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SURINAME

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VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS: AN UPDATE

JULY 1988

SUMMARY

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On 22 September 1987 Amnesty International published a research paper, Suriname: Violations of Human Rights. It included the findings of interviews conducted by Amnesty International with witnesses of the killings during 1986 of civilians, mainly women and children, by soldiers. The circumstances of these killings suggested that the victims had been extrajudicially executed as part of the government's policy to contain armed opposition by a rebel group operating in eastern Suriname.

This circular gives information about developments in Suriname during 1987, on human rights in the country. These violations occurred under the military government that was in power until the end of 1987.

No official investigations seemed to have been conducted by the former government into the circumstances of the killing of unarmed civilians in 1986 and more civilians were reported to have been killed by the Surinamese army in 1987. Arrests and detentions without charge or trial continued during 1987, but according to the government all detainees had been released by the end of the year.

There were two important developments during the year in the political context within which these abuses occurred: a new constitution was approved in a referendum in September which provides for the right to security of person and forbids torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. It also states that the right to life is to be protected by law. Elections for the National Assembly were held in November for the first time since 1976 and seven years after the coup that brought the military to power. In early 1988 the National Assembly elected a new civilian President and Vice-President (who is also Prime Minister).

This summarizes a six-page document, Suriname: Violations of Human Rights, an Update (AI Index AMR 48/02/88) issued by Amnesty International in April 1988. Anyone wishing to have further details should consult the full document.

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SURINAME: VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

UPDATE

INTRODUCTION

This document updates the information contained in a research paper published in September 1987 by Amnesty International. All the violations of human rights mentioned in both documents took place during the rule of the military government, which was in power until December 1987.

In September 1987 Amnesty International published a research paper, Suriname: Violations of Human Rights. It included the findings of interviews conducted by the organization with eyewitnesses to the killings during 1986 of civilians, mainly women and children, by army personnel. The circumstances of these killings suggested that the victims had been extrajudicially executed as part of the government's measures to contain the activities of an armed opposition group operating in Eastern Suriname. The group started operating in July 1986 and their stated aim was to cause the fall of the military government and to bring back democracy to Suriname.

No official investigations appear to have been carried into the circumstances of apparent extrajudicial executions of unarmed civilians that took place during 1986 and more civilians were reported to have been killed by the Surinamese army during 1987. Arrests and detentions without charge or trial continued during the year but according to the government all detainees had been released by the end of 1987.

The victims of these human rights violations have been mostly members of the Bush Negro ethnic group, descendants of runaway slaves, who represent 10 percent of Suriname's population and who live in villages mainly in Eastern Suriname.

Two important political developments took place during the year: a new constitution was approved in a referendum in September 1987 and elections for the National Assembly were held in November 1987.

KILLING OF CIVILIANS BY SURINAMESE ARMED FORCES IN SEPTEMBER 1987

Amnesty International received reports that between 10 and 40 civilians had been killed by the army on 10/11 September 1987 in an incident in the road that leads from Brownsweg to Pokigron, known to Bush Negro people as Tjongalangapassie.

The first reports received about this incident emanated from the official Suriname News Agency and indicated that the deaths had occurred in confrontations between the army and members of the Jungle Commando, an armed group trying to depose the then military government.

This information was later contradicted by doctors working in Suriname for a French medical organization, Aide Medicale Internationale (AMI); they had been told by eyewitnesses that the army had killed 15 civilians in Pokigron on 11 September.

According to the testimonies given to the doctors the Jungle Commando had mostly left the area where the killings occurred during the first week of June 1987. Their only subsequent presence in the area was by sporadic small patrols of no more than seven men. The witnesses declared that there had been no fighting in that period. Also, a message allegedly issued by the army to non-combatant civilians, that they should leave the area before 10 September, had not been transmitted to the population.

It was reported that following the killings access to the area where they had taken place was strictly forbidden, except on special permission obtainable from the army, until the order was rescinded on 15 October.

Amnesty International later received a report from reliable sources in Suriname containing the names of 15 alleged victims.

Information on Victims

Date of incident: 10-11 September 1987

- a. DIEKO, Edmund, male, 17. Reported to have been killed on km 49 of the road from Brownsweg to Pokigron on 11 September. Some sources indicate that he may have been a non-combatant sympathizer who acted as look-out for the Jungle Commando.
- b. DONOU, Ajajo Roel, male, 35, from Brownsweg, killed on km 18 on 11 September.
- c. GAJAGO, xx, male, age unknown, from the village of Pinpin, killed in the same road on 11 September.
- d. GAJAGO, xx, female, 2, daughter of above. Killed on same date, same place.
- e. MAIN, Baasa (aka Kapiten Faka), male, 21, killed on km 49 on 11 September. He may have been a non-combatant sympathizer of the Jungle Commando, acting as a camp look-out.
- f. PAN A TJOK, Nagwete, male, 35, from the village of Pinpin. Killed on km 49 on 11 September. He may have been a non-combatant sympathizer of the Jungle Commando, acting as a camp look-out.

g. POEKETIE, William Andeloe, male, 23, from Kajapatia. Killed on km 54 on 11 September.

h. VREDE, Desman, male, 37, from Brownsweg-Nieuw Ganzee. Killed on km 54 on 10 September.

i. XXX, Waldie, male, 17, from Brownsweg-Kadjoe. Killed on km 18 on 11 September.

j. The body of a woman, around 40 years of age, and a child of about 6 were discovered off km 54. The woman's body showed signs of having been raped. It is estimated that both were killed on 11 September.

Date of incident: 18 September 1987

a. FINKI, Amonie Pantooli, male, 50, resident in Paramaribo, killed near the landing strip in Pokigron on 18 September 1987. Reportedly he was on his way back to his village from the village of his wife's relatives after making preliminary preparations for the annual agricultural work in the fields. He was travelling by boat accompanied by his son and two sons in law when they were fired upon by army soldiers. He was killed, his son was wounded and the other two escaped. He worked as a security guard in Paramaribo.

Date of incident: 30 September 1987

a. ATANSO, xx, male, 22. He was reportedly killed on Km 10 of the Brownsweg-Pokigron road on 30 September 1987.

b. FINKI, Hugo Paiti, male, 21, killed on km 16. (No relation of Amonie Patooli Finki above.)

c. METISEN, Boisi, male, 38 with residence in Paramaribo. Killed on km 10 on 30 September. He was a metal worker.

d. Another, unidentified, body was discovered in the same area. Reports received by AI said that it may be another member of the Metisen family, probably killed on 30 September.

On 22 December AI wrote to Lt Col Bouterse expressing its concerns about reports of the killings of civilians on 11 September and urging the government to investigate this incident. The letter also noted that AI had received unconfirmed reports about the other two incidents alleged to have taken place on 18 and 30 September and informed Lt Col Bouterse that the organization was continuing its inquiries into these reports.

Another incident reported to have happened in September involved a 14-15 year old boy from the village of Kadjoe. According to reports the boy and some companions discovered that a camp (where the boy had been living) had been destroyed. They started off to warn the chief of the camp but on the way they came across army personnel who shot at the boy and his companions. The others managed to escape but the boy is reported to have been killed.

KILLING OF CIVILIANS BY SURINAMESE ARMED FORCES IN DECEMBER 1987

On 31 December 1987 six people, all of them Bush Negroes, were reportedly killed and one seriously wounded by members of the Suriname army at Atjonni, district of Sipaliwini.

According to reports, on the day of the incident a group of around 100 people had gathered at Atjonni, a landing place for boats near Pokigron. Most of these people were returning to their villages from Paramaribo. Many of them were old people who had just come back from the capital after collecting their monthly pension and buying supplies of provisions.

From this group soldiers seized seven men whom they suspected of belonging to the Jungle Commando. Apparently, the soldiers thought their boat belonged to the rebel group and concluded the men were members of it. The seven were taken into the jungle, stabbed with bayonets and shot and their bodies abandoned there.

At night a group of people went to search for the bodies of the victims. They found the bodies of six victims and one man, Ameikanbuka Aside from Grantatai, who was badly wounded but still alive. He had gunshot wounds in his thigh; one arm was broken and he had injuries to his left leg; marks in the shape of an X had been cut with a knife into his right shoulder blade. He was taken into hiding by the search party and later on transferred to the Academic Hospital in Paramaribo, after the representative from an international organization obtained permission from the authorities to move him from his hiding place. Visits from his family were allowed subject to special permission from the military police. However, he is reported to have died subsequently.

The six victims who died were:

1. Daison ALOEBOETOE, 28, from Gujaba
2. Dedemanu ALOEBOETOE, also from Gujaba
3. Mikuwendje ALOEBOETOE, 14, also from Gujaba
4. John AMOIDA, from Asidohopo but lived in Gujaba
5. Martin Indisie BANAI, from Gujaba
6. Beri TIOPPO, from Gujaba

The families of the dead had to negotiate for several weeks with the authorities to be granted the official permission necessary to collect and bury their relatives' bodies.

ARRESTS, DETENTION WITHOUT TRIAL, ILL-TREATMENT OF DETAINEES AND RELEASES

During 1987 a number of suspected sympathizers of the Jungle Commando, mostly Bush Negroes, were allegedly arrested, apparently for no other reason than their ethnic origin. In April 1987 that Rudy Wachter and up to ten other people were arrested by the Surinamese army at the Phedra Palm oil plant, in the Brokopondo district, where they worked. According to these reports Rudy Wachter, 36, was ill-treated in Fort Zelandia, where he and the others were taken after their arrest. They were denied visits for some weeks and only on 7 June was Rudy Wachter allowed to receive a visit from a member of his family.

Rudy Wachter and the other ten people arrested with him were released on various dates throughout June and July. No charges were made against

them.

Karel Sapelie and Leo Brunswijk, both mentioned in AI's report, were released in August. Karel Sapelie, a 27-year-old insurance agent had been arrested in December 1986 in Paramaribo. Leo Brunswijk, 19 year old brother of the Jungle Commando leader, had been arrested in July 1986. They were never charged during the period they spent in prison.

On 1 December the government released 20 people and was reported to have declared that these were the last political prisoners left in detention. Those released included people arrested between mid July 1986 to October 1987. None of them had been charged.

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Two important political developments took place during 1987: the approval of a new constitution and the holding of elections.

The Advisory National Assembly - a body created in 1984 to supervise the implementation of the democratization process and which included representatives from the military, trade unions and the private sector - unanimously approved the draft constitution in March 1987. This draft was then submitted to a public referendum held on 30 September, when it was approved by an overwhelming majority.

The new constitution provides for the right to security of the person and forbids torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. It states that the right to life will be protected by law. It states that nobody may be discriminated against on grounds of birth, sex, race, language, religion, ethnic origin, education, political convictions, economic position or social circumstances.

The new constitution outlines the individual and collective rights of the Surinamese people and sets out the executive and administrative structure. It provides for a 51-member National Assembly elected for a five-year term.

The President is the Head of State as well as Head of Government, Head of the Armed Forces, chair of the Council of State and the security council (which assumes all government functions in the event of war, state of siege or exceptional circumstances to be determined by law). The President, together with the Vice-president and the Council of Ministers form the Government. The Government is accountable to the National Assembly.

The National Assembly is described in the constitution as the "highest organ of the people" and has the responsibility of electing a President. The legislative power is exercised jointly by the National Assembly and the Government.

The constitution also establishes a Council of State with responsibility for, among other things, supervising the correct implementation of the resolutions of the National Assembly. It can suspend decisions of the Council of Ministers and from lower/inferior bodies, such as district and provincial councils, which appear to be contrary to the constitution, and it advises the President on his activities/duties as Head of State and Head of Government. The Council of State is a nine-member body with representation from the armed forces, the political parties, the labour and business

community. The Council of State is chaired by the President.

The constitution defines the role of the military as "the military vanguard of the people" and its task is to defend Suriname's sovereignty and independence, and to protect the rights and liberties of the people and the country. Through its representation in the Council of State the military have retained some direct influence in the government of the country.

The election of a National Assembly was held on 25 November 1987. It was contested by six parties, among them the National Democratic Party (NDP), which replaced the 25th February Movement founded by Lt Col Bouterse; the Front for Democracy and Development (FDD), a coalition party representing the Creole, East Indian and Indonesian ethnic groups (and comprising the United Reform Party, the National Party and the National Harmony Party); the Suriname Labour Party; the Progressive Workers and Farmers Union (PALU) and the Javanese Pendawalima Party. The 51 seats in the National Assembly were won by:

Front for Democracy and Development: 40 seats
 Progressive Workers and Farmers Union: 4 seats
 National Democratic Party : 3 seats
 Javanese Pendawalima Party: 4 seats

On 12 January 1988 the National Assembly elected a president to replace Lt Col Desi Bouterse as head of state: Ramsewak Shankar, 51, an agricultural economist who had served as Minister of Justice and Police in 1969 and as Minister of Agriculture until 1971. He had retired from public life later on and pursued a career in business.

Henck Arron, who was the Prime Minister at the time of the coup in February 1980, was chosen as vice-president, an office that includes the post of Prime Minister.

The Jungle Commando appears to have been inactive since the beginning of 1988, although they have not officially declared that they have or will definitely cease in their activities, in view of the return to democracy in Suriname which was its stated objective. There have been no comments from the government as to whether it would cease the counter-insurgency strategy adopted by the former government which led to the human rights violations detailed above. An end to the conflict would also affect the situation of the thousands of Bush Negroes and Amerindians who escaped to French Guiana. These refugees started their exodus in small numbers in October 1986 but the flow increased in December 1986 following an escalation in the armed conflict and the extrajudicial executions of non-combatant civilians in late November; on some days over a hundred people were crossing the Marowijne river seeking refuge in French Guiana. By the end of 1987 nearly 10.000 from Suriname had fled to French Guiana.

RATIFICATIONS

On 12 November 1987 Suriname ratified the Inter-American Convention to prevent and punish torture. It acceded to the American Convention on Human Rights and recognized the jurisdiction of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights on the same date.