

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Further information on 218/92 (ASA 14/02/92, 30 June 1992) - Fear of "Disappearance"

BHUTAN: H B Sapkota

Amnesty International has recently been informed by a government official that H B Sapkota, who was feared to have "disappeared" while in custody, died in Thimphu Hospital in the early hours of 2 January 1992, while in police custody.

H B Sapkota had been arrested on 4 September 1990 on suspicion of involvement in "anti-national activities". On 1 January 1992 H B Sapkota was seen in Thimphu Hospital, wearing shackles and apparently in a very weak state, by another prisoner. The following morning the other prisoner was informed by hospital staff that H B Sapkota had died in the night. However, when H B Sapkota's wife returned to Bhutan from Nepal in March 1992 to seek clarification of what had happened to her husband she was informed by a police officer in Gaylegphug that H B Sapkota was in good health.

Copies of some of H B Sapkota's medical records have been provided to Amnesty International by the government. According to these, prior to his admission to hospital H B Sapkota had been suffering from stomach and chest pain and fever, and he was diagnosed as having hypertension. When finally admitted to Thimphu Hospital on 28 December 1991 he was diagnosed as having typhoid. The medical records given to Amnesty International show no evidence of H B Sapkota having been ill-treated or neglected, although an independent doctor who studied the documents for Amnesty International pointed out that inadequate diet or poor prison conditions may have contributed to his ill-health. The doctor also stated that H B Sapkota appeared to have often been given "inappropriate and ineffectual medical care". It is not clear to Amnesty International whether a post-mortem was carried out and, if so, what the outcome of it was.

A government official confirmed that the normal procedures for informing the next of kin of a person who has died in custody were not followed in the case of H B Sapkota. He stressed that local officials, with whom responsibility for this task apparently lay, have been reprimanded.

No further action is required in this case. Thank you to all those who sent appeals.