

Amnesty International ‘Good News’

Please note that this compilation is not geopolitically balanced, and the quotes and stories are intended for use individually, rather than as a complete collection.

1. INDIVIDUAL STORIES

AFRICA

Burundi

Jean Minani was charged with involvement in the murder of an army officer. The only evidence was his confession and the statement of a witness, both extracted under torture. AI submitted photographs and other evidence of torture to the court when the case came to trial. In court, a witness retracted her statement saying that it was false and she had only made it because she was threatened and intimidated. Jean Minani was eventually acquitted because all the evidence against him was ruled inadmissible.

Somalia

“My husband used to be a judge. In 1975, there was an attempted coup in Somalia. The president brought in laws that were undemocratic, unfair. My husband would have had to implement them, sentencing people without trial. So he resigned, but Siad Barre put him under great pressure. My husband was not allowed to work or leave the country. We knew what was going to happen, so in March 1976 he left Somalia.

“I wanted to join him but they wouldn’t let me. I had three children and they put me under a lot of pressure. They would come and sit on the steps of my house and look through the window at me. This went on for two years.

“I was arrested on the morning of 13 June 1978. I was going to visit my mother, to the north of Mogadishu. A Land Rover pulled up and in front of the bus and forced it to stop. Some men jumped out. They were in uniform, but I recognized them as being the same men that had harassed me at home. There were six of them to arrest just me. They were rude and rough and humiliating.

“When we arrived, I was taken to a place I knew of. It is called ‘The Hole’. Immediately I was stripped and questioned. They thought I was leaving the country, but I told them where I had been going.

“I don’t remember those early days and weeks and months very well. The first day, yes. All the rest is blurred. I was unconscious a lot of the time, or I was too weak or too tired. I can only tell you how it all started. There was no real routine to the torture. I didn’t know when to expect it or why. When it happened it was always at night, from nine o’clock to about three in the morning. Perhaps that was when they were bored.

“Because of Amnesty International, my name was well known in different parts of the world. Later I learnt that Siad Barre had received letters from Amnesty. I remember receiving one, too. All I can recall of it is that I burnt it, as I was afraid that if it was found, I might have been in danger. But it was a very good thing for me. It is so important that prisoners get letters, it really does help.

“When it came to my final release, it was again because of a rumour. It was put around that I wanted to divorce my husband; this would have meant that I no longer supported him or the opposition in exile. This would have been good publicity for the government. They believed the story so much that they quickly brought the papers for me to sign. I did this, and so I was released.

“Two days later I escaped from Somalia. To this day I don’t know how I managed it. The observers must have been asleep. From the time I reached the Ethiopian border until I was reunited with my family, my story is quite simple, although there were dangers. I had to walk the last 15 kilometres at night, as the area was full of soldiers. We had to walk on the exposed roots of trees and on clumps of grass to avoid the mines. It was a very long night.

“Eventually I made my way to Galdogob. When my husband arrived there, we were all together after so many years, I cannot tell you how I felt.”

Saida Botan Elmi, Somali ex-prisoner of conscience, released June 1984.

AMERICAS

Brazil

AI's first Urgent Action (1973)

Brazil, 9 December 1995; as Latin American Urgent Action (UA) coordinators gather in São Paulo for a regional meeting, there are three extra names on the guest list: Luiz Rossi, María José Rossi and Tracy Ulltveit-Moe. Over the next two days, the trio will transport the meeting back to a time, more than two decades ago, when their lives became inextricably linked. São Paulo, Brazil, the night of 15 February 1973; heavily armed military police force their way into the home of Luiz Basilio Rossi, Professor of Brazilian History at São Paulo University, and without explanation, take him away into the darkness. Now, more than 20 years on, he tells the gathered UA coordinators how "*at the time, many people were being arrested for political reasons and tortured to death or "disappeared", and I had a real fear that this would happen to me too.*" The security forces return to the house, surround it and even nail boards across the front door to prevent the professor's wife, María José, and three young daughters from telling the world what has happened. "*We couldn't get out of the house*", recalls María José, "*not even out to the street, so I had to write a note to a neighbour without the police seeing.*" Via a back window and the neighbour's young daughter, the message is passed to a priest, who in turn passes it on to the Bishop of Lins.

On the other side of the world - not yet "*shrunk*" by computers, faxes and e-mail - a small organization called Amnesty International has for some time been receiving disturbing reports from Brazil telling of brutal state torture. The organization's existing action techniques - with their cautious concentration on prisoners of conscience (POCs) - are beginning to seem hopelessly inadequate in the face of these horror stories. Tracy Ulltveit-Moe was AI's Brazil researcher in 1973. She remembers: "*We invited one of our Brazilian contacts, who was in Paris at the time, to come to London and meet with myself and Martin Ennals, then Secretary General. We spent the entire weekend discussing the problem and concluded that what we needed was a quick action for prisoners in danger, irrespective of the POC issue. I suggested the name "URGENT ACTION", and the title stuck.*" More than that - a technique which over the next 23 years and beyond would spawn millions of appeals on behalf of thousands of individuals in many countries, was born." By now the Rossi family's smuggled message has reached London where it finds Tracy at AI. The case of the Brazilian professor abducted by the military in the middle of the night is set to become AI's first "Urgent Action". Details are typed up and, on 19 March 1973, using names selected from a "shoe box" of hand-written address cards, the UA is mailed out, requesting immediate appeals in order to save the professor from torture and possible "disappearance" or death. Two weeks later, María José receives a telegram ordering her to come to the military police (DOPS) headquarters in Sao Paulo to "*identify her husband's body*". On arrival, however, she gets a glimpse of her husband alive! She is also shown a pile of letters. María José still remembers how the DOPS Director told her "*Your husband must be a more important person than we thought, because we've got all these letters from all over the world*". She is forced to sign a letter stating that Luiz is alive and well and not being tortured, and that the international action should stop. The authorities send the fake letter to AI in London. However, as María José now tells: "*When I got home I immediately wrote another letter to AI, telling the real story, that Luiz had been tortured, but that several hundred protest letters had arrived which I believed had saved his life.*" Two decades on, she remains firmly convinced of this: "*In my opinion, the intervention of AI was fundamental in saving Luiz from further torture and worse. I got the impression from the DOPS Director that he and the authorities were feeling under great pressure from AI - pressure to produce the prisoner, to show him, because he was getting so much publicity. Moreover, we were heartened to know that people outside Brazil knew what was going on, that they cared, and that they were prepared to do something about it. It gave us great comfort and hope. I and my family felt lonely and frightened and kindness from outsiders helped enormously.*" Tracy, too, recalls the events with clarity: "*I have a very clear memory of the case - in AI they say you never forget your first prisoner! When we received María José's second letter, we were overjoyed and very emotional to think that the Urgent Action had worked and that Luiz was safe*". Luiz himself believes that the international appeals were crucial: "*The torturer aims to isolate you, to cut all your links with the outside world. But AI was able to break that isolation. ... Once the authorities know that other people know you're there and what's happening to you, they are forced to be more careful about how they treat you ... When I saw my wife, I knew that my case had become public, I knew they could no longer kill me. Then the pressure on me decreased and conditions improved.*" After his release, the family left Brazil and eventually settled in Belgium. When they returned to Brazil years later, María José helped to set up an AI Health Professional's Network and was a founding member of the AI group in Brasilia where they now live. São Paulo 10 December 1995, Human Rights Day: the latest chapter in the story of the first UA closes with Professor Rossi, by now wearing a British Section UA T-shirt, hugging everyone goodbye as he leaves the meeting: "*I am an example of your success and a symbol of the importance of continuing your work. And I will write an Urgent Action appeal anytime - how can I refuse!*"

Cuba

The airport lounge, which at 2am would usually stand deserted, echoed with the voices of 12 newly-arrived Cuban exiles as they told their stories to the world. *"We've been waiting all our lives for this chance to speak out"*, said Edilberto Del Toro Argota, a 45-year-old bus driver charged with disseminating 'enemy propaganda' and sentenced to four years in a Cuban prison for his human rights work. *"But never in my life did I think it would be here in Canada ... My life in prison was very sad and very dangerous"*, said sculptor Luis Alberto Ferrandiz Alfaro, who was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment for 'rebellion', after urging a boycott of the 1993 municipal elections in Cuba. He reportedly almost died after he was beaten in jail. Some of the exiles had been released only hours before their April 1998 flights to Canada. Yet on each of their minds was the continuing fight for justice and human rights in Cuba, and thoughts of those still behind bars for the crime of speaking their mind. One of the most vociferous spokesmen for the political prisoners left behind was Dr Omar Del Pozo Marrero. Seven years before, in September 1991, 42-year-old Dr Del Pozo had been among some 40 demonstrators outside Villa Marista, the headquarters and detention centre of the Cuban State Security Police, crying *'Freedom for Political Prisoners!'* Dr Del Pozo, the president of the National Civic Union, a non-violent opposition group, was subsequently sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment on the pretext of *'revealing state security secrets'*. However, AI believes he was imprisoned as a punishment for his involvement with Cuba's political opposition. AI adopted him as a prisoner of conscience, and his case was allocated to local groups in Mexico, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Japan. These groups heard of how Dr Del Pozo was held in a maximum security prison until May 1995, often in so-called *'punishment cells'*, and how he went on hunger strike in protest at his detention. They heard reports of his ulcers, high blood pressure and heart and kidney problems, of how he was being denied medical attention. In a heartrending letter to the UK group, Dr Del Pozo's sister, living in Florida USA, wrote in August 1995, *"We appreciate your interest and unstinting efforts in the struggle for human rights and above all for the release of my brother... but his health is quickly deteriorating"*, and described how the authorities refused to let his family supply him with food and medicine. AI researchers were later to hear first-hand about the prison conditions in Cuba. In addition to many prisoners' severe malnourishment, their overcrowded, mosquito-infested cells were breeding grounds for infectious diseases, including tuberculosis and scabies. There is a general shortage of medical supplies in the country as a whole as a result of the USA's economic embargo, which inevitably affects the medical attention provided in the prisons. Conditions in punishment cells are said to be particularly poor – there is often no bed or mattress and little or no light, either natural or artificial.

The four AI groups worked tirelessly to secure Dr Del Pozo's release. Letter-writing was to play a key part in this campaign. The groups wrote to many authorities in Cuba to push for Dr Del Pozo's release, to his relatives to offer support, and also to the Vatican. Pope John Paul II was due to visit Cuba in January 1998 and had been mentioning the human rights situation in Cuba in some of his speeches. It seemed that this might be a particularly effective place to apply pressure on Dr Del Pozo's behalf.

In the event, it turned out that over a dozen prisoners of conscience whose cases had been adopted by AI, including Dr Del Pozo, were among the 300 political and common-law prisoners released by the Cuban authorities in the wake of the Pope's visit. When he was released on 6 April 1998, Dr Del Pozo weighed just 40 kilos and had lost almost all of his hair and several teeth, apparently as a result of malnutrition. *"He might well have died there. It's a scandal that his release, like that of many others, was conditional on him going into exile abroad. And, since the Pope's visit, there has been no change in the policy of the Cuban government ... But we welcome the release of any political prisoner. For them and their families, this is the beginning of the rest of their lives."* A short time after his arrival in Canada, the local groups entered into correspondence with Dr Del Pozo, and one of his letters to the UK group was later read out as part of a church service to mark the 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. *"Today has brought me joy because your letter has come into my hands"*, Dr Del Pozo wrote. *"With it I received confirmation of a thought which I always held dear during captivity – that while it is pleasurable and emotional to recover lost freedom, it is even more comforting to know that this was only possible thanks to those persons and prestigious organizations worldwide that worked tirelessly for my freedom, my well-being and my happiness."*

Dr Del Pozo told the Netherlands group: *"I owe my freedom to the enormous amount of work many good and humane people have done to get me released ... I am greatly indebted to people like you and I considered it my duty to help you with your great efforts in favour of freedom and peace for those who suffer persecution and imprisonment."*

ASIA

East Timor

When Indonesia invaded East Timor in 1975, many of Francisco Branco's family fled, but he remained. He worked in the Indonesian civil service, but was secretly a member of the independence movement, striving for self-determination for his people. After the massacre of hundreds of East Timorese students by the Indonesian army at the Santa Cruz cemetery in Dili in 1991, Francisco was arrested, interrogated and kept in solitary confinement for many months. He was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment for subversion. Later, he was transferred to Java, 1,000 kilometres from his home. His wife was unable to visit him more than twice a year. AI adopted Francisco as a prisoner of conscience, and groups around the world worked for his release and wrote to him in prison. "*The letters I received from my friends at Amnesty International helped me through times of great crisis and threat,*" he said. Although the prison authorities stopped much of his mail, two letters from AI members got through to him in prison in August 1994. Francisco was not allowed to reply. He and other East Timorese prisoners went on hunger strike and persuaded the authorities to let them have visits from local Christians. One of these visitors, Sister Caritas Pi, regularly carried letters in and out for the prisoners, at great personal risk. Her actions allowed them much needed contact with the outside world. In 1998 an East Timorese surgeon who used to visit Francisco in prison was able to tell an AI member, by e-mail, of the release of two of Francisco's cell-mates the day it happened. Friends smuggled a mobile telephone into his cell, which enabled him to keep in touch with his home in Dili. This meant that in September 1999, during the violence following the vote in favour of independence for East Timor, Francisco knew of his family's escape to safety into the hills and under cover of darkness. A few weeks later Francisco was finally released after eight years in prison, returning home on 10 December, Human Rights Day. In October 2000, he paid an emotional visit to AI's offices in London. He said, "*When I decided to work for East Timor I knew Amnesty International would defend me if anything happened. This knowledge enabled me to defend the truth. I had the strength and courage to live through these difficult times because of the solidarity and support of my friends.*"

Fiji

Fiji Human Rights Group thanks AI for support and protection of our field workers during the Fiji crises and aftermath of 19th May 2000.

Indo-Fijians farmers in the remote, rural areas of Muaniweni, Dawasamu, Waicelece, Viria, Baulevu were brutally terrorised by 'Rebel' thugs from the day of the May 19th attempted coup. Their belongings and crops were looted. Their livestock and dairy cows and calves were slaughtered and carted by police vans to feed Rebel supporters who were keeping the Prime Minister and his cabinet hostage at the Parliamentary Complex.

Our field worker went to these areas at the end of May and found entire families hiding in the jungle; families with babies, children, grandparents. Fiji Human Rights Group established a Sanctuary Camp, at Lautoka, on the other side of Viti Levu, taking 71 people to safety. At its peak, May-November, 375 people were living in the camp.

Amnesty International's Pacific Team contacted the camp in the beginning stages. From across the world, they talked to the field workers, the victims, people in authority, the police, the military. They were constantly in touch and at the darkest moments, were our contact with the outside world and sanity.

The Fiji Human Rights Group and the 172 people remaining at the Sanctuary Camp in Lautoka sincerely thank Amnesty International for this contact and hope. We await a situation in Fiji where we feel able to negotiate a future for the people at the camp. They are still too afraid to return home.

Malaysia

Dear friends of AI,

Greetings from one of your "adopted" prisoners of conscience from Malaysia. I am finally free after spending one year in jail for trying to defend an under-age girl who was raped and instead of being protected by the law, punished and detained for 3 years.

The girl's rapists were never jailed because of the Malaysian government's attempt to cover up the scandal as the rapists allegedly included a senior government Minister. I find a certain satisfaction that a man can go to prison for women's rights.

During these bleak days in prison, your letters bring me much cheer. Coming from foreign lands, it gives a whiff of exotic places far away that makes you forget the dismal situation one is in for a while. Even the stamps lend promise of a much better world outside, one that we can escape to if we can endure the adversities of prison life. These little things matter when you are a prisoner with nothing much to look forward to.

I can never say thank you enough to all of you who wrote, whether in English or languages I did not understand, especially little notes and crayon drawings from children. Your cards and messages of support gives hope not only to a better future but also personal comfort when I am ill that I am not alone.

It is an unfortunate fact of life that one gets abandoned by friends when in prison even for a just cause. I never lost faith for I know that I have friends from AI. That is the magic of AI, its ability to gather a community of peoples all over the world for the common cause of humanity and dignity of man and woman- not only to lend hope to prisoners of conscience but also give human fellowship and warmth.

From the scriptures, we learn the value of serving others, of raising the soul by diminishing the self. In AI, we have seen its practical application.

I wish to share some of my experiences inside my prison where I learnt a great deal of the sorrows of fighting injustice. Such sorrow endured by my family and me, painful though it may be, is expected. What is not expected though is that sorrow can help to strengthen my resolve to endure all these adversities. Struggling on despite our sorrow serves to affirm and reaffirm the commitment to our cause and the rightness of our principles.

Even though I have lost almost everything, I am thankful for the love of my family and the moral support you all have shown. I will still continue my struggle to bring justice, freedom and human dignity to my people. Prison bars may break our backs but they can never break our spirit to demand nothing less than equality for women.

Together we can overcome, whether in Malaysia or other parts of the world. May God bless you!

[Lim Guan Eng]

Republic of Korea

As Son Pyong-son, a 60-year-old political prisoner, finished off a letter to an AI member in Germany in June 1997, an image from his past seems to have struck him:

“Between 1969 and 1992, before being imprisoned here, I cultivated roses, sharing technological skills with farmers and working for improvement in living conditions. I had the largest rose farm in Korea ... If I ever have the opportunity to be close to earth again, I promise to cultivate the most beautiful red rose in the world with my own hands and present you with an armful, for I am deeply indebted to you.

Wishing you good health,

Son Pyong-son’.

Son Pyong-son spent much of his time - when he wasn't gardening - as an anti-nuclear and peace campaigner. Arrested without warrant in September 1992, and reportedly tortured during interrogation, he was sentenced to life imprisonment in February 1993. Although the South Korean authorities have seemed eager to imprison people like Son Pyong-son for the non-violent expression of their political beliefs, they do allow some prisoners to write to the outside world. Although this correspondence is often restricted, the responses to AI groups' letters demonstrate how much it is of value. The bonds that such correspondence forges between prisoners and those who write to them are often incredibly strong.

Suh Jun-Sik, a law student at Seoul National University, was arrested in April 1971 and spent 17 years in jail for non-violent political activities. During this time an AI group in Cheshire, United Kingdom, took up his case, organizing letter-writing campaigns, political lobbying, fund-raising and vigils. They even made a birthday cake for him, which they took to a local market, and invited members of the public to eat while they signed birthday cards. He was freed in 1988, telling AI that he was hugely moved by the support for him from around the world, and that: *“an important thing is to maintain a level of pressure for a very long time. You must be prepared to be patient and never give up... My family got enthusiastic support from abroad and it gave them determination to keep going.”*

In May 1997, he came to the United Kingdom and visited some of the people who had worked on his case, swapping stories and memories with them. Little did anyone know that Suh Jun-Sik would soon be back in prison as a prisoner of conscience, arrested in November 1997 in connection with a human rights film festival he had helped organize. *"We immediately wrote to the South Korean authorities, appealing for his release"*, a member of the Cheshire AI group told AI. *"On 5 February, we received a call from South Korea to say that he had been released. We spoke to Suh Jun-Sik the following day, when he told us that he had received our greetings card while in prison."*

Nepal

Bishnu Pukar Shrestha (see Worldwide Appeals, April 2000), whose whereabouts remained unknown for 10 months, was finally released from unacknowledged detention on 7 July 2000. According to a report in Kantipur newspaper, his release took place in the presence of a member of parliament of the ruling Nepali Congress Party.

AI received reliable information indicating that for the majority of the time Bishnu Pukar Shrestha was held incommunicado within the Armed Forces Section of the Police Training Centre at Majaharajgunj, Kathmandu, an unofficial place of detention.

Bishnu Pukar Shrestha, a secondary- school teacher and human rights activist, "disappeared" on 2 September 1999 when he was abducted after stepping off a bus in Satumangal, Kathmandu. Witnesses saw six men in civilian dress, believed to be police officers, force him inside a Jeep with black tinted windows which then headed towards the city centre. When relatives made inquiries at local police posts and at police headquarters in Kathmandu, the police denied his arrest. A habeas corpus writ was filed on behalf of Bishnu Pukar Shrestha with the Supreme Court. Nine witnesses gave testimony in court about his arrest. The Court also ordered the Transport Department to reveal the details of the person under whose name the Jeep in which he was abducted was registered and, at a later hearing, for the owner to appear in court. But, 10 months after his arrest, the Supreme Court's action had not succeeded in establishing his whereabouts. Appeals on behalf of Bishnu Pukar Shrestha were sent to the Nepal government authorities by members of parliament, the diplomatic community and local and international human rights organizations, including members of AI. In a letter to AI, dated 6 August 2000, Bishnu Pukar Shrestha wrote:

"It is the happiest moment for me to say thanks to you for your noblest job to release me from the dark room and bring me outside in the world... I owe for the tremendous job performed by you, the Secretary General, the staff and officials of Amnesty International for my release. I would like to extend my cordial thanks to all of them who were involved to bring me out of the mouth of death..."

EUROPE

Former Yugoslavia

"This letter gave me much courage. I feel like a different person. Just the thought that there is someone like this group that intervenes for human rights... It is nearly two years since my husband was locked up and no one from the government has asked me how I am living. I love my homeland and want to be a good citizen, but we have been pushed aside without a thought. Therefore a letter such as the one from Amnesty International gives a person strength and makes you feel human again. The very fact that you have written to us means a great deal to me, and I will not forget it."

Wife of prisoner of conscience, Anto Kovacevic, prisoner of conscience, in a letter to the AI Dutch group working for Anto Kovacevic's release.

"Greetings to Amnesty International. I have come home from prison and am very, very grateful... Mainly I owe my early release to you and to your work on my case... Thank you for all your support."

Anto Kovacevic, released prisoner of conscience, in a letter to AI and the groups that had worked for his release

Romania

"Amnesty International saved my life... I found out [that I had been adopted by AI] in prison, from somebody in the next cell. I didn't see the person; my cell was dark; I was not permitted to see other persons or be seen. He asked me quietly if I was Carmen Popescu... He told me 'don't be frightened, don't be discouraged. You have friends over the seas: they know about you...'

"The message from many Romanians who know your wonderful work for prisoners of conscience around the world is to say thank you for your wonderful work."

Carmen Popescu, released prisoner of conscience, in a talk to a high-school group in California, USA

Uzbekistan

"My soul was calm while I was in prison because I knew that I was innocent and that human rights organizations were supporting me." On 22 December 2000, prison guards told 55-year-old Makhbuba Kasymova, prisoner of conscience and member of the Independent Human Rights Organization of Uzbekistan (NOPCHU), that she was to be released in half an hour. At 7pm she walked out of the prison gates. Makhbuba said, *"When I was released from prison the guards handed over a package of 40 letters. They hadn't given me a single one before. There were even drawings children had done for me."* Earlier that day, the new US Ambassador to Uzbekistan had met President Islam Karimov and raised Makhbuba's case. Immediately, an order went out to free her. Both she and NOPCHU are convinced that this would not have happened if Amnesty International and other human rights organizations had not campaigned persistently for her release. Makhbuba, a former teacher and mother of six, was among many opposition democrats harassed in the early 1990s because of their non-violent political activities. She was one of a small group of human rights defenders who monitored a wave of arrests and trials which followed the murders of officials in 1997 and bomb explosions in Tashkent in 1999. The government used the explosions to justify a clampdown on individuals and groups it perceived as a threat to its stability and authority. On 12 May 1999 a group of plain clothes officers from the Tashkent City police searched Makhbuba's flat. The officers did not identify themselves or produce a search warrant, as the law requires. In the days following, Makhbuba was repeatedly questioned at the City Department of Internal Affairs (GUVD), often for many hours at a time. In July 1999 she was sentenced to five years' imprisonment for "concealing a crime" and "misappropriation of funds" after a grossly unfair three-hour trial described by human rights monitors as a "farce". Now she has her freedom once more. *"I am glad that Makhbuba is back,"* said Mikhail Ardzinov, the head of NOPCHU, *"It'll be a lot easier to continue our work on the protection of human rights in Uzbekistan now that Makhbuba can help us again."*

MIDDLE EAST / NORTH AFRICA

Israel/Lebanon

Khiam Detention Centre's doors forced open

Amnesty International delegates travelled to Lebanon in May 2000 to research human rights concerns in south Lebanon. These visits took place at the time of the withdrawal of Israeli forces from its self-styled "security zone" and the collapse of the South Lebanon Army (SLA), Israel's proxy militia in south Lebanon. On 29 May, together with former detainees, the delegates visited Khiam Detention Centre, where hundreds of Lebanese nationals have been detained over the years without charge or trial.

One delegate recalled: "Only six days before our visit, this was still a frightening detention centre, with its tales of torture, degradation and despair. The accounts we heard that morning from detainees just freed did not differ significantly from those we had become familiar with over the years. Filthy hoods, relentless interrogation, beatings, repeated suspension from an electricity pylon, dousing with water, electric shocks. Detention in crowded, dark and dirty cells followed interrogation. No one held there was charged or tried but some were held in these conditions for up to 15 years. Others died there.

"Then suddenly, at midday on 23 May, there was a dramatic liberation. No jailers showed up with the keys to the cells - they had run away to join other SLA members streaming to the border to seek refuge in Israel, in the wake of Israeli troops. The villagers of Khiam made their way spontaneously to the detention centre. Detainees heard shouting, some shooting, and feared that fellow detainees were being executed. But they were shots of celebration, while, using any tools they could find, the villagers broke down the doors of the prison, setting free all the remaining 144 detainees.

“With dignity and courage former prisoners relived their experiences as they showed the delegation around the prison. One detainee, returning with her daughter and husband for the first time since her release just six days before, had tears in her eyes as she faced her cell with memories all too fresh.

“The joy of liberation mixed with the sorrow of recent experiences made this an extraordinary and moving day, filled with incongruous sights and powerful, mixed emotions.”

With the traces of its terrible past still fresh, Khiam is at the same time already well into history. A chapter is closing, but another one has immediately opened, more intimate, more difficult for the prisoners and their families. Amnesty International will continue to help.

Lebanon

“You were the light in the darkness of my jail, you were my hope that pushed me to survive”. Antoinette Chahin was arrested, tortured, and sentenced to death for a murder she had nothing to do with. She still suffers nightmares and is anxious about the future. She visited the International Secretariat and AI United Kingdom in October to meet some of those who had campaigned for her release from a Lebanese prison. She spoke movingly of her ordeal; her arrest, of the physical and mental torture inflicted upon her by her captors, and of her hopes and fears now she has been released. Antoinette Chahin featured in a *Worldwide Appeal* (WWA) in August 1997: she had been sentenced to death in January 1997 - this was subsequently commuted to life imprisonment with hard labour - on charges of involvement with a murder. The primary evidence against her was the confession of her co-defendants, allegedly extracted under torture. They later claimed that they never knew Antoinette Chahin. She was finally given a retrial which started on 23 June 1998 and, a year later, she was acquitted by the Criminal Court of Cassation. No investigation was ever carried out into her torture. As well as the thousands of AI members who wrote in response to the WWA, AI groups in Canada, France, Japan and Morocco worked tirelessly on Antoinette Chahin’s case. In a letter to AI, she wrote: *“You were the light in the darkness of my jail, you were my hope that pushed me to survive”*.

Tunisia

‘I want to warmly thank all Amnesty International members’. Radhia Nasraoui, a Tunisian human rights lawyer who for years has been harassed and intimidated by security forces because of her human rights work, writes about her long involvement with Amnesty International: *“When I first got in contact with Amnesty I was a young lawyer at the beginning of my career. It was 1978, the time of the riots and the suppression of the trade-unionists of the Union Générale des Travailleurs de Tunisie, the Tunisian Workers’ General Union. I discovered the seriousness with which Amnesty representatives treated the cases they were working on, their quest for truth, their discretion ... I was struck by their independence towards everyone ... While working on the cases of my clients, who were of various political convictions and backgrounds, I understood just how efficient Amnesty International’s work was. For instance, a client who had “disappeared” was brought before the examining magistrate after an Urgent Action was issued on his behalf, and a client who was beaten and ill-treated in prison was given less harsh detention conditions. And when a client finds out that people who he doesn’t know, in a country far away, are demanding his release or ask about his health ... all these actions play a large part in easing the detainee’s isolation. It gives him hope and helps him to bear his possibly inhuman detention conditions ... When my husband, Hamma Hammami, was arrested, tortured and sentenced to jail in 1994, I myself experienced the effectiveness of Amnesty International’s actions. Amnesty International and other non-governmental organizations played a very important role in the improvement of his harsh detention conditions (months of isolation, physical and psychological aggression) and in his release. I will always remember the moral support Amnesty International gave me, particularly some calls from Amnesty International friends in difficult moments. I was always sure that any information that I gave about my husband would be broadcast to all corners of the world, breaking the feeling of isolation and contributing to exposing the torturers ... In the end I too became the victim of constant harassment. My conviction of Amnesty International’s role has been confirmed: It is an absolutely necessary action for the defence of human rights at the international level. Through my own experience, I have come to understand that Amnesty International’s intervention on behalf of a victim reminds the authorities that this person*

is not “forgotten”, that hundreds or even thousands of people worldwide are concerned about the fate of this person ...

It is very important that Amnesty International does not take into account the social background, ideology or political stand of the victim. Amnesty International’s actions prove that “human rights for all” is not an empty slogan. The hundreds of postcards that my husband and I received are the living proof of this effective solidarity from Amnesty International members who are aware of our difficult situation. Through this story, I want to warmly thank all Amnesty International members. The pursuit of Amnesty International action is vital so that one day, all human rights abuses will end”.

2. CAMPAIGNS

Torture Campaigns

The Stop Torture campaign (Oct 2000 – Dec 2001) is AI’s third global campaign on torture and follows major successes in AI’s first campaign denouncing torture (1972-1973) and its second focussing on the prevention of torture (1984). These campaigns contributed to the UN’s adoption of the Convention against Torture, on (Human Rights Day) 10 December 1984.

On 10 December 1972 AI launched a global one-year Campaign for the Abolition of Torture, in which it set out to make torture “as unthinkable as slavery”. In his book *NGOs and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, William Korey said that the campaign “was one of the most successful initiatives ever undertaken by an NGO. In the course of a fairly short time frame, masses of people were involved along with numerous NGOs, in pressuring governments and, ultimately, the UN General Assembly to brand torture among the vilest of crimes and to erect a set of institutions to combat it. The campaign was impressively orchestrated.”

- A In 1975, the Fifth UN Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders was held. Following intense lobbying by AI, the Congress agreed a Declaration Against Torture.
- A AI then worked globally to ensure that the UN General Assembly would adopt this Declaration - which it did unanimously on 9 December 1975.
- A On 10 December 1984, the UN agreed the UN Convention Against Torture, which came into force three years later. According to Jonathan Power in his book *Like Water On Stone* (2001), “it was Amnesty International, with its combination of attention to detail and zeal of purpose, that carried the day. Without that degree of energy the Convention Against Torture would never have seen the light of day”.
- A AI’s website www.stoptorture.org enables people to receive emails and mobile text messages on behalf of individuals facing torture and then send emails to the relevant governments. In the first five months of the Stop Torture campaign, over 19,500 subscribers from 188 countries used this innovative form of campaigning on behalf of eight individuals. Within 12 hours of each action, an average of 2,500 appeals was generated. Three of the eight individuals (in Turkey, Mexico, and Ecuador) have been released.

End Secrecy, End Suffering: Saudi Arabia Campaign (Mar 2000 - Sept 2000)

Focussing particularly on abuses committed because of a secretive and unaccountable judicial system, this was the first full-scale campaign by a human rights organization on Saudi Arabia.

- A This campaign led to an unprecedented debate about human rights in Saudi Arabia, amongst the media, government ministers and the public at large.
- A Days after the campaign’s launch, Saudi Arabian officials announced new human rights measures, including an invitation to the UN special rapporteur on judges and lawyers and the setting up of new human rights bodies.
- A In September, the month that AI released a report on abuses committed against women in Saudi Arabia, the country signed and ratified the Women’s Convention.

Rights for All: USA campaign (Oct 1998 – Sept 1999)

Following this campaign, which focussed on the USA's record on a range of human rights issues:-

- A Four states agreed legislation criminalizing sexual relations between male guards and female prisoners.
- A The Illinois State Assembly ended the use of shackles on pregnant women.
- A New York City cancelled its order for stun belts.
- A The Department of Justice held a summit on police brutality.
- A A mass letter-writing campaign made US prosecutors drop plans to seek the death penalty against two children accused of murder.
- A The head of the Department of Corrections in California, after reading AI's report on conditions in the Valley State Women's Prison, wrote: *"Your organization's valuable findings and recommendations are considered when implementing new policies and procedures for female inmates ... I look forward to continued co-operation with AI."*

Get Up, Sign Up!: 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Campaign (Dec 1997 - Dec 1998)

AI's campaign allowed people from all walks of life to sign personal pledges to support the values of the Universal Declaration.

- A Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi made the first pledge. She was followed by the Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson, and countless politicians (Vaclav Havel, Tony Blair, Bill Clinton, Lech Walesa) and celebrities (U2, Annie Lennox, Mick Jagger, Harrison Ford, Julia Roberts).
- A On 10 December 1998, the pledges of 13 million people from 124 countries were brought together to form the world's biggest book, presented to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in Paris.
- A Two prisoners featured in the campaign's appeal cases (Dr Beko Ransome-Kuti in Nigeria and Akhtam Mu'aysa in Syria) were released during the year.

Sierra Leone (2000)

In May 2000, the security situation in Sierra Leone deteriorated rapidly following the capture of 500 United Nations troops by the armed opposition Revolutionary United Front (RUF). AI devised new campaigning techniques to tackle the immediate risk to civilians as well as some of the root causes of the nine-year armed conflict.

The illicit trade in diamonds from rebel-held areas of Sierra Leone through neighbouring countries, in particular Liberia, had financed military assistance to the RUF, enabling it to continue to commit widespread abuses against civilians. A UN Security Council arms embargo in 1997 had never been effectively enforced.

AI and other NGOs campaigned to ensure that the UN arms embargo was enforced; for an independent investigation into diamond trading from West Africa; and for regulation and control of the diamond industry to ensure that diamonds from rebel-held areas of Sierra Leone could be identified and the trade stopped. AI members around the world put intense pressure on key players within the diamond trade. The rapid achievements of the campaign went beyond all expectations:

- A on 5 July 2000 the UN Security Council imposed an 18-month embargo on diamonds exports from Sierra Leone, and asked the UN Secretary General to establish a panel of experts to investigate the links between the diamond trade and the arms trade in West Africa;
- A enforcement of the UN arms embargo was strengthened;
- A governments of most major diamond-importing countries announced new measures to regulate and control the trade in their country. Many have passed relevant legislation;
- A the diamond industry began to introduce new measures to regulate and control the trade;
- A with international assistance, government-authorised exports of diamonds from Sierra Leone resumed on 12 October 2000 using a new system of certification;

A the government of Liberia remains under heavy diplomatic pressure to end its military and political support of the RUF.

3. URGENT ACTIONS

Since the first urgent action appeal was issued in 1973, AI has initiated some 16,600 urgent appeals on behalf of men, women and children in immediate danger. In about one third of new urgent action appeal cases, AI has learnt of some improvement in the situation of the person or people named in the appeal.

"Amnesty International is making a big fuss about you. We won't do anything to you."

This assurance by Turkish security officers was given to five political detainees days after AI mobilised Urgent Action appeals to the Turkish authorities not to harm them. Unlike many other prisoners in Turkey held in similar circumstances, the five, arrested in March 2000, were not tortured.

Father David Fernandez, Head of Miguel Agustin Human Rights Centre in Mexico, received death threats in August 1995. The next day an Urgent Action was issued on his behalf. He wrote: *"Amnesty International's solidarity has protected us like a safe, friendly home."* In 1996 he visited London and said: *"I think Urgent Actions are one of the main factors that stop indirect aggression against us. If we hadn't had this support, maybe we would have had more people killed by direct aggression. Although the threats continue and nobody has been brought to justice, I think Urgent Actions make the difference between life and death."*

Prins Gunasekera, a Sri Lankan lawyer, received death threats in 1989. He has said: *"They killed one lawyer, they killed two, they killed three of my juniors, they killed a fourth and my own nephew, my sister's only son, and threatened to come for me. It's the speed that matters. It's like attending on an injured person in an accident, giving first aid to stop bleeding, something like that. The quicker the response, the greater chance of saving the life of the person concerned. I am living testimony to the fact that Urgent Action is an efficient way of saving human lives. This is living proof. I am here because of your Urgent Actions."*

Eren Keskin, a Turkish human rights lawyer, was imprisoned 1996. She later said: *"In the evening I thought they were going to release me but instead they took me to the Anti-Terror Branch and for a couple of hours they made me stand leaning against a wall with my face to the wall. They were kicking and hitting me at the back then they made as if they were going to take me off for torture. They blindfolded me. Just then the Anti-Terror Branch Chief appeared saying "what are you doing, she is a guest here, let her go." We learned, later of course, that Amnesty International had issued an Urgent Action for us. In Turkey an Urgent Action is regarded as a sort of saviour."*

4. INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE

In the last few years ground-breaking measures have been taken to ensure that those accused of serious human rights crimes who have evaded justice in their own country can be held to account internationally.

International Criminal Court

AI's campaign for a permanent International Criminal Court (ICC) has been highly effective. It was the theme for AI Week 1996 as well as the subject of consistent campaigning for many years.

A In December 1996 the UN General Assembly decided to convene a conference of governments to be held in July 1998. At this conference the Statute of the ICC (Rome Statute) was adopted. The Rome Statute reflects many of the 16 fundamental principles AI had argued for. The challenge is now the early ratification of the Rome

Statute and effective lobbying on the rules of procedure, evidence and elements of crimes, and the provision of adequate resources to the court.

The Augusto Pinochet case

In October 1998, when the British police arrested Augusto Pinochet, former military ruler of Chile, the world celebrated. The Pinochet case created unprecedented media and public interest in AI's work and in the issues of torture, "disappearances", and impunity. Although Pinochet was eventually allowed to return to Chile on health grounds in March 2000, his arrest and detention transformed the human rights landscape.

- A The fact that Pinochet was arrested – almost unthinkable before October 1998 – sent a powerful message: no one is above international law, even when national laws offer protection from prosecution.
- A Internationally, the case affirmed that former heads of state were no longer immune from prosecution. The precedent established by the case was the most important for international law since the Nuremberg tribunals.
- A In Chile, it paved the way for renewed investigations regarding the responsibility of both Pinochet and other leaders for crimes against humanity during Pinochet's rule.
- A The so-called "Pinochet effect" continues. For example: In January 2000 the United Kingdom Home Secretary announced that police were investigating torture allegations against Ian Henderson, a British-born former head of the security services in Bahrain. On 5 February 2000, Lieutenant-Colonel Tharcisse Muvunyi, a former commander in the Rwandese army during the genocide, was arrested in London, United Kingdom, following the issue of an international warrant by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.