

## AI INDEX: ACT 33/09/93

**@The lives behind the lies: the campaign against "disappearances" and political killings (text of seven new leaflets included in third set)**

### BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

#### case

On a June morning in 1992 Serbian paramilitaries arrived at a flat just a few yards from the police station in Višegrad, a town in eastern Bosnia. There were three teenage girls in the flat: 16-year-old Mirsada, her 17-year-old sister, Azra (both pseudonyms), and one of their school friends.

The three girls were told they were going to be taken to the police station. Instead they were taken to the *Vilina Vlas* hotel, seven kilometres north of Višegrad.

This hotel is notorious; it is one of many places in Bosnia-Herzegovina where Serb militiamen have detained and raped Muslim and Croatian women, many of whom have never been seen again.

Mirsada too has not been seen since. She never returned from the hotel. Azra did return, and she remembers very clearly what happened there. When they arrived at the hotel the girls were taken to separate rooms. Five minutes later a soldier came into the room where Azra was and locked the door. "He asked me who had weapons among the Muslims. I said I didn't know ... He said I was lying and he asked me who my father was ... Then he started to take off his clothes and ordered me to strip as well."

Azra was beaten and raped. Afterwards, she heard a long scream. "A bit later a door was unlocked and I heard a soldier cursing. A girl was crying in the hallway and it was my sister."

Azra was eventually released and allowed to return to Višegrad but her sister was not. Mirsada's mother tried to find her daughter but her efforts were in vain. Day after day she went to the police station, only to be told that the police could do nothing. Police officers told her that they knew what was going on in the hotel but said the situation was beyond their control. In July Mirsada's family fled Višegrad and became refugees.

#### back

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judicial investigations of “disappearances” and political killings are never taken. Government agents commit appalling abuses with impunity.

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Add your voice to ours. Join our campaign. Write to the President of the Republic of Serbia and to the Representative of the Bosnian Serbs. Say that you have read about Mirsada’s case, which illustrates the fate of many women missing from the *Vilina Vlas* hotel. Urge that it be fully and impartially investigated and that those responsible are brought to justice. Send your letters to: Slobodan Milošević/ Predsednik Republike Srbije/ Andricev Venac 1/11000 Beograd/ Yugoslavia; and to: Dr Radovan Karadžić/Biro “Republike Srpske”/ Moše Pijade 8/11000 Beograd/ Yugoslavia.

### **Country background**

The break-up of Yugoslavia commenced in June 1991 with the declarations of independence by Slovenia and Croatia and the subsequent use of force by the Federal Yugoslav and Serbian Governments in an attempt to prevent their secession. Bosnia-Herzegovina quickly became unstable as the main Bosnian Serb party blocked attempts led by the main Muslim and Croatian parties to bring about the secession of the republic. Clashes started in March 1992 after a referendum which favoured independence for the republic. Armed Serbs, backed by Yugoslav army units, took control of large areas of the country with Bosnian Croat and Bosnian Government forces controlling the rest.

Thousands of civilians and captured or wounded combatants have been deliberately and arbitrarily killed since March 1992. Many thousands more civilians have been detained on account of their ethnic origins and often as hostages. Most of these prisoners, with prisoners of war, have been tortured or ill-treated. Large numbers of people have probably “disappeared”, after being abducted by the opposing parties. Others have become refugees, the victims of deliberate policies to displace whole populations because of their religious or ethnic origin. Abuses against women, including rape, have been widespread during the war. They often appear to fit into a wider pattern of abuses, characterized by the indiscriminate use of force against part of a local population of a particular ethnicity, aimed at causing the group as a whole to flee in fear.

All sides have been responsible for the savage abuses which have dominated headlines in the international media. However, Muslims appear to have been the most frequent victims while armed Serbs have commonly been the perpetrators.

### **Caption**

***Bosanski Brod, April 1992: Some of the thousands of victims of deliberate and arbitrary killings in Bosnia-Herzegovina. A pathologist examined photographs of this group of Croat victims of Serbian forces, which included elderly women and men, and concluded that several had probably been shot in the back of the head at close range.***

## **BRAZIL**

### **case**

Eighteen-year-old Roberto Carlos da Costa and his friend Natalino José Batista, aged 16, “disappeared” in September 1992. They were last seen in the São Paulo suburb of Vila Nova York.

Roberto Carlos da Costa was on probation when he “disappeared”. He had been convicted of petty theft by a juvenile court and placed in the care of social workers from the Monica Paião Trevisan Centre for the Defence of Children and Adolescents, a local human rights organization. According to workers at the centre, Roberto Carlos da Costa was making good progress.

Six months before he “disappeared”, Roberto Carlos da Costa had been detained by a military police patrol, on suspicion of petty theft. He had been tortured for several hours to make him confess where he had hidden the goods he was suspected of stealing, by the military police who arrested him and by the civil police in the 70th Police Station, where he was taken. The day after his release, complaints about Roberto Carlos da Costa’s treatment were made to the São Paulo Public Prosecutor for Children and Adolescents and to a municipal commission of inquiry into violence against children. He underwent a forensic medical examination and an internal police inquiry was opened into the incident.

At the end of August Roberto Carlos da Costa told a human rights worker that he had been shot at from an unidentified car. On 10 September he and his friend “disappeared”. The boys’ families and human rights workers from the Monica Paião Trevisan centre searched for them in hospitals, mortuaries and police stations. Their “disappearance” was reported to the police. But neither of the boys has been seen again.

Although there is no concrete evidence of responsibility for the “disappearance” of Roberto Carlos da Costa and his friend, the pattern of political killings and - “disappearances” of street children suggests the police may have been involved in this case, just as they have in many others.

In 1992 the São Paulo municipal commission of inquiry into violence against children blamed the police for many of the killings it had recorded. The report also stated that it was common practice for military police officers in São Paulo to torture children taken into custody.

### **back of leaflet**

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history, rounded up to the nearest ten thousand. All the victims were individuals, people like those cases we are highlighting. Theirs are the lives behind the lies.

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Add your voice to ours. Join our campaign. Write to the Governor of the state of São Paulo, Brazil. Say that you have read about the "disappearance" of Roberto Carlos da Costa. Urge that it be fully and impartially investigated and that those responsible are brought to justice.

Send your letter to: Exmo Sr. Governador de Estado de São Paulo/Sr. Luis Antônio Fleury/ Palácio do Bandeirantes/Av Morumbi/ 05.598 São Paulo, SP/Brazil.

### **country**

Brazil, the largest and most populous country in Latin America,

is a federal republic comprising 26 state governments and the federal district of Brasília. In 1985 the country returned to civilian rule after 21 years of military dictatorship. Constitutional guarantees for fundamental human rights were reaffirmed and international human rights standards ratified. Despite these positive steps, human rights violations continue to be an everyday occurrence.

Hundreds of street children are killed every year in Brazil. There are approximately 60 million children, aged 18 and under, in Brazil—41 per cent of the population. In 1987 homicide and suicide were the primary cause of death in the 15 to 17 age group in several of the main cities. Uniformed military police have been responsible for killing children and adults on the streets. A 1992 report by a parliamentary commission of inquiry stated that the involvement of civil and military police in the killings of children is "far from exceptional" and that police killing is the third largest cause of violent death among the same group. In other cases, the killings are the work of "death squads" composed of civilian vigilantes and police officers who are privately paid by local businesses to rid their neighbourhoods of "undesirable elements". Whoever the perpetrators, these killings are almost never investigated. Impunity for human rights violations of all kinds is a well-established precedent in Brazil. Irrespective of whether the victims are street children, members of indigenous groups, or peasant farmers, those responsible for political killings, torture and "disappearance" invariably escape justice.

#### **caption**

***Marcos Antonio Alves da Silva (top), who was killed with seven street children in July 1993 during a "death squad"-style attack outside the Candelária church in Rio de Janeiro. Evidence has recently emerged of heavy police involvement in a network of killers for hire in Rio Janeiro, responsible for these killings and others, including that of 21 residents of the shanty town of Vigário Geral in August, and the "disappearance" of 11 people from the Acarí shanty town in August 1993.***

## ISRAEL / OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

### case

Najah Abu Dalal was shot in the head by an Israeli soldier on 21 April 1993. She died five days later.

The day began like most days in the Nusayrat Refugee Camp where 34-year-old Najah and her family lived. At about 6.30am she left her house to see her children off to school. She could hear the sound of gunfire and grenades coming from another part of the camp. She went back inside to the family's private courtyard to talk to a relative.

Minutes later she fell to the ground. She had been shot in the left eye, apparently by a soldier stationed at the top of a house some 100 metres away.

Najah's brother-in-law went with her to hospital and said that the ambulance was stopped by soldiers for 15 minutes on the way. She was transferred to al-Shifa hospital in Gaza City, where she died on 26 April.

Her husband was invited to meet the military governor on 10 May to describe the incident. He said he waited from 7am until 5pm without being seen and was sent away after having been told that he would be summoned again.

The Israeli authorities have promised to provide information about the investigation into this killing, but so far nothing has been received.

Hundreds of Palestinian civilians have been killed by Israeli forces since the *intifada* began in 1987. The investigations into these killings have usually been inadequate and have rarely resulted in prosecutions.

Almost 40 of those killed since mid-December 1992 were children, aged 16 and under. According to eye-witnesses, 11-year-old Rana Abu Tuuyur was shot dead on her way to buy milk; 19-year-old Rizq al-Fara, who helped to carry the child's body to a car, was shot dead later that day while standing on his balcony. Eighteen-month-old Fares al-Kurdi was shot in the chest and killed while sheltering in a doorway with his father during clashes in Jabalia Refugee Camp.

### back of leaflet

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Add your voice to ours. Join our campaign. Write to the Prime Minister of Israel. Say that you have read about the killing of Najah Abu Dalal. Urge that it be fully and impartially investigated and that anyone found responsible is brought to justice.

Send your letter to: Yitzhak Rabin/Prime Minister and Minister of Defence/Office of the Prime Minister/ 3 Kaplan Street/ Hakiryia/Jerusalem 91919/Israel.

### **country background**

Since the start of the Palestinian *intifada* (uprising) in December 1987, more than 1,000 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli security forces in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, occupied by Israel since 1967.

Many were shot dead during clashes with the army or border

police. Some died as a result of beatings or torture, or after the seemingly deliberate misuse of tear-gas. An alarmingly high number of the victims, including women and children, were apparently not engaged in any violent activity at all. Many of the killings were totally unjustifiable and some may have amounted to extrajudicial executions.

Methods of protest during the *intifada* have included strikes, tax boycotts, and demonstrations, sometimes on a large scale. Israeli forces and civilians have been attacked with stones and other missiles, petrol bombs, and, with increasing frequency, knives and firearms. More than 90 Israeli civilians and over 700 Palestinians, mainly alleged "collaborators", have been killed by Palestinians since the *intifada* began.

The Israeli security forces have responded to the protests with widespread arrests, the imprisonment of thousands under administrative detention orders and the often excessive and indiscriminate use of force, including live ammunition. Between mid-December 1992 and the end of July 1993 over 120 Palestinians were shot dead by Israeli forces.

**caption**

Palestinian children demonstrating in the early stages of the *intifada*

## **SOUTH AFRICA**

### **case**

Bheki Mlangeni, aged 32, worked for a Johannesburg law firm and was the branch chairman of the ANC in Jabulani, Soweto. He was an active member of the Independent Board of Inquiry into Informal Repression, and had helped present evidence of covert police assassinations to a government-appointed commission of inquiry.

On 16 February 1991 a package arrived at the law firm offices, addressed to a man named Dirk Coetzee and giving the return address as "Bheki" at the law firm. Bheki Mlangeni opened the package, possibly under the impression that it was addressed to him since the return address appeared prominently on the front. And he was familiar with Dirk Coetzee's name.

Dirk Coetzee is a former security police captain, and a key witness in support of allegations that the white minority government had been sanctioning "death-squad" killings of its opponents; he told an official inquiry that he had taken part in such killings while serving in a special security police unit based at Vlakplaas near Pretoria. Bheki Mlangeni was investigating the activities of the Vlakplaas unit and was in regular contact with Dirk Coetzee.

The package contained a personal stereo cassette player with headphones and a tape labelled "Evidence of hit squads". That night, Bheki Mlangeni decided to play the tape. He put on the headphones. Simultaneous explosions in both earpieces killed him instantly.

Following a police investigation into Bheki Mlangeni's killing, in December 1991 the Attorney-General announced that there was insufficient evidence to prosecute anyone, but ordered a judicial inquest.

In December 1992 the inquest judge ruled that Bheki Mlangeni's death was the result of "an unlawful act by an unknown person or persons", and said that the inquest had been hampered by the initial police investigation, which he described as "lethargic".

Under cross-examination the head of the police investigation admitted that he had not visited Vlakplaas until three months after Bheki Mlangeni's death and had intentionally misled the forensic expert employed by Bheki Mlangeni's family, who accused the police team of a cover-up.

Although a judicial inquest has been held, Amnesty International is concerned that Bheki Mlangeni's death was not investigated thoroughly and independently and is calling for his killers to be brought to justice.

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Add your voice to ours. Join our campaign. Write to the President of South Africa. Say that you have read about the political killing of Bheki Mlangeni and that the judicial inquest was hampered by a police cover-up. Urge that the killing be fully and impartially investigated and that those responsible are brought to justice.

Send your letter to: F. W. de Klerk/State President's Office/ Private Bag X83/Pretoria 0001/South Africa.

### **country background**

The beginning of the 1990s saw dramatic change in South Africa. Inhuman *apartheid* laws began to be dismantled. African National Congress (ANC) leader Nelson Mandela was released from prison after serving 26 years of a life sentence. Discussions began

between the government, the ANC and other political parties towards ending white minority rule. For the first time in decades respect for human rights seemed to be on the agenda. But the process of political reform has gone hand in hand with horrifying levels of bloodshed. Since 1990, over 10,000 South Africans have been murdered, many of them in circumstances implicating the security forces or by armed groups acting with tacit official support. Scores of leading opponents of *apartheid* have been gunned down by "death squads" linked to the security forces. Torture and deaths in police custody continue with alarming regularity.

In most cases, members of the security forces and others responsible for these human rights violations have not been held to account for their actions. This atmosphere of impunity has been a major contributing factor to the escalation of violence since 1990. In November 1992 the government enacted the Further Indemnity Act, effectively granting impunity to human rights violators.

The ANC has also committed human rights abuses; it has admitted responsibility for torture, ill-treatment and executions in its detention camps outside South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s.

#### **caption**

**Demonstrators run for cover as the security forces open fire in Ciskei in September 1992. At least 29 people were killed.**

## MYANMAR

### Case

Rahila, a 30-year-old Muslim woman, worked as a day labourer in the rice fields surrounding Hlaingbwe Township of Kayin (Karen) state. She was single and had suffered from epilepsy since she was a child.

Rahila is not her real name. Her identity has been concealed to protect her relatives from reprisals by Myanmar's armed forces, known as the *tatmadaw*. But her case represents hundreds who have suffered the same fate as her.

For years members of the ethnic minorities living in the remote and mountainous rural areas of Myanmar have been at the mercy of the *tatmadaw*. Thousands have been deliberately killed on suspicion of supporting armed insurgents. Hundreds of thousands have been forced to work as porters or as human mine-detectors for the *tatmadaw* counter-insurgency patrols.

Many have died of exhaustion or severe ill-treatment, including children and pregnant women. Others have been killed for disobeying orders or because they were too exhausted to work; some died when they were forced to walk across minefields at gunpoint.

On an April morning in 1991 a *tatmadaw* unit came to Rahila's village looking for people they could use as porters. Rahila was among those taken away. Her nephew describes what happened:

"The village head said, 'Don't take her, she is ill.' They took her anyway, saying, 'We'll only take her for a little while.' Ten days later we heard she was dead... one of the porters who was with her came back and told me... She was carrying rice on her back and exerting herself so much she had a fit. They kicked and punched her to try to make her get up, but she couldn't, and then they kicked and punched her so much she died... She died from the beatings."

Anyone who refuses to go with the *tatmadaw* risks being shot. A woman whose cousin and his two-year-old child were shot dead when he refused to join troops as a porter told Amnesty International that the family had not protested about the incident. "There is no way of complaining about anything the government does," she said.

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Add your voice to ours. Join our campaign. Write to the Chairman of the SLORC in Myanmar. Say that you have read about the political killing of Rahila. Urge that it be fully and impartially investigated and that those responsible are brought to justice. Send your letter to:

General Than Shwe/ Chairman/State Law and Order  
Restoration/Ministry of Defence/ Signal Pagoda  
Road/Yangon/Union of Myanmar.

### **Country background**

Human rights are grossly and persistently violated throughout

Myanmar. The country has been in the grip of martial law since the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) took power in September 1988. All opposition has been systematically suppressed. When challenged, the SLORC simply proclaims that martial law gives it the right to do as it pleases.

Hundreds of political activists, many of them prisoners of conscience, have been jailed, some without trial, others after unfair trials. Many have been tortured or suffered other forms of ill-treatment. One of Myanmar's best known prisoners of conscience, Aung San Suu Kyi, won the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize. She has been under house arrest since 1989.

Human rights violations are reported from all parts of the country. In urban and rural areas alike the military detains civilians to work as porters or as labourers, who are routinely ill-treated and even summarily killed when they become too exhausted to continue working. Ethnic minority peoples make up a third of Myanmar's population of around 42 million. In ethnic minority areas where the military faces armed insurgency, defenceless civilians have been arbitrarily detained, tortured and killed. Minorities in areas where there is little or no armed opposition, like the Muslims of Rakhine (Arakan) state, have also suffered gross violations of their basic rights including arbitrary arrest, torture and extrajudicial execution.

Armed opposition groups in Myanmar have also committed grave human rights abuses, including torture and summary executions of prisoners.

### **Caption**

Woman who was raped by the *tatmadaw*

## **TOGO**

### **Case**

Esther Kassakpo, aged 25, worked as a street seller in Lomé, Togo's capital city. She was also a member of the Collective of Women's Associations, which is affiliated to an opposition organization, the Collective of Democratic Opposition. Women's organizations have played a prominent part in the pro-democracy movement in Togo.

On 25 January 1993 Esther Kassakpo was among hundreds of people who joined a peaceful demonstration in Lomé organized by the opposition to show public support for an initiative by the French and German governments aimed at resolving the political deadlock between the President, the transitional government and the transitional parliamentary body. As the demonstrators gathered the security forces forced them to move and then apparently opened fire without warning. At least 19 people were killed, including Esther Kassakpo.

The Togolese Interior Minister issued a statement saying that 12 people were killed when the security forces fired in the air after one of their colleagues was attacked by demonstrators. However, this version of events was contradicted by eye-witness reports. The State Prosecutor ordered that autopsies be carried out on those killed. The results of these autopsies have not been made public. Nor has there been any official investigation into the killings.

Esther Kassakpo's family are believed to have fled the country after she was killed, fearing reprisals and further political violence. They are among at least a quarter of a million Togolese who have become refugees, principally in neighbouring Ghana and Benin.

Further political killings have since been reported. In March 1992 at least 20 people were extrajudicially executed by the army following an alleged attack on the army barracks in Lomé where the President lives. Most of the victims were military personnel.

On the day of the presidential election, opposition supporters, angered to discover that some ballot boxes had apparently been filled with false ballot papers in favour of General Eyadéma before voting took place, ransacked voting booths in and around a village in the centre of the country called Agbandi. Some 40 people were arrested in connection with the incident. In Blitta, the detainees were forced into a tiny cell. Twenty-one died as a result of poisoning, asphyxiation, or of injuries sustained when they were arrested.

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Add your voice to ours. Join our campaign. Write to the President of Togo. Say that you have read about the political killing of Esther Kassakpo. Urge that it be fully and impartially investigated and that those responsible are brought to justice. Send your letter to: Général Gnassingbé Eyadéma/ Président de la République/Palais présidentiel/Avenue de la Marina/ Lomé/Togo.

### **Country background**

When General Eyadéma became President of Togo in 1967 he promised democratic elections and appointed a committee to draft a new constitution. The committee’s report was never published; in 1969 President Eyadéma established a one-party state.

For the next 22 years human rights violations were rife. President Eyadéma and his party ruled every aspect of political life, determining when and how opponents would be imprisoned, often without any judicial process. Many were targeted because of their ethnic origin or because they were believed to oppose the government.

Since 1990 the scale of human rights violations has increased dramatically. In early 1991, after months of violent confrontations between the security forces and opponents of one-party rule the government agreed to introduce a multi-party

political system. A National Conference held in mid-1991 examined past violations and elected a prime minister who nominated a transitional government to run the country until the elections.

Political instability and violence intensified after the National Conference. In 1992 prominent members of the opposition faced a new pattern of assassinations, in which the security forces were implicated but never prosecuted. During the first half of 1993 the security forces became more openly involved in abuses, principally extrajudicial executions. In July 1993 the security forces were confined to barracks as part of an agreement between the government and the opposition to allow the elections to take place without military interference.

The presidential election held in August 1993 returned President Eyadéma to power, amid widespread allegations of ballot-rigging. Within a few days, there were new reports of prisoners dying in custody.

**Caption**

Some of the victims of the massacre in January 1993

## VENEZUELA

### Case

I buried half my life when I buried my son. I have not recovered from the death of my son, from this nightmare. And I believe that no father can recover from the death of a son who was cut down in a way that is as drastic and as violent as this. My wish is for these things to stop happening in this country.

This was how Hipólito Landa Torres described the suffering caused by the killing of his son.

On 17 September 1992 Luis Enrique Landa Díaz, a 21-year-old medical student at Carabobo State University in Aragua, was celebrating the medical school's 17th anniversary with fellow students and staff. According to witnesses, a group of 20 members of the National Guard began to patrol the area around 11am. Following a verbal dispute between some of the students and the National Guard, the guards began firing tear-gas at the students. At 2.30pm the guards started to fire arbitrarily at the defenceless students, with live ammunition. Luis Landa was shot dead.

An official investigation was opened into the killing and a member of the National Guard was identified as a suspect on 20 September. Proceedings were opened by the military and civilian courts.

However, in March 1993 the military courts requested exclusive jurisdiction over the case. The military courts have repeatedly exonerated members of the security forces accused of human rights violations. The Supreme Court is to rule on the issue of jurisdiction.

Luis Landa's family, who sought publicity for his killing, have been the target of systematic harassment. They have received threatening phone calls and shots have been fired at their house. In December 1992 Luis Landa's father was shot in the knee by a group of armed men in a car.

A number of demonstrators, many of them students, have been seriously injured or killed as a result of excessive use of firearms by members of the Venezuelan security forces. There is also a pattern of killings, particularly among the urban poor, of people whom the police claim are criminal suspects. But in many cases it appears that the use of firearms was either unnecessary or else intended to kill or cause serious injury. In most of these cases those responsible have not been brought to justice.

### Back of leaflet

Luis Enrique Landa Díaz is one of the "Lives" featured in Amnesty International's campaign against "disappearances" and political killings.

Victims of human rights violations are often presented as

faceless masses. The greatest of massacres are recorded in history, rounded up to the nearest ten thousand. All the victims were individuals, people like those cases we are highlighting. Theirs are the lives behind the lies. This is our major international campaign of 1993. We hope it will force governments to stop "disappearances" and political killings and to take measures which will prevent these terrible human rights violations in the future.

One way of preventing human rights violations is to bring the guilty to justice. This rarely happens in the countries on which our campaign focuses. In most, even elementary steps such as judicial investigations of "disappearances" and political killings are never taken. Government agents commit appalling abuses with impunity.

Proper investigation of abuses is essential if the truth is to emerge. Victims, their relatives and society at large all have a vital interest in knowing the truth about human rights violations.

Bringing the guilty to justice also sends a clear message that human rights violations will not be tolerated.

We want governments to account for the "disappeared" and conduct full and impartial investigations into political killings and "disappearances". We want them to bring those responsible to justice.

We also want governments to compensate the victims' families. Millions of people around the world have been orphaned, widowed and thrown into destitution by the "disappearance" or political killing of their relatives.

Our campaign will put pressure on the international community to take seriously its responsibilities—through the United Nations and other intergovernmental bodies—to prevent "disappearances" and political killings; and to create international means for bringing perpetrators to justice where national avenues have been closed.

Add your voice to ours. Join our campaign. Write to the President of Venezuela. Say that you have read about the deliberate and arbitrary killing of Luis Enrique Landa Díaz. Urge that it be fully and impartially investigated and that those responsible are brought to justice. Send your letter to: Sr. Ramón José Velásquez/President de la República/Palacio de Miraflores/ Caracas/Venezuela.

### **Country background**

Democratically elected civilian governments have ruled Venezuela without interruption since 1958 and have increasingly stated their commitment to human rights. Yet in recent years, against a background of rising political tensions, state officials have been allowed to commit gross abuses with virtual impunity.

In February and March 1989 hundreds of people were killed during widespread and sometimes violent protests against austerity measures introduced by the new government of President Carlos Andrés Pérez. Many died as a result of deliberate or indiscriminate shootings by the police and army. Further extrajudicial executions were committed in 1992, particularly in the wake of two attempted military coups in February and November. In just one incident in November, 63 prisoners were massacred.

The government responded to each political crisis by suspending a wide range of constitutional guarantees concerning individual human rights. In almost every case of alleged extrajudicial execution and other serious violations, the judicial system failed to mount proper investigations or bring those responsible to justice.

In May 1993 the Senate suspended President Carlos Andrés Pérez from office after the Supreme Court ruled he should stand trial for alleged corruption. In June, Ramón José Velásquez was elected by Congress as the country's interim President. He will hold office until February 1994, when a new administration will take over following general elections scheduled for December 1993.

### **Caption**

A member of the security forces beats a student during a demonstration in Caracas in April 1992.