
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 256/94

TO: PRESS OFFICERSAI INDEX: NWS 11/256/94
FROM: IS PRESS OFFICEDISTR: SC/PO
DATE: 9 NOVEMBER 1994 NO OF WORDS: 874

INTERNAL

NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - **RWANDA WAR CRIMES TRIBUNAL**

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Egypt - 10 November - SEE NEWS SERVICE 254/94

Peru/Committee against Torture - 9 November - SEE NEWS SERVICE 243/94

Nigeria - 11 November - SEE NEWS SERVICE 252/94

Pakistan - 24/25/28 November - SEE NEWS SERVICE 254/94

Iraq - 29 November - SEE NEWS SERVICE 212/94

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

****India - 27 November****

News item to go with report, "India: The Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act: The lack of 'scrupulous care'", AI Index: ASA 20/39/94. The IS press office will only be sending the news item and report to correspondents in India. The report will not be sent out in a Weekly Mailing until 23 November - so please call Sarah Thomas (India Research Team) on +44 71 413 5651 if you need a copy before the embargo.

News Service 256/94

AI INDEX MDE 12/WU 05/94
EMBARGOED UNTIL 0001 GMT 10 NOVEMBER 1994

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL STRONGLY PROTESTS THE ESCALATING HARASSMENT OF ITS LOCAL GROUPS
IN MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Amnesty International's Secretary-General Pierre Sané today strongly protested the escalating harassment of the human rights organization's local groups in Egypt and across the Middle East and North Africa.

"If Amnesty International members are barred from meeting to elect their own leaders, banned from carrying out their activities, and if we can't send our staff to train these members or send researchers to investigate the human rights situation, what clearer signal do we need that Amnesty International is not welcome?" Pierre Sané said.

At the end of last month, Egyptian authorities banned Amnesty International's Egyptian members from holding their annual general meeting. The government also barred the organization's international representatives from attending meetings and accused Amnesty International's organizational field worker in Egypt of carrying out "illegal activities".

This action comes in the wake of the September publication of the Amnesty International report on Egypt, "Egypt: Human Rights Defenders Under Threat." It detailed the arbitrary arrests of human rights defenders, including at least 41 lawyers and journalists. Egyptian police have also administratively detained thousands of suspected members and sympathizers of banned Islamist militant groups, according to the report which describes systematic torture and the deaths of detainees while in police custody.

In high-level talks in Cairo last year, officials at Egypt's Foreign Affairs Ministry repeated assurances first given in 1992 that local members of Amnesty International would soon have legal standing. Yet those assurances have not produced any government action.

"For years, we have asked the government to give our groups legal recognition in Egypt and instead they are taking steps to silence us," Pierre Sané said. "I find it hard to reconcile this with President Mubarak's statement to us in 1992 that Amnesty International is welcome in Egypt, providing that it does not concern itself with the internal politics of the country."

Amnesty International has always operated openly and within the law, keeping authorities informed of its peaceful activities carried out in solidarity with the victims of human rights violations worldwide. Amnesty International's own procedures provide that members campaign on behalf of individual cases of human rights violations throughout the world -- but not in their own country.

The de facto banning of Amnesty International in Egypt fits a pattern of harassment that Amnesty International members, delegates and staff members face elsewhere in the region.

In Tunisia, the government has harassed the Amnesty International section for over two years, blocking publications from entering the country, and so preventing its members from receiving the basic tools to carry out their normal activities.

They have received no mailings of the organization's newsletter since April 1994 nor copies of the annual International Report. The Tunisian authorities have imposed administrative impediments and restrictions on the Amnesty International section and have banned a member of the International Secretariat from visiting the country.

In Kuwait, the local Amnesty International groups applied for registration two years ago. Despite support by the parliament's Human Rights Committee, authorities continue to refuse legal registration to the groups and consequently imposes restrictions on their activity. The Kuwaiti Government has also denied entry visas to the Amnesty International membership development team for more than two years.

"This is a dangerous trend of harassment and restrictions on human rights organizations -- not just Amnesty International -- across the Middle East and North Africa," Pierre Sané said. "Authorities deliberately create a grey area by refusing legal recognition of human rights organizations, imposing restrictions on their activities and banning their meetings."

While governments in the region are pleased to proclaim the existence of Amnesty International groups and members in their countries in international human rights fora, this does not stop these same governments from targeting the organization's members, staff and delegates -- apparently in response to Amnesty International's worldwide campaigning activities against human rights abuses in these countries.

"We shall not remain silent," Pierre Sané said. "Such action against our movement simply reinforces our resolve to fight against human rights abuses and re-affirm the principle of international solidarity among defenders of human rights worldwide."

Amnesty International's Secretary-General, Pierre Sané, is available for a limited number of interviews today on this press release. Please contact the Press Office at the International Secretariat at (44) 71 413 5810.

Copies of Amnesty International's report "Egypt: Human Rights Defenders Under Threat" (AI Index MDE 12/15/94) are available from the Press Office.