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WEEKLY UPDATE SERVICE 20/92

Contained in this weekly update are external items on Lesotho, Hong Kong, Switzerland, Thailand and Algeria and an internal item on United Kingdom.

1. NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

URGENT CORRECTION

Two last minute corrections have been made to the Annual Report Summary which was sent on 7 May:-

In the Europe Summary, 10th paragraph, please DELETE the opening sentence: "In Greece an administrative inquiry.. acted in self-defence." The paragraph should now begin: "In Turkey the government attributed..."

In the Middle East Summary, 8th paragraph, the figure 90 should be replaced with 80, to read: "...and in the Israeli-Occupied Territories - where some 80 Palestinians, including children, were shot dead..."

Apologies for these changes.

Burundi - 28 May

A news release and report should be with you.

Pakistan - 3 June

A document and targeted news release on arrests in Sind have now been sent to you.

South Africa - 10 June

International news release and possibly two sets of questions and answers to go with publication on security force involvement in torture and political killings since the start of reforms.

Nepal - 17 June

Limited news release to go with a document on Nepal.

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Greece - 24 June

Targeted news release to go with a publication on ill-treatment.

Annual Report - 9 July

The embargo time is confirmed at 1300 hrs gmt. After the event we will be asking you for feedback about how the media coverage was, particularly in the light of the changed time.

The Annual Report summaries have now been sent to you. The updates will be with you in the first week of June.

UNCONFIRMED NEWS INITIATIVES

USA - possibly 18 June 1992(New Information)

The research team is working hard on a document about police brutality in Los Angeles. Because of the recent international publicity about the subject, we hope to bring the report out sooner than expected with a news release and have a tentative embargo date of 18 June. We are also currently working on a questions and answers on the subject which should be with you next week.

Indigenous People's Campaign

Discussions are currently under way at the IS about the media strategy for the report, which will have an embargo date in September/October. We are currently considering media materials, speakers, how to present the material, etc. As this is the first time we have done a report like this, we would like your input and think there should be an opportunity to discuss problems in advance. If you are interested in a conference call, please let us know.

SECTION NEWS INITIATIVES

From the British Section - Press Conference on Peru

The British Section Press Office will be holding a press conference on Peru, on Monday, June 1. At the press conference we will be presenting Pancho Soberón, the human rights activist from Peru, who will be visiting the UK. We will also be using the conference as an opportunity to present Amnesty's new report on Peru (an external document which does not have a press release). Peter Archard, the Peruvian researcher will also be attending. UK press will be invited, and we will also be trying to get coverage for Pancho on various news and feature programmes during that week. This is to alert you to any "spin off" about this report, although foreign press are not being invited.

Japanese Section - Death Penalty News Release

The Japanese Section will be sending out a news release on the death penalty in Japan, embargoed for 0100 hrs gmt Friday 22 May. It will be going mostly to Japanese contacts but also to a limited selection of English-speaking media. The English text is available from the IS.

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2. AFR 33/WU 01/92 EXTERNAL

2 June 1992

INTERNAL

The IS will be sending this item as an 'Advice to Editors' embargoed for Tuesday 2 June to international radio stations and Southern Africa media along with the report, Lesotho: Torture, political killings and abuses against trade unionists, AI Index: AFR 33/01/92.

EXTERNAL

LESOTHO: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS FOR ACTION AGAINST POLICE TORTURERS

Amnesty International has issued a report calling on the Government of Lesotho to investigate and take action to stop a pattern of torture, deaths in custody and extrajudicial executions which dates back several years. Despite compelling evidence of torture and other abuses - including post-mortem reports on prisoners who died in custody - the government has not initiated impartial investigations nor brought those responsible to justice.

Amnesty International fears existing patterns of police torture and ill-treatment of prisoners could continue even after the planned election of a civilian government later this year, and is calling for an independent commission of inquiry into human rights violations, which should result in those responsible being brought to justice.

Over the past two years the government has used its powers under the Internal Security Act to charge trade union officials for holding meetings of union members. In the most serious incident involving the trade unions, in August 1991 police shot dead an official of the construction workers' union at the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, in what appeared to be a deliberate extrajudicial execution.

The organization also cites details of the cases of 23 military personnel held since 1986 after being tried by a court martial without proper legal representation.

The army has ruled Lesotho since 1986 and plans to hand over power to an elected civilian government in late 1992. The proposed new civilian constitution guarantees basic human rights, but Amnesty International considers that decisive action is needed now to end a pattern of abuse which dates back many years. The following are some of the cases highlighted by Amnesty International:

- Mofokeng Makakole, a 31-year-old criminal suspect, died in police custody in September 1991. According to an independent post-mortem examination he died of strangulation and had been severely beaten.
- John Ralengana, a prisoner at Maseru Prison, was wounded with lead shot during a disturbance at the prison in August 1991. He was placed in solitary confinement in a flooded cell for nearly two weeks after the incident and by March 1992 had still not been given any medical treatment.
- Bathobokae Mokhothu, aged 17 years, was shot dead by police as he was on his way to a football match in August 1990. His mother saw police chasing and whipping him. The incident coincided with a national demonstration by striking teachers. One police officer is reported to have been reprimanded for his part in Bathobokae Mokhothu's death.
- Lakia Pholo, a bank official, was arrested in July 1989, suspected of a criminal offence. He was later released without charge and then sued the government for damages for torture. The court found that he had been stripped of his trousers and underpants, beaten and pinched with pliers. The police put

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crushed stones in his shoes and made him jump up and down in time with the ringing of a bell. His interrogators forced a stick into his anus which they then put into his mouth. Despite this court finding there has been no criminal prosecution of the police officers responsible.

● Samuel Hlapo was one of four men who hijacked a bus in September 1988, shortly before the visit to Lesotho of Pope John Paul II. The other three were killed in a gun battle with South African security forces, but Samuel Hlapo was taken into Lesotho police custody suffering only superficial wounds. The following day he was dead. The official post-mortem examination found that his throat had been slit and his skull smashed. There have apparently been no further investigations into his death and no one has been charged in connection with the case.

Amnesty International has gathered evidence of a number of other instances where prisoners have suffered similar torture to that inflicted on Laka Pholo. The government's failure to investigate or take action over such cases is not new. The previous government of Chief Leabua Jonathan failed to conduct adequate investigations into the 1981 murder of a church newspaper editor and two friends, apparently at the hands of a pro-government death squad.

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3. ASA 19/WU 01/92 EXTERNAL

20 May 1992

HONG KONG: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CONCERNS ABOUT REFUGEE SCREENING PROCESS

On 12 May 1992 the governments of Hong Kong, the United Kingdom and Viet Nam announced that they had signed an agreement to forcibly return to Viet Nam the Vietnamese asylum-seekers who arrived in Hong Kong before 29 October 1991, and who, through a screening process, are considered not to be refugees.

Amnesty International continues to have some concerns regarding this screening process, in particular the organization considers that, contrary to current practice, each asylum-seeker should receive legal advice at all stages of the process and receive an oral hearing when appealing against refusal of refugee status.

Amnesty International is concerned that no asylum-seeker should be forcibly returned if they would be at risk of serious human rights violations in Viet Nam and believes that the Hong Kong authorities must continue to make improvements to the screening process to ensure that all those at risk are identified. Amnesty International will continue to monitor the screening process. In recent months Amnesty International has identified some cases of individual asylum-seekers who had been "screened out" but whose forcible return it opposed because it feared they would be at risk of human rights violations if returned to Viet Nam.

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4. EUR 43/WU 01/92 EXTERNAL
20 May 1992

SWITZERLAND: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL WELCOMES NATIONAL REFERENDUM VOTE INTRODUCING A CIVILIAN ALTERNATIVE TO COMPULSORY MILITARY SERVICE

A majority of voters in a national referendum held in Switzerland on 17 May approved a proposal to amend the Federal Constitution and introduce, for the first time, a civilian alternative to compulsory military service.

Amnesty International has for many years expressed concern about the imprisonment of hundreds of conscripts each year as a result of their refusal, on grounds of conscience, to carry out military service and has appealed for their release as prisoners of conscience.

The organization has repeatedly pressed for the introduction of the right to refuse military service on grounds of conscience and for a civilian alternative to compulsory military service.

Amnesty International therefore welcomes the amendment to the Constitution as a first essential step towards the introduction, in practice, of a genuine alternative civilian service, outside the military system and of a non-punitive nature, available to conscripts objecting to military service on religious, ethical, moral, humanitarian, philosophical, political or similar grounds.

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4. ASA 20/WU 01/92 EXTERNAL
19 May 1992

INTERNAL

This item was sent out to you as an urgent note to press officers yesterday morning - with an index number to correspond with this weekly update.

EXTERNAL

THAILAND: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CONCERNED ABOUT USE OF LETHAL FORCE, PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE

Amnesty International has today protested to the government of Thailand about the recent violence there, and called for an immediate inquiry into security force killings of demonstrators.

The call comes after several nights of violence in Bangkok, the capital, as security forces used water cannons, truncheons and even automatic weapons to break up protest demonstrations calling for the resignation of the unelected prime minister, General Suchinda Khraprayun. On 18 May, General Suchinda declared a State of Emergency, banned all public gatherings and imposed censorship.

Amnesty International believes that the shooting of demonstrators by Thai security forces constituted a gross violation of human rights. Some of the resulting deaths of unarmed civilians may have been extrajudicial executions and were unlawful.

The organization is also urging the Thai authorities to release all prisoners of conscience, including member of parliament Chamlong Srimuang.

Chamlong Srimuang, the leader of the protest demonstrations, was arrested on 18 May and Amnesty International considers him a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for his non-violent opposition. His wife, Sirilak Srimuang, may also have been arrested and three other demonstration organizers were also reportedly arrested and could be prisoners of conscience.

Amnesty International is also worried about the fate of some 1300 people arrested during the demonstrations, many of whom may also be prisoners of conscience.

The demonstrations met with violent opposition from the security forces on 18 and 19 May and on at least two separate occasions security forces fired directly into crowds of demonstrators. The security forces reportedly advanced through the streets, firing rounds of automatic weapon fire in an effort to disperse the demonstrators fleeing before them. At least 20 people are believed to have been killed, with scores of others injured, mostly by truncheon beatings by police.

On 19 May, Thai authorities announced that they had set up units to hunt down people on motorcycles, who had allegedly been inciting violence. There are reports that at least three motorcyclists have since been shot by Thai police.

The demonstrations have been in protest at the appointment of General Suchinda on 7 April after general elections in Thailand. General Suchinda was not an elected member of parliament but was chosen by the governing coalition of political parties. Last year, he led a coup d'état which removed Chatichai Choonhavan, the elected Prime Minister, from power.

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5. MDE 28/WU 05/92 EXTERNAL
26 May 1992

INTERNAL

This item is being sent to the Arabic and French services of some international radio stations and the Algerian press by the IS as an 'Advice to Editors' embargoed for Tuesday 26 May.

EXTERNAL

ALGERIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL URGES ALGERIAN GOVERNMENT TO END ADMINISTRATIVE DETENTION

Amnesty International has sent a memorandum to the Algerian Government detailing its concerns about human rights violations in Algeria over the past year, particularly since the declaration of the state of emergency in February 1992.

The memorandum, drawn up following the visit of an Amnesty International fact-finding team to Algeria in March 1992, criticizes the authorities' use of administrative detention to hold over 6,000 suspected political opponents without charge or trial, and says some may be prisoners of conscience. It also expresses concerns about arbitrary arrests, ill-treatment and torture of detainees; fatal shootings of unarmed civilians by the security forces when there appeared to be no threat to their lives; and the imposition of 19 death sentences since March of people convicted of politically motivated murders.

Amnesty International makes a number of recommendations which it says must be implemented to halt current abuses and provide future safeguards for human rights in Algeria. In particular the organization is urging the Algerian Government to:

- release all prisoners of conscience immediately and unconditionally;
- ensure that all those administratively detained, without charge or trial for political reasons are either brought to trial fairly and within a reasonable time on recognizably criminal charges or released;
- ensure that no detainees are held in prolonged incommunicado detention and that they all have prompt access to their families, lawyers and medical care where necessary;
- commute all death sentences.

In order to create a climate in Algeria in which individuals can make complaints about human rights violations with confidence that they will be immediately investigated and redressed, Amnesty International has also urged the government to:

- instruct all law enforcement and justice officials that ill-treatment and torture of any person in their custody is unacceptable in all circumstances, and that all allegations of torture, ill-treatment or other abuses of detainees will be thoroughly investigated whether or not a formal complaint has been lodged.
- investigate all cases involving the use of lethal force since the beginning of the state of emergency. Any law enforcement official shown to have committed extra-judicial executions or other grave human rights violations should be brought to justice and the victims or their families should be compensated.

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6. EUR 45/WU 04/92 INTERNAL
20 May 1992

UNITED KINGDOM: CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR RELEASED FROM PRISON

Vic Williams, the conscientious objector sentenced in September 1991 to 14 months' imprisonment for his refusal to participate in the Gulf War, was released on 23 April 1992, having served half his sentence. He had been adopted by Amnesty International as a prisoner of conscience.