



Iraqis flee to Syria to escape violence

Said Boumedouha, AI researcher, reports from Damascus, Syria, June

"We don't have a home to go to, they took it from us; we have nothing left in Iraq to go to." With these words, Um 'Omar explained why she and her five children fled from their home in Baghdad and joined the swelling number of Iraqi refugees – now more than 1.5 million – trying to rebuild their lives in Syria.

Um 'Omar and her children have now found shelter in a tiny apartment that they have been able to rent in the capital, Damascus. Um 'Omar's story was one of a number of similar accounts that I and my colleagues have heard since we arrived in Damascus a few days ago to look into the plight of Iraqi refugees.

Some 2,000 Iraqi refugees are reported to cross the border into Syria each day to escape the violence – suicide bombings, sectarian killings and other gross abuses – that have become an everyday fact of life in Baghdad and other parts of Iraq. Our team is here in Syria to find out how the local authorities are coping in the face of this mass influx of needy people, many of them traumatized by what they have seen or experienced in Iraq.

Their sheer numbers are placing an enormous strain on local services – health, education and housing provision – and on the resources of international agencies such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, as well as on local relief agencies such as the Syrian Red Crescent Society.

Some parts of Damascus, such as Sayyeda Zeinab district, have virtually become Iraqi neighbourhoods, so great has been the congregation of refugees there. Happily, however, the sectarian violence that has become so widespread in Iraq, especially since the Shi'a holy shrine at Samarra was badly damaged in a bomb attack 16 months ago, is not at all evident here in Damascus.

In Sayyeda Zeinab we also met Zahra and her four grown-up daughters with their children. The eldest daughter lost her husband in Baghdad in a car bomb attack. The family has so far survived thanks to some savings that they had brought with them from Iraq, but the monthly rent they have to pay is already taking its toll.

Even though there are no restrictions on access to education for Iraqi children in Syria, the family said their children do not go to school because they cannot afford to pay for their school uniforms, books, etc. Other Iraqis prefer to send their children to work illegally to earn some desperately needed cash to pay for food and accommodation, while many young Iraqi girls have felt obliged to turn to prostitution to support their families.

Despite the continuing daily mass influx of Iraqi refugees into the country Syria has kept its borders open, but for how long? AI would like to see more commitment from the international community, in particular the USA, European Union and other rich countries, to provide substantial help to host countries like Jordan, where the number of Iraqi refugees now exceeds 750,000, and Syria, and be more generous in their resettlement programmes.



Iraqi families receive a cooked meal from a charity in the Jaramana district of Damascus, Syria, June 2007. More than 1.5 million Iraqis have now fled to Syria.



A woman looks out from a straw shelter at a camp in central Azerbaijan. More than half a million people have been displaced for over a decade as a result of the conflict in Nagorny Karabakh between 1991 and 1994.

Displaced people denied rights in Azerbaijan

"We cannot live like human beings for as long as this peace process goes on." These are the words of Ayaz Mammadov, an internally displaced person from Jebrail, Azerbaijan, now living in former student halls in the Bakuvian suburb of Sumqayit. He shares a room with his wife, two sons and a daughter-in-law. Forced to leave his home in 1994, he is one of more than half a million people who have been displaced for over a decade as a result of the territorial conflict between Azeris and Armenians in Nagorny Karabakh between 1991 and 1994.

Forced displacement resulting from the territorial conflicts of the former Soviet Union is no longer hot news. With sporadic exceptions the region's conflicts gave way in the mid-1990s to lengthy peace processes which have yet to be resolved. While the international community has long since moved on to "more urgent" crises elsewhere, the legacy and impact of forced displacement remains.

At 600,000 – seven per cent of the total population – Azerbaijan's internally displaced population is one of the largest per capita of any state in the world. The majority of the displaced come from territories surrounding the former autonomous region of Nagorny Karabakh, which are now occupied by Armenian forces. A minority comes from Nagorny Karabakh itself, now an unrecognized republic inhabited by its Armenian population.

While their lives may no longer be in imminent danger, entire communities of the displaced are confronted with daily crises of subsistence. Excluded from the benefits of the new oil economy in Azerbaijan, they become ever more dependent on the state.

In addition to these difficulties, internally displaced people often face discrimination in everyday life. AI

was told by a group of women in Baku that the local population "looks down on us as whites once did on blacks." They said that their children faced bullying in school.

Since the start of the conflict the government has struggled, often under difficult conditions, to address the rights and needs of displaced people. AI acknowledges these efforts, while also recognizing that internally displaced people have the right to voluntary return under conditions of security and dignity. Yet displaced people also have the right to choose integration or permanent resettlement elsewhere in the country, a right which must be respected particularly in a context where return is extremely unlikely in the foreseeable future.

In its report, *Azerbaijan: Displaced then discriminated against – the plight of the internally displaced population* (EUR 55/010/2007), AI outlines a series of policies and practices that effectively segregate and penalize the displaced population. For example, an internal registration system forces people to live in fixed locations to qualify for benefits and employment. Many new settlements constructed to house displaced people are built in geographically and economically isolated areas. Legal provisions guaranteeing displaced people's access to free social services, goods and medicines are often not effectively implemented, leaving many in a worse situation than their fellow Azerbaijani citizens.

In the meantime, efforts to integrate displaced people and provide a durable basis to their lives will make it easier in the long-term for them to return. Self-reliant communities will ultimately return bringing skills, experience and enterprise with them, rather than enduring dependency on state subsidies.

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WHEREABOUTS UNKNOWN - THOUSANDS

30 August - International Day of the Disappeared

Enforced disappearances are not a thing of the past. They continue all over the world - in Algeria, Colombia, Nepal, the Russian Federation, Sri Lanka, the former Yugoslavia - to name but a few countries. The USA, sometimes acting with the complicity of other governments, has carried out enforced disappearances of terror suspects. Those who commit these crimes have done so with almost complete impunity.

In Sri Lanka, the Vice-Chancellor of Eastern University, Sivasubramaniam Raveendranath, was reportedly abducted while at a conference in the capital, Colombo, on 15 December 2006. He was in an area of the capital tightly controlled by the army; it is likely that his captors were military agents. He has not been heard from since.

There are currently 5,749 outstanding cases of enforced disappearance in Sri Lanka being reviewed by the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances. Since 2006, hundreds of people have reportedly been abducted and forcibly disappeared by the security forces or armed groups in areas in the north and east of Sri Lanka, as well as in Colombo. Often taken in "for questioning" and held incommunicado, no records of their detention are available. Many cases implicate members of the security forces, others implicate armed groups including the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Karuna group.

In Colombia, 43 people were abducted on 14 January 1990 from the Pueblo Bello community in Antioquia department (see poster, right) by 60 army-backed paramilitaries. This was allegedly in retaliation for the theft of some cattle belonging to a paramilitary commander. The 43 were taken to a farm where they were most probably killed. On the road to the farm, the paramilitaries were not challenged at a military checkpoint,

despite reports that screams could be heard coming from the trucks.

Following exhumations, six bodies were identified as victims of the Pueblo Bello abductions. The fate of the other 37 victims remains unknown. Some paramilitaries have been given prison sentences for killing the six people identified. However, the perpetrators responsible for the enforced disappearance of the other victims have gone unpunished.

In January 2006, the Inter-American Court on Human Rights found that the Colombian government had failed to meet its obligations to guarantee the rights of the people affected. The Court made clear that it believed that the armed forces were implicated in the case. It concluded that the state was responsible for fomenting the development of the paramilitary structures and thus creating a situation of risk for the community of Pueblo Bello.

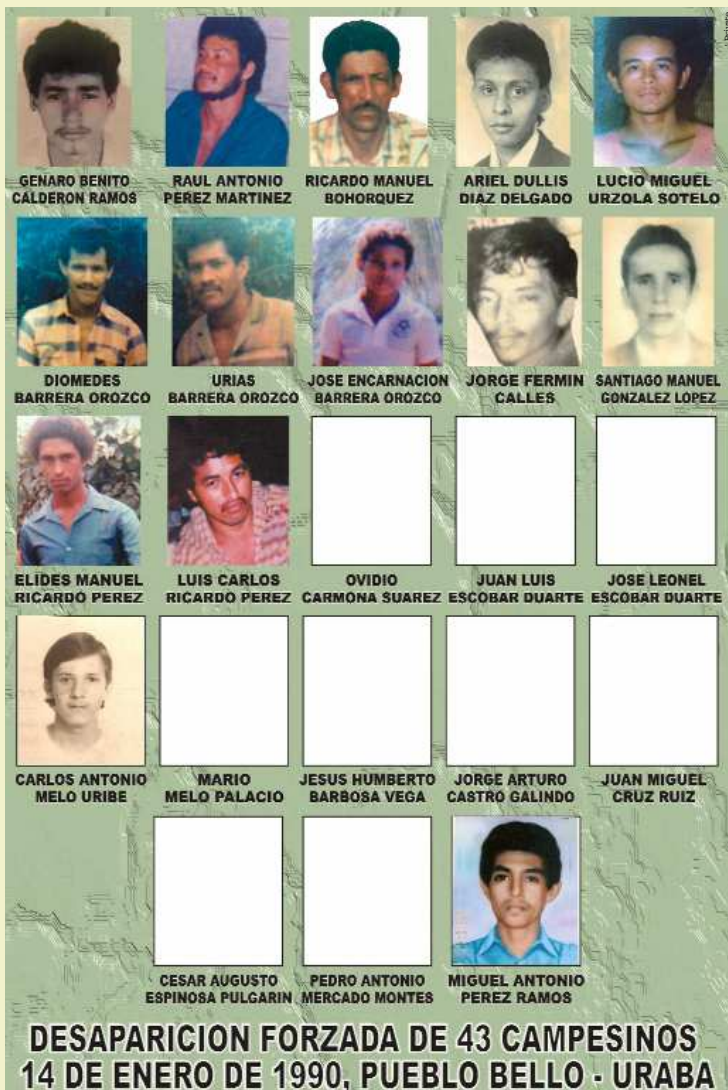
In December 2006, the UN adopted a powerful human rights treaty - the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. It aims to prevent enforced disappearances, establish the truth when this crime occurs, punish the perpetrators and provide reparations to the victims and their families.

The international community must now ensure that the Convention is ratified and effectively implemented throughout the world.

ACT NOW

Urge your government to ratify the Convention at the earliest opportunity and without reservations which undermine its object and purpose.

Go to www.amnesty.org/un to see how you can support the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from enforced Disappearance.



USA / PAKISTAN

Secret detention of terror suspect

"I carry on not ever knowing if my husband is alive or dead, if they are torturing him, or what they might be doing to him."

Elena Moreno, Mustafa Setmariam Nasar's wife

Mustafa Setmariam Nasar (also known as Abu Musab al-Suri), a dual Syrian/Spanish national, was captured by Pakistani officials in Quetta, Pakistan, in early November 2005.

He is best known for his writings on "Global Islamic Resistance", which are thought to provide much of the intellectual framework for current al-Qa'ida operations. He ran an al-Qa'ida training camp in Afghanistan, and was indicted in 2003 by the Spanish authorities for training al-Qa'ida " sleeper" cells (later linked to the 2004 Madrid bombings).

In the weeks following Mustafa Setmariam Nasar's capture, officials reportedly said that details about his detention

were being withheld to allow US and Pakistani agents time to act on information gained during his interrogation. However, his detention was not officially announced by either the US or Pakistani authorities.

In April 2006, Pakistani intelligence officials privately confirmed that Mustafa Setmariam Nasar had been handed over to US agents, who had flown him out of Pakistan some months earlier. In March 2006, his name had been abruptly removed from the US government's "Rewards for Justice" list, and the US\$5 million reward for information leading to his arrest was withdrawn. US officials have declined to explain why his name was removed from the list.

Mustafa Setmariam Nasar's name was later included in a list of "Terrorists No Longer a Threat", read into the US Congressional Record on 19 July 2006. No other information about his fate has been released by the US government. Although AI received information in April 2006 that he had been "deported" to Syria, his current whereabouts remain unclear.

➤ Please write, asking the US and Pakistan governments to disclose the whereabouts of Mustafa Setmariam Nasar since his detention, and ensure that he is given access to his family and to an adequate legal process. Call on the authorities to end secret detention and enforced disappearance, and to clarify the fate and whereabouts of all people who have been secretly detained by US and Pakistani officials.

Send appeals to the US and Pakistan embassies in your country. Addresses can be found at: <http://usembassy.state.gov/> and <http://pk.embassyinformation.com/>

ALGERIA

Fate of thousands is still unknown

Salah Saker, a teacher and member of the banned Salvation Islamic Front, was arrested without a warrant by the Algerian security forces on 29 May 1994 at his home in the city of Constantine.

His wife, Louisa, still does not know what happened to him. She wrote to the authorities and filed a complaint in the court in Constantine in order to locate her husband and be informed of any charges against him. Eventually, in February 1997, the security forces in Constantine wrote to her acknowledging that they had arrested him and then transferred him to a designated military investigation centre on 3 July 1994.

In December 1998, the National Human Rights Observatory informed his wife that, according to the security forces, Salah Saker had been abducted by an unidentified armed group while detained at the investigation centre. They said that he was wanted in connection with a terrorist group and had been sentenced to death in absentia on 29 July 1995. However, the circumstances of his detention have never been clarified.

In Algeria the fate of thousands of victims of enforced disappearance during the 1990s' internal conflict remains unknown and the anguish of their relatives continue. The 2006 amnesty laws bar courts from investigating complaints against the security forces.

In October 2000, Salah Saker's wife submitted a complaint to the UN Human Rights Committee, having failed to obtain a remedy through domestic mechanisms. In its first decision on enforced disappearance in Algeria, the Committee ruled, in March 2006, that the authorities had failed to protect the rights and life of Salah Saker.

The Algerian authorities have still not investigated the enforced disappearance of Salah Saker.

➤ Please write, calling for legal provisions which prevent investigations into enforced disappearances to be repealed so that Louisa Saker and thousands of others like her can learn the truth about the fate of their relatives.
Send appeals to: His Excellency Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Président de la République, Présidence de la République, El Mouradia, Alger, Algeria.
Fax: +213 21 609618 or +213 21 691595.
E-mail: president@el-mouradia.dz
Salutation: Your Excellency

STILL MISSING WORLDWIDE

Small steps towards justice in Chechnya

Impunity for human rights violations in the Chechen conflict in the Russian Federation is widespread. But, decisions in four recent cases, both in Russian courts and in the European Court of Human Rights, show that justice is possible. Tens of thousands of people have been killed, and an estimated 3-5,000 people have become victims of enforced disappearance or abduction since the conflict re-erupted in 1999.

The authorities in Russia have failed in virtually all cases to investigate and prosecute the serious human rights violations and war crimes that have taken place. They have also failed to provide redress to the victims.

European Court rulings

Ruslan Alikhadzhev, speaker of the Chechen parliament in the late 1990s, was detained by Russian state agents in May 2000 and he has not been seen since. Aiubkhan Magomadov (right) was detained by federal forces in October 2000; the authorities claim he was released the next morning but his family have not seen him since. The Russian authorities have never revealed the fate or whereabouts of either man.



In July the European Court of Human Rights found the Russian Federation responsible for the enforced disappearance of both men and for failing to conduct an effective investigation. The Court held that they must be presumed dead and that their deaths were attributable to the Russian government.

Zura Bitieva was a well-known peace activist, organizing marches and demonstrations for peace by Chechen women. She was arbitrarily detained for about a month in early 2000. After her release she filed a complaint with the European Court of Human Rights.

She and three other members of her family were killed in their home on 21 May 2003. Their killers were armed men in camouflage, who, according to eyewitnesses, spoke Russian and travelled in military vehicles through roadblocks during curfew hours.

The European Court of Human Rights ruled that the Russian Federation was responsible for the deaths of Zura Bitieva and her three relatives.

Rare conviction

Four members of a special unit of Russian Military Intelligence (GRU) were convicted by a court in Chechnya on 14 June for killing six unarmed Chechen civilians near the village of Dai in January 2002.

According to the prosecution, the GRU unit opened fire on a car without warning. One man was killed and two people were wounded. Captain Eduard Ulman and his subordinates, Aleksander Kalaganskii and Vladimir Voevodin, took the five survivors to an abandoned building and administered first aid. However, Major Aleksei Perelevskii radioed Captain Ulman with an order to eliminate the detainees. Captain Ulman then ordered his subordinates to shoot them, and to put the bodies into the car and set it on fire. The victims included a pregnant woman.

Captain Ulman, Aleksander Kalaganskii, Vladimir Voevodin and Major Perelevskii were convicted of murder and of "exceeding official authority" and sentenced to imprisonment for terms of nine to 14 years.

AI welcomes these convictions, but is concerned that only a handful of Russian military service personnel have been prosecuted and convicted for serious human rights violations committed during the Chechen conflict.

The authorities must immediately take steps to effectively investigate and prosecute the perpetrators of the serious human rights violations that have taken place during the Chechen conflict. See *Russian Federation: What justice for Chechnya's disappeared?* (EUR 46/015/2007).

Fourteen men missing and at risk of torture in Chad

At least 14 men, some army officers, some civilians, have not been seen since they were arrested by security forces in April 2006. For more than a year, the Chadian authorities have refused to disclose any information about them. Their families do not even know whether they are alive or dead.

On 13 and 14 April 2006 the capital, N'Djamena, was attacked by a coalition of armed groups, the United Front for Democratic Change (FUC). The armed opposition groups, which were seeking to oust President Idriss Déby, fought pitched battles with government forces on the outskirts of the capital. Hundreds of people were killed. At least 14 senior army officers and several civilians were arrested by members of the security forces on suspicion of being involved in or knowing about this attack.

In December 2006 a peace agreement was signed in Tripoli, Libya, between the government of Chad and the FUC. Mahamat Nour, the leader of FUC, was appointed Minister of Defence in March 2007. However, no news emerged on the fate of the arrested men.

Among the 14 victims of enforced disappearance are: Colonel Abakar Gawi, Colonel Khamis Doukoune, Commandant Adil Ousman, Colonel Ahmet Haroun, Colonel Abdoulaye, Youssouf Seid, Ramat Ahoula, Michelim Ahmet Oumar, Ahmet Mahamat, Ali Ousman, Guy Bekam and Mahamat Saleh Idriss.

If alive, AI believes that they are at serious risk of torture. The Chadian authorities have refused to say where they are held or what state of health

they are in, despite calls from the victims' families and human rights organizations. The authorities have also failed to respect due process and the rule of law. Enforced disappearance is a crime under international law.

AI is calling on the Chadian authorities to disclose the fate and whereabouts of those who have disappeared and to inform their families and their representatives; to ensure that these men are immediately granted access to their lawyers, families and doctors; to charge the men and give them a fair trial or release them; and to initiate an independent and impartial investigation into these enforced disappearances and to bring those responsible to justice.

'It is so hard and painful to not know what happened to my husband. After one year, I just want to know where he is.'

Wife of one of the disappeared

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Military implicated in kidnapping

Bulat Chilaev, a driver for the Russian non-governmental organization Citizen's Assistance has not been seen since 9 April 2006.

That day Chechen and Russian federal security forces reportedly raided the Chechen village of Sernovodsk, checking the identity documents of everyone there. They detained an acquaintance of Bulat Chilaev for a few hours to check his identity. He was released without charge. After he was released he asked Bulat Chilaev to give him a lift to Grozny. The two men set off for Grozny in Bulat Chilaev's car.

Eyewitnesses reported that at a crossroads, between the villages of Sernovodsk and Assinovskaia, they saw masked men in uniform blocking the road. They dragged the two men out of the car, handcuffed them and bundled them into another car, putting one man in the boot of the car and the other on the back seat. Both cars were driven away in the direction of Grozny.

Following appeals by AI and other non-governmental organizations asking for help to trace Bulat Chilaev, the Prosecutor of the Chechen Republic confirmed reports of the abduction and said that a criminal case had been opened.



Friends and colleagues demonstrate in Grozny, calling for the release of Bulat Chilaev, May 2006.

Witnesses to the abduction provided the registration numbers of the cars and an identity tag of a member of a military unit under the Russian Ministry of Defence which had been found at the scene.

The owner of the identity tag was subsequently questioned, and claimed that he had lost his tag, but it appears that the investigation did not proceed further. In October 2006 AI received unofficial information that he had been killed while on duty.

➔ Please write, calling on the authorities to establish what has happened to Bulat Chilaev and for those responsible for his abduction to be brought to justice.

Send appeals to: Valerii Alekseevich Kuznetsov, Prosecutor of the Chechen Republic, Office of the Public Prosecutor of the Chechen Republic, Ul. Idrisova 42, g. Grozny, 364000, Russian Federation. Fax: +7 8712 22 32 63 (If someone answers please say "fax"). Salutation: Dear Prosecutor

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (DRC)

Doctor abducted

Faustin Sosso was abducted in the capital, Kinshasa, on the evening of 20 August 2006 by armed men believed to be members of the Garde Républicaine, President Joseph Kabila's presidential guard.

Faustin Sosso is a medical doctor who also worked as medical adviser to Jean-Pierre Bemba, the main rival to President Kabila in the DRC's 2006 presidential elections.

After his abduction Faustin Sosso was driven away in a jeep to an unknown destination. Reports suggest that he was taken to Camp Tshatshi, the main base of the Garde Républicaine in Kinshasa, and that he may subsequently have been transferred into the custody of military intelligence, known as ex-DEMIAP.

AI believes his enforced disappearance relates solely to his professional connection with Jean-Pierre Bemba. Some reports suggest that Faustin Sosso has been extrajudicially executed or that he died as a result of torture while in custody, and that his body has been secretly disposed of. His family, however, continue to believe that he is alive and held in secret detention, based on unconfirmed "sightings" reported to them by telephone. After his enforced disappearance, family members received phone calls from people identifying themselves as security force officers demanding

money for Faustin Sosso's release.

Politically motivated arrests and abuses by the security forces were especially common during the presidential elections in late 2006 and subsequent fighting in Kinshasa in March 2007 between government forces and militia loyal to Jean-Pierre Bemba. Peaceful opposition members and supporters, journalists and others were arbitrarily detained, ill-treated, tortured and in some cases, killed or disappeared. Many of those arrested are still in detention awaiting trial on what AI believes are unfounded charges of "espionage" or "participation in an insurrectionary movement". Some of them may be prisoners of conscience.

➔ Please write, calling on the DRC authorities to conduct a prompt, thorough and independent investigation into the enforced disappearance of Dr Faustin Sosso, with the results made public and for those responsible for his abduction and subsequent human rights violations to be brought to justice.

Send appeals to: President Joseph Kabila, Présidence de la République, Kinshasa Gombe, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Email: pr@presidentrdc.cd or pp@presidentrdc.cd Salutation: Dear President

The trial of Charles Taylor

An eyewitness account by AI researcher Tania Bernath

Stephen Rapp, the Prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, was reading out 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity – it was the beginning of the trial of Liberia's former president, Charles Taylor. I found myself thinking of Miatta, one of hundreds of thousands of women and girls brutalized during the 11-year conflict. I met Miatta on my last trip to Sierra Leone in March 2007 where I regularly visit as AI's researcher.

At the age of four, Miatta witnessed members of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), allegedly under the command of Charles Taylor, burning alive her parents, brothers, and sisters. She was abducted and taken to Kailahun, the easternmost district in Sierra Leone, where she was forced to live as a slave.

Now 17, she is unable to have children of her own, is crippled and has poor eyesight – a direct consequence of the sustained and prolonged rape, torture and sexual violence that she experienced in captivity. She survives with no assistance from the government nor reparations from those responsible for her plight.

When the conflict ended in 2002, the Special Court for Sierra Leone was set up to try those who bear the greatest responsibility for serious violations of international humanitarian law. Crimes specific to women, including sexual violence, rape, sexual slavery and outrages upon personal dignity, are among the charges against Charles Taylor. For security reasons his trial is taking place in the Hague. In June the Special Court found senior members of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), who often worked with the RUF and allegedly under the command of Charles Taylor, guilty of rape and outrages of personal dignity including forced marriage and sexual slavery.

Many women still suffering

An estimated 250,000 women and girls (about one in three) were victims of sexual violence during the conflict. Tragically, many women continue to suffer without any support, the majority in rural areas far from the capital, Freetown. They live on the margins of society, constantly disappointed with their government's failure to acknowledge and address the consequences of these crimes. Most are unaware of the Special Court for Sierra Leone – their lives are fully consumed with the effort to survive, including finding strategies to deal with shame and stigma, poor health and poverty.

These women desperately need medicine, psychological and social support, funds to pay for their children's school fees, and micro-credit and training opportunities to help them become self-sufficient and rebuild their lives. They also need to be part of the healing process that justice and reparations can bring. The government of Sierra Leone should make far greater efforts to contact women in the communities where the worst atrocities took place. It should also bring more war criminals to justice, by overturning the amnesty provision in the Lomé peace accord that grants perpetrators immunity from prosecution and by giving women legal aid so that they can pursue perpetrators and apply for reparations in national courts.

I continued to listen to the proceedings, fully aware of their importance, but couldn't help wondering, with the trial taking place thousands of miles from Sierra Leone, whether Miatta was even aware that they had begun or that members of the AFRC had been found guilty of the same crimes she had been a victim of.

DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Women in Zimbabwe stand up for their rights

Women human rights defenders in Zimbabwe have shown remarkable resilience and bravery in facing a state which consistently uses excessive force to break up peaceful demonstrations. The women endure repeated arbitrary arrests, detentions and beatings as well as sexual and verbal abuse while in police custody for exercising their right to peaceful assembly. Their refusal to be cowed is largely a reflection of the desperate situation prevailing in a country where many can no longer afford to buy food or pay for education and medical care.

Since 2000, the human rights situation has deteriorated rapidly against a backdrop of unprecedented economic meltdown. The government's policies on land reform and forced evictions have denied the entire population their rights to food, health, education and housing.

In response to the violation of economic and social rights, Zimbabwean women are mobilizing to confront the government. They are demanding respect and protection of their human rights, and the rights of others in their communities. As the women struggle to feed their children, pay for school fees and for health care for themselves and their families, they are impelled to confront the government by taking to non-violent street action.

Clara, a 60-year-old widow and member of the Women's Coalition, spoke out at a community meeting in 2003 about food aid distribution practices which discriminated against opposition party supporters in her village. In August 2006, she was found "guilty of being disrespectful to men" by a chief's court and fined a goat. She refused to pay because she did not accept that she had committed any offence. By February 2007 Clara was still not allowed to buy government maize.

The government has become increasingly intolerant of critics of its policies. It continues to condone and encourage the use of excessive force, torture and arbitrary arrest by the Zimbabwe Republic Police. Government critics including human rights activists are regularly detained.



A riot police officer arrests a woman protester taking part in a march calling for free and fair elections, February 2002.

Gladys, an activist with Women and AIDS Support Network, is one of the hundreds of women whose rights were violated while she was in police custody. Six months pregnant, she was arrested in Harare and detained overnight in a cold cell with no blankets.

'It's useless for you to be crying and screaming. It's like you are in a bottle and the lid is shut... no one can hear you so you have to open that lid and at least your voice will be heard.'

Irene, a trainer with Women of Zimbabwe Arise, talks to AI, Bulawayo, 2007

Since 2000, the government has used the law, in particular the Public Order and Security Act, the Miscellaneous Offences Act and the Criminal Codification Act to prevent human rights defenders from peacefully organizing.

AI's report, *Zimbabwe: Between a rock and a hard place – women human rights defenders at risk* (AFR 46/017/2007), documents the many levels on which women human rights defenders' rights are being violated.

Testimonies from Zimbabwean women recorded by AI in 2007 accompany the report and show their incredible resilience despite the many obstacles that they face as a result of government policies.

AI urges the government of Zimbabwe to respect the vital role played by women human rights defenders, to allow them the freedom to assemble and associate freely and peacefully, and to bring an immediate end to ill-treatment perpetrated by the Zimbabwe Republic Police.

Activists at risk in Central America

Donny Reyes, treasurer of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender organization, Rainbow Association, was detained on 18 March. He was reportedly stopped by six police officers as he left his workplace in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, and asked to show his identity documents.

Despite co-operating with the police, Donny Reyes was taken to the Comayagüela police station. An officer put him in a cell and reportedly told the other inmates, "Look, I'm bringing you a little princess, you know what to do." Donny Reyes told AI that the other detainees took this as a signal to beat him and rape him repeatedly. He was released after six and a half hours when he agreed to pay a fine.

Donny Reyes' experience is not unique and is certainly not limited to Honduras.

While seeking to promote respect for the most impoverished and marginalized communities, human rights defenders across Central America often face similar risks and obstacles. Many tackle a wide variety of gross inequalities in the distribution of wealth, access to basic health facilities, education, water and food. Others have prioritized the protection of the environment and the associated economic, social and cultural rights of affected communities, others defend and promote lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender rights.

However, the absence of political will by governments has allowed violations against human rights defenders to continue and impunity for the perpetrators to prevail. Reports of killings, death threats, harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders in Central America continue despite advances in the development of international human rights standards on their protection.

Intimidated and attacked

According to the Human Rights Defenders Protection Unit of the National Human Rights Movement in Guatemala, 278 acts of intimidation and attacks against human rights defenders were reported in 2006. More than half of them were directed against individuals and organizations focusing on economic, social and cultural rights, including labour rights, the rights of Indigenous people and housing rights.

The law is being misused in order to harass human rights workers. Surveillance of their offices and homes and the theft of sensitive and important human rights information are just some of the tactics used to intimidate them.

Most violations targeting human rights defenders are not taken seriously. In many cases there is no investigation, in others the investigations are grossly inadequate and suggest that the authorities are more concerned with protecting the abuser than the defender.

See *Persecution and resistance: The experience of human rights defenders in Honduras and Guatemala* (AMR 02/001/2007).

Police violence hits the poor in Brazil



Civil Police fire into a favela in August 2006 reportedly resulting in three deaths and one arrest.

More than a thousand police officers stormed the Complexo do Alemão – a cluster of favelas in the north of Rio de Janeiro on 27 June. Some came on foot, others in the much-feared armoured vehicle known as the *caveirão* (literally: big skull). Residents covered in the street, as police exchanged fire with drug gangs. At the end of the day 19 lay dead, including three teenagers. This latest "invasion" is part of a 10-week-long operation that has so far claimed 44 lives and wounded more than 80. The community has suffered damage to property and infrastructure, children have been prevented from attending school, and small businesses have closed. When AI visited the community in May, residents complained of abuses by the police including excessive use of force, beatings and extrajudicial executions. They showed AI delegates the pock-marked walls of shops, crèches and a church.

AI's report, *Brazil: 'From burning buses to caveirões' – the search for human security* (AMR 19/010/2007), criticizes the violent, reckless

and divisive way that socially excluded communities are being policed. True security can only be achieved through inclusive policies: day-to-day presence of the police along with long-term investment in public services for communities that have suffered decades of neglect.

Minister of Justice Tarso Genro, publicly welcoming AI's recommendations, said: "The report's conclusions are exactly the premises on which the Ministry of Justice is working." In a recent meeting with AI's Secretary General, Irene Khan, the Brazilian Foreign Minister, Celso Amorim, reiterated the federal government's commitment to a more holistic approach to public security.

However, serious concerns remain and human rights violations continue to be committed in the name of public security. As the Complexo do Alemão operations continue, with more "invasions" promised in the future, AI will continue pressuring state and federal authorities to provide true security for all Brazilians, whether rich or poor.

'Nurturing Hope – Seeking Common Ground'

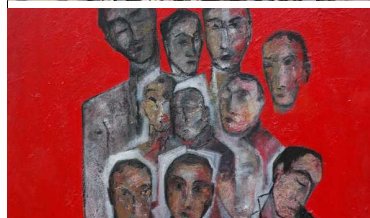
AI hosted an exhibition of paintings entitled "Nurturing Hope – Seeking Common Ground" by the artist Ricky Romain at the International Secretariat from 20 June-20 July to mark World Refugee Day. His work portrays the pain and suffering that forced displacement causes around the world and a series of 53 paintings were on sale to staff and visitors with 10 per cent of proceeds going to AI.

"The themes of asylum and immigration are political. As an artist, I try not to work with any party political agenda because I fully comprehend the complexities of the practical problems that society has to deal with concerning this subject," says Ricky Romain.

"However, as a human being, it concerns me that we are all too often ready to take part in the debate about numbers and statistics, with insufficient awareness of the root causes behind the human dilemmas in any given situation."

To see more of Ricky Romain's paintings go to www.amnesty.org/refugees and www.rickyromain.com and www.axisweb.org/artist/rickyromain

Clockwise from top: *Fast-track family* (detail), *Lost identities – container series*, *Looking for work and Interrogation* (detail) © Ricky Romain



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