

INTRODUCTION TO THE WORK OF ASIA WATCH

Human rights in Asia suffered one setback after another in 1989. The peaceful Chinese democracy movement was crushed, leaving as many as 1000 dead and tens of thousands to be arrested throughout the year. Civilians in Afghanistan and Sri Lanka suffered appalling carnage as both governments and opposition groups violated the laws of war. With far fewer casualties than those countries but ongoing human rights violations by both sides, the conflict in the Philippines was no closer to resolution. The Khmer Rouge appeared to be growing stronger in Cambodia. The leaders of Burma (Myanmar) tortured pro-democracy detainees and arrested key leaders of the opposition. State repression of basic civil liberties continued to characterize Indonesia, Singapore and Nepal. The process of political liberalization in South Korea was cut short with a crackdown on alleged leftists and over 1000 arrests, including many peaceful advocates of reunification with the North. Around the region, with few exceptions, the human rights picture was unremittingly grim.

Asia Watch worked on more countries in Asia than ever before in 1989, with much of its efforts and resources devoted to China. Before June 4, we worked with Chinese human rights groups in this country to support the efforts of Professor Fang Lizhi to draw attention to political prisoners in China. After the crackdown, we issued regular updates on arrests and executions and undertook a major campaign to urge American trade unions, teachers' federations, bar associations and other groups to take up the cases of individual detainees. We took a strong stance in favor of economic sanctions and pressured the Bush administration to take a less conciliatory stance toward China. The combination of documentation, campaigning and lobbying became a model of what we would like to do on other countries in the region.

We put a high priority on building ties with human rights organizations in the region. Research associate Patricia Gossman travelled through India in March to assess the needs, priorities and concerns of local groups. Fact-finding missions to the Philippines and Indonesia and trial observations in Taiwan and Singapore reinforced ties with domestic human rights monitors, and communication with groups in Korea remained close.

We continued to produce reports and bulletins which received wide circulation throughout the United States, Europe and Asia. We published comprehensive reports on Indonesia, Singapore and Nepal, a short report on Khmer Rouge abuses along the Thai-Cambodian border, and 16 issues of News from Asia Watch on topics ranging from death marches in Burma to restrictions on civil liberties in Taiwan. Newspapers in Asia routinely picked up our press releases, helping serve notice to repressive governments in the region that their actions were being closely monitored in the United States.

The press was one means of alerting offending governments to the fact that they were under observation; we also held direct talks with government officials, through embassy visits and in the course of travel to the region. Following the trip to the Philippines where we raised several cases of human rights violations with the Deputy Chief of Staff for Civil-Military Relations, the latter fired off a letter to the relevant regional

commanders saying, "Desire immediate investigation of the aforementioned cases. Asia Watch is one of three human rights monitors which commands credibility in the US bureaucracy, hence prompt action is necessary to preempt possible foreign media and human rights monitors action." This is precisely the reaction we hope to elicit from all governments.

The loss of Washington Director Eric Schwartz to the staff of Congressman Stephen Solarz was a major blow, but with the help of Holly Burkhalter, Washington Director of Human Rights Watch, we maintained a strong presence on Capitol Hill, especially with regard to China, Burma and South Asia.

The work of Asia Watch centered around several main themes during the year. Freedom of expression was a major focus throughout the region. Without taking any political position, we argued that people had the right under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to espouse "bourgeois liberal" themes in China; to advocate independence in Tibet; to support independence for Taiwan; to urge reunification of the two Koreas; to challenge the state ideology, Pancasila, in Indonesia or the party-less panchayat system of government in Nepal; or to advocate political and social change in Singapore. In the Philippines, Cambodia and Afghanistan, we looked at violations of the laws of war and called on all parties to these conflicts to observe the Geneva Conventions. And in Burma, China, Sri Lanka, Korea, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia and Nepal, we called for the repeal of emergency or national laws permitting lengthy or indefinite detention on vaguely defined national security grounds.

Sidney Jones
Executive Director
Asia Watch
AFGHANISTAN

In February, Asia Watch published an update, "Policies of the Pakistani Military toward the Afghan Resistance: Human Rights Implications." The report described indiscriminate attacks on cities by resistance forces, and efforts by the Pakistani military, in conjunction with certain resistance parties, to exclude other Afghan groups from playing any part in the political process. In March, board member Barnett Rubin briefed Congressional staff and NGO representatives on human rights conditions following the Soviet withdrawal.

In June, an op-ed by Patricia Gossman on the role of the Pakistani military in Afghanistan was published in The Christian Science Monitor, to coincide with the visit to the U.S. of Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto.

In November Asia Watch released an update, "Human Rights Abuses by Elements of the Afghan Resistance." The report focused on politically-motivated killings of relief workers and refugee intellectuals, summary executions of prisoners, and indiscriminate attacks on civilian targets.

CAMBODIA

In February, Asia Watch produced its first report on the Cambodian conflict, "Khmer Rouge Abuses along the Thai-Cambodian Border," which documented the human rights violations by the Khmer Rouge in the camps they administer along the border areas. The report

discussed the forced removal of civilians, summary executions, forced labor and portering, cruel and inhuman treatment and the denial of basic medical care. In December a delegation went back to the border areas to document human rights violations by all the resistance factions. A report will be produced early in 1990.

CHINA AND TIBET

China was a major focus of Asia Watch's work even before the student-led democracy movement was crushed. In February, Asia Watch issued a news release criticizing President Bush's failure to raise human rights issues during his visit to Beijing, especially after Chinese authorities prevented Professor Fang Lizhi from attending a dinner to which Mr. Bush had invited him.

On March 8, another Asia Watch news release condemned the killings by Chinese police of at least 11 demonstrators in Lhasa, Tibet after demonstrations on March 5, 6, and 7. The demonstrations were followed by the imposition of martial law which was still in place by the end of the year.

Later the same month, the tenth anniversary of the arrest of the Democracy Wall activist Wei Jingsheng became the occasion for a public evening co-sponsored by Asia Watch, the American chapter of PEN, and Human Rights in China. A News From Asia Watch issued at the time endorsed the appeal of Chinese intellectuals including Professor Fang Lizhi for an amnesty for all political prisoners.

In early May Sidney Jones joined Orville Schell and Liu Baifang in going to Beijing to talk with many of those involved in the pro-democracy demonstrations, then at their height.

Asia Watch acted immediately to condemn the June 3-4 massacre of civilians in Beijing, issuing an open letter to President Bush on June 4 calling on him to impose severe diplomatic and economic sanctions against the Deng Xiaoping government for its actions.

Asia Watch China specialist Robin Munro was in Tiananmen Square as the tanks came in, and his eyewitness account of the assault was subsequently published in Human Rights Watch newsletter, providing a rare source of reliable information on the democracy movement's final hours.

From New York, Washington and Hong Kong, Asia Watch began intensive monitoring of the repression as it unfolded and of the U.S. government's response. We issued both regular updates on the arrests of pro-democracy activists throughout China and a series of more detailed prisoner profiles. One of the prisoners featured was Han Dongfang, leader of the Beijing Workers Autonomous Federation; Chinese and Polish versions of Han's profile were distributed worldwide, and Lech Walesa used the document to publicize the plight of China's independent labor movement at the annual Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award ceremony in Washington in November.

In an effort to familiarize Americans with the cases of those arrested, volunteers for Asia Watch wrote to every American sister city organization with a Chinese partner, every bar association in the country and more than 600 trade unions. In July, a concert to benefit work on human rights in China was co-sponsored by Asia Watch and the Foundation for Chinese Democracy. A full-page advertisement in the New York Times also drew attention to the arrests of prominent dissidents. In an effort to draw the business

community into a discussion of ethical dimensions of doing business in China after the crackdown, Asia Watch prepared a draft set of principles for companies working in China.

Holly Burkhalter became one of the most vocal advocates of sanctions against China on Capitol Hill. Aryeh Neier testified on China in August before the Asia and Human Rights Subcommittees of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Another important response by Asia Watch to the China crisis was to set up a branch office in Hong Kong. This enabled us to tap the extensive information-gathering network in Hong Kong and facilitated our work on behalf of pro-democracy activists who escaped there after June 4.

The New York office of Asia Watch acted as an intermediary with donors to get financial assistance to a number of Chinese students, scholars and writers who were stranded without funds in the U.S. or Hong Kong after the crackdown. We also embarked on a program to translate into Chinese the writings of key members of Eastern European democracy movements.

In November, Asia Watch issued an urgent appeal to Premier Li Peng to halt plans for the execution of Tibetan monk Tseten Norgye, arrested in April 1989 for peaceful political activities. The arrests, trials and sentences of Tibetan activists were regularly reported in Asia Watch's updates on China.

INDIA

In 1989, Asia Watch concentrated on building links to Indian human rights organizations. In March, Patricia Gossman travelled to India where she met with human rights groups in Delhi, Bombay, Chandigarh, Madras and Hyderabad. She also met with Indian journalists and editors, who are now receiving Asia Watch reports regularly. (Asia Watch's reports on Afghanistan, Burma, Nepal and Sri Lanka have received wide coverage in the Indian press.)

In December, David Rothman travelled to Delhi and Bombay to meet with lawyers and human rights activists to prepare a planned Prison Watch report on Indian prisons. A fact-finding mission is scheduled for October 1990.

INDONESIA AND EAST TIMOR

Over 100 political trials took place in Indonesia in 1989; security forces continued, quite literally, to get away with murder; torture and physical abuse of detainees under interrogation was commonplace; and people suspected of having links more than 20 years ago to the banned Indonesian Communist Party continued to face persecution and discrimination. Freedom of opinion and expression continued to be tightly controlled, and hundreds of arrests in East Timor were cause for alarm.

In March, a News from Asia Watch, "Violence In Lampung, Indonesia," urged a public investigation into a military assault on a religious school in February in Lampung, Sumatra. As many as 100 civilians may have been killed. Muslim radicals at the school had taken a military officer hostage and later murdered him, but Asia Watch believed the military used excessive force and caused unnecessary civilian deaths in its assault.

Asia Watch sent a human rights briefing to Vice-President Quayle prior to his visit to Jakarta in early May. In early June, as President Suharto prepared to visit Washington, Asia Watch wrote

President Bush, urging him to raise human rights issues. These issues, ranging from political prisoners to torture, were outlined in a June 1 News from Asia Watch.

In August, Asia Watch submitted a petition on human rights abuses in East Timor to the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization, and in November, a joint Asia Watch-Prison Watch mission of Betty Vorenberg, James Vorenberg and Sidney Jones visited Indonesia to look at prison conditions. Bishop Paul Moore visited East Timor on behalf of Asia Watch to gather information on abuses there. A report on Indonesia was scheduled for early 1990.

MALAYSIA

Asia Watch continued to monitor human rights in Malaysia throughout 1989. In April, the last two detainees of the original 106 political activists arrested in late 1987 under the Internal Security Act (ISA) were released, and post-release restrictions on other detainees were later dropped. While welcoming these developments, Asia Watch was concerned about an amendment to the ISA in June which effectively eliminated judicial review.

In March, Asia Watch briefed a congressional delegation going to Malaysia. In December, Asia Watch publicly condemned the Malaysian government's "push-off" policy in dealing with boatloads of Vietnamese asylum-seekers. Since May, over 2,500 Vietnamese in more than 40 boats were reportedly forced from Malaysian territorial waters. At least four are known to have died as a result. Many more may have died at sea.

NEPAL

In September, Asia Watch released a comprehensive 104 page report on Nepal, based on a mission to the country undertaken by Jack Greenberg, Deborah Greenberg and Ingrid Kircher. The report describes a pattern of repression against government critics, restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly, and the routine torture of prisoners. The report received widespread coverage in the Nepali and Indian press. Shortly after release of the report, Patricia Gossman participated in a briefing for the new U.S. Ambassador to Nepal.

PHILIPPINES

The conflict in the Philippines between the military and the guerrilla New People's Army (NPA) resulted in violations of humanitarian law by both sides. Armed groups linked to the military were also responsible for disappearances and extrajudicial executions during the year.

Asia Watch sent a fact-finding mission of Sidney Jones and Jemera Rone to Manila and four provinces -- Zamboanga del Norte, Kalinga-Apayao, Negros Occidental and Quezon -- in September to investigate violations of the laws of war. A report was expected in early 1990.

Three issues of News from Asia Watch were issued on the Philippines during the year. One urged an investigation into the death of human rights lawyer Oscar Tonog in Samar. A second called attention to the killings in Mindanao of a Catholic priest and a Protestant minister active on human rights issues and the disappearance of a local left-wing politician, Carlos Vina, after his abduction by armed men. (He later re-appeared and is not in

custody.) Men linked to the military or official paramilitary organization CAFGU were believed responsible for all three incidents. In a third bulletin, issued in June, Asia Watch called on the Philippines government to condemn death threats against human rights activists in Negros Occidental following their statements protesting the forced eviction of thousands of villagers during a military operation. CAFGU members were reported to have been responsible for the threats. Asia Watch wrote directly to the commander of that operation as well as to the governor of Negros Occidental, the Secretary of Defense in Manila, and the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, urging that the threats be investigated and the perpetrators punished.

In November, during President Aquino's visit to the United States, Asia Watch circulated a briefing on human rights issues in the Philippines to members of Congress.

SINGAPORE

In 1989 the Singapore government amended the Internal Security Act (ISA), extended both the detention orders of political detainees Teo Soh Lung and Vincent Cheng and the restrictions on the ex-detainees who had been arrested in a government clampdown on dissent in May and June 1987, and continued its attacks on the international press.

In April, Asia Watch initiated an international appeal for the release of Teo and Cheng, and the lifting of restrictions on the ex-detainees. Some 150 legislators from seven nations signed the cable to Singapore's Home Affairs Minister. Working with Asia Watch, 26 Members of Congress wrote to Vice President Dan Quayle urging him to press human rights issues during his September visit to Singapore.

Chia Thye Poh, detained without charge or trial for 22 years, was transferred from prison in May and confined to the small island of Sentosa under strict restrictions. Ken Roth visited Chia in July and wrote an article describing his detention, "Exile in Disneyland," for the Far East Economic Review (September 7, 1989). Throughout the year, Asia Watch carried on a running debate with the Singapore government in the letters column of the Review.

In September, Asia Watch published a 120 page report, Silencing All Critics: Human Rights Violations in Singapore. A month later a News from Asia Watch updated the cases of Teo and Cheng. Both detainees filed habeas corpus petitions and Allison Conner observed Teo Soh Lung's final habeas corpus hearing in November for Asia Watch.

In late December, Asia Watch condemned the Singapore government's decision to bring criminal contempt of court charges against the editor, publishers, printers, and distributors of the Asian Wall Street Journal.

Other efforts during the year included:

- * initiating a congressional letter, signed by 30 members of Congress, to Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew protesting the extension of the detention orders on Cheng and Teo.

- * briefing members of Congress before meetings with Singaporean officials.

SOUTH KOREA

The government of President Roh Tae Woo began a crackdown in April on "leftists." Hundreds were arrested and thousands of publications were seized from publishing houses and bookstores. By year's end, the number of political prisoners was over 1,000, many arrested for peacefully advocating reunification. Asia Watch efforts to publicize human rights abuses elicited a statement in Washington in October from President Roh, quoted in the Washington Post, specifically denying Asia Watch's allegations.

In February, 41 members of Congress working with Asia Watch sent a letter to President Bush urging him to raise the case of some four dozen elderly men detained during the Korean War who were being held following the expiration of their sentences.

Two issues of News from Asia Watch, in July and September, focused on the arrests of senior editors, journalists and other prominent dissident figures. In August, Asia Watch sent a letter to President Roh deploring continuing arrests of peaceful dissidents and reunification advocates. Before Vice-President Quayle's trip to Seoul in September, members of Congress, again working closely with Asia Watch, wrote President Bush urging that Mr. Quayle raise human rights issues. Asia Watch wrote a similar letter to the Pope during his highly publicized trip to South Korea the same month. These efforts were widely reported in the Korean press.

SRI LANKA

Human Rights conditions in Sri Lanka, already among the worst in Asia, deteriorated dramatically in 1989. By year's end, as many as 30,000 people had been killed, the vast majority of them civilians executed by government-backed death squads or by guerrilla forces. In testimony before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations in March, Asia Watch urged that foreign assistance to Sri Lanka be conditioned upon progress on human rights, and in particular upon Sri Lanka Government willingness to permit access to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). International pressure on this issue paid off when the government granted the ICRC access to the south on October 9.

In July, Asia Watch issued an update, "Emergency Reimposed as Killings Continue," describing mass arrests and disappearances under the state of emergency, and the upsurge in political killings of human rights lawyers by death squads. In consultation with Asia Watch, the American Bar Association issued several appeals on the death squad killings of human rights lawyers.

A September press release on the massacre of 51 Tamil civilians by Indian forces and an update on reprisal killings of civilians by death squads and by Sinhalese militants received wide coverage in the Sri Lankan and Indian press. Following release of these reports, the Embassy of Sri Lanka requested a meeting with Asia Watch, at which Sidney Jones and Patricia Gossman raised concerns about Sri Lanka's Indemnity Act (which provides indemnity for security forces who have committed human rights violations), access for the ICRC and death squad killings.

TAIWAN

Asia Watch continued to monitor and publicize restrictions on freedom of expression, especially freedom to advocate Tawianese independence. We protested limits on the freedoms of assembly and association which were particularly apparent prior to national

elections on December 2.

In April, Asia Watch cabled President Lee, expressing concern at the death of Cheng Nan-rong, publisher of Freedom Era Weekly, who killed himself to escape arrest. The authorities had accused him of sedition because he published a draft constitution for an independent Taiwan.

In August, Asia Watch wrote to the Minister of the Interior expressing concern over a new Civic Organizations Law that denies the right to legal status to organizations using "Taiwan" in their names without following it by "Republic of China." Several organizations, including some human rights groups, refused to register, thereby risking dissolution by the government, a fine, or imprisonment.

In September, Timothy Gelatt attended a trial of a member of the opposition Democratic Progressive Party, arrested in connection with a demonstration in 1987 to protest the enactment of the National Security Law. The court did not allow the defendant, Dr. Hong Chi-Chang, to call witnesses, and Asia Watch protested that action.

Prior to the election on December 2, a News from Asia Watch analyzed how restrictions on civil liberties might impede democratic participation. James Feinerman testified for Asia Watch at a hearing on the elections held by the House Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs.

VIETNAM

In August, Asia Watch issued a News From Asia Watch, "Vietnam: Update on Prisoner Cases," providing information on the three Tran brothers arrested for trying to report on human rights conditions in Vietnam. In September, Asia Watch wrote to Vietnamese authorities welcoming the release of one of the Tran brothers but expressed concern about the continuing detention of Tran Vong Quoc, whose health has deteriorated markedly in prison.