

FEBRUARY 1998 WORLDWIDE APPEALS

SOUTH KOREA: Prisoner of conscience

Kim Song-man, aged 40, is currently serving a life sentence in the Republic of Korea (South Korea) for the non-violent expression of his political opinion.

Arrested in June 1985 and held incommunicado for two months, he was sentenced to death in January 1986. He was charged under the National Security Law with “anti-state” activities. However, the only evidence to support the charges against him was his confession, reportedly extracted under torture.

His sentence was commuted to life imprisonment in 1989.

The National Security Law prohibits unauthorized contacts with the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea). In the early 1980s, while studying in the USA, Kim Song-man visited several North Korean embassies in Eastern Europe and discussed Korean reunification. He also wrote pamphlets critical of South Korean government policy.

North and South Korea have been divided since the Korean War, which ended in 1953. While business contacts have grown in recent years, many students and activists in South Korea have been imprisoned for trying to communicate with North Korea.

Kim Song-man has written: “I am a person who wishes the independence of our nation and democracy. I think that this ideal can be realized in a socialistic country. I was interrogated and tortured mercilessly...”

Please write, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Kim Song-man and all others imprisoned for the non-violent expression of their political opinion, and for the National Security Law to be amended in line with international standards. Send letters to: President-elect Kim Dae-jung, The Blue House, 1 Sejong-no, Chongno-gu, Seoul, Republic of Korea. Fax: +82 2 770 0253. E-mail: webmaster@cwd.go.kr

Venezuela: Extrajudicial Execution

Lian Jonathan Cáceres Herrera, a 13-year-old boy, was shot dead by a Metropolitan Police officer in Caracas on 7 May 1996. As Lian was on his way to the hairdresser, the uniformed officer grabbed him roughly from behind, held a pistol to his head and shot him at point-blank range. He died instantly. The police officer then tried to plant a gun on Lian’s body -- the police often attempt to portray their victims as having died in shoot-outs. However, he was prevented from doing so by witnesses, one of whom was later taken to a police station and threatened in order to dissuade her from giving evidence. As of December 1997, a police officer was being detained in connection with the killing.

Children in Venezuela are at risk of extrajudicial execution, torture and ill-treatment, and arbitrary arrest. Those from the poorest sectors of society have been particularly targeted by security forces in the context of operations purportedly aimed at combating crime, while any child is at risk of joining the scores who have been the random targets of extreme violence. In the vast majority of cases, the Venezuelan authorities have failed to conduct adequate investigations.

Please write, deploring the killing by a police officer of Lian Jonathan Cáceres Herrera, and urging the government to expedite proceedings and bring to justice those responsible. Send letters to: Dr José Guillermo Andueza, Minister of the Interior, Ministerio de Relaciones Interiores, Carmelitas a Santa Capilla -- Av. Urdaneta, Caracas, Venezuela.

Palestinian Authority – Prolonged Incommunicado detention

Faruq Muhammad Salama Abu Hassan, a 43-year-old post office inspector, has been held in incommunicado detention by the Palestinian Authority for more than three years.

On the evening of 8 November 1994, a Military Intelligence officer came to Faruq’s home and asked him to go for a 10-minute interview. Faruq left with the officer, and has not been seen by relatives, or legal counsel, since. As of December 1997, he was being held in Gaza Central Prison. It is believed that since his arrest, Faruq Abu Hassan has not been brought before any Palestinian court.

Faruq's wife, Zahira Abu Hassan, has contacted the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of the Palestinian Authority, but has not been able to find out the reason for his detention. She is also concerned that her husband may not be receiving adequate medical treatment -- he suffered a spinal injury after being shot in the back during the intifada (uprising).

More than 2,000 political detainees have been arrested and detained by the Palestinian Authority since mid-1994. The great majority have been held, sometimes for years, without charge or trial.

+ Please write, calling for Faruq Muhammad Salama Abu Hassan's immediate and unconditional release, unless he is to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and given a trial which meets international fair trial standards. Also urge the Palestinian Authority to give Faruq access to relatives, legal counsel and appropriate medical treatment while he is still in detention. Send letters to: President Yasser Arafat, Palestinian Authority, Al-Muntada, Gaza, Palestinian Authority; and to: General Musa Arafat, Head of Military Intelligence, Military Intelligence Headquarters, Gaza, Palestinian Authority.