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China clamps down on users of the Internet

The Chinese authorities have clamped down on Internet use, closing thousands of Internet cafés and denying access to more than half a million websites. At least 30,000 state security personnel are believed to be engaged in surveillance of websites, chat rooms and private e-mail messages. Dozens of people have been detained and some sentenced to long terms of imprisonment for expressing their views or putting information on the Internet.

Huang Qi, a computer engineer who set up China's first domestic human rights website, is one of 33 prisoners of conscience known to be detained for posting material on the Internet. He was charged with "subversion" when messages critical of the authorities were posted on his website, including an account by a Tiananmen Mother who accused police of beating her son to death during the 1989 pro-democracy protests.

Chen Shaowen, a writer, was detained by police in August and charged with "subverting state power" after posting articles on the Internet. According to the Hunan Daily newspaper he had repeatedly browsed "reactionary websites" and had sent in articles "vilifying the Chinese Communist Party". He remains held still without trial.

Since the commercialization of the Internet in China in 1995, the country has one of the world's fastest-growing Internet markets. Some surveys put the number of users at more than 50 million, making China second only to the USA in the number of Internet users.

The Internet opens up new ways of sharing and disseminating information from sources all over the world, enabling a freedom of expression never known before in China. However, while the Internet may empower ordinary Chinese, the authorities consider it a threat and are doing everything they can to monitor and control this new tool for the expression of individual freedoms in China.

The authorities have introduced scores of regulations in an attempt to control the Internet. Thousands of Internet cafés throughout China have been forced to close in recent months. Those that remain are obliged to install software which filters out more than 500,000 banned sites with pornographic or "subversive" elements.

Many websites considered politically sensitive are inaccessible from China including international news sites and the websites of human rights organizations. Websites of banned groups or others on democracy and human rights which are considered "reactionary" or "subversive" are also inaccessible.

Following a fire at an Internet café in June which killed 25 people, 2,400 Internet cafés were closed in Beijing for so-called "safety" reasons. There are said to be 200,000 Internet cafés throughout China but only about 110,000 of them are officially registered. All Internet café owners have had to re-register this year with a number of different authorities to obtain a licence and avoid being shut down or fined heavily.

Chinese officials are using a variety of means to make Internet companies implement the numerous laws and regulations. For example the Internet Society of China issued a pledge whose signatories agree to "refrain from producing, posting or disseminating pernicious information that may jeopardise state security and disrupt social stability, contravene laws and regulations and spread superstition and obscenity". The decision of the website company Yahoo! to sign this pledge is a retrograde step for freedom of expression in China.

Sohu.com, a Chinese Internet portal, reminds those accessing its chat room that "topics which damage the reputation of the state" are forbidden and states "If you are a Chinese national and willingly choose to break these laws, Sohu.com is legally obliged to report you to the Public Security Bureau".

In November 2000, the Ministry of Public Security announced its "Golden Shield" project. This project will promote "the adoption of advanced information and communication technology to strengthen police control" for a massive surveillance database system with reportedly immediate access to records of every Chinese citizen. To realize this initiative, the authorities depend on the

technological expertise and investment of western companies. AI is concerned at reports that western companies may be providing China with Internet technology which contributes to denial of basic human rights. It believes that multinational companies in China have a responsibility to contribute to the promotion and protection of human rights.

People who breach the laws and regulations restricting free expression of opinion and information through the Internet face imprisonment. According to recent regulations, they could even be sentenced to death.

For further information and details of individual prisoners, see: People's Republic of China: State Control of the Internet in China (ASA 17/007/2002) and Appeal Cases (ASA 17/046/2002).

In a recent memorandum to the Chinese authorities, AI urges reforms to the legal system to establish genuine rule of law and respect for human rights. See: People's Republic of China: rule of law and human rights – time for institutional reform (ASA 17/052/2002).

[Picture caption: Chinese police raid an Internet café in Guangzhou, June 2002. Thousands of Internet cafés have been shut down this year. Copyright: Reuters]

Côte d'Ivoire is hit by turbulent times

Once seen as the most stable country in West Africa, Côte d'Ivoire has been in turmoil since a military coup in December 1999, the first in the country's history. A transitional government led by General Robert Gueï adopted a new constitution and in presidential elections in October 2000 Laurent Gbagbo was elected President.

Since then, periods of calm and tension have alternated. On 19 September 2002, a new rebellion by military groups virtually cut the country in half, with the government in control of the south and rebels in control of much of the north.

Hundreds of people have been killed. Thousands more have been driven from their homes and now face hunger and disease. Abuses have been committed both by government security forces and by the armed opposition group the Mouvement patriotique de la Côte d'Ivoire (MPCI), Côte d'Ivoire Patriotic Movement.

Both sides have attacked civilians suspected of supporting their opponents. An atmosphere of heightened nationalism has been stirred up, and many people from other West African countries, especially Burkina Faso, were harassed by security forces in the days after the insurrection. Some were killed.

Government security forces destroyed several shanty towns in the capital Abidjan on the grounds that they "were sheltering assailants", leaving thousands of people homeless. President Gbagbo subsequently ordered the destruction of the shanty towns to stop and appealed for a halt to the attacks on foreigners.

A few hours after the rebellion started on 19 September, former Head of State General Gueï was shot dead by soldiers in Abidjan. The dead body of his wife, Rose Gueï, was left in a gutter. Eight other people from General Gueï's household were also killed.

Both Ivorian and foreign journalists have been harassed by the security forces and some have received death threats. An AI delegate conducting research in Abidjan in October was himself taken in for questioning, together with two Ivorian human rights defenders who were conducting interviews with women whose homes had been razed to the ground. AI delegates were denied access to detainees held in secret since 19 September, who number at least 59.

MPCI forces occupying Bouaké called on people to denounce anyone thought to be a military official or government sympathizer. Members of the security forces were reportedly shot dead in cold blood by MPCI soldiers. MPCI forces are also reported to have secretly detained dozens of people and to have recruited children as young as 14.

After government forces retook the town of Daloa on 16 October, dozens of civilians were summarily executed by people dressed in military fatigues. The government deplored the killings but denied responsibility, even though some of the killers reportedly arrived in tanks and other military vehicles.

AI appeals to both sides to halt summary executions, arbitrary arrests, secret detention and the recruitment of child soldiers.

[Picture caption : Destruction by government forces in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, September 2002. Copyright: AI]

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Slavery still scars Mauritania despite its abolition in law

Despite the legal abolition of slavery in Mauritania 20 years ago, the government has yet to take practical steps to ensure its abolition in practice. Mauritians are still suffering extreme exploitation, hardship and humiliation because they are held as slaves or have inherited the social status associated with slavery.

Mauritania's own laws and its international human rights obligations prohibit slavery, but anyone escaping slavery has no legal protection. There is considerable discrimination against those who have ceased to be enslaved and there is no official will to take the necessary action to eradicate this abhorrent system.

The lack of action by the authorities when faced with evidence of the persistence of slavery is shown by the case of M'Bareckould Bilalould Braikat, a youth aged around 17 who escaped from slavery in April 2001. With the support of SOS Esclaves, an unauthorized non-governmental organization, he approached the Regional Governor of Kaédi. M'Bareck sought protection for himself and the release from slavery of his three younger brothers, sister and mother.

The Governor reportedly refused to meet the youth himself, but promised SOS Esclaves that he would send the gendarmerie to speak to the family which had enslaved him. However, the only action reportedly taken by the gendarmerie was to interrogate M'Bareck, search the place where he was staying and question the man who had sheltered him. The rest of his family remain enslaved.

The Mauritanian government has on occasions flatly denied the existence of slavery and related human rights abuses. More often the government claims that since slavery was abolished by law in 1981, all that remains are its economic, social and cultural after-effects.

While no official steps are taken to ensure that slavery is eradicated in practice, people working to combat slavery have been refused official recognition and have faced arrest and imprisonment. In 1998, five human rights defenders were sentenced to 13 months' imprisonment for running unauthorized human rights organizations. Their arrests followed a television program on slavery which was broadcast on a French-language television channel and which featured an interview with Boubacar Messaoud, President of SOS Esclaves.

In 1997, Mauritanian Presidentould Taya stated that those who discussed slavery were only aiming to damage the country's reputation, and accused them of being part of a group previously involved in an attempted coup. Such statements indicate an attitude of denial at the highest level. This denial disguises the real situation. It also results in protection for those who profit from slavery and punishment for those who speak out about the practice and resulting human rights abuses.

No definition of slavery adequately conveys the full extent of the damage it causes. Even people who have been freed from slavery in Mauritania continue to suffer discrimination before the law, in the work place and in their social lives as a result of the fact they were previously held in slavery. Slavery and slavery-like practices are an abominable attack on human dignity and freedom since they negate the very idea of human rights.

See AI's report: Mauritania: A future free from slavery (AFR 38/003/2002).

[Picture caption: Soueïlemould Ely, who escaped from slavery and is seeking the release of his mother and sister. Copyright: Private]

Abuses during Kenyan elections

Presidential and parliamentary elections take place in Kenya on 27 December. As elections draw near there is growing fear that the ruling party, Kenya African National Union (KANU), will step up intimidation, harassment and detention of people who do not toe the party line.

The 1992 and 1997 elections were marred by politically motivated violence and an increase in human rights abuses. Very few perpetrators were ever brought to justice.

In the run-up to these elections, human rights activists and opposition politicians have been harassed and detained. Many political meetings have been forcibly and often violently broken up. Others have not been allowed to take place.

Private militias have also carried out human rights abuses with impunity during this election period.

For example, on 4 March at least 23 people were killed in an attack by about 300 members of the Mungiki Sect in the Kariobangi Estate in Nairobi. The Sect and 17 other vigilante and militia groups were outlawed the same month. However, this did not prevent Mungiki members publicly demonstrating their support for the KANU presidential nominee, Uhuru Kenyatta, in August. Police, though present at the demonstration, did not intervene.

AI is concerned that the government has done little to prevent the recurrence of violence and to safeguard human rights and fundamental freedoms.

AI urges President Daniel Arap Moi to publicly condemn and take lawful measures to end all forms of politically motivated violence. These include the forcible dispersal of rallies and the use of ethnically or politically aligned militia and other vigilante groups.

All those implicated in such incidents should be brought to justice, irrespective of their political or ethnic affiliations.

Brazil's newly elected President says he will combat poverty and implement reforms

The election of the Worker's Party (PT) candidate Luiz Inácio 'Lula' da Silva in the recent elections in Brazil has underlined the successful transition from military rule to democratic government. However, at the same time it has raised a number of questions. Not least among these is the PT's ability to improve the human rights situation in the country.

On a visit to Brazil just before the elections AI took the opportunity to push for a wider debate on the issue of human rights. It also lobbied the main candidates on the necessity to ensure that measures to improve respect for human rights will be an essential element of any future government's policy agenda.

However, with urban crime a major issue affecting the general public, there was not only a lack of interest shown on the issue of human rights but direct hostility towards those defending them. Human rights defenders have increasingly been targeted as "defenders of criminals". Human rights, far from being a vote winner, were in fact a potential vote loser and as such few candidates wanted to be identified with those involved in actively defending them.

During meetings with AI, the President-elect stressed that combating poverty was as much an issue of human rights as any other, and would be his focus of attention. Nevertheless, the PT has produced a detailed and serious policy proposal for public security, which if fully implemented would be an important step towards tackling the root causes of urban violence as well as the systematic violence used by the state to combat it. Within this proposal there is talk of reforming the judicial system and the prison system as well as fundamentally changing the policing structure in the country.

What remains to be seen is whether international pressure coupled with the complex congressional system, which will force the President into making broad alliances, will allow for these policies to be fully implemented, and whether the hope invested by so many looking for a more equal and just Brazil will finally bear fruit.

[Picture caption: Hiparadi Top'Tiro, leader of the Xavante indigenous group, is in hiding following death threats. Indigenous people in Brazil face human rights violations ranging from assault to massacres during disputes over land rights. The authorities' failure to arbitrate leaves them vulnerable to attack. Copyright: AI]

Mass arrests in Bangladesh's 'Operation Clean Heart'

At least 23 people are reported to have died in custody and many detainees have been taken to hospital with serious injuries since an army crackdown on crime named "Operation Clean Heart" began in Bangladesh on 17 October. By early November, more than 3,000 people had been arrested. According to media reports the army claimed that most of the deaths in custody were due to "heart attacks", but relatives of the victims told journalists that the detainees were tortured to death. Witnesses reported seeing marks of beatings and other injuries on the bodies.

Some of those detained have since been released but many are thought to remain in detention. Some are being held in unofficial detention centres which places them at increased risk of torture and ill-treatment. On 30 October, the government confirmed the deaths of 12 people in army custody and promised to investigate each case. However, since then deaths in custody have continued to be reported on an almost daily basis, casting doubt on whether the authorities are taking measures to protect detainees against torture. There are also concerns that this operation is being used as an opportunity to arrest senior opposition politicians.

Although members and activists of all political parties have been arrested during the army crackdown, several senior Awami League politicians are among those arrested and the charges against some of them appear to be politically motivated. In particular, AI believes that Saber Hossain Chowdhury, Political Secretary to the leader of the opposition, and Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim (MP), who were arrested on 20 and 21 October respectively, are prisoners of conscience.

AI urges the government of Bangladesh to investigate immediately, through an independent, impartial and competent body, any reports of torture in army custody and calls for any army or police personnel involved in acts of torture to be brought to justice. AI also urges the government to release, immediately and unconditionally, any people detained solely for their peaceful political activities or views.

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Worldwide appeals

Austria

Mentally ill man shot dead by police

Binali Ilter was shot dead by police on a busy street in the centre of Vienna, Austria, on the afternoon of 31 August. At the time of the shooting he was unarmed and suffering from severe mental health problems. Binali Ilter, a 28-year-old Austrian national of Kurdish origin, had suffered from schizophrenia for several years. Police in Vienna's 11th district, where he lived, were said to have been aware of his condition. On the afternoon he died his mother informed the local police that her son was experiencing mental health difficulties and asked them to help her find him.

At around 2.45pm Binali Ilter was involved in an incident in a children's clothes shop during which he hit a sales assistant in the face, after unsuccessfully demanding money from her. The shop owner, who informed the police, reportedly later stated that Binali Ilter was visibly confused and had not run away after the incident. Shortly afterwards, Binali Ilter asked another woman for money and made a half-hearted attempt to place his hand on her handbag.

The fatal shooting occurred at around 4pm after police intercepted Binali Ilter in the city centre. He was wandering barefoot, wearing a T-shirt, three-quarter length trousers and carrying a bottle of mineral water. Two police officers ordered him to stop, reportedly firing a warning shot after he failed to respond to their initial commands. Two other police officers reportedly overtook him in their car as he walked along the street. They then stopped, got out of their car, and one drew out his gun. One of the police officers who had been following Binali Ilter then shot him in the shoulder and stomach, after the unarmed and obviously disturbed man shouted and stepped towards him.

Although police called for an ambulance they apparently made no attempt to stem his bleeding. Binali Ilter died in hospital later that day.

Please write, calling for a prompt, thorough and impartial investigation into the incident, and asking to be informed why firearms were used against an unarmed man.

Send your appeals to: Ernst Strasser, Bundesminister für Inneres, Bundesministerium für Inneres, Herrengasse 7, 1014 Vienna, Austria. Fax:+43 1 531 26 39 10.

[Picture caption: Family and friends mourn the death of Binali Ilter in Vienna, September 2002.

Copyright: Andy Urban]

Morocco/Western Sahara

Sahrawi activist detained

Ali-Salem Tamek was sentenced to two years' imprisonment and a fine on 10 September for "undermining the internal security of the state". His sentence was confirmed on appeal on 24 October.

Ali-Salem Tamek's conviction was based on two elements. The first was his belief that Western Sahara should be an independent state. The second was a statement, made by three former Sahrawi prisoners of conscience during questioning by Moroccan security forces in 1999, that he received funds from the Polisario Front, the pro-independence movement based in neighbouring Algeria. He has denied the accusation. The three other prisoners, who were sentenced on similar charges but released following a royal pardon, have alleged that the statement was extracted from them under torture. Their allegations have never been investigated. (See Worldwide Appeal October 2000).

Ali-Salem Tamek is a prominent activist in the Western Sahara branch of the Forum for Truth and Justice – an association set up in 1999 to campaign for the rights of victims of torture, "disappearances" and other human rights violations.

Tens of other Sahrawi civil society activists, many of whom are perceived to have pro-independence tendencies, have been the subject of harassment and intimidation by the Moroccan authorities in recent months. Many have been members of the Western Sahara branch of the Forum for Truth and Justice.

There is a territorial dispute over Western Sahara with Morocco, which annexed the territory in 1975 and claims sovereignty there, and the Polisario Front, which calls for an independent state in the territory and has set up a self-proclaimed government-in-exile in refugee camps in southwestern Algeria.

Please write, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of prisoner of conscience Ali-Salem Tamek and for the allegations of torture to be investigated.

Send appeals to: M. Omar Azziman, Ministre de Justice, Ministère de la Justice, Place Mamounia, Rabat, Morocco. Fax: + 212 37 72 37 10 or 37 73 07 72 or 37 73 89 40.

[Picture: Ali-Salem Tamek. Copyright: Private]

Ecuador

'Sold for sex' by prison guard

Three transgendered adults and two adolescents were arrested in April by police in Ecuador, who have a history of persecuting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) people.

One of the two adolescents was "sold for sex" by guards to a detainee and raped.

The two young people were held for two days in the Centro de Detención Provisional, Provisional Detention Centre, in Guayaquil, ill-treated and threatened with confinement in the Lagartera – a cell in which the most aggressive prisoners are held.

After the incident was reported, in May a delegation of the Provincial Ombudsman, the National Human Rights Director for Women, Children and Adolescents, representatives of the Friends For Life Foundation, and the adolescent involved visited the Provisional Detention Centre. As a result five prison guards were detained in July in relation to the case. However, they were released after it was established that they were not the ones identified as the perpetrators. The perpetrators remain at large.

The delegation reported to the Director of Prisons that other young people detained at the Centre had said that they had been ill-treated by guards and forced to pay them. The delegation reported that the cells at the detention centre were overcrowded – holding up to three times more than the maximum capacity – and that the conditions in which the detainees were held were cruel, inhuman and degrading.

Please write, expressing concern that an adolescent was "sold for sex" by a prison guard and then raped, and calling for those responsible to be brought to justice. Express concern that young people are being held in overcrowded conditions in an adults' detention centre.

Send appeals to: Ing. Rómulo Ambrossi, Director del Centro de Rehabilitación Social, Dirección de Rehabilitación Social, Kilómetro 16, Vía Daule, Guayaquil, Ecuador. Fax: +593 4 289 3386.

Laos

Imprisoned for political dissent

More than three years after their arrest, AI continues to call for the immediate and unconditional release of five leading members of the underground Lao Students Movement for Democracy: (from left to right) Thongpaseuth Keuakoun, a father of seven, Khamphouvieng Sisaath, Seng-Along Phengphanh, Bouavanh Chanhmanivong and Keochay.

On 26 October 1999, hundreds of people, most of them young students, gathered at different locations in Vientiane to take part in a demonstration planned by the movement. According to eyewitnesses the attempted protest was immediately crushed by police. Hundreds of people are reported to have been taken for questioning by the police about their possible involvement in the planned demonstrations.

An “open letter” written by the demonstration organizers listed their demands, which included respect for human rights, the release of political prisoners, a multi-party political system, and greater government support for education and health care. Political dissent is not tolerated in Laos and this was an unprecedented attempt to openly express criticism of government policies.

The Lao authorities consistently refused to reveal the fate and whereabouts of the five arrested men, or to publicly acknowledge their detention. Only in June 2002, during talks with European parliamentarians in Strasbourg, did Lao officials finally admit that the five had been sentenced in June 2001 and are now being held in Samkhe Prison, Vientiane. No information has been provided on the charges against them or the length of their sentences.

AI believes that the five men are prisoners of conscience, detained solely because of the non-violent expression of their political beliefs. AI fears for their safety in detention where they are at risk of torture and ill-treatment. Conditions in Lao prisons are extremely harsh, with lack of access to medical facilities and appalling cruelty by prison officials.

Please write, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of the five men.

Send appeals to: His Excellency Bounyang Vorachit, Prime Minister, Office of the Prime Minister, Vientiane, Lao People’s Democratic Republic.

[Picture: (from left to right) Thongpaseuth Keuakoun, a father of seven, Khamphouvieng Sisaath, Seng-Along Phengphanh, Bouavanh Chanhmanivong and Keochay. Copyright: Private]

Updates

Tibetan nun has been released

Tibetan Buddhist nun Ngawang Sangdrol was released on “good behaviour parole” on 17 October. She was the longest-serving female prisoner of conscience in Tibet. She was arrested in 1992 at the age of 15 for taking part in a peaceful demonstration and sentenced to three years in prison by the Chinese authorities. In 1993, her sentence was increased for composing and recording pro-independence songs with other nuns in the prison. Following further charges of “disobedience”, her sentence was extended again and she was not due for release until 2011. During her imprisonment, Ngawang Sangdrol was subjected to severe beatings.

AI members around the world have been working for Ngawang Sangdrol’s release for many years. We can now celebrate her freedom but we must also continue to work for the release of other prisoners of conscience who remain imprisoned in Tibet.

[Picture: Ngawang Sangdrol. Copyright: Private]

Release in Equatorial Guinea

Fabián Nsué Nguema Obono was released from prison on 16 October under the terms of an amnesty to commemorate Equatorial Guinea’s independence. The conditions of the amnesty mean that for one year he has to report to the authorities monthly and needs permission to leave the country. At the time of his release he had served five and a half months of his one-year sentence. The conditions of his release mean that he will still have to report to the authorities beyond the date when his sentence would have been completed.

Fabián Nsué Nguema Obono thanked AI and said that while in prison he was aware of AI’s work on his behalf and believes that it contributed to his release. See Worldwide Appeal September 2002.

[Picture: Fabián Nsué Nguema Obono. Copyright: Private]

UN adopts new treaty designed to prevent torture

The Third Committee of the UN General Assembly adopted an Optional Protocol to the (UN) Convention against Torture in November. After 10 years of often difficult negotiations, an overwhelming majority of states at the UN General Assembly voted to take practical and concrete steps to eradicate this appalling violation of human rights.

This shows that sustained lobbying and campaigning can and does work! In the words of the Director of AI Canada (English-speaking): “In a year where it feels like we face undermining hurdles of US unilateralism at almost every multilateral turn, this is a great reminder that there is still an international community out there that can be counted on to do the right thing”.

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Young people meet in Morocco

AI’s first Middle East and North Africa Regional Youth Forum took place from 10-15 September, in Bouznika, Morocco. It brought together around 30 youth activists from Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Tunisia, and Yemen. The Forum provided an excellent opportunity for participants to strengthen their campaigning, organizational and leadership skills and strengthened the relationship between young human rights activists in the region. On the last day the participants created a colourful and innovative event for AI’s campaign on the Russian Federation using theatrical sketches, songs with a human rights theme, speeches and a mock demonstration.

[Copyright: AI]

Ten Turkish police officers found guilty of torture

The fight against torture in Turkey was boosted when 10 police officers were convicted of torture and sentenced to prison terms in a high-profile case known as that of the “Manisa Children”. On 16 October the police officers were sentenced to between five and 11 years’ imprisonment.

The 16 “Manisa Children”, aged between 14 and 26, were tortured in detention at police headquarters in Manisa, western Turkey, between December 1995 and January 1996. Detained on suspicion of membership of an illegal leftist group, the victims reported being stripped naked, sexually assaulted, hung by the arms and subjected to electric shocks. Their claims were corroborated by medical reports and eyewitness accounts.

At times it looked as though the police officers found responsible might benefit from the impunity that torturers in Turkey often enjoy. Most notably, the prosecutor reduced the charges from torture to ill-treatment, despite the seriousness of the crimes. The officers were acquitted in March 1998 and again in January 1999. However, this was overturned by the Appeal Court, which concluded that the officers had actively participated in torturing the juveniles.

A further retrial was ordered in May 2001, but the proceedings ran the risk of exceeding the time limit on prosecutions. There was a series of delays, many of which appeared to be intentional. For example, court sessions were delayed by the failure of the court to locate some of the accused police officers, despite the fact that they were still on active duty.

While AI welcomes the outcome of this case, it remains concerned about reports of torture in police and gendarmerie stations, particularly in southeast Turkey, and about a continuing pattern of impunity for torturers.

AI urges the authorities to take further steps to protect all people in Turkey from the crime of torture, for example, by completely abolishing incommunicado detention. AI also calls for any allegation that a person has been subjected to torture to be promptly, thoroughly and independently investigated.

Israeli war crimes committed in Jenin and Nablus must be investigated

The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) committed war crimes in Jenin and Nablus in March and April 2002 during Operation Defensive Shield, states AI in a new report.

Human rights violations by Israeli forces included unlawful killings and the wanton destructions of hundreds of homes, in some cases with the inhabitants still inside. In one case 10 members of the Shu'bi family were buried alive under the rubble of their house in Nablus for six days – eight of them died and only two survived. In Jenin refugee camp and Jenin city, more than half of the 54 Palestinians who were killed in the IDF incursion between 3 and 17 April appear not to have been involved in fighting. Four of those killed were children. Other human rights violations include torture and ill-treatment of prisoners; the blocking of ambulances and denial of humanitarian assistance; and the use of Palestinian civilians as “human shields”.

While Israel has the right to take measures to prevent unlawful violence, in doing so it must not violate international law. In Jenin and Nablus, the IDF blocked access for days to ambulances, humanitarian aid and the outside world while the dead and wounded lay in streets or houses. In Jenin a whole residential quarter of the refugee camp was demolished, leaving 4,000 people homeless.

AI submitted most of the cases detailed in the report to the IDF for comment but, despite repeated promises, no response has yet been received. All attempts to end human rights violations and install a system of international protection in Israel and the Occupied Territories, in particular by introducing monitors with a clear human rights mandate, have been undermined by the refusal of the government of Israel. The USA has consistently supported the Israeli position, effectively leading to inaction by the international community.

AI reiterates its call for the international community to stop being an ineffective witness of the grave violations that take place in Israel and the Occupied Territories. Stressing that there will be no peace or security in the region until human rights are respected, it urges meaningful, urgent and appropriate action.

See, Israel and the Occupied Territories: Shielded from Scrutiny : IDF violations in Jenin and Nablus (MDE 15/143/2002).

‘Justice for everybody’

AI’s campaign for “Justice for everybody” in Russia was launched in Moscow on 30 October. Despite the authorities’ ban on demonstrations following the hostage crisis, people came together on this day in the centre of Moscow to remember the victims of political repression in Russia. They included many elderly people, who had been victims of political repression in the Soviet era, as well as young people, leaders of political parties and the directors of the Dutch, Finnish and Norwegian AI sections. They laid flowers on a stone brought to Moscow from one of the gulag camps. AI Secretary General Irene Khan lit a candle which was then used by many other people to light their own candles. At the same time people in many countries all over the world lit candles and signed petitions to Russian President Vladimir Putin. AI Nepal collected 500 signatures on that day and in Iceland the Russian Ambassador lit the AI candle. For further information see: www.amnesty.org/russia

[Copyright: AI]

Solidarity quilts for Colombia

Eighteen months ago, AI members in Montreal, Canada, wondered if they might be able to generate enough interest to make just one quilt to send to CREDHOS, a Colombian human rights group based in Barrancabermeja, as a sign of support and solidarity. Over the next year AI members across Canada were inspired to follow suit, and took the idea to Parliament, church groups, schools and other venues. Over 1,200 squares were produced, each with its own unique message of concern, enough to create 17 spectacular quilts. They represented an impressive chorus of Canadian voices, sharing a message with Colombian human rights defenders that they do not stand alone.

On Colombia’s National Human Rights Day, 9 September, the quilts were presented to Colombia’s human rights defenders in an event held at the National Congress in Bogotá. Speakers all highlighted the critical importance that human rights must play in Colombia, the vital role of human rights defenders and stressed the concrete steps the new government must take if it is to truly turn around the country’s human rights crisis. Nineteen Colombian human rights groups presented an open letter to Colombia’s new President Alvaro Uribe Vélez, calling on him to establish a meaningful and ongoing dialogue with human rights defenders to prevent attacks against them.

The quilts were received as beautiful works of art but, more importantly, strong, visual reminders – to defenders, their colleagues and their communities – that their work is valued and supported around the world. They will be displayed prominently and defiantly in human rights groups’ offices across the

country. For more information see: www.amnesty.org

[Copyright: AI]

Recent reports

EGYPT: No protection – systematic torture continues (MDE 12/031/2002)

NIGERIA: Vigilante violence in the south and south-east (AFR 44/014/2002)

HAITI: Update of the Jean Dominique investigation and the situation of journalists
(AMR 36/013/2002)