

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

DELEGATION FROM THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

for relations with the

UNITED STATES CONGRESS

New York and Washington, DC

31 October to 4 November 1977

Notice to Members

Please find attached a translation of an article which appeared in 'Le Monde' on 12 October 1977 after the 1977 Nobel Peace prize was awarded to Amnesty International.

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR COMMITTEES
AND INTER-PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Annex

20 October 1977

'Practical humanitarian and impartial' action

by P.J. Franceschini

'In a world of increasing brutality and international violence, terrorism and torture, Amnesty International has used its forces to protect the value of human life' were the words used by the Nobel Peace prize committee to explain a choice that does it honour. When, in 1961, an article in 'The Observer', 'The forgotten prisoner' by British lawyer Peter Benenson created the organization, no-one could foresee that the revolt of a man of principle would one day unite almost 100,000 human rights activists throughout the world.

As the Oslo committee said, Amnesty's success has been due to the new form of 'practical humanitarian and impartial' aid that has become its hallmark. The relationship between humanitarianism and politics has always been marred by ambiguity since the natural tendency is to be affected only by the sufferings of one's friends. Blood is thicker than water. Countless indignities, a Gulag as a historical necessity and a right wing that grudgingly condemns the torturers in power all bear witness to this fact. The humanitarian debate has often become a pretext for selfish petitions and well-timed indignation.

Quite justifiably, Amnesty International does not admit to being 'apolitical'. Its action is indeed political but it has introduced a spirit of exacting stringency into the human rights discussion. As the chairman of its executive committee recently stated, its complete impartiality, its sovereign indifference to scheming and bargaining and its concern for men imprisoned or tortured for their convictions have earned it the criticism of a growing number of governments in both East and West. The haunt of communists in the eyes of the caudillos of Latin America, in Moscow it is regarded as a bastion of the cold war. Everywhere, its patient and tireless efforts, its letter campaigns, its interventions, its reiteration of the universal declaration of human rights in connection with some former minister or some obscure detainee embarrass, antagonize and rouse indignation. Often it is allowed to win its case simply to be rid of its fully justified harassment.

With the exception, alas, of some aberrant regimes, no government remains entirely indifferent to international public opinion. No-one likes to have the gulf between his principles and his actions exposed with polite meticulousness. No-one takes pleasure in having his cruelty and baseness on public display. When all is said and done, the effectiveness of Amnesty International is due to knowledge of that fact. The withholding of information, a practice particularly widespread in the Third World, limits its opportunities for action. In the planetary Gulag more and more archipelagos are uncharted. Concealed repression, the silent crime, injustice screened from view or censure are also the politically most effective method of circumventing the standards recently honoured by the Nobel Peace prize.
