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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CITES INDISCRIMINATE KILLING OF UNARMED

CIVILIANS BY ARMY IN SURINAME

Government forces in Suriname indiscriminately killed unarmed men, women and children during counter-insurgency operations that began last year, Amnesty International said today (Tuesday 22 September 1987).

In a new report, the worldwide human rights organization details human rights violations by the army during the continuing conflict with members of the Surinamese Liberation Army, an armed opposition group also known as the Jungle Commando. It says at least 35 people have been arbitrarily killed by government forces, including babies and pregnant women.

Most of the killings are said to have taken place in November 1986. In July the Jungle Commando had attacked a military post about 125km from the capital, Paramaribo, and further attacks on villages occurred later in the year. In December a state of emergency was imposed on the southern and eastern regions of the country, with a dusk-to-dawn curfew.

The report includes testimony taken by Amnesty International delegates from relatives of the dead and other Surinamese refugees now living in neighbouring French Guiana.

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Amnesty International is an independent worldwide movement working impartially for the release of all prisoners of conscience, fair and prompt trials for political prisoners and an end to torture and executions. It is funded by donations from its members and supporters throughout the world. It has formal relations with the United Nations, Unesco, the Council of Europe, the Organization of African Unity and the Organization of American States.

Survivors described how 35 villagers were indiscriminately shot dead by soldiers in Mooiwana village in November 1986. Some of the victims were babies or young children, many were under 18 and three of those killed were pregnant women.

One 24-year-old woman told Amnesty International she witnessed the killing of a baby of seven months. The child was in its mother's arms when a soldier put a gun in its mouth and shot it dead, she said. She also said that eight members of her family were killed.

The survivors told Amnesty International that no Jungle Commandos were in the village at the time and no one was shooting at the soldiers.

According to press reports, Lieutenant-Colonel Bouterse, the head of state, later said that civilians killed in Mooiwana died in an army offensive against the Jungle Commando and that they had been told to leave the area beforehand.

Another woman testified to seeing a three-year-old child being shot in its mothers arms by soldiers in the village of Morakondre in August 1986. They were hunting members of the Jungle Commando or its leader, Ronny Brunswijk, and wanted to frighten villagers into giving information, the woman said.

The official version of this incident was that the child died in an exchange of fire between the army and members of the Jungle Commando. Amnesty International says, however, that several people stated that no Jungle Commandos were in Morakondre on that day and that no one attacked the soldiers.

Amnesty International has also received reports of arbitrary arrests and detentions without charge or trial during and after army operations following attacks on government installations. Women and children are said to have been beaten and many young men taken away for interrogation.

Amnesty International believes many may still be in detention.

Most of the members of the Jungle Commando are Bush Negroes, an ethnic group which comprises about 10 per cent of the population and lives mainly in eastern Suriname.

Amnesty International makes several recommendations in its report including a call for an inquiry into the killings and for those responsible to be prosecuted. It received no reply to a similar appeal sent earlier this year.

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