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Amnesty International
International Secretariat
1 Easton Street
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TO: PRESS OFFICERS

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DATE: 18 DECEMBER 1991

WEEKLY UPDATE SERVICE 48/91

Contained in this weekly update are external items on Cyprus and Burundi.

Please note that there will be no Weekly Update next week or the following week because of national holidays in the UK. The next Weekly Update will be sent out in the week of 6 January 1992.

1. NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

Women's Action - 5 February 1992

An international news release on rape and sexual assault in custody to follow a Focus article in the International Newsletter.

Philippines - 26 February 1992

An international news release to go with a document on extrajudicial executions. Possible questions and answers.

India - 27 March 1991

An international news release for the campaign against rape, torture and deaths in custody.

2. EUR 17/WU 01/91 EXTERNAL
18 December 1991

CYPRUS: GOVERNMENT MOVES TOWARDS RECOGNIZING CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION

Amnesty International has welcomed moves by the Cypriot government towards recognizing the right to conscientious objection to military service in Cyprus. However, the organization is concerned that they do not go far enough.

According to a Cyprus News Agency report, on 12 December the government tabled a bill which, if passed, would offer religious conscientious objectors to military service three years' unarmed military service or four years in social service as alternatives to the 26-month normal military service.

The United Nations Commission on Human Rights has recognized conscientious objection to military service as a fundamental human right, and has called on governments to offer an alternative service which is civilian and not punitive in nature. Amnesty International considers the provisions proposed by the Cypriot government a definite improvement on the current lack of any alternative, but is concerned that they fall short of international standards on a number of counts.

Firstly, the alternative service would be available to religious objectors only. Amnesty International has appealed repeatedly to the government to recognize the right to conscientious objection on moral, pacifist, philosophical, political and other grounds. Secondly, in Amnesty International's view, its length - almost twice as long as ordinary military service - is punitive, and as such falls short of United Nations and Council of Europe standards.

"Defence Minister Andreas Aloneftis himself said that the length of the proposed service was intended to act as a deterrent," said AI. "Both the United Nations and the Council of Europe have called on states to implement a service which is not of a punitive nature."

Amnesty International is calling on the government to amend the draft legislation before it is passed and also to ensure that the service provided is indeed purely civilian and under civilian control and that it is also open to people whose conscientious objections develop after they are drafted into the armed forces. If the bill were passed without these crucial considerations being taken into account, Amnesty International would consider conscientious objectors imprisoned either because they were not covered by the provisions of the amendment or for refusing to perform

the service on grounds of its punitive length to be prisoners of conscience.

This year, Amnesty International has adopted some 20 Cypriot conscientious objectors as prisoners of conscience. They were all Jehovah's Witnesses who were given sentences of up to six months for refusing to perform military service or take part in reservist exercises. Some of these men were serving their second or third prison sentence for their conscientious objection. At the end of November two conscientious objectors were in jail in Cyprus.

Not all conscientious objectors in Cyprus have objected to military service on religious grounds. In 1989 Amnesty International adopted as a prisoner of conscience Yannis Parpas, the first known conscientious objector in Cyprus who was not a Jehovah's Witness. He objected to military service in Cyprus on political grounds and was released in December 1989 after spending six months in prison.

3. AFR 16/WU 01/91 EXTERNAL
18 December 1991

BURUNDI: REPORTS OF SERIOUS HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Amnesty International has received numerous reports of serious human rights violations carried out by members of the Burundi security forces. The violations come in the aftermath of violent attacks by armed government opponents on military and other installations in the capital, Bujumbura, and in the northwestern provinces of Bubanza and Cibitoke, which started on 23 November 1991. Reports concern arbitrary arrests, torture and other forms of ill-treatment, extrajudicial executions and "disappearances".

The victims of recent human rights violations appear all to belong to Burundi's majority Hutu ethnic group, whereas the security forces continue to be dominated by the Tutsi minority. The authorities blame a clandestine Hutu political organization for the attacks in late November and early December.

Although few details are available of developments in the northwest, there are reported to have been as many as 1,000 extrajudicial executions by the security forces, mainly in Cibitoke and Bubanza provinces. Many appear to have been carried out as reprisals or on the basis, without evidence, that the victims had been involved in armed opposition. For example, after searching one house in Muzinda, 15 kilometres north of Bujumbura, in late November and finding a suspect was not there, soldiers reportedly threw a grenade into the house, killing six people, four of them children aged between eight months and 6 years. On 27 November soldiers opened fire apparently without provocation on a group of at least 30 people in Cibitoke province, including five government agricultural station workers, killing all of them. In other cases, prisoners are reported to have been executed extrajudicially in military custody at several army barracks in Bujumbura. About 30 people are reported to have "disappeared": unofficial sources report that they were arrested but the authorities deny they are in custody and there are fears that they may be dead.

These reports suggest that extrajudicial executions are occurring similar to those committed on several occasions in the past, particularly in 1965, 1969, 1972 and, most recently, in 1988. Following thousands of killings by the army in 1988, the government refused to take action to bring soldiers responsible for human rights violations to justice, although at a political level steps were taken to bring about reconciliation between Hutu and Tutsi.

In addition to the recent killings, at least 159 people arrested in connection with the violent attacks on 23 November are reported to be still in custody in Bujumbura. About 150 others were detained but have been released. Amnesty International is concerned that many of those still detained are held on the basis of unsubstantiated evidence, such as denunciations by their personal enemies. Many of those arrested are reported to have been subjected to severe beatings, both at the time of their arrest and later, while in custody. For example, Isidore Ciiza, a farmer and taxi operator arrested on 9 December is reported to have sustained two broken ribs and swollen ankles as a result of beatings.

Amnesty International has called on the Burundi Government to take action to end the present wave of gross human rights violations. It has received no response to its appeals so far. As in 1988, the organization is calling on the government to set up an independent and impartial inquiry into reports of human rights violations and to bring those responsible to justice. Amnesty International is also urging the authorities to end the apparent impunity of the armed forces and to take action to prevent them repeatedly committing human rights violations at times of political crisis.

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DATE: 20 December 1991

ADDITION TO WEEKLY UPDATE SERVICE 48/91

Contained in this addition to the weekly update are external items on Syria and the USA.

PLEASE NOTE that all sections were sent out the latest Facts and Figures earlier this week. Unfortunately, it seems it went out with two mistakes. The first is the number of volunteer groups worldwide, which is given on page 1 as 4230. This is being checked and may well be higher. The second mistake is an editing query which has not been deleted - on page 4 please delete the word (NEW?) which appears at the bottom of the page.

We will get back to you as soon as possible with the correct number of volunteer groups. Our apologies for the mistakes.

Weekly Update NWS 11/48/91 add

1. MDE 24/WU 03/91 EXTERNAL
20 December 1991

SYRIA: AI ASKS GOVERNMENT FOR DETAILS ON PRISONER RELEASES - EXPRESSES CONCERN ABOUT HUNDREDS STILL DETAINED

Amnesty International has today written to the Syrian government asking it to make public the list of prisoners reported to have been pardoned and released in recent days.

The human rights organization is also asking for details of any charges or trials these people faced, since many are believed to have been detained for up to 10 years without ever being charged or tried.

The human rights organization remains concerned about the hundreds of political prisoners, many of them prisoners of conscience, that it believes may still be held in detention without charge or trial.

"The release of hundreds of these prisoners is obviously an important step in the right direction," Amnesty International said. "But we're still concerned about the fact that many should never have been behind bars in the first place and that thousands could still be unfairly held without ever being charged or tried."

The government has announced that some 2,800 prisoners "who committed crimes against national security" have been pardoned and are to be freed immediately.

Amnesty International has been able to confirm from reliable sources that more than 700 prisoners have been released since 14 December and understands that further releases are expected. The majority of those already released are reported to be connected with various banned political parties and of the Engineers' Association. None had been charged or tried and many were detained for over ten years. An estimated 60 women were also released on 1 December including members of the Party for Communist Action and people held in lieu of their relatives.

But the organization said there is still considerable uncertainty about who has been pardoned and whether some of those said to have been released have in fact been freed. Amnesty International has heard that one prisoner of conscience, Ghassan Najjar, who was said to have been released from prison was in fact transferred to another prison. He had been detained without charge or trial for 11 years for taking part in a one-day strike protesting against the state of emergency in effect since 1963.

Other prisoners that Amnesty International believes are still being held include former government officials, such as Hakem al-Faiz, a prisoner of conscience held since 1971; members of the Communist Party - Political Bureau such as Riad al-Turk, detained since 1980; and others such as Bara al-Sarraj held in lieu of his uncle 'Adnan Sa'd al-Din, a leading figure in the Muslim Brotherhood Movement, who has been held since 1984.

Under the state of emergency imposed in 1963, security forces have wide powers to arrest and detain indefinitely men and women accused of "endangering security and public order". In practice, these powers have been grossly abused, resulting in thousands of arbitrary arrests with those arrested held sometimes for up to 20 years without being charged or tried. Sometimes women and children have been arrested as a form of punishment for male relatives already in detention.

Amnesty International also remains concerned about reports of systematic and widespread torture or ill-treatment in Syrian prisons and detention centres and the continuing use of the death penalty.

Last year, at least four prisoners died in custody, allegedly as a result of torture, including having eyes gouged out and electric shocks applied. The same number of people were publicly hanged in Damascus in 1990.

Weekly Update NWS 11/48/91 add

2. AMR 51/WU 05/91 EXTERNAL
20 December 1991

USA: JUVENILE OFFENDER SCHEDULED TO BE EXECUTED IN TEXAS IN JANUARY 1992

Johnny Frank Garrett is due to be executed in Texas on 7 January for a crime committed when he was 17. Garrett was convicted of the rape and murder of a nun and sentenced to death in September 1982. If this execution is carried out, he will become the fifth juvenile offender executed in the USA since the death penalty was reintroduced in the 1970s, and the third in Texas under its current death penalty laws.

According to reports, Johnny Garrett has a history of drug and alcohol abuse, has been diagnosed as chronically psychotic and suffered several head injuries. Yet the jury at his trial was apparently not given an opportunity to consider this important mitigating evidence in deciding whether to impose the death penalty or life imprisonment.

The sisters of St Francis' convent, to which the murdered nun belonged, and the Roman Catholic Bishops of Texas have all strongly opposed the execution of Johnny Garrett. In 1984 the Texas Catholic Conference called on the Texas legislature to ban capital punishment in the state. "We reject the notion that capital punishment is a deterrent to, or an acceptable punishment for, these abominable acts," said the conference. "The sanctity of life at all stages of its development must be safeguarded."

The execution of juvenile offenders is extremely rare worldwide. More than 70 countries which retain the death penalty in law have abolished it for people aged under 18 at the time of the crime. The USA is one of only seven countries known to have executed juvenile offenders in the last decade (the other countries are Barbados, which has since raised its minimum age to 18; Iran; Iraq; Nigeria; Pakistan and Bangladesh). Some 30 juvenile offenders are currently under sentence of death in twelve US states.

The imposition of the death penalty on juvenile offenders is in clear contravention of international human rights standards on the death penalty, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the American Convention on Human Rights, both of which the US government signed in 1977 but has not yet ratified.

Treaties and standards exempting people under 18 from the death penalty were developed in recognition of the fact that the death penalty is wholly inappropriate for individuals who have not attained full physical or emotional maturity. However heinous the crime, the imposition on a young person of a sentence which denies any possibility of eventual rehabilitation or reform is contrary to contemporary standards of justice and humane treatment.

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ADDITION TO WEEKLY UPDATE SERVICE 48/91

Contained in this addition to the weekly update is an internal item on the resignation of Secretary General Ian Martin.

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1. ORG 60/WU 02/91 INTERNAL: FOR RESPONSE
23 December 1991

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE ON SECRETARY GENERAL'S RESIGNATION

A surprise article appeared in The Observer newspaper in London this Sunday giving an account of the resignation of Secretary General Ian Martin. It contained a number of inaccuracies and unattributed quotations, although it made it clear that "turmoil" within the organization was over following the decisions made in Yokohama. Stories based on this article have since been carried by several news agencies and in other media. Some of them refer to a "statement": no statement of any sort has been issued by the IS -- we have responded to the very small number of media inquiries about this as they have arisen.

Over the weekend, we gave quotes on Ian's behalf to Reuters news agency to make it clear that there was no leadership crisis in AI. You are free to use these if you need to: "Although I submitted my resignation in February, the work to which all of us at AI are committed has in no way been diminished. It was important that internal organizational issues be addressed and I have confidence in the way this is

being done by the new IEC elected in September: it is now a logical time for the transition to a new Secretary General.

"It has been an immense privilege to be AI's Secretary General during the past five years of rapid political change in which the profile of human rights has been raised higher than ever. AI is a wonderful organization whose highly effective contribution to human rights will go on increasing and which I am continuing to lead with conviction until I hand over to my successor next year."

Please refer any inquiries about Ian's resignation to the Press Office at the IS. If you face any particular problems as a result of the distorted reports, please let us know so that we can see whether further advice or guidance for all press officers is needed.

