

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS
JANUARY 1999
AI Index: NWS 21/01/99

SOUTH AFRICA

Writing the end of a chapter?

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) handed its report on human rights abuses committed during the apartheid era to President Nelson Mandela in October 1998. However, South Africa's struggle to come to terms with its violent past through investigations and public acknowledgment is still far from over.

The report names and calls to account a wide range of organizations and individuals for the "gross violations of human rights" committed between 1960 and 1994. It states that the apartheid state committed the "predominant portion" of human rights violations. Some of these abuses occurred "in collusion with certain other political groupings" such as the Inkatha Freedom Party.

The report finds that the South African state "knowingly planned, undertook, condoned and covered up the commission of unlawful acts, including the extra-judicial killings of political opponents and others, inside and outside South Africa", the scale of which escalated from the late 1970s. The State Security Council -- the most influential organ of the apartheid state -- is singled out for knowingly inciting the abduction, "disappearance", maiming or killing of government opponents and their associates, and for consistently failing to initiate any substantive investigation into any of these violations.

Former opposition groups were also held responsible for human rights abuses, with sectors of civil society contributing "to the emergence of a culture of impunity" because they failed to speak out or intervene on behalf of the victims.

The African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan-Africanist Congress fought a "just war" against a system condemned internationally as a crime against humanity, according to the Commission. However, both were held responsible for violations of human rights such as the targeting of civilians and indiscriminate use of landmines. On the eve of publication a court injunction by the ANC, intended to delay the disclosure of these and other findings, failed.

The Commission reached its conclusions despite the systematic destruction of official records on a "massive scale" and an "overarching sense of denial" from leaders of the former state, very few of whom "grasped the olive branch of full disclosure" in exchange for amnesty. This silence, in the Commission's view, reflected a lack of any "real appreciation of the enormity of the violations... or of the massive degree of hurt and pain their actions caused". This led the Commission to remark on the "perhaps unbridgeable... chasm between the perspectives of those who wielded power in the apartheid era and those who suffered at their hands".

In the meantime, the TRC's semi-autonomous Amnesty Committee is continuing to review hundreds of remaining amnesty applications. Many of those named by the Commission in connection with human rights violations -- some of whom remain in positions of authority -- have neither sought amnesty for their alleged crimes nor made any disclosures to the Commission. They are thus open to prosecution.

However, in the wake of the report, calls from within the political establishment for a general

amnesty have increased, with the new National Director of Public Prosecutions conceding that his office might not pursue prosecutions if they are not in the "best interests of the country". The October report emphatically takes a stand against any such blanket amnesty "[i]n order to avoid a culture of impunity and to entrench the rule of law".

True reconciliation in South Africa must be based on knowledge and accountability. The TRC report is a vital step in the right direction. Its work must not be undone by letting the perpetrators of crimes during the apartheid era get away with their inhuman actions.

INDIA

Still no justice for victims of riots

A wave of rioting in Mumbai (Bombay) six years ago left some 1,500 people dead. So why, months after the publication of a report stating that police and politicians were behind some of the violence, has no one been held to account?

The riots, which involved members of the Hindu and Muslim communities, took place between December 1992 and January 1993, and followed nationwide tension caused by the demolition of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya.

The Srikrishna Commission of Inquiry was established in 1993 to investigate the riots. The Commission's report, published in August 1998, raised several issues of concern regarding police practices and anti-Muslim bias among police, and recommended the prosecution of over a dozen police officers for direct involvement in the riots. Political leaders responsible for inciting the riots were also identified.

The government of Maharashtra state (a Bharatiya Janata Party/Shiv Sena [Hindu nationalist] alliance) dismissed the majority of the report's recommendations, accusing it of being biased against Hindus. The Maharashtra government also continued to block steps to prosecute political leaders; during the course of the inquiry, it had closed hundreds of cases against Shiv Sena activists charged with crimes such as inciting communal hatred.

The failure to implement recommendations made by successive Commissions of Inquiry follows a pattern throughout India. This has contributed to continuing human rights violations, and to an attitude among law enforcement officials that they can escape justice for illegal practices.

You can help by calling on the Maharashtra government to take action against police officers where there is clear evidence that they killed people deliberately and illegally, or that they participated in the rioting and looting. Express your concern at the government's rejection of the many recommendations made by the Srikrishna Commission of Inquiry to improve police practices and prevent future violations. Write to: Mr Manohar Joshi, Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Office of the Chief Minister, Mantralaya, Mumbai 400 001, Maharashtra, India.

SIERRA LEONE

A year of atrocities against civilians

The Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and the armed opposition Revolutionary United Front (RUF) had a name for their campaign of systematic killing, rape and mutilation in Sierra Leone. They called it "Operation No Living Thing".

During 1998, several thousand unarmed civilians were brutally killed or suffered crude amputations of their feet, hands, arms, lips or ears. A UN official said that the brutal treatment of civilians by the AFRC and RUF was unlike anything he had seen in 29 years of humanitarian work.

The AFRC and the RUF took control of Sierra Leone in May 1997 following a military coup, but were ousted by West African troops in February 1998. The previously elected government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah was then reinstated. AFRC and RUF forces have subsequently perpetrated an unprecedented level of atrocities in the north and east of the country.

Children and women in particular are victims of the violence and brutality. Around 2,500 children abducted by rebel forces remain captive and are forced to fight. Girls and women are systematically raped and forced into sexual slavery.

Children are also most vulnerable to the acute hardship, disease and malnutrition suffered by many of some 550,000 Sierra Leonean refugees and internally displaced people. In July 1998 the UN High Commissioner for Refugees described Sierra Leone's refugee crisis as the worst in Africa.

The international community must place human rights protection at the centre of continuing efforts to bring peace and security to Sierra Leone.

For more information, please see Sierra Leone: 1998 -- A year of atrocities against civilians, November 1998 (AI Index: AFR 51/22/98).

MOROCCO

New hope for human rights

The release of 28 political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience, and the provision of new information about the "disappeared", have raised hopes of a more open attitude towards human rights in Morocco.

Many of the released prisoners had spent decades in detention, and all received unfair trials. Their release was granted by royal amnesty in October 1998 following the review of their cases by Morocco's official human rights council. The council stated that the cases of another 20 people, whom they did not name, would be studied further.

The human rights council also published a list officially acknowledging the deaths in secret detention of 25 Moroccans and one Lebanese national who had "disappeared" at the hands of the security forces from the 1960s to the 1980s. Among them was Houcine al-Manouzi, a trade unionist who "disappeared" in 1972. Also mentioned on the list were the names of 30 "disappeared" Moroccans who had died in the secret detention centre of Tazmamert and whose families had already been notified of their deaths.

However, the council did not provide any information concerning the date, place and circumstances of the death of these "disappeared", neither did they return the bodies to the families or inform them of the place of burial. There was also no acknowledgement of the deaths of over 50 Sahrawis in secret detention between 1975 and 1990.

You can help by welcoming the steps taken by the Moroccan government to reveal the fate of some of the "disappeared", but urging the immediate examination of the cases of around 500 others -- the majority from the Western Sahara -- who "disappeared" after arrest by the security forces and remain unaccounted for. Write to: M. Driss BASRI, Ministre de l'Intérieur, Ministère de l'Intérieur, Quartier Administratif, Rabat, Morocco.

AN INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT MOVES CLOSER TO REALITY

The perpetrators of the worst crimes in the world, such as war crimes and genocide, are now closer to justice following decisive steps towards the establishment of an international criminal court (ICC).

At a Rome conference in July 1998, the world's governments voted overwhelmingly to adopt a Statute for an ICC. Only seven governments, including the USA and Israel, voted against the Statute, while 21 abstained.

AI, which has been campaigning for an ICC for over four years, has argued that 16 principles are fundamental to an effective court. Most of these principles were incorporated in the Statute. For example, the ICC has been given the power to try people accused of violating humanitarian law in internal armed conflicts. The definition of "crimes against humanity" includes systematic or widespread "disappearances". Conscripting or enlisting children under the age of 15, as well as using them actively to participate in hostilities, are war crimes. An independent prosecutor can begin investigating and prosecuting crimes without waiting for the UN Security Council or individual states to act.

Special attention was given to the ICC's provision of justice for women. Rape or other sexual abuse are defined as war crimes and, when committed on a widespread or systematic basis -- whether in peace or armed conflict -- as crimes against humanity. The ICC is required to protect women victims and their families.

The Statute also guarantees the right to fair trial and excludes the death penalty, as well as providing for the award of reparations to victims.

However, there are still several flaws in the Statute. Most significantly, states are able to declare when they ratify the Statute that they will not accept the ICC's power to try war crimes on their territory or committed by their nationals (the so-called "license to kill" declaration). The ICC's prosecutor is heavily dependent on national authorities in coordinating investigations, while the UN Security Council can require the ICC to delay an investigation or prosecution for successive one-year periods.

The Statute will enter into force when it has been ratified by 60 states. By mid-October 1998, it had received 58 signatures -- the first step towards ratification. AI, in partnership with more than 800 members of a non-governmental organization global coalition for an ICC, is working for

prompt ratification of the Statute so cases can be brought before the ICC at the earliest opportunity.

OVER TEN MILLION PEOPLE BRING HUMAN RIGHTS TO LIFE

Over the past year, AI has challenged the citizens of the world to mark the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by signing the pledge, 'I will do everything in my power to ensure that the rights in the UDHR become a reality throughout the world'.

The first to sign, in December 1997, was human rights campaigner and Nobel Laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from Myanmar. Since then her name has been joined by 36 heads of state and other signatories such as the mothers of the "disappeared" in Argentina, former Chinese prisoner of conscience Wei Jingsheng, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson, Lech Walesa of Poland, the Dalai Lama, Rolling Stone Mick Jagger and Hawaiian Sumo wrestler Konishki (all pictured above).

Reasons of space prevent us from printing the photographs of many other signatories, as there were an incredible 10 million of them. If they all linked hands the line would encompass the globe, from the North Pole to the South Pole.

This massive demonstration of popular support for human rights owes much to the tireless activities of AI campaigners across the globe, some of which took place in collaboration with The Body Shop. The events pictured above were organized in Gambia, Thailand, Ecuador, Uganda, Israel, Mongolia, Croatia, Korea, Kuwait, Greece, Nepal and the United Kingdom.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL APPEALS

SYRIA Prisoner of conscience / Unfair trial / Health Concern

Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout, a Palestinian, has been detained in Syria for almost 33 years after an unfair trial. He is possibly the longest-serving political prisoner in the Middle East. Concerns about his health have been heightened following his recent hunger strike.

A former member of Fatah, the mainstream faction in the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout was arrested in May 1966 and charged with the murder of a Palestinian leader. He has consistently denied the charge, and alleges that he was tortured for 46 days following his arrest.

He was sentenced to death in 1966 by an exceptional Military Court after a summary and grossly unfair trial. However, in 1989 the death sentence was commuted by the Minister of Defence to a prison term equivalent to the time he had already spent in custody. The Minister of Defence also ordered that Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout should be released unless he was charged with another offence.

This ruling was ignored and Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout remains in detention. In October 1998, he was admitted to hospital after a hunger strike in protest at his detention. He was comatose and suffering from internal bleeding caused by a chronic and untreated ulcer. He also

suffers from heart problems.

Please write, urging the Syrian authorities to release Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout immediately. Also ask that, while he remains in detention, he is granted access to any specialist medical care that he needs. Send letters to: His Excellency, President Hafez al-Assad, Presidential Palace, Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic.

GUATEMALA Fear for safety

Witnesses and survivors of the 1982 Río Negro massacre are once again in fear for their lives. This time, the aim of the violence is to prevent them from testifying against the military officials responsible for the massacre.

In March 1982, over 177 women and children were killed by members of the armed forces and their auxiliaries in the Guatemalan village of Río Negro, Baja Verapaz department. One month earlier, the men from the same village had been massacred. In January 1994, the remains of at least 143 victims were exhumed from three mass graves.

The trial of those suspected of involvement in the massacre, including members of a Civil Defence patrol, began in November 1998. This is the first trial of those alleged to have been responsible for the hundreds of massacres of Mayan peoples that took place during the early 1980s. Witnesses and survivors of the massacre, and their families, have been threatened and intimidated in apparent attempts to stop them testifying.

In March 1998, the leader of an organization campaigning on behalf of victims' relatives for the exhumation of secret mass graves -- including those of Río Negro -- was shot at while walking his son home from school. Other people working for the rights of victims and relatives have also been threatened or have had their property destroyed.

Although legal complaints by those who have been intimidated or threatened have been filed before the relevant Guatemalan authorities, no investigation into these crimes is known to have taken place. Please write, urging the authorities to guarantee the safety of all those involved in the investigation into the Río Negro massacre of March 1982, and calling for the full investigation of all allegations of violence and intimidation. Send letters to: Lic. Rodolfo Mendoza Rosales, Ministro de Gobernación, Ministerio de Gobernación, Despacho Ministerial -- Of. N° 8, Palacio Nacional, 6ª Calle y 7ª Avenida -- Zona 1, Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala. (Fax: 502 362 0239)

UZBEKISTAN Possible prisoner of conscience

Abdumalik Nazarov, the youngest brother of a prominent Islamic leader, has been sentenced to nine years' imprisonment. It is believed that his conviction may be part of the Uzbek authorities' clamp-down on independent Islamic institutions.

Twenty-four-year-old Abdumalik was arrested while waiting to drive across the border between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan on 26 December 1997. His car was searched in his presence but nothing illegal was found. However, a second search later that day reportedly revealed a small quantity of narcotics. Abdumalik Nazarov has claimed that the narcotics were planted by police

officers, a practice which has been in evidence during this and previous campaigns against those perceived as threats to the government's authority.

In April 1998, Abdumalik Nazarov was sentenced to nine years' imprisonment for illegal possession of narcotics and forgery of official documents.

There is strong evidence to suggest that the charges against him were fabricated as a way of punishing his brother Obidkhon, an independent Islamic leader. The Uzbek authorities have been conducting a campaign against Islamic leaders and congregations which are not affiliated to the state-regulated Muslim Spiritual Directorate.

Please write, calling for an immediate review of Abdumalik Nazarov's case. Send letters to: His Excellency Islam Abduganievich Karimov, President of Uzbekistan, 700000 g. Tashkent, pr. Uzbekistansky, Rezidentsiya Prezidenta, Prezidentu Karimovu I.A, Uzbekistan. (Faxes: 7 3712 (1) 39 55 25 / (1) 39 54 00). Also send letters to the Uzbek embassy in your country.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL FOCUS Worldwide Appeal Updates

In the last twelve months some 20 people whose cases featured as Worldwide Appeals have been freed.

Many were released during the dramatic political events that took place in Indonesia and Nigeria in May and June 1998. New Indonesian President B.J. Habibie ordered a prisoner release program and amnesty, benefiting at least 110 Indonesian and East Timorese, including prisoner of conscience Muchtar Pakpahan (pictured above). In Nigeria, General Abdulsalam Abubakar released dozens of prisoners of conscience and possible prisoners of conscience when he succeeded General Sani Abacha as Head of State in June 1998. The work of local and international non-governmental organizations, alongside letters from AI members, helped to keep the focus on these and other political prisoners and prisoners of conscience.

While releases in other countries may not have grabbed the international headlines, they resulted in the end of unjust sentences of imprisonment. Pius Njawé, editor of Cameroon's longest-running independent newspaper, was imprisoned in December 1997 after an article in the paper suggested that President Paul Biya suffered from a heart complaint. He was released in October 1998, after being granted a presidential pardon.

AI members have appealed not just to bring freedom to those imprisoned for their political beliefs, but on a wide range of other human rights concerns, including the rights to a fair trial and to adequate medical treatment, and for investigations into extrajudicial executions. Dr Asrat Woldeyes, imprisoned in Ethiopia since 1994, was denied access to appropriate medical treatment for deteriorating vision, linked to diabetes, and a reported brain haemorrhage. After urgent appeals by AI, the authorities allowed him to receive better medical care in hospital and his health is gradually improving. Pressure from AI members also played a part in the case of Lian Jonathan Cáceres Herrera, a 13-year-old boy shot dead in Caracas, Venezuela, in May 1996. More than two years after Lian's death, a warrant has finally been issued for the arrest of the police officer implicated in the killing.

Sadly, not all the news has been positive. For some of those whose cases featured as Worldwide Appeals there has been little change. Leo Pilo Echegaray, who was sentenced to death in September 1994, continues to face execution in the Philippines. Prisoner of conscience Brigadier General Gallardo Rodriguez has spent more than five years in jail, despite a recommendation by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights calling for his release.

In August 1998 we asked you to send appeals on behalf of Lim Guan Eng, a prominent opposition politician in Malaysia who faced imprisonment for speaking out for women's rights. When the Federal Court upheld his sentence at the end of the month, AI adopted him as a prisoner of conscience.

All these people urgently need your help. For further details of their cases and recommended actions see AIWorks December 1998 (AI Index: NWS 22/08/98).

We are often asked if your letters make a difference, and we always answer that they do. While it has not been possible to establish the exact contribution made by AI members to a particular outcome, it is clear that pressure from AI often plays a significant role. Words of thanks from prisoners of conscience themselves testify to the value of your letters. Time and time again those who have been unjustly imprisoned write to thank you for the hope that your efforts inspired in them.

RELEASED IN 1998 . RELEASED IN 1998 . RELEASED IN 1998 .RELEASED IN 1998 .

Nigeria November 1995*
Chris Anyanwu

Chris Anyanwu, editor of The Sunday Magazine, was released on 15 June 1998 by Nigeria's new Head of State, General Abdulsalam Abubakar. She was released along with dozens of other prisoners of conscience and possible prisoners of conscience.

In July 1995 Chris Anyanwu had been sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment by a Special Military Tribunal. She was convicted of being an "accessory after the fact to treason" for publishing articles about the arrests and secret treason trials of armed forces officers earlier that year. AI considered her a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for the peaceful expression of her beliefs. Her trial did not conform to international standards for fair trial.

In a letter to AI, written shortly after her release, she said: "I cannot tell you how wonderful it feels to be free again and to be able to write this note. It is something that I have wanted to do since 1997 when I received my first batch of cards from the peoples of the world, generated through Amnesty's efforts.

"It is impossible to paint an accurate picture of the actions and reactions as I sat in that tiny cell, the floor carpeted with cards and envelopes. It was deeply touching, greatly encouraging and strengthening.

"Thereafter, I knew that I was not alone, and held onto the thought till the end. I pasted the walls with the photographs and the words of exhortation. I was emboldened by them, inspired even to stretch my imagination beyond the ubiquitous, constricting walls.

"I thank the... members of Amnesty International worldwide. I thank all those thousands of people of the world who gave me strength and encouragement through cards, and notes. I shall never forget your kindness. Thank you with all my heart."

* Dates refer to the month in which the Worldwide Appeal first featured in AI News.

South Korea February 1998

Kim song-man

Kim Song-man was released from prison in August 1998. He is currently resting and allowing himself to return to good health.

In January 1986 Kim Song-man was sentenced to death for "anti-state" activities, a sentence later commuted to life imprisonment. In February 1998, it was further reduced to 20 years' imprisonment. His release was announced in the second prisoner amnesty granted by President Kim Dae-jung, a former prisoner of conscience, since taking office in February 1998.

Kim Song-man was imprisoned for the non-violent expression of his political opinion. While studying in the USA, he visited several North Korean embassies in Eastern Europe and discussed Korean reunification. He also wrote pamphlets critical of South Korean government policy.

However, Kim Song-man was released on parole and could go back to prison at any time. The Ministry of Justice has warned that prisoners released in the amnesty may be reimprisoned if they take part in activities of a political nature, including campaigns for the abolition of the National Security Law, under which they were jailed. AI is calling for the release of Kim Song-man to be unconditional.

In September 1998, during an AI visit to South Korea, Kim Song-man spoke of the importance of AI's work. "I was in prison for 13 years and on death row for two years. I didn't know whether or not I would die... [but] I know that AI and Minkahyop [a human rights organization which groups the families of political prisoners] saved my life... Thank you. I am alive and free... 13 years was like a long dark tunnel which had no end. Sometimes it was exhausting and sometimes lonely, but AI's work consoled and encouraged me. To receive cards and parcels was so enjoyable in a monotonous prison life. Your efforts to release prisoners of conscience made our heavy burden light and endurable. AI taught ordinary people and prisoners of conscience the importance of human rights."

Syria December 1995

Khalil Brayez

Prisoner of conscience Khalil Brayez, aged 65, was released from prison in May 1998 following a presidential amnesty. He had spent a total of 27 years in prison.

Khalil Brayez was originally abducted by Syrian security forces in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1970. In 1973 he was told that he had been sentenced in absentia to 15 years' imprisonment, reportedly for criticizing the performance of the Syrian army during the 1967 war. He was then held for a further 12 years beyond the expiry of his sentence.

More than 30 other prisoners of conscience and political prisoners were also released from Syrian prisons in May.

Khalil Brayez is now free. Many thanks to those who sent appeals on his behalf, and to the sustained efforts of AI members who worked on his case for over two decades.

Viet Nam August 1995
Thich Quang Do

The Venerable Thich Quang Do, a 68-year-old Buddhist monk and a prominent writer and scholar, is one of 12 prisoners of conscience known to have been released under a presidential amnesty in September 1998.

Thich Quang Do was arrested in January 1995 after denouncing the three-month detention of 23 monks and lay Buddhists. He was sentenced to five years' imprisonment in August 1995. AI believes that he had been detained solely for exercising his rights to freedom of association and to freedom of religion. During his period of detention, lack of adequate medical care reportedly led to the deterioration of his eyesight.

He was released from B14 Prison near Hanoi and is reported to be staying at a Buddhist monastery in Ho Chi Minh City.

Iran July 1997
Faraj Sarkouhi

Writer and editor Faraj Sarkouhi was released on 28 January 1998. He was one of 134 writers who in 1994 signed an open letter calling for an end to censorship. Some of these writers have since reportedly received death threats, or have died in unclear circumstances.

Faraj Sarkouhi "disappeared" for about seven weeks in 1996 and was released in December 1996. He was rearrested at the end of January 1997 on the grounds that he had been trying to leave the country illegally.

Charges reportedly brought against Faraj Sarkouhi in July 1997 included "spying for a foreign country", a charge that carries a mandatory death sentence in Iran. This was later replaced with the lesser charges of disseminating "propaganda against the Islamic Republic of Iran". He was tried in camera in September 1997 by a Revolutionary Court in Tehran, convicted and sentenced to one year's imprisonment. AI sought to observe his trial, but was refused permission.

Faraj Sarkouhi was released on the completion of his sentence, which included the period of almost seven months that he had already spent in detention.

In April 1998 Faraj Sarkouhi's passport was returned to him by the authorities and he was allowed to leave the country. In May 1998, on his arrival in Germany, he was reunited with his wife and children and invited by the International Writers' Parliament to spend a year in

Frankfurt, as part of their Cities of Asylum project.

Shortly after his release, he thanked the many organizations, AI included, that worked to secure his release. "Since I do not know the names of all those who contribute to this campaign" he wrote, "I express my general thanks to all individuals. These efforts not only saved my life but brought to the attention of the world the difficult condition of the environment in which the Iranian writers and intellectuals live and write."

Cameroon May 1998
Pius Njawé

Pius Njawé, a prominent journalist and director of Cameroon's longest established independent newspaper Le Messenger has been released after being granted a presidential pardon on 12 October 1998.

Pius Njawé was arrested on 24 December 1997 following an article in Le Messenger which suggested that President Paul Biya suffered from a heart complaint. Although the government's denial was subsequently published by the newspaper, Pius Njawé was charged with dissemination of false news and transferred to the Central Prison, New Bell, in Douala. On 13 January 1998 he was convicted and sentenced to two years' imprisonment, reduced to one year's imprisonment on appeal in April. This sentence was confirmed by the Supreme Court in September 1998.

Pius Njawé had been imprisoned on many occasions in the past. In 1996 he and a colleague were convicted of insulting the President and members of the National Assembly. More than 30 court cases have been brought against Le Messenger since 1990, almost all of them by the government.

Pius Njawé wrote to AI shortly after his release and thanked AI members for all their work carried out on his behalf. "At last I am free! Free after ten months of detention in horrible conditions, which I could only endure with your constant moral support. Really, if I was able to survive that hell, if I was able also to keep a strong spirit, at the surprise of my oppressors, it was thanks to the constant backing and signs of solidarity from the members of your organization... I would like to let you know that each of your actions, at any level, has greatly contributed not only to my liberation, but also to the promotion of press freedom... I would like to sincerely express my deep gratitude to your support and solidarity. I would also like to say THANK YOU!"

In November 1998 Pius Njawé took part in the All-Africa Human Rights Defenders Conference in Johannesburg, South Africa, organized by AI.

Turkey July 1998
Edip polat

Prisoner of conscience Edip Polat was released from Ankara Central Closed Prison in August 1998 on the completion of his sentence, with remission.

Edip Polat, a Kurdish writer and former biology teacher, was charged and tried under Article 159

of the Turkish Penal Code for "insulting the organs of state" in a statement he made to the newspaper Ozgur Gundem in July 1993. He was sentenced to 10 months' imprisonment. Ironically, the statement for which he was imprisoned was a bitter complaint about the penalties imposed by the courts on writers and newspapers who exercise their freedom of expression by criticizing government policies in the mainly Kurdish southeastern provinces of Turkey. He has been imprisoned several times for his writings.

Edip Polat was held in violation of Article 10 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, to which Turkey is a state party.

After his release, Edip Polat telephoned AI to thank all those who sent appeals on his behalf. He said that the many letters and cards he received while he was in prison had given him courage and support.

Mexico December 1997
Gerardo Demesa Padilla

Gerardo Demesa Padilla, a leading member of the Committee for the Unity of Tepoztlán, a civil rights organization, was released from prison on 26 May 1998 after his sentence was revoked by a judge.

Gerardo Demesa Padilla had been sentenced to eight years' imprisonment in September 1997, the reason for which, AI believes, was his peaceful opposition to a large tourism development, including a golf course, in Morelos State.

After his release, he expressed his gratitude for the support given to him by AI members during his time in prison.

For further information on all Worldwide Appeals featured in AI News since 1995, see AIWorks December 1998: Updates to AI Appeals and features about AI's impact (AI Index: NWS 22/08/98).

AIWORKS

How effective is AI in achieving greater respect for human rights? AIWorks attempts to answer this question by providing stories, from around the world, of instances where AI members have made a positive contribution in the struggle for justice. In the third edition of AIWorks, we follow stories such as the "Journey of Hope... from Violence to Healing" in the Philippines, and we hear about AI's role in a youth project in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Also featured is this story of courage, determination and hope from Turkey.

TURKEY

A forest for the 'disappeared'

[Please check page proofs for Turkish characters]

In Anatolia, Turkey, there is an old tradition of planting a tree when a child is born. It is intended that the child's life will be long and, symbolically, that the child and the tree will grow together.

AI's Istanbul group drew on this tradition when they developed the idea of planting trees for the "disappeared". They planned the forest to raise the profile of Turkey's "disappeared", and to express the wish that the right to life be held sacred.

On 27 September 1998 more than 150 people gathered in the Piyale Pasa Bulvari to take part in the first planting event. They included guests from the public, police officers, celebrities, journalists and relatives of the "disappeared".

The event was also attended by several international figures, such as Teresa Meschiati, who "disappeared" in the secret detention centre "La Perla" in Argentina from September 1976 to December 1978. She related her own story before planting a tree for her friend, Monica Maria Candelaria Mignone, whose whereabouts are still unknown. Nassera Dutour, the founder of a French-based collective of families of the "disappeared" in Algeria, spoke of her struggle for justice before planting a tree on behalf of her son Amine Amrouche who "disappeared" in January 1997. Lastly, Emine Ocak from Turkey planted a tree for her son, Hasan Ocak, who "disappeared" in March 1995.

The land for the forest, Piyale Pasa Bulvari, was provided by the environmental department of Istanbul's municipal government. Piyale Pasa Bulvari is located in a very central area of the city and, as there are already around 200 trees growing on the site, it is highly visible. The forest is situated between three motorways, meaning that the trees are noticed by the thousands of commuters who pass by every day. The grant of the land for planting was an unusual example of official sanction of human rights activism. Police not only held back from intervening, but an officer was witnessed helping to plant a tree.

In the preceding weeks, a rash of forest fires started around Istanbul by unscrupulous developers hoping to open up land for lucrative building projects had provoked a wave of public outrage. AI's event provided a striking contrast and was rewarded with widespread coverage in the national newspapers and television.

Now, as a result of the forest project, the relatives of the "disappeared" have a physical reminder of their loved ones, while a permanent placard displaying AI's name and logo makes a strong statement for the future of human rights.

For further information, see Turkey: Listen to the Saturday Mothers (AI Index: EUR 44/17/98), AIWorks December 1998 (AI Index: NWS 22/08/98) and AIWorks (AI Index: NWS 22/04/98).