

# The Wire

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## Women carry the burden in the Occupied Territories

*"I crawled behind a concrete block by the checkpoint to have some privacy and gave birth there, in the dust, like an animal. I held the baby... she moved a little but after a few minutes she died in my arms".*

Severe restrictions on the movement of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories have had tragic consequences for women and girls. In August 2003, Rula Ashtiya (*quoted above*) was forced to give birth on a dirt road by the Beit Furik checkpoint, in the West Bank, after Israeli soldiers refused her passage from her village to the nearby town of Nablus.

In December 2004, Bayan Hussein-Ali gave birth in an ambulance at a checkpoint near Nablus after being delayed by Israeli soldiers in the middle of the night. The ambulance was not allowed to pass through the checkpoint so a second ambulance was called to collect her from the other side of the checkpoint. Known as the "back-to-back" method, this is how merchandise – and often patients – are transported through Israeli army checkpoints.

Such experiences demonstrate the vulnerability of women to a system of control that discriminates against Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. Subject to an increasingly sophisticated system of blockades and checkpoints, 3.5 million Palestinian women, men and children are prevented from moving between towns and villages, and are often confined to their homes. As a result, they are denied access to work, education and adequate health care.

Under siege and under strain, the potential for increased family violence, including sexual abuse, is heightened. Unprecedented levels of poverty and unemployment caused by the restrictions imposed by the Israeli army and the increased militarization of the conflict have aggravated existing problems of gender inequality in Palestinian society.

Women have borne the brunt of the anger and frustration of male relatives who feel humiliated because they cannot fulfill their expected role as providers.

The greater the external threat, the less opportunity women have to confront internal issues within Palestinian society, especially those considered as private matters concerning family "honour". Those who do seek help are thwarted by ineffectual laws that discriminate against women and give little or no protection to victims of family violence. Restrictions on movement further exacerbate matters.

In September 2004, Maha, a young woman from northern Gaza, was forced to drink poison by her father when he discovered that she was pregnant. Efforts by women's rights activists, hospital staff and local officials were hampered because the Israeli army had just launched a major operation and had completely sealed the area. Maha died.

For women and girls who are at risk of being killed by their families, leaving their immediate surroundings, even for a short period, is often the only effective solution. However, as one non-governmental organization (NGO) worker told AI: "In the past few years getting to the victims and getting the victims out of the danger area has been very difficult and at times totally impossible. These military blockades, curfews and checkpoints have caused the death

of some women who could have easily been saved”.

See AI’s latest report, *Israel/Occupied Territories: Conflict, occupation and patriarchy: Women carry the burden* (MDE 15/016/2005).

## **Human rights crisis continues in Nepal**

As the internal conflict between the security forces and armed insurgents of the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) (Maoist) enters its 10th year, a long-ignored human rights crisis threatens to slide toward catastrophe. The situation deteriorated sharply following King Gyanendra’s direct seizure of power and declaration of a State of Emergency on 1 February. Fundamental rights were suspended, including freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and freedom of movement. Within days, hundreds of people were arrested – among them political leaders, student activists, trade unionists, journalists, and human rights defenders.

Krishna Pahadi, a former chairperson of AI Nepal and founding chairman of the Human Rights and Peace Society, was one of those arrested. Four members of the security forces dressed in plain clothes seized him at his office on 9 February, the day before a planned rally in Kathmandu organized by the Society to protest against the emergency rule and challenge the ban on public demonstrations. Eleven other Society activists were arrested at the rally itself, where protestors chanted slogans such as “Human rights have been violated” and “Long live democracy”. While the other protesters were released after a few days, Krishna Pahadi remained in police custody.

An AI delegation, led by Secretary General Irene Khan, met Krishna Pahadi in detention at the police station in Naxal, Kathmandu, during an AI visit to Nepal in mid-February. He told them there was little point in being released, as he was sure to be rearrested for his opposition to the restrictions imposed by the king.

The attacks on human rights defenders, journalists and others following the state of emergency are crippling Nepal’s dynamic civil society. Those who were exposing and condemning the human rights abuses perpetrated both by the security forces and the CPN (Maoist) are being muzzled by the threat of arrest or assault, restrictions on freedom of movement, and the imposition of censorship.

In March a team from Nepal’s National Human Rights Commission was prevented from travelling to Kapilvastu district to investigate reports that mobs allegedly operating with the sanction of the Royal Nepal Army had targeted Maoists and suspected Maoist sympathizers, burning hundreds of homes and killing an estimated 30 villagers. Without witnesses, both sides are free to commit human rights abuses with impunity.

While the state of emergency and mass arrests have drawn international attention, it is important to remember that the most serious human rights concern in Nepal is the daily violence and terror inflicted on ordinary communities across the country.

For more information about the human rights situation in Nepal, see *Nepal: A long ignored human rights crisis is now on the brink of catastrophe* (ASA 31/022/2005) and *Nepal: Killing with impunity* (ASA 31/001/2005).

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**Nigeria’s unheard voices: widespread violence against women in the family**

*“The day my daddy called me a prostitute, I decided to leave... he just said if I leave the house all his problems would be solved. I left that day.”*

This 14-year-old girl had been molested and verbally abused by her father for months. The day she left the house, she was raped by a stranger after hours of wandering in Lagos. When she returned home later, a friend of her father who was staying at the house also raped her.

When AI met her in November 2004, she was six months pregnant and living in a shelter for abused women. She told AI she wants to go back to school.

Violence against women in the family in Nigeria is widespread and multifaceted. Violence can be physical, psychological and economic. Husbands, partners and fathers are responsible for most of the violence, and in some cases, employers of domestic workers; women in the extended family are also often complicit.

Violence against women is not addressed and treated with the seriousness that the issue requires. One human rights defender told AI: “My cousin is beaten up by her husband every second because he suspects her of having an affair. My cousin has told me to stay away and not report the case to the police although he almost killed her once. She thinks her husband’s extended family supports him and will exonerate him if she reports it.”

There are no laws specifically criminalizing violence in the family, either at the federal or state level. Victims of such violence can only bring charges of common assault. The police often dismiss these cases as “a family issue” and tell the parties to “go home and settle the problems”.

Every day women are subjected to physical violence in Nigeria. They are hit, raped and even murdered by members of their family. However, the lack of official statistics on gender-based violence makes it almost impossible to estimate the extent of the problem. Patricia Azuka Ani, from Lagos, died in December 2000 from her injuries after her husband beat her and threw her from the first floor of their house. He was never brought to justice and remains a free man.

Under international human rights law, states must ensure women’s rights to equality, life, liberty and security, as well as freedom from discrimination, torture and inhuman and degrading treatment. They must provide women with redress and reparation when these rights are abused. AI considers that the Nigerian federal government has done nothing to protect victims of violence in the family, including failing to reform laws that discriminate against women.

However, in Lagos State, a draft bill on domestic violence is currently before the House of Assembly, and, if enacted, would be the first state-level legislation on violence in the family, including criminal and civil remedies. This would be a step in the right direction and would set an inspiring example for the rest of the country. Nigeria must ensure that women’s voices are heard.

AI will shortly be issuing a report, *Nigeria: Unheard voices* (AFR 44/004/2005), on violence in the family in Lagos State, as part of its campaign to stop violence against women in Nigeria.

## **A victory for international law – an end to the execution of child offenders in USA**

The ruling came decades late, and was disturbingly close, considering that it involves a country that claims to be a progressive force for human rights. Nevertheless, it was a cause

for celebration when on 1 March the United States Supreme Court decided by five votes to four that the execution of offenders who were under 18 years old at the time of the crime was now unconstitutional. The decision brings the USA – by far the world’s leading perpetrator of this violation – into a global consensus that such use of the death penalty is wrong. More than 70 child offenders will be removed from death row as a result.

In *Roper v. Simmons*, a case involving Christopher Simmons who was sentenced to death in Missouri for a murder committed when he was 17 years old, the US Supreme Court majority noted the “stark reality” of the USA’s international isolation on this issue. Writing for the majority, Justice Kennedy pointed out that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), a treaty which only the USA and Somalia have failed to ratify, prohibits the use of the death penalty against anyone who was under 18 at the time of the crime. He said that it was “proper that we acknowledge the overwhelming weight of international opinion”, which provided “respected and significant confirmation” of the court’s decision.

This was the latest twist in a struggle among US Supreme Court Justices about the weight they should attach to international standards. In 1988 the court ended the death penalty against offenders who were aged 15 or younger at the time of the crime, giving a favourable nod to international standards. AI had filed an *amicus curiae* (friend of the court) brief with the court. It failed to impress Justice Scalia, who wrote: “The plurality’s reliance upon Amnesty International’s account of what it pronounces to be civilized standards of decency in other countries is totally inappropriate as a means of establishing the fundamental beliefs of this Nation”.

Shockingly, a year later, the court ruled that the execution of 16- and 17-year-old offenders was constitutional. This time Justice Scalia’s opinion prevailed. Rejecting petitions to the contrary, he emphasized that the sentencing practices of other countries were irrelevant to “American conceptions of decency.”

In *Roper v. Simmons*, AI’s brief with 16 other Nobel Peace laureates was cited in the majority opinion. Justice Scalia was back in the minority, protesting that “the views of other countries and the so-called international community” had taken “center stage”.

It may be surprising, then, that AI finds reason to agree with Justice Scalia. “If we are truly going to get in line with the international community”, he wrote in his *Roper* dissent, then it should be noted that the CRC also prohibits life imprisonment without the possibility of parole for offenders who were under 18 at the time of the crime. Justice Kennedy’s opinion had pointed to this as a possible alternative punishment for child offenders now that the death penalty was outlawed. But the USA should not replace one internationally illegal penalty with another.

There are already hundreds of people serving life sentences without parole in the USA for crimes committed when they were younger than 18. AI has worked on cases of defendants as young as 12 at the time of the crime who have been given such sentences. It will continue to campaign for abolition of life without parole for children, which, like the death penalty, disregards the immaturity of young offenders and their capacity for change. No law-abiding government should respond to the crimes of children by killing them or by throwing away the key.

## **Women confront violence in the Solomon Islands**

Women in the Solomon Islands marked International Women’s Day 2005 by celebrating remarkable progress on human rights. Years of dedicated work and women’s determination to

confront violence and discrimination are paying off – assisted by international donor support to rebuild the country after the end of internal armed conflict in 2003.

Examples from recent months include:

- the opening of the country's first purpose-built shelter for women and children who are victims of family violence;
- the creation of the first Police Sexual Assault Unit to help address violence against women and compile statistics on gender-based crime; a new police gender policy and increased recruitment of women as police officers;
- the appointment of a female Court Information Officer and the launch of a law and order awareness campaign to explain legal rights and processes to the general public – a key request from many village women and chiefs;
- an increase in the number of judges, court rooms and support staff to bring to justice people accused of deliberate and arbitrary killings, rape and other forms of torture, extortion with threats of violence, and abduction;
- the announcement by the Prime Minister that a national Human Rights Commission is to be established, already reflected in a proposed new Constitution.

AI welcomes these developments as important steps toward greater respect for the protection and promotion of human rights in a country emerging from years of armed conflict and widespread serious human rights violations. See *Solomon Islands: Women confronting violence* (ASA 43/001/2004).

However, substantial assistance and a clear public commitment by the Solomon Islands government – where necessary with donor support – will be needed to make such changes truly effective and sustainable.

For example, the new Police Sexual Assault Unit still lacks basic resources, such as specialized training for officers involved and a computer for collecting and processing statistics on gender-based crime. In addition, police and health authorities need to agree on procedures by which police officers can refer a victim of sexual assault to a hospital for medico-legal examination and care. Specially trained medical staff and a dedicated examination suite are needed to ensure that forensic evidence can be gathered to assist with prosecuting perpetrators while ensuring medical care for the victim.

To help support these human rights initiatives in the Solomon Islands, please write, calling for government support for the new Police Sexual Assault Unit, to: Prime Minister Allan Kemakeza, Office of the Prime Minister, PO Box G1, Honiara, Solomon Islands. Fax +677 26088.

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## **Worldwide Appeals**

### **Philippines**

Sharp rise in 'vigilante' killings

More than 320 people suspected of crimes such as drug dealing, solvent abuse and petty theft have reportedly been killed in Davao City since 1998. Local human rights groups have repeatedly voiced fears that government agents may be behind these “vigilante” killings. Most of the victims, who include street children and youth gang members from the city’s poorest communities, were shot dead by unidentified gunmen on motorcycles. The rate of killings has risen each year since 2000, with a particularly sharp rise in the first few weeks of 2005.

Among those waiting for justice is a woman whose three teenage sons were killed by suspected vigilantes. The youngest, 14-year-old Bobby Alia, had been accused of theft and possession of a knife. Newspapers reported that he was killed the day after he was released from police custody.

Fears of involvement by local officials and police in the killings have been heightened by repeated public statements by the Mayor of Davao City which appear to encourage extrajudicial executions as an acceptable and effective way of combating crime. At an election rally in 2004 he reportedly told a crowd: “If I win, more criminals will get killed because I have vowed to protect the people of this city... I’ve been telling criminals it’s a place where you can die any time. If that’s a cue for anybody, that’s fine.” While the authorities continue to deny responsibility for the killings, no one has been brought to justice and investigations have failed to identify the perpetrators.

Please write, urging the authorities to condemn publicly all extrajudicial executions of criminal suspects. Call for prompt, effective and impartial investigations into the killings and for those responsible to be brought to justice.

Send appeals to: Mayor Rodrigo Duterte, City Hall, City Hall Drive, Davao City 8000, Philippines.

## **Iraq**

### **Palestinian students held**

Two Palestinian students have been detained in Iraq since their arrest in April 2003, and remain held without charge or trial. Jayab Mahmood Hassan Humeidat and Ahmad Badran Faris, both aged 21, were arrested by US troops at their university residence in al-Qadisiya, Baghdad, along with 10 other Palestinian students. All were transferred to Camp Bucca, a detention facility under US control in Umm Qasr, southern Iraq.

The International Committee of the Red Cross were initially given access to the prisoners and the last visit was in July 2004. None of those arrested had access to lawyers.

Jayab Mahmood Hassan Humeidat and Ahmad Badran Faris continue to be held at Camp Bucca. Their families believe that they are detained because they hold Palestinian passports and come from the Occupied Territories. The other Palestinian students arrested with them were released, having served several months in detention without charge or trial. Those Palestinians released held foreign passports and have returned to their countries of residence.

Jayab Mahmood Hassan Humeidat and Ahmad Badran Faris, from the Hebron area in the Occupied Territories, were studying accountancy at al-Rusafah University, Baghdad. They travelled to Iraq to take up their university course in November 2001. At least 9,000 people are detained in Iraq, including in Camp Bucca and Abu Ghraib prison, near Baghdad. They are held under US control, without charge or trial – many since April 2003. Their legal status remains unclear and AI has raised its concerns on detainees with the US and Iraqi authorities.

Please write, expressing concern at the detention without charge or trial since April 2003 of Jayab Mahmood Hassan Humeidat and Ahmad Badran Faris. Call for their immediate release if they are being held simply because of their Palestinian origin and also call for clarification of the legal status of the thousands of detainees held in Iraq, specifically in Umm Qasr and Abu Ghraib.

Send appeals to: Prime Minister, Republic of Iraq, Convention Centre (Qasr al-Ma'aridh), Baghdad, Iraq; and to: The Honorable Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense, Office of the Secretary, The Pentagon, Washington, DC 20301, USA. Fax: +1 703 697 8339 Email: send appeals via the US Department of Defense website: [www.defenselink.mil/faq/comment.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/faq/comment.html)

## **Sudan**

Incommunicado detention of Darfurians

Ma'mun Issa Abdel Gader, a Fur community leader from Niyertiti in war-torn Darfur, remains detained incommunicado, a year after his arrest in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum. He has never been charged and has only been allowed one visit from his family, during Eid in November 2004.

He is being held in Kober prison in Khartoum, after being transferred between several detention centres. He is reportedly in poor health and suffers from a fractured arm which has not healed properly.

A lawyers' petition to the National Security Forces called for him to be charged or released, as his detention contravenes even the Sudan National Security Forces Act, which allows incommunicado detention without charge for up to nine months. The authorities claim that he is linked to armed groups in Darfur, at war with the government. AI believes that he is held because of his high status among the Fur community – he is a senior civil servant in the Ministry of Environment in Darfur – and for his concerns about the human rights crisis in the region.

Ma'mun Issa Abdel Gader is one of many Darfurians detained because of their origin by the Sudanese authorities, who have used the State of Emergency to justify detentions without due process. Civilians sharing the same ethnicity as armed groups, mainly composed of Fur, Zaghawa and Masalit, bear the brunt of the government's military and political repression. They risk arbitrary arrest, prolonged incommunicado detention and torture, not only in Darfur, but also in other government-controlled areas, particularly in Khartoum.

*See Sudan – No one to complain to: No respite for the victims, impunity for the perpetrators (AFR 54/138/2004).*

Please write, calling for Ma'mun Issa Abdel Gader and other Darfurians held without charge to be released immediately or charged with a recognizable criminal offence and tried according to international standards for fair trial.

Send appeals to: Mr Ali Osman Mohamed Taha, First Vice-President and Presidential Envoy for Darfur, People's Palace, PO Box 281, Khartoum, Sudan. Fax: +249 183 771651/779977

## **Turkmenistan**

Conscientious objectors detained

At least four Jehovah's Witnesses continue to be held in Turkmenistan for objecting to compulsory military service on religious grounds.

Atamurat Suvkhanov of Doshoguz was sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment in December 2004. He is serving his sentence in a prison colony in Seydi, hundreds of kilometres from his home.

In February 2005, Begench Shakhmuradov from Ashgabat was given a one-year sentence. Both prisoners of conscience are held for "evading regular call-up to active military service".

Mansur Masharipov and Vepa Tuvakov (see *Worldwide Appeals* August 2004), both Jehovah's Witnesses, are also in prison for refusing military service on religious grounds. However, six others were released in June 2004 as a result of international pressure. Their release is believed to have been motivated by the Turkmen authorities' desire to avoid being classified as a "country of particular concern" under the USA's International Religious Freedom Act. Such classification can lead to the USA taking steps ranging from diplomatic protest to targeted trade sanctions.

On 20 December 2004, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution reiterating its "grave concern at the continuing and serious human rights violations occurring in Turkmenistan".

Please write, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of prisoners of conscience Atamurat Suvkhanov, Begench Shakhmuradov, Mansur Masharipov and Vepa Tuvakov, who have been imprisoned solely for refusing to serve in the army on religious grounds.

Send appeals to: President Niyazovu, Apparat Prezidenta, 744000 g. Ashgabat, Turkmenistan. Fax +993 12 35 42 41/ 39 28 50

## **Updates**

### **Death penalty in Burundi**

AI delegates convened a meeting in January to discuss the abolition of the death penalty in Burundi. Representatives from several Burundian NGOs, international organizations, and the UN peace-keeping mission in Burundi – as well as the former

Burundian minister of human rights and others – attended the meeting. They agreed to form a coalition to work toward the abolition of the death penalty. The human rights organization Ligue Iteka offered to lead the coalition.

Recent moves to introduce a law which would radically shorten the judicial process for people caught in the act of committing violent crime have fuelled fears that the government is considering resumption of the death penalty after a gap of seven years. It was agreed that, since Burundi is moving out of a period of political transition and toward elections, it is a good time to raise the issue of the abolition of the death penalty in the country. Some 533 people are currently under sentence of death in Burundi.

### **UK breaks promise on inquiry**

The UK government has reneged on its promise to hold a public inquiry into the murder of human rights lawyer Patrick Finucane. Instead, the UK authorities are seeking to enact new legislation which – with the excuse of protecting “national security” – would eliminate independent, impartial and public scrutiny of the authorities’ alleged involvement in the killing. AI is calling for the withdrawal of this legislation and for an inquiry under the Tribunals of Inquiry (Evidence) Act 1921. Patrick Finucane was killed in Northern Ireland in 1989.

See *Worldwide Appeal* November 1999 and *Update* November 2004.

### **Kenya releases Iraqi**

Abdel Mohammed Al-Dahas, an Iraqi held without charge or trial in police cells in Kenya since October 2001, was released to the UNHCR on 28 February. A former pilot with the Iraqi armed forces, he was held on suspicion of being a “terrorist” although no evidence of any alleged “terrorist” activity was presented to him. He was arrested by the Kenyan authorities while his refugee status was being decided. No reason has been given for his sudden release. He will not now be forced to return to Iraq against his wishes. See *Worldwide Appeal* September 2003.

### **Conscientious objector free**

Camilo Mejía Castillo was released from prison by US authorities in February, three months before the end of his one-year sentence, on grounds of good conduct.

On his release he said: “I can’t express enough how much I appreciate everything that AI has done on my case. I received thousands of letters in prison.” His lawyer also thanked AI, saying that he thought the campaign played an important role in protecting Camilo in the prison environment, and in securing his early release.

Camilo Mejía Castillo was imprisoned in May 2004 for desertion, after refusing to return to his unit in Iraq. He cited his moral objections to the conduct of US troops toward Iraqi civilians and prisoners, questioned the legality of the war and applied for conscientious objector status. By appealing against his conviction he hopes to have his Bad Conduct Discharge revoked and his rank and pay restored. If his first appeal is unsuccessful, it will then be taken to the US Army Court of Criminal Appeals. See *Worldwide Appeal* September 2004.

## **‘Write more!’ urges former prisoner of conscience**

“You cannot imagine how much AI meant to us,” said Anwar Ibrahim, former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia and freed prisoner of conscience. “The immense contribution of AI is indescribable.” Addressing AI staff and volunteers in London, he thanked the movement for supporting him during his six years of imprisonment on politically motivated charges.

Anwar Ibrahim was arrested under the Internal Security Act in September 1998, three weeks after being dismissed from his government post. “They stormed my house, broke open the door,” he said. Outside, scores of members of the media were waiting for him. “It was a show of force,” he explained. “If we can treat Anwar like this then the rest cannot be saved.” His dismissal, following policy disagreements with then Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed, had sparked a series of public demonstrations calling for political and social reform.

Held in solitary confinement and beaten by the then national police chief, Anwar Ibrahim initially had limited access to his family. His wife, Dr Wan Azizah, and children were allowed just one 40-minute visit per month. Years later this increased to weekly visits. Prohibited from bringing notes or writing materials with them, Wan Azizah – and even the children – had to memorize summaries of the numerous statements and letters written in support of his case. His lawyers smuggled in written statements on their weekly visits. The information, he said, was “a major boost and spiritually uplifting.”

Sentenced to a total of 15 years’ imprisonment after unfair trials, Anwar Ibrahim was released in September 2004 after Malaysia’s highest court overturned his conviction. He is currently spending time outside Malaysia, lecturing at universities in the USA and UK. But this is not out of free choice. “They [Malaysian authorities] have used the courts to deny me holding public office until 2008,” he said. “They have taken away my car, my pension. There is no possibility of getting a job.”

Despite such restrictions, he remains a leading public figure in Malaysia. His visits to local areas have prompted thousands to turn up, unannounced, to speak to him. Though not active in formal politics in Malaysia, he is determined that this should change in the future. “I will certainly return,” he said, “because if I do not – avoiding the risk in the political scene in Malaysia – then I am surrendering to them.”

Anwar Ibrahim’s arrest and detention sparked unprecedented public protests in Malaysia, many of which were forcefully repressed. They unleashed thousands of appeals worldwide. But Anwar Ibrahim stressed his release is by no means an indication of a real change in government thinking or its record on human rights.

“The judiciary remains the same as it was before,” he said. “We [also] have thousands of migrant workers imprisoned in Malaysia – caned just because they are migrants... They are not our slaves and they shouldn’t be treated as such.”

Despite reports of human rights violations being routinely ignored by the government-influenced media, statements issued by AI and other human rights organizations asking for Anwar Ibrahim’s release were still disseminated across the country.

Appeals sent by supporters worldwide make a vast difference, said Anwar Ibrahim, even if they never reach the ear of the public. “They [government ministers] read the letters. It annoys them,” he said. His message to supporters is clear: “Write more, affect them more!”

## **He lit the torch for human rights**

“Peter Benenson’s life was a courageous testament to his visionary commitment to fight injustice around the world.” Irene Khan, AI Secretary General, 26 February

It was a chance reading of an article in the press that led British lawyer Peter Benenson to take a stand against human rights abuses – this at a time when human rights had little protection under inter-national law. Outraged by the case of two students in Portugal who were imprisoned for raising a toast to freedom, Peter Benenson decided to take action. He wrote a full-page appeal in the UK newspaper, *The Observer*, later explaining: “It was necessary to think of a larger group which would harness the enthusiasm of people all over the world who were anxious to see wider respect for human rights.”

The article prompted thousands to write letters of support, and with it, AI was born. From a one-year campaign for the release of six prisoners of conscience, AI grew to become a worldwide human rights movement, taking up thousands of cases and inspiring millions to take action to defend human rights the world over.

Throughout his life, Peter Benenson put human rights first, whether as a student helping to bring Jews fleeing Nazi Germany to Britain, or as a co-founder of the legal society, Justice.

Now in its 44th year, AI has become the world’s largest independent human rights organization, with over 1.8 million members and supporters worldwide. Its founder could not have been more prescient when he said, lighting the first candle for AI in 1961, “We have today lit such a candle as shall never be put out.”

*Peter Benenson, founder of AI, died on 25 February, aged 83.*

## **Girl jailed for espionage released in Somaliland**

Zamzam Ahmed Dualeh, aged 16, has finally returned to her native Puntland after spending five months in prison in Somaliland. Wrongly convicted of espionage and jailed for five years in a grossly unfair trial, she was pardoned and released into the care of the visiting UN Independent Expert on human rights in Somalia on 2 February. She left Somaliland the next day.

Zamzam Ahmed Dualeh was arrested in Hargeisa, the Somaliland capital, in August 2004. She was accused of spying for a supposed Islamist “terrorist” group in neighbouring Puntland, a regional state of Somalia, which had clashed with Somaliland over disputed border regions.

Denying the charges, she claimed that she had been raped and beaten by six police officers to make her confess. She said she was taken from her police cell and tortured at a secret location on several occasions. She identified some of the alleged rapists who were brought as prosecution witnesses. Her defence counsel was not allowed to see testimony by government doctors said to have assessed her rape allegations, nor to conduct a proper cross-examination. The judge summarily dismissed her rape and torture allegations.

Her four defence lawyers were jailed for three years for “insulting the judge” but were released shortly afterwards. Local human rights defenders who supported her were harassed and threatened, and some briefly arrested.

AI severely criticized the court’s failure to investigate adequately her rape and torture allegations and called for an independent and impartial inquiry into them. If the allegations are substantiated, any police officer found to be responsible for rape should be tried in accordance with recognized standards of fair trial.

Zamzam Ahmed Dualeh should not have been tried in an adult court, since she was under the internationally-recognized age limit of 18 years, and she should not have been imprisoned with adults.

She was finally released through the intervention of the UN Independent Expert, Dr Ghanim Alnajjar. Under a negotiated arrangement to settle this much-criticized case, the Somaliland government also agreed to cooperate if she decided to make a court complaint against the authorities.

Dr Alnajjar also held meetings about human rights issues with government officials and NGOs, including human rights defenders, both in the Somaliland Republic – whose self-declared independence since 1991 has not been internationally recognized – and in Puntland. In Kenya, where the Somalia peace and reconciliation conference concluded in late 2004, after nearly 14 years of state collapse and massive human rights abuses, he also met members of the new Transitional Federal Government of Somalia. He submits his fourth annual report to the UN Commission on Human Rights in April.

AI issued a new report on 17 March, *Somalia: Urgent need for effective human rights protection under the new transitional government* (AFR 52/001/2005).

## **Recent Reports**

### **Women caught in the firing line**

*“From one day to the next, my dreams were shattered – all because of the irresponsibility of supposedly civilized men who only feel brave with a gun in their hands.”* Camila Magalhães Lima, Brazil

Women are finding themselves increasingly under attack as the multi-billion dollar trade in arms spirals further out of control. In South Africa, a woman is shot dead by a current or former partner every 18 hours. In the USA, a gun in the home increases the risk of a murder in the household by 41 per cent, but increases the risk for women by

272 per cent. There are almost 650 million small arms in the world today, most of them in the hands of men.

A new report, *The impact of guns on women's lives* (ACT 30/001/2005), examines circumstances in the home, in communities and during and after conflict where women are most at risk from armed violence. Produced by AI, Oxfam and IANSA for the Control Arms and Stop Violence against Women campaigns, the report also highlights the range of gun control measures adopted around the world, mainly in response to campaigns against gun violence led by women.