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WEEKLY UPDATE SERVICE 39/91

Contained in this weekly update are external items on the meeting of Commonwealth heads of government and Kenya.

1. NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

African Charter - 21 October

An advice to editors on AI's activities to mark the fifth anniversary of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights coming into force has been sent to sections. The advice to editors is not embargoed, although it is intended to encourage specialist media to write about the charter on or around 21 October, African Human and People's Rights Day. The IS has sent the advice to editors to media in Africa and specialist media in London, and section press officers are encouraged to contact their African specialist media as well. If you want any more information, please call the IS.

Egypt - 23 October

Egypt - Ten years of torture MDE 12/18/91

A news release has been sent to sections, to go with an external document on torture, including strong individual cases.

Peru - 20 or 21 November (date still to be decided)

Peru - Human rights in a climate of terror AMR 46/56/91

News release and feature article to go with research paper, to launch country campaign on Peru.

Weekly Update NWS 11/39/91

2. IOR 31/WU 01/91 EXTERNAL

16 October 1991

INTERNAL

This weekly update item may be used by sections promoting human rights issues at the time of the Commonwealth meeting. It is based on the human rights promotion proposal sent to all heads of government and to sections in Commonwealth countries for lobbying their home governments in August last year (IOR 31/01/90). This item focuses on the proposal, and not on specific campaigning activity, which sections are encouraged to include if they want to publicize the proposal. Journalists may ask for overall information on the human rights records of the Commonwealth countries. There is no comprehensive report reviewing the block of countries, so we suggest you refer to the annual report or more recent Urgent Actions or external documents.

MEETING OF COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT: AI URGES ACTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS PROMOTION

Amnesty International is urging the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Harare, Zimbabwe to make human rights a priority during the next decade and beyond.

The worldwide human rights organization said that the protection of human rights should be promoted and violations of those rights addressed across the board in the Commonwealth.

"Human rights abuses must be addressed in all countries, and not be condemned or overlooked selectively for reasons of political expediency," Amnesty International said. "No country in the Commonwealth should be immune from that scrutiny."

The organization also said that the Commonwealth as a whole and individual governments need to take concrete measures to promote and protect human rights.

"Over the past two decades, the Commonwealth has increasingly stated its commitment to human rights," Amnesty International said. "We believe the time is right to back that commitment with action."

The organization continued to urge the Commonwealth to implement a nine-point human rights promotion program first presented by Amnesty International to all heads of government last year.

A key item in that program is encouraging all 50 member states to ratify important human rights treaties, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention against Torture and implementing those treaties in practice. To reach that goal, the Commonwealth should look at ways of helping individual countries overcome

any obstacles to ratifying or upholding those treaties. To date, the majority of Commonwealth countries have not ratified those treaties.

Amnesty International said the Commonwealth should also promote among its members the observance of other international standards for the treatment of prisoners, conduct of law enforcement officers, and the independence of the judiciary.

The proposal also includes making human rights a regular item at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings, where governments could develop strategies for promoting human rights and review the progress made in that area.

The organization said another important feature of any human rights program would be to ensure that non-governmental organizations and individuals working to defend and protect human rights were able to carry out their activities without facing threats or harassment and to expand human rights training programs for public officials.

The organization also recommended that the Commonwealth should strengthen its own human rights unit, established in 1985, by making sure it has adequate resources and that the unit should publish reports on its activities and set up a human rights information network.

Weekly Update NWS 11/39/91

4. AFR 32/WU 05/91 EXTERNAL

16 October 1991

INTERNAL

Note for press officers: This is particularly for use to respond to any inquiries about the Commonwealth Heads of Governments meeting in Harare, Zimbabwe this week.

KENYA: SUMMARY OF AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S CURRENT CONCERNS

The torture and imprisonment of prisoners of conscience and other political prisoners after unfair trials remain pressing human rights concerns in Kenya.

However, with the release of three prominent prisoners of conscience between April and June 1991 - Kenneth Matiba, Charles Rubia and Raila Odinga - no political detainees are currently held in administrative detention in the country.

In July this year, Amnesty International adopted four prisoners of conscience jailed on sedition charges after an unfair trial and continues to appeal for their immediate and unconditional release. The four prisoners -- George Anyona, a former member of parliament; Edward Oyugi, former professor of educational psychology; Ngotho Kariuki, a former university dean; and Augustine Kathangu, a dissident official of the ruling party -- were jailed for seven years each for supposedly holding a seditious meeting in a Nairobi bar. They were allegedly tortured during the six months they spent in custody before their six-month-long trial began. The trial judge summarily dismissed their torture complaints and, although there was no evidence that they had used or planned violence against the government, found them guilty of sedition. The first three had been prisoners of conscience before.

Over 20 other political prisoners are serving long prison terms for "sedition" and other political offences imposed after unfair trials in recent years. Most were tortured or ill-treated to make them plead guilty. In addition, Koigi wa Wamwere, a former political activist who had been living in exile has been imprisoned since October 1990. He and two lawyers opposed to the government, Rumba Kinuthia and Mirugi Kariuki, are among eight people in prison on charges of treason which could result in their being sentenced to death. They have alleged that they were tortured to make false statements incriminating themselves or other defendants. No date has yet been set for their trial.

The government of President Daniel arap Moi has faced increasing pressure to end the one-party state and introduce a multi-party political system allowing more freedom of political expression, but he has recently reiterated that no political parties other than the ruling Kenya African National Union will be allowed. Those who seek to form opposition political

parties face arrest, interrogation by the security police, possible imprisonment and other violations.