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AI's Work on the Conditions of Politically Motivated Prisoners in the  
FRG: A Progress Report On 16 August 1977 the Research Department of  
the IS issued an NS circular (EUR 23/01/77) headed 'Explanatory Note  
About AI Action Concerning Hunger and Thirst Strike in the Federal  
Republic of Germany'. This pointed out the increasing problems faced by  
AI, particularly in Western Europe and North America, in regard to the  
'grey areas' of the Statute. Of particular concern in this context was  
the issue of isolation and its relation to article 10 ("cruel, inhuman  
or degrading treatment or punishment"). Such concern <sup>came</sup> stemmed from the fact  
that over the past few years a growing number of people suspected or  
convicted of politically motivated crimes had been held for long periods in

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isolation. The manner of isolation varied from total isolation and solitary confinement to isolation in small groups. In many cases persons had been held for as long as four, five or six years, and in some cases longer, under conditions of isolation both prior to and after conviction.

AI received numerous allegations that such forms of imprisonment subjected the prisoners to conditions which damaged their health. The question of the extent to which these prison conditions came within the scope of AI in terms of the provisions in its Statute regarding 'cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment' is a complex one, and towards the end of 1977 AI's International Executive Committee commissioned a study of this matter.

In December 1978 the final report on this study was presented to, and approved by, the IEC and on 13 February 1979 a Memorandum was sent to Herr Dr. Hans-Jochen Vogel Federal Minister of Justice in Bonn. Following talks with the Federal authorities, copies of the Memorandum were sent to Senator the Ministries of Justice of the Laender and the ~~Senate~~ for Justice of West Berlin at the beginning of August 1979.

The Memorandum refers to the general effects of isolation on the physical and mental health of persons subjected to it. Such effects have been observed in persons serving long term prison sentences even under normal prison conditions, as well as in persons isolated in hospitals, Arctic and space stations and submarines. Such isolation negatively affects a person's ability to respond to his or her environment, both psychologically and physically (through the autonomic nervous system). The effects will be all the more pronounced the greater the isolation of the prisoners and are further dependent on the personality of the individual prisoner. These effects militate against reform and rehabilitation; internationally recognised norms stress that action should be taken to counterbalance them.

The prison conditions of the prisoners whose cases were examined in the course of the study amounted to severe forms of isolation. The study found clear symptoms which, although they fitted into the general pattern described above, were most pronounced and in some cases reminiscent of the effects produced by sensory deprivation in experimental situations.

AI concluded that in individual cases prolonged solitary confinement and social isolation had impaired the health of prisoners and that the prison conditions of prisoners suspected or convicted of politically motivated crimes in the FRG are of concern to it. AI further concluded that ways must and can be found to accommodate security with humane treatment, avoiding the severe forms of isolation inherent in the prison conditions which the Memorandum described. AI therefore urged the government to seek alternatives to the use of solitary confinement and small group isolation as regular forms of imprisonment.

Although appreciating the problems posed by this question, in its continuing contacts with the Federal and Land authorities AI is sustaining pressure for change in the conditions of imprisonment which have given rise to the above-mentioned effects.

In accordance with the guidelines contained in the Mandate Committee's report, as endorsed by the last ICM, AI interventions will continue to be made in general terms, aimed at the setting of standards for acceptable prison conditions. Although this does not preclude the taking up of individual cases as a means of setting such standards, illustrating general problems and so on, this would be exceptional.

In late April/early May, [quite unrelated to the progress of AI's work in the field of prison conditions,] over 70 prisoners of the Red Army Fraction, 2 June Movement and other groups, began a new hunger strike. This was the first major hunger strike since August 1977 (see EUR 23/01/77 and the following circular EUR 23/02/77). The expressed aims of the strike included, as in the past, the abolition of isolation and small group isolation, and the association of prisoners in groups of at least 15 as proposed by the medical expert Prof. Dr. W. Rasch. The hunger strike was 'suspended' at the end of June. On 15 June AI sent a telex to the Justice Ministry of Baden-Württemberg (where Stammheim prison is situated) with a copy to the

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Federal Justice Ministry. This stated:-

"Amnesty International has received reports that the hunger strike of politically motivated prisoners in the FRG which began at the end of April 1979, has reached a critical stage for a number of these prisoners. Amnesty International is particularly concerned about the reported state of health of Frau Irmgard Möller, who is imprisoned at Stammheim, and whose lawyer has said that he fears for her life.

"Although Amnesty International cannot support the specific demands made by the prisoners on hunger strike, it has expressed to the Federal Government its general concerns about prison conditions in regard to solitary confinement and small group isolation of politically motivated prisoners. Discussions with the Federal Government are still in progress and Amnesty International wishes to make it clear that, as in the past, it is on purely humanitarian grounds that it urges that ways be sought to save the lives of prisoners on hunger strike".

On 15 October AI was informed that a small number of female prisoners detained in small group isolation in Moabit prison, West Berlin, had gone on hunger and thirst strike. This action had been prompted by a decision to transfer a number of them to the high security wing of Luebeck prison. That same day AI sent a telex to the Justice Senator for West Berlin, referring to its current discussions with the government authorities. In this letter AI strongly urged that, on the basis of these discussions, "any measure that further limits the social contacts of prisoners be reconsidered as an immediate means to end the present hunger and thirst strike of the prisoners and to save lives".

The prisoners broke off their strike at the beginning of November.