

# @UA NEWS

Amnesty International UA Newsletter.....AUGUST 1994.....Amnesty International UA Newsletter

## Milestone for Morocco

### *King Orders Release of Hundreds of Political Prisoners*

AMNESTY International has welcomed the release of more than 400 political prisoners after King Hassan II declared it was time to turn the page on "what are known as political prisoners".

In a speech to mark the occasion of Moroccan National Youth Day on July 8, the King announced that he had instructed the official human rights body, CCDH, to submit a list of prisoners, to which he would put his royal seal, and all on that list would be released.

King Hassan II stated that he wanted to put an end to what was internally "a situation of embarrassment and doubt", and "the tendentious criticisms of malevolent persons or enemies abroad". He added that Moroccans would then be credible when they claimed that Morocco was a state where the

rule of law was respected.

Many of the released political prisoners have spent more than 10 years in prison, after having been sentenced in unfair trials since the 1980s.

"This amnesty is a milestone for Morocco in the process of redressing the injustice of past unfair trials", Amnesty said. The organisation stated, however, that scores of other prisoners of conscience and political prisoners remain imprisoned. Hundreds who have "disappeared" since the 1960s, most of them Sahrawis, also remain unaccounted for.

In 1993, the Urgent Action network sent thousands of appeals on behalf of Abdelhaq Rouissi, one of the long-term "disappeared" in Morocco. None of the "disappeared", however, have been included on the list of those amnestied.

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This is still, nevertheless, one of the most positive developments in Morocco since AI was founded.

The UA Network has appealed in 1994 for prisoners of conscience on trial in Morocco who were than released after UA pressure was applied.



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# NEWS in BRIEF

## UNITED KINGDOM

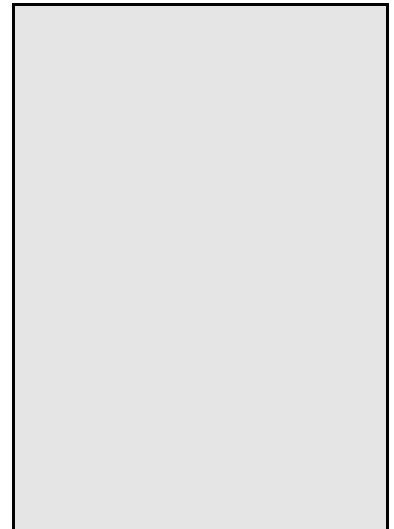
SIKH asylum-seeker Karamjit Singh Chahal (photo), under threat of refoulement from the UK to India, where he would be at risk of torture or death, was the subject of UA appeals in 1993. On 2 March 1994, the House of Lords decided not to accept Chahal's petition for further review of his case, but the following day the Home Office stated that he would not be expelled until adjudication of his case in the European Court. However, Chahal will remain in custody, despite having already been administratively detained for nearly four years. Given the lengthy legal processes involved at the European Court, it is possible he could be detained without charge for several more years.



## SUDAN

At a press conference in Toronto to launch the 1994 AI Annual Report, ex-prisoner Taisier Mohamed Ahmed Ali, a Sudanese political science professor, now living in exile in Canada, told reporters: "Had it not been for the urgent action appeals of Amnesty, I would not be here today." He is still a peace activist dedicated to ending the civil war in Sudan.

## SOUTH KOREA



"THANK you for everything you have done concerning our case. I am sure it was due to your efforts that I was released early."

Kim Un-ju (photo) and her brother Kim Sam-sok, detained under the National Security Law, were forced to confess to espionage charges. Kim Sam-sok has been given a seven-year sentence.

## TADZHIKISTAN

FOUR days after a UA was issued on fears that paramilitary forces had begun systematically emptying unofficial prison camps by killing detainees, it was reported that the Government of Tadjikistan intended to protest "in international courts" over AI's allegations.

At a news conference, Tajik leader Imamali Rakhmonov stated, "our experts are working on this subject", but gave no further details of any legal proceedings. Later, a government statement said unnamed forces were using AI to spread lies. The authorities have invited UN representatives in Tadjikistan to investigate the allegations.

UA NEWS welcomes your letters about your experiences working in the UA Network.

Please address communications to: Angela Robson and Rob Freer, Urgent Action Team, Amnesty International, International Secretariat, 1 Easton Street, London WC1X 8DJ, UK

Milestone for Morocco cont'd

# ***A New Start for a 17-year-old. A New Start for South Africa?***

***TO NAME BUT A FEW.....***

***Hundreds and hundreds of names have appeared in Urgent Actions on South Africa over the years of apartheid rule: Children, trade unionists, women, doctors, journalists, political activists, hunger-strikers, death row inmates, religious leaders, mothers, fathers, students, lawyers, community workers and human rights activists from all parts of South Africa. In response the UA Network sent many hundreds of thousands of appeals on behalf of these individuals.***

WITH the ending of apartheid and the election of a new government, there is a new feeling of hope for South Africa's future.

If the cycle of impunity is to be broken and a repetition of serious human rights abuses prevented, those responsible for the violations so often featured in UAs of the past must be brought to justice. The urgency to confront this issue is highlighted by reports of abuses still coming out of South Africa.

But now is a good time to remind you of the many times over the years that those struggling for justice inside South Africa have expressed their thanks for your tireless efforts on their behalf, and for the pressure that your appeals maintained on the apartheid authorities. A response to one of the last Urgent Actions issued before the national elections in April serves as such a reminder.

From late March to early May 1994 the UA Network appealed on behalf of 17-year-old detainee, Michael Mathe,

this pressure, Michael was transferred to hospital from police custody and then released on bail to continue treatment for his post-traumatic stress symptoms.

Sally Sealey, fieldworker with the Independent Board of Inquiry in Johannesburg, wrote to AI:

"I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Amnesty International network for all the letters of support for Michael Mathe. I believe that the number of letters sent by Amnesty International members helped in ensuring that Michael received urgent medical treatment and that he was finally released on bail after five months.

Michael still needs counselling to help him come to terms with the trauma he went through while he was detained. I know the hundreds of letters kept his spirits up and made him realise just how many people cared.

Michael specifically asked me to write a letter thanking everyone who participated in the Urgent Actions."

about whose physical and mental health there was serious concern. Following

# *Their courage -*

***"In work to stop violations of human rights, you find strength you did not know you had. In Colombia we all know that defending human rights puts us personally at risk. But we have to take up the challenge."***

Dr Rafael Barrios.

In Colombia, to defend human rights is to put your life on the line. As human rights abuses have become endemic there, the security forces have increasingly taken to threatening and attacking such defenders. These attacks uncover the very heart of a violent state attempting to camouflage its true self behind a skilful public relations campaign.

In recent months the UA Network has appealed on behalf of two human rights lawyers threatened because of their work. Despite these appeals, both Lourdes Castro García and Dr Rafael Barrios Mendivil were forced to leave Colombia in fear for their lives.

While in London, both lawyers visited Amnesty's International Secretariat and

spoke about Amnesty's work.

**Lourdes Castro:** "Those of us, committed to human rights in Colombia rely so much on the support of the international community in our work. The Colombian government is increasingly sensitive to international opinion, and campaigns such as Amnesty's

are very important. I think the Urgent Action Network is useful in preventing any imminent abuse.

**Dr Barrios:** "I think that UAs are an efficient mechanism for the prevention of serious human rights violations. Countries with democratic or apparently democratic governments, such as Colombia, who wish to sell an image to the outside world, are sensitive to appeals from international non-governmental organizations.

So without the support and recognition of the international community, it would be hard for the defenders of freedom, justice, and true democracy to protect themselves from the State's criminal activities.

NGOs have the legal, moral and political duty to accompany us in this struggle, through the use of urgent actions."

# our solidarity

*"I am sincerely grateful for the appeals you have sent to the national authorities. Your support in our tragedy... strengthens the defence of human rights and encourages our daily struggle."*

*(letter from Amelia Molina Enciso in response to appeals on UA 17/94 on the killing of three members of her family)*

UAs cannot always be issued in time to save an individual's life. Often abuses occur in remote areas where contact with the outside world is slow. Not all killings are preceded by specific threats which give the international community a convenient signal to step in and confront the perpetrators.

But when a pattern of unpunished political murder emerges, the threat to others at risk is accentuated by each new killing. Impunity itself becomes the threat - another method of spreading terror, just as fear is spread by a note pushed through a door inviting the addressee to their own funeral.

In March, AI launched its Campaign on Colombia aiming to bring to world attention the reality of the human rights crisis in Colombia.

The UA Network needs no education about this reality. For years the Colombian authorities have been one of the prime targets of the Network's efforts.

So far, the Colombian government has reacted defensively to the Campaign. In May, Fernando Brito, the head of Colombia's internal security service (DAS) threatened to sue AI over its allegations. One UA featured specifically in his threat, namely UA 82/94, which reported the killing of Evaristo Amaya Morales, and the concern that his murder raised for the safety of individuals

whose names also reportedly appeared on a list held by the DAS and armed civilians.

At a press conference, Brito announced that he planned to initiate legal proceedings against AI in the United Nations, so that "some kind of sanction can be placed (on AI) for the irresponsible way in which it has been levelling accusations against the Colombian state and in this case against the DAS." Fernando Brito specifically referred to letters sent to him by UA participants in Germany and the United Kingdom.

At the same time the Colombian government was reported to be planning a public relations strategy to clean up its image in Europe.

It seems that the joint efforts of the Campaign and the UA Network have at least been successful in rattling the Colombian government's complacency and in questioning the credibility of the myths it has perpetuated about its human rights record.

Meanwhile the abuses go on, and the UA Network is as busy as ever on Colombia. The work sometimes seems fruitless, but the importance activists in Colombia attach to your appeals can no more eloquently be put than in the message sent by the Association of the Families of the Disappeared (ASFADDES) after AI issued an EXTRA in July which attempted to get outgoing President Gaviria to promulgate a draft law to criminalize "disappearances". In reaction to President Gavira's failure to promulgate the law, ASFADDES expressed their deep frustration :

*"This is extremely painful for us; as if it has not been enough to snuff out the lives of our loved ones, not enough that we live every day without knowing where they are, not enough the suffering we have been through on finding them tortured and killed, not enough to keep knocking on door after door, day after day, demanding answers we are never given. There is no limit to the indignity suffered in this country and we are not as strong as we would wish. Only by thinking about the solidarity and moral support of people like yourselves can we find the strength to carry on dreaming in spite of blows like this."*

**"No More War"** -  
graffiti of hope in  
Colombia

# Urgent Actions & USENET

Ray Mitchell

THE nature of UA concerns means that the latest technology is used to speed up the distribution of case-sheets and the sending of appeals. Both fax and electronic mail are currently used to send UAs from the IS to UA Coordinators around the world, many of whom then distribute UAs by the same methods to letter-writers in their networks.

UAs are also placed on closed computer networks such as GreenNet and Peacenet. This article discusses another way of using today's technology to distribute UAs, USENET.

USENET is a worldwide, public collection of electronic bulletin boards, called newsgroups, with a readership of millions of people. These newsgroups carry information on everything from computer programming to how to look after your cat. Several are concerned with human rights, the main ones of which are *soc.rights.human*, *misc.*

*activism.progressive*, and *alt.activism.death-penalty*. The strange names are a result of the naming conventions used by USENET.

Monthly statistics reveal how many people consult each newsgroup. In April 1994, *alt.activism.death-penalty* attracted 120,000 readers, *soc.rights.human*, 93,000, and *misc.activism.progressive*, 58,000 readers.

Even assuming that many individuals read more than one newsgroup, the statistics still show that over 90,000 people read the main human rights newsgroup, approximately as many people as participate in the UA Network worldwide.

So, should AI distribute UAs to these newsgroups, thereby increasing the response to each UA? There are pros and cons to this suggestion. The average UA generates 3,500 - 5,000 appeals. If UAs were distributed to USENET newsgroups, each UA would be read by an extra 90,000

people, the great majority of whom, however, are concentrated in Western countries. Also many are students, who have free access to USENET. Therefore, appeals would predominantly come from US students. Do we want to increase the number of appeals at the expense of the international mix of those appeals?

Many of the 90,000+ readers are not AI members and may not be aware of AI's concerns. Some may disagree with AI's stance and may use the information for their own ends. For example, the information in a US death penalty UA may be used to send letters to the relevant governor in support of an execution.

Should AI distribute UAs indiscriminately? A compromise may be to distribute UAs to the newsgroups for information only, without the addresses or recommended actions.

This important issue is one which I hope the UA Working Group will soon tackle, to enable UA coordinators to have greater coordination of their on-line campaigning.

\* Ray Mitchell is the British Section UA Coordinator. He will present a paper on this subject at the September meeting of the International Computer Communications Working Group. For more information, write to [rmitchellai@gn.apc.org](mailto:rmitchellai@gn.apc.org), or Ray Mitchell, AI British Section, 99-119 Rosebery Avenue, London EC1R 4RE.

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# Mission to Mexico

***In January, Amnesty International arrived in Chiapas, Mexico to investigate reports of gross human rights violations by the Mexican security forces. A member of the UA team speaks to Morris Tidball-Binz, researcher for Mexico, who led the mission....***

"YOU can't just plan for a revolution" says Morris Tidball-Binz ruefully, sitting in his small office at Amnesty's International Secretariat. "This was New Year - the last thing we needed was an uprising in the state of Chiapas!"

Any hint of humour in Tidball-Binz's voice is immediately dispelled as he reaches over to a photo-album on the corner of his desk. He opens it at page one and I am forced to catch my breath at the gallery of horror displayed before me. In one picture, five guerillas lie, face-down, their hands tightly bound with string. All have been shot through the head. In another photo, a man is captured in a moment of pure grief, bending over the corpses of two blood-soaked bodies.

The uprising by the armed opposition group, the Zapatista National Liberation Army, on 1 January in Chiapas sent shock-waves through Mexico's ruling elite, resulting in a brutal quashing of the rebellion by the Mexican security forces.

Within the first two weeks of fighting, Amnesty was investigating reports of gross human rights violations by the Mexican army, with accounts of the torture and execution of detainees soon being confirmed.

But what could Amnesty do in such a time of crisis? The Mexico team at the IS was being bombarded with constant requests from the press asking for clarification of the situation.

"We quickly decided to send a research mission to Mexico," said Tidball-Binz. "From past experience, we knew that the visit of an Amnesty delegation would probably have a dissuasive effect over on-going human rights violations in the area. The Mexican government is extremely sensitive about its image internationally. This was definitely the time to act."

Tidball-Binz flew to Mexico on January 15. He met with indigenous communities in Chiapas, as well as Mexican government officials, and interviewed around 70 detainees in Cerro Hueco prison (see UA 25/94). Most prisoners had been arrested on false charges and subjected to brutal torture.

However, within days of Amnesty's arrival in Chiapas, the situation was changing. The visit was helping publicise the human rights situation

worldwide and ensuring the access of human rights monitors to prisons holding detainees. Several Urgent Actions were issued, based on information Morris sent back to the International Secretariat. A week after Morris visited the Cerro Hueco prison, more than half the detainees were released.

Amnesty, however, believes that human rights violations have been committed with impunity: "Prosecuting human rights violators is one of the most fundamental steps the Mexican government can take if it wants to end violations," states Tidball-Binz. He closes the photo-album, and locks it away in a filing cabinet. Is it too much to hope, I ask before leaving, that the human rights situation may stabilize in the country?

"This is Mexico", he says. "Let's wait and see."

# Network Update

## UA Working Group

THE International UA Working Group is presently being set up and should be in formation by September 1.

The group will consist of 10 UA coordinators, two from each world region. It will particularly aim to assist UA networks in new or small sections by exchanging advice and support or by providing specified materials, equipment or services.

The Working Group would help ensure that there are regular inter-section meetings on the UA action form.

Projects that the group will start working on are the organisation of the next international UA conference, assistance to West African UA networks, and exchanges of UA coordinators between large and small sections.

The next edition of UA NEWS will contain further information on the nature of these projects, as well as a list of all UA Coordinators in the Working Group.

## Meeting in Ghana

PLANS are underway for a regional meeting of West African UA Coordinators. The three day conference will take place in Accra, Ghana on 7-9 October and will bring together UA Coordinators and Group Development Officers from six countries.

The objective of the meeting is to improve the capacity of West African groups and sections to respond to crisis situations. An integral part of the conference will include training on word-processing and electronic mail.

## UAs in South Africa

SOUTH Africa recently became the first country in Africa to receive UAs by electronic mail. This means AI groups and individuals can respond to Amnesty's urgent concerns as soon as a case is issued.

If you would like more information by e-mail, contact Christopher Merrett, on: [Chris@gn{merrett@library.unp.ac.za}](mailto:Chris@gn{merrett@library.unp.ac.za})

## "To Save a Life"

MEMBERS of the German Section distributed UAs at showings of Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List*, the story of a man who saved some 1200 Jews from almost certain death during the Holocaust. Half a century on, the world still needs activists to intervene on behalf of individuals persecuted and terrorized by agents of the state.

## Special Appeal Against Extradition

IN February an EXTRA was issued for Antonio Ti Luo, at risk of extradition from the Portuguese Territory of Macau to China, where he faced possible execution. The action was sent with an AI delegate to a Symposium of Human Rights Organizations held in Guinea-Bissau from 21-23 February. A special appeal was faxed from all the delegates at the conference to the relevant authorities.