Egypt. In the period from January to May 1996, at least 46 civilians were deliberately killed by members of armed Islamist groups.

On 24 February 1996, two armed men, allegedly members of al-Gama'a al-Islamiya, opened fire on civilians who were sitting outside their houses in al-'Uthmaniya village, near al-Badari in the Governorate of Asyut. The two gunmen killed eight civilians including six Coptic Christians. The area where the killings took place, known as 'Izbat al-Aqbat, is predominantly Coptic Christian and it appears that the victims were targeted because of their religion.

Eighteen Greek tourists, including 14 women, were deliberately killed outside a hotel in Cairo, by four armed men, in the early morning of 18 April 1996. Fifteen others, including nine women, and an Egyptian man, were reportedly injured. Al-Gama'a al-Islamiya claimed responsibility for the killing, adding that it believed the tourists were Israeli nationals and that it had acted in retaliation for Israeli attacks in South Lebanon. AI issued a statement on the same day strongly condemning the killings. In recent years, armed Islamist groups have also issued death threats. The well known writer, Dr Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid, remains under a threat of death, which was reportedly issued by the armed Islamist group, al-Gihad (Holy Struggle) on 21 June 1995. The death threat came after a court of appeal in Cairo ruled on 14 June 1995 that Dr Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid must separate from his wife because he allegedly insulted the Islamic faith through his writings, and that as a Muslim she could not remain married to an "apostate". On 29 June 1995 AI issued a public statement calling for the withdrawal of the death threat against him.

AI has repeatedly condemned all deliberate killings of civilians by armed Islamist groups and continues to call for an end to such killings. They are human rights abuses which should not be tolerated under any circumstances.