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WEEKLY UPDATE SERVICE 17/93

Contained in this weekly update is are external items on Israel/OT, Guinea-Bissau and Malawi.

NEWS INITIATIVES

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Japan - 0500 hrs gmt, 17 March

Please note the embargo is confirmed for 0500 hrs gmt, 17 March for this document on refugee issues and we anticipate a high level of media interest in this news release.

The Japanese Section is holding a press conference in Tokyo to launch the report on 17 March. IS staff member, David Petrusek, who wrote the report, is going to Tokyo to help with media there. The Japanese Section will be inviting international media to attend the press conference and the IS will also inform international media of the launch. Details of the conference will shortly be available from the IS press office if you need them.

An Electronic News Release (ENR) is being prepared at the last minute to go with the report. Unfortunately, resources and time will not allow the IS to distribute it to sections. However, it will be given to Japanese TV at the press launch and the IS is giving it to WTN, VISNEWS, BBC World Service TV and CNN - so please refer your media to these. The master copy is held at Dubbs, 25-26 Poland Street, London W1V 3DB - Tel: +44 71 629 0055. Media who urgently require the full ENR may order copies direct from Dubbs, paying the copying costs only.

Chad - 21 April

Please Note

The document to go with this campaign has been sent out to sections dated February. Please inform your section campaign coordinators and anyone else who may receive it that it is EMBARGOED FOR 21 APRIL.

Chad Campaign, document, news release, Q&A and ENR. More details to follow shortly.

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

International Women's Day - 8 March(New Information)

An item in weekly update NWS 11/16/93, about AI's Women Activist Action, also focusing on a woman activist killed in Brazil - whose case has not received good publicity as yet. The IS will send out to international media.

Section Initiatives

French Section - European Press Officers' Meeting

The second European Press Officers' meeting will take place in Paris this year. The registration forms have not arrived yet, but when they do please send them to Luisa de Soriano or Josette Debord at the French Section Press Office before the end of February. The date of this meeting is now fixed for 15 and 16 May as the majority of you asked for. It will be focused on two themes: Audiovisual work (production and TV experiences) and how to improve it; and the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna. The French Section Press Office will send the program to all participants during the last week of February. Many thanks.

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2. MDE 15/WU 01/93 EXTERNAL

3 March 1993

ISRAEL AND THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES: CONCERNS ABOUT TREATMENT OF DETAINEES

Amnesty International has expressed concern to the Israeli authorities about reports that three Palestinians with United States citizenship have been ill-treated in Israeli custody.

Muhammad 'Abd al-Halim Salah, aged 39, was arrested on 25 January 1993 and is currently held in Ramallah Prison. On 2 February he was remanded for 18 days and on 17 February was further remanded until 4 March. He was allowed consular access on 31 January, but was not allowed to speak to his lawyer until 7 February. He has alleged that he was deprived of sleep for about four days at the start of his interrogation and that he was threatened with beatings if he refused to sign a document in Hebrew - a language he does not understand. He has also apparently alleged that for the first two days of his detention he was hooded and handcuffed and forced to sit on a low chair. His lawyer complained about his treatment during the remand hearing of 17 February. He remains under interrogation in solitary confinement.

Muhammad Jum'ah Hilmi Jarad, aged 35, was also arrested on 25 January 1993 and is currently held in the hospital in Ayalon (Ramleh) Prison in Israel. He suffers from congenital aortic valve disease, for which he underwent open-heart surgery in 1982 and for which he requires daily medication. He is said to have been deprived of this medication for the first days of his detention, and was hospitalized on 18 February. His lawyer also apparently complained at a remand hearing about his treatment during detention.

Statements by Israeli authorities to the media have suggested that both men are members of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) and had brought money from the United States for the organization in the Occupied Territories. These statements are said to be based on the minutes of interrogation sessions conducted with Muhammad Salah. His lawyer has not been given access to these minutes. Both men have denied any such involvement with Hamas. Neither has been charged.

Muhammad Tawfiq Hajjaj, a resident of Bir Nabala on the West Bank, was arrested on 24 January 1993 also on suspicion of involvement with Hamas. His detention was extended on 4 February for nine days, but he was released on 11 February without charge. Although he was given consular access on 28 January, he was denied a visit from his lawyer until 11 February, the day of his release. After his release he is reported to have said on Israeli Television that he had been ill-treated during his detention, including by being beaten.

Amnesty International has called on the Israeli authorities to carry out thorough and impartial investigations into the allegations of ill-treatment of these three men. It said that Muhammad Salah and Muhammad Jarad should be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and given a prompt and fair trial or released. Amnesty International also sought assurances that while they remained in detention they would be treated in accordance with international standards for the treatment of detainees.

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3. AFR 30/WU 01/93 EXTERNAL

4 March 1993

GUINEA-BISSAU: DEATH PENALTY ABOLISHED

Amnesty International welcomes the abolition of the death penalty in Guinea-Bissau on 16 February 1993, when more than two-thirds of National Assembly Deputies voted in favour of abolishing the death penalty.

A movement towards abolition in Guinea-Bissau began over a decade ago, gathering momentum after the Constitution was amended in May 1991 to introduce a multi-party political system. Elections are due to take place later in 1993. The Guinea-Bissau Human Rights League, formed in mid-1991, campaigned actively for abolition. All the opposition parties were opposed to capital punishment and so were many members of the ruling *Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde* (PAIGC), African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde, although President João Bernardo "Nino" Vieira recently stated that he favoured abolition.

The death penalty had been introduced by the PAIGC during its war for independence from Portugal. Portuguese law did not provide for the death penalty except for certain military offences. After the fall of the Portuguese dictatorship in 1974, the PAIGC came to power in both Cape Verde, which remained abolitionist in practice, and Guinea-Bissau, where the death penalty continued to be used. At least 40 people were sentenced to death between 1974 and 1980 while President Luis Cabral was in power. Many others were executed without being tried.

In 1980 a debate about the retention of the death penalty in a draft new constitution was interrupted when the present government took power in a coup and shortly afterwards President Vieira said that he was opposed to the use of the death penalty. However, the law which provided the death penalty for certain crimes, including political offences and premeditated murder, remained on the statute books: a number of people were convicted of murder and executed.

The pro-abolition movement was strengthened when, in July 1986, six well-known people including the former Vice President, Paulo Correia, faced the firing squad. Their trial, on charges of conspiring to overthrow the government, was unfair and they were denied the right to appeal to a higher court against their convictions and sentences. The executions were greeted with profound shock.

Guinea-Bissau is the sixth African country to abolish capital punishment -- the others are: Cape Verde in 1981; Namibia, Mozambique, and São Tomé e Príncipe in 1990; and Angola in 1992. Amnesty International welcomes this step and hopes that Guinea-Bissau will soon ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its two Optional Protocols. The Second Optional Protocol commits states parties not to execute anyone and to take all necessary measures to abolish the death penalty within their jurisdiction. Although Guinea-Bissau has now abolished the death penalty, ratification of the Second Optional Protocol would strengthen the worldwide movement to end judicial executions.

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4. AFR 39/WU 02/93 EXTERNAL
4 March 1993

INTERNAL

Please draw this to the attention of your Malawi Co-groups, (if appropriate), especially at AIUSA and the Malawi country-linking sections in Germany, UK, Japan and Nigeria. Chakufwa Chihana's appeal is going before the Supreme Court on Monday, 8 March - please raise as much publicity as possible before and during the appeal.

EXTERNAL

MALAWI: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL URGES RELEASE OF TRADE UNIONIST

Amnesty International is renewing its call for the unconditional release of trade unionist Chakufwa Chihana - on the eve of his appeal before the Supreme Court of Malawi, scheduled for 8 March. He is a prisoner of conscience, sentenced to two years' imprisonment for sedition because he had publicly advocated a multi-party political system.

Chakufwa Chihana, aged 52 - previously a prisoner of conscience from 1971 to 1977 - is the Secretary General of the Southern Africa Trade Union Coordination Council and chairman of the Malawian opposition Alliance for Democracy (AFORD). AFORD is campaigning for an end to the 29-year single-party rule of the Malawi Congress Party, led by Life- President Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda. A referendum on the issue is due to be held in June 1993.

Chakufwa Chihana was arrested on 6 April 1992 in Lilongwe, as he returned from an opposition meeting in Zambia. He was held incommunicado in defiance of several High Court rulings until July 1992, when he was taken to court and charged with possessing "seditious" publications, such as his airport speech advocating a multi-party system and a pastoral letter by Malawi's Roman Catholic bishops criticizing human rights violations and abuses of democracy. The court released him on bail but police promptly rearrested him and added further charges of sedition for a press interview he gave. After a further two months in prison he was granted bail to await trial.

Chakufwa Chihana later told a visiting delegation of British lawyers about his treatment in his early weeks in Mikuyu prison in Zomba:

"The cell was a very small cell. It was only about the size of my body. There was a window in the cell which had been deliberately blocked off. There was no ventilation. Their intention was that I should suffocate. I was held for almost a month in leg irons that had been imported from Sheffield (England). My legs swelled. I was incommunicado from family and friends."

His case came to trial by the High Court in November 1992. The prosecution argued that under Malawian law he committed sedition by "bringing the government into hatred or contempt" and by "raising discontent" against the Life-President. On 14 December 1992, he was found guilty of sedition and sentenced to two years' imprisonment. He was refused bail pending his appeal and is currently held again at Mikuyu Prison.

The outcome of Chakufwa Chihana's appeal will affect other current political cases as well as the fairness of the referendum on the one-party/multi-party issue to be held on 14 June 1993. A United Nations technical team advising the government on the referendum recommended that political prisoners should be released, exiles should be allowed home to take part, and the rights to freedom of expression and association should be guaranteed.

However, the authorities are continuing to arrest, threaten and harass multi-party campaigners. Some are in fear of their lives on account of death threats or rumours of assassination plots. Over 130 people are currently being tried for demonstrating against the Chihana trial judgment in December. In the first two months of 1993, prominent AFORD members such as the Reverend Peter Kaleso have been arrested, as well as Bakili Muluzi and Chakakala Chaziya, leaders of the United Democratic Front (UDF), another opposition group. Felix Mponda Phiri, the editor of a new independent newspaper published abroad, was arrested for bringing copies of his newspaper into the country - one article criticised the Chihana trial judgment. Returning exiles from South Africa and Zambia have been arrested on arrival and are still held without charge.

In the past two years, the human rights situation in Malawi has improved in important respects as a result of pressure from the international community. Hundreds of long-term prisoners of conscience and other political prisoners have been released. Vera Chirwa, a lawyer abducted from Zambia in 1981, whose death sentence after a grossly unfair trial was later commuted, was finally freed in January 1993. But there has still been no inquest into the death in prison three months earlier of her husband, Orton Chirwa, a well-known nationalist politician jailed at the same time. Reports of torture and ill-treatment of political prisoners have become less common recently. Yet the continuation of human rights violations requires continuing international pressure to ensure permanent protection for basic human rights in Malawi.

Amnesty International is calling for the unconditional release of Chakufwa Chihana, the dropping of sedition and other political charges against many other pro-democracy activists, and an end to the pattern of arrests, intimidation and harassment of non-violent government opponents.