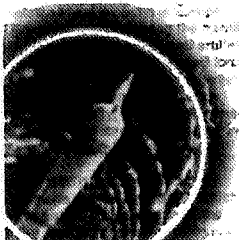




63

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Amnesty International - May 2004
Amnesty International Report 2004 – Ghana

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Covering events from January - December 2003

A death sentence was imposed; no executions were carried out. A National Reconciliation Commission started its hearings into human rights abuses during Ghana's periods of unconstitutional government since 1957. A woman was imprisoned for practising female genital mutilation. A draft Domestic Violence Bill was still not tabled in Parliament.

Death penalty

The death penalty remained on the statute books. In April an Accra High Court sentenced Dereck George Mensah to death for murdering his employer. No executions were carried out.

The National Reconciliation Commission

Hearings began in January of the National Reconciliation Commission. Established by the government in 2002, its task was to compile a record of human rights abuses committed during Ghana's periods of unconstitutional rule since independence from colonial rule in 1957, and to make recommendations for reparations and reforms. The government appointed the Commission's members, who included judges, representatives of religious communities, academics, traditional rulers and the military. The law establishing the Commission did not require it to include representatives of non-governmental organizations among its members or to make its findings and recommendations public. It also allowed evidence to be heard behind closed doors on grounds of national security, and granted limited immunity from prosecution to witnesses who incriminated themselves with regard to that particular evidence.

Most of the people making statements in hearings before the Commission were victims of human rights violations under the military governments headed by Flight Lieutenant, later President, J.J. Rawlings. Much of the testimony involved allegations of summary executions, "disappearances", torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Some victims had been politically targeted. In other cases, soldiers had flogged and killed men and women they accused of hoarding and other economic crimes, looted their property and stolen from their homes and businesses.

Women's rights

Despite being made a criminal offence in 1994 by an amendment of the Criminal Code, female genital mutilation is still practised. In September a woman from Wa, Upper West

Region, who had performed female genital mutilation on three girls, was convicted and sentenced to five years' imprisonment.

By the end of the year, a draft Domestic Violence Bill had not yet been tabled in Parliament. The bill aimed to strengthen official responses to complaints of violence against women and to broaden remedies available to the courts. It received wide support from women's organizations and other civil society groups.