

## **The Wire**

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[Page 1]

### **Aceh after the tsunami – ‘We are organizing...’**

Human rights groups in the Indonesian province of Aceh re-emerge after the disaster which claimed the lives of some 230,000 people

The words “we are organizing” have been heard again and again as AI has contacted human rights colleagues in Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam (Aceh) following the tsunami. Every organization seems to be organizing something – food for internally displaced persons, shelter, or family reunification programmes.

Women’s rights groups have been among these. The staff of Flower Aceh, one of the oldest women’s rights organizations in the province, escaped the tsunami by running to the second floor of a building nearby. From there, they watched as their office was swept away below them.

A Flower Aceh staff member later told AI, “You can replace offices, and computers – but you cannot replace information. And you cannot replace people”.

Since 1989, Flower Aceh has researched the impact of cultural practices and the ongoing conflict on women in Aceh. This information – unique and irreplaceable – was gone in minutes. The organization’s garden, containing more than 600 plants used for traditional medicine, was also destroyed.

Many Acehnese organizations have suffered similar losses. Some have lost staff members. Among those still missing is Syarifah Murlana, a lawyer with the Legal Aid Foundation (Lembaga Bantuan Hukum, LBH). Late last year, she told an AI staff member about her recent visit to a group of political prisoners suspected of belonging to or sympathizing with the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM). She was among a handful of lawyers who continued to represent these people, in spite of personal threats and a judicial system which offered them little chance of a fair trial.

Syarifah, her husband and their children have not been heard from since the tsunami. More than 40 human rights defenders are reported to have lost their lives or are unaccounted for following the tsunami. A number of the prisoners Syarifah represented are also reported to have been killed. At least five prisons in Aceh were destroyed, and many inmates, including political prisoners and possible prisoners of conscience, were drowned or are missing.

Even before the tsunami, Acehnese human rights and humanitarian organizations faced serious challenges to their work. The breakdown of peace talks between the Indonesian government and GAM in May 2003 was followed by intense military operations. The gravity and pervasiveness of abuses committed by both sides of the

conflict during the course of these operations affected almost all aspects of civilian life in the province.

During this period, Acehese organizations were at the front-line, providing assistance and human rights protection in spite of threats and intimidation. Meanwhile, international humanitarian and human rights organizations were restricted from entering the province. Following the tsunami, these agencies have been permitted to enter Aceh on request. AI has called on the Indonesian government to continue to ensure that they are given full, unimpeded and unhindered access.

It is estimated that over 600,000 people were displaced from their homes and forced to live in relief camps as a result of the tsunami. Much of the immediate relief has focused on ensuring that they receive basic needs such as food and water, shelter and sanitation. Flower Aceh together with other women's rights organizations have established a centre focusing on relief for women and children in such camps. Members of LBH have also expanded their programme of work to respond to humanitarian needs.

The international community has pledged unprecedented levels of support and commitment to both immediate relief efforts and longer term reconstruction. AI has welcomed this commitment and has called on donors to ensure that relief and reconstruction efforts are conducted within a framework that protects and promotes human rights.

The input and involvement of local NGOs in the reconstruction of Aceh is a prerequisite for accountability, social cohesion and stability. It is essential that the work of local organizations – both before and after the tsunami – is fully recognized. Their wealth of local knowledge must be used, so that reconstruction can take place in an appropriate and sustainable manner. Acehese NGOs have been organizing for years and are continuing to do so. They are the ones likely to be responsible for humanitarian and human rights protection in the future.

[Picture caption] Women carry plastic bags full of goods saved from damaged shops in tsunami-ravaged Banda Aceh, Indonesia, in January © REUTERS/Enny Nuraheni  
[back page picture] Syarifah Murlana © Private

## Repression of Kurds in Syria is widespread

*“We were put in a closed room... sleeping on the floor with lice and mice. Our hair was shaved. They would only open the door to throw in the food then close the door again. [And] during meals they would turn on the water tap and put us under it clothed, then we would be beaten.”*

Testimony given to AI by Hassan (not his real name), detained for two months following violence in Qamishli, Syria in March 2004

Security forces reportedly fired live bullets into the Kurdish section of the crowd when tensions rose between rival Arab and Kurdish fans during a football match in March 2004, in the north-eastern town of Qamishli. Several people were killed. The next day, police officers opened fire on a funeral procession for Kurds killed the

previous day. This led to two days of protests and riots in largely Kurdish populated towns across northern Syria. At least 30 Kurds were killed.

More than 2,000 people, almost all of them Kurds, are believed to have been detained following these events. Most were held incommunicado and there are widespread reports of torture and ill-treatment of detainees, including children, women and the elderly. Children as young as 12 were reportedly beaten with electric cables and had their heads bashed together.

Testimonies of torture of adults cite electric shocks, having fingernails pulled off and being sexually humiliated. At least five Kurds died allegedly as a result of torture and ill-treatment in custody. A further six Kurdish conscripts are reported to have been killed in suspicious circumstances on account of their Kurdish identity.

About 200 Kurds detained during the March 2004 events were still held at the beginning of 2005. Fifteen of them were referred to trial before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC). Trials before the SSSC, which was created 42 years ago under Syria's emergency laws, do not meet international standards for fair trials: its decisions are not subject to appeal and "confessions" allegedly extracted under torture are accepted as evidence.

The Kurds are the second largest ethnic group in Syria. However, Kurdish is not recognized as an official language and it is forbidden to publish materials in Kurdish. Kurdish cannot be used in schools and in the workplace. Tens of thousands of "stateless" Kurds are not allowed to own property, work in various professions, or study at university. Kurds who peacefully protest such discrimination face harassment, detention, torture and unfair trials.

The Syrian authorities must investigate all allegations of torture and suspected unlawful killings. Those suspected of having committed torture or having carried out unlawful killings should be brought to justice. The Syrian government should end the prohibitions imposed on Kurdish people living in Syria including the ban on use of the Kurdish language in schools and the workplace.

[Picture caption] Demonstration in Damascus, June 2003, calling for Syrian Kurdish children's rights to be respected, including the right to be taught in their own language. Police officers and security forces broke up the peaceful protest, injuring about 20 people. Four of the participants remain imprisoned today. © Private

[Page 2]

## UK 'anti-terrorism' law comes under renewed public scrutiny

As four UK nationals were transferred to the UK in January after being detained as "enemy combatants" at the US naval base in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, the UK's own response to the events of 11 September 2001 came under renewed scrutiny. At the time of going to print, 10 foreign nationals continued to be held without charge or trial in the UK under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 (ATCSA).

But the ATCSA had already received a major blow in December 2004 when a panel of nine Law Lords, the highest court in the UK, held that detention under the ATCSA breached European human rights law. It allows the indefinite detention without charge or trial of foreign nationals suspected of “terrorism” who cannot be deported on grounds that they might be tortured or killed in their home country. In a landmark ruling, the Law Lords voted – eight-to-one – that this unjustifiably discriminated against such suspects and was therefore unlawful.

AI took the highly unusual step of making written submissions to the Law Lords, arguing that the ATCSA violated fair trial rights guaranteed by international law, including treaties binding on the UK. AI also argued that the use of evidence obtained as a result of torture or other ill-treatment in ATCSA proceedings violates the UK’s obligations under international law.

AI remains extremely concerned at the willingness of the UK authorities and judiciary to accept information extracted under torture as “evidence” permissible in court. In August 2004, the Court of Appeal of England and Wales concluded that the ATCSA *required* the use of “evidence” obtained through torture of a third party (someone other than the “accused” in a given case), provided that UK officials neither committed nor conspired to commit that torture. Permission to appeal this ruling had not been granted at the time of going to print.

This interpretation was condemned by the UN Committee against Torture in November 2004. It recommended that the UK authorities ensure that they will not rely on or present “evidence” obtained through torture in any proceedings.

On 26 January, the UK Home Secretary announced proposals that would, if enacted, replace the emergency powers allowed under the ATCSA. House arrest was just one of the measures proposed to replace arbitrary detention in UK prisons. AI believes that the announced proposals fall far short of the government’s obligations under human rights law. If enacted, they would violate the human rights of those subjected to them and undermine the rule of law.

See *UK: Text of Amnesty International submission to House of Lords opposing indefinite detention* (EUR 45/027/2004) and *UK: Briefing for the Committee against Torture* (EUR 45/029/2004).

[Picture caption] Five children of Mahmoud Abu Rideh protest against his detention, London, 2003. At the time of going to print, 10 men were still detained without charge under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. © Sarah Lee 2003

## Activists unite to change the world

The World Social Forum (WSF) came full circle this year, returning to where it first began in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2001. Running from 26-31 January, the WSF tackled a range of issues, including social struggle and democratic alternatives, demilitarization, economic independence, and human rights and dignity.

An AI delegation of 30 activists from as far afield as Spain, Paraguay, Switzerland and France, as well as seven members of staff from AI’s secretariat in London, joined

the throng of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and grassroots groups calling for a better world. The WSF gave AI a chance to raise the profile of its campaign work while forging stronger links with co-activists.

Along with its partners Oxfam and IANSA, AI encouraged people to bring under control the proliferation of arms by signing up to the Control Arms Campaign. Banners were strung up and volunteers organized to collect images for the Million Faces Petition supporting the campaign. The Control Arms seminar attracted 150 people and featured speakers from the Instituto Sau de Paz, Oxfam UK, the Aria Foundation and Viva Rio, and included individuals from Italy, USA, Japan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Their experiences underlined the fact that the proliferation of arms is a global issue with equally destructive consequences worldwide.

Supporting its Stop Violence Against Women campaign and work on economic and social rights, AI joined other organizations to put together two seminars on women human rights defenders and corporate abuses. These offered individuals and groups the opportunity to share their experiences, giving rise to tales of triumph as well as woe.

Stories of big businesses dwarfing local needs echoed AI Secretary General Irene Khan's call for human rights to be placed at the centre of any corporate projects. Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Switzerland, which ran from 26-29 January, she highlighted the corporate sector's responsibility in respecting and promoting human rights.

The WSF showed the power of solidarity – the ability not only to achieve great things through group action, but to fortify individuals through group exchange and support.

[Picture captions] Participants prepare for the Dignity Rally at the start of the World Social Forum, Porto Alegre, Brazil, January © AI  
Delegates set up the AI stall highlighting some of its work, including the Stop Violence Against Women campaign and Control Arms campaign, January © AI

## Libya abolishes People's Court

*“The Leader of the Revolution, Muammar al Gathafi, renewed his call to the Basic People's Congresses to abolish extraordinary laws and the People's Court.”*  
Jamahiriya News Agency, 11 January

Libya's parliament, the General People's Congress, abolished the People's Court in an historic ruling on 12 January.

The abolition of this exceptional court, renowned for trying political cases, is an important step forward for human rights in Libya. It is hoped its abolition will contribute to improving the human rights situation in the country.

AI has highlighted a pattern of unfair trials before the People's Court, in which the rights of the accused were routinely violated, even when these rights are guaranteed in Libyan law.

AI hopes that the two committees set up to take the abolition process forward will ensure that all pending cases will be transferred to the jurisdiction of the ordinary criminal court system. AI urges the authorities to conduct a review of all cases of prisoners who have been tried by the People's Court in the past. Those tried in the past should either be retried before ordinary courts, in full compliance with international standards for fair trial, or be released immediately and unconditionally.

Despite moves toward its abolition, trials before the People's Court continued to take place until as late as December 2004. Those sentenced after unfair trials before this court include scores of men, sentenced solely for the peaceful expression of their political beliefs. Some 85 prisoners of conscience had their sentences confirmed on appeal; these ranged from 10 years' imprisonment to the death penalty for those suspected of supporting or sympathizing with the banned Libyan Islamic Group (al-Jama'a al-Islamiya al-Libya), also known as the Muslim Brothers.

Two other significant steps were taken at the General People's Congress in January. A new committee on legal affairs and human rights was set up, and investigative committees were created to identify prisoners of conscience.

AI welcomes the authorities' willingness to address the pressing issue of prisoners of conscience in Libyan prisons. It is hoped that those appointed to work on these committees will use internationally agreed standards relating to freedom of expression and association when assessing which prisoners can be classified as prisoners of conscience, and will release immediately and unconditionally all those who fall within this category.

Please write, welcoming the abolition of the People's Court and calling for all those who have been tried before it to either be retried before ordinary courts, in line with international standards for fair trial, or be released immediately and unconditionally. Send letters to: His Excellency Ali Omar Abu Bakr, Secretary of the General People's Committee for Justice, (Minister of Justice), Secretariat of the General People's Committee for Justice, Tripoli, Libya.

[Picture captions] Prisoners of conscience Abdullah Ahmed 'Izzedin (*left*) and Salem Abu Hanak (*right*) were both sentenced to death by the People's Court in 2002, following a grossly unfair trial © AI

In many cases heard before the People's Court, defendants were not allowed to choose their own lawyers. Instead, a lawyer was appointed from the Popular Lawyers' Office. Defendants often had little, if any, contact with their lawyer. © AI

[Page 3]

## Worldwide Appeals

### Tajikistan

'No signs of a crime'

*“[T]hey forced me to stand up and beat me again until I fell on the floor,” said Viktor Dudenkov. “When they noticed that traces of their boots were visible on my shirt they forced me to take it off and continued to beat me.”*

Viktor Dudenkov and Vladimir Vasilchikov – members of the Awakening Baptist Church in Nurek, a town south of the country’s capital Dushanbe – were allegedly beaten by police at their local police station between 16 and 23 June 2004. Elena Dudenkova, Viktor Dudenkov’s wife, was insulted, forced to stand up for several hours and denied food and drink. The three were summoned for questioning in the case of Vladimir Vasilchikov’s mother, Mariya Vasilchikova, who was last seen in June 2002. Police accused the men of killing her although no formal charges were brought. They maintained their innocence and alleged they were pressured by police into signing “confessions”.

Following complaints by both men to the General Procuracy, a key judicial body charged with considering such cases, they were examined by doctors at the Republican Centre of Forensic Medicine in Dushanbe. On 25 June the experts concluded that they suffered from concussion and head injuries. Both had to be hospitalized for two weeks.

The men continued to appeal to the authorities, urging them to bring those responsible to justice. However, on 5 August, the investigation was closed on the basis that “no signs of a crime” were found in the activities of the police.

Please write, urging the authorities to promptly open a thorough and independent investigation into allegations that Viktor Dudenkov, Elena Dudenkova and Vladimir Vasilchikov were ill-treated in Nurek police station between 16 and 23 June 2004. Ask that they be protected from further possible abuse and that those responsible for the ill-treatment be brought to justice.

Send appeals to: Talbak Nazarov, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Respublika Tajikistan, 734051 g. Dushanbe, Ministerstvo innostrannykh del, Ministru Nazarovu T, Tajikistan. Fax: +992 372 21 02 59 Email: [dushanbe@mfaumo.td.silk.org](mailto:dushanbe@mfaumo.td.silk.org) If fax/email do not work, please send appeals by post.

[Picture caption] Viktor Dudenkov (*left*) Elena Dudenkova (*centre*) and Vladimir Vasilchikov (*right*) © Private

## Zimbabwe

### Harsh sentence for opposition MP

Opposition Member of Parliament (MP) Roy Bennet was sentenced to 15 months’ imprisonment with hard labour, in October 2004. His sentence relates to an incident in parliament on 18 May 2004 when Roy Bennet pushed Patrick Chinamasa, the Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs, to the floor following a heated debate during which Minister Chinamasa is said to have verbally abused Roy Bennet.

While AI does not condone Roy Bennet’s actions, it has severely criticized the parliamentary procedures used to convict and sentence him. The procedure was

demonstrably biased and politically motivated, and his imprisonment is grossly disproportionate to the offence committed.

In Zimbabwe, parliament can act as a court with power to award and execute punishments for certain offences under the Privileges, Immunities and Powers of Parliament Act. Assaulting an MP in the parliament building is one such offence. In Roy Bennet's case, the five-person committee set up by parliament to look into the case was made up of two members of the ruling ZANU-PF party, two from the opposition party and a third person who was appointed to parliament by President Robert Mugabe. This committee was biased towards the ruling party.

The committee's recommended sentence was approved by parliament with voting split along party lines. Minister Chinamasa was among those MPs who voted in favour of the recommended sentence. The parliamentary procedure followed in this case provides no mechanism for appeal against this sentence.

If the case had been brought before a criminal court, Roy Bennet would most likely have been charged with common assault and would have been given a far less severe sentence. In many such cases only a fine is imposed. Even a more serious assault charge would be highly unlikely to have attracted such a severe penalty.

Please write, calling for Roy Bennet's immediate release on bail pending either a review of his conviction and sentence by an independent and impartial court, or a trial before an independent and impartial court.

Send appeals to: His Excellency The Hon. Robert G Mugabe, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, Office of the President, Private Bag 7700, Causeway, Harare, Zimbabwe. Fax: + 263 4 728 799 / + 263 4 708 557

## Mexico

### Activist threatened

Obtilia Eugenio Manuel, an indigenous rights activist, has received numerous death threats and fears that her family is also in danger.

A leading member of the indigenous organization Organización del Pueblo Indígena Tlapaneco, AC (OPIT), she has documented human rights violations committed by the military against indigenous communities in the southern state of Guerrero. She criticized the government's failure to properly investigate the cases of Valentina Rosendo Cantú and Inés Fernández Ortega, from the Tlapaneca indigenous group, who were reportedly raped by soldiers in 2002.

Obtilia Eugenio Manuel reportedly received a letter in December 2004, threatening her family and warning [translators: *muy pronto descansar[ás] en paz*] "...soon you will rest in peace". It accused her of lying about the rape of the two women saying: "We've had enough of the stupidities you accuse us of. We were already going to get you but now you are really in trouble". She has received threats before but has not reported them for fear of reprisals against her family.

Since receiving the letter, men have been seen watching her house and the OPIT offices, making notes and taking pictures.

In 2002, the Mexican army investigated the two rape cases but the allegations were dismissed. As with other investigations into human rights violations carried out by the military, they lacked impartiality.

Indigenous communities report frequently being intimidated by soldiers investigating drug trafficking in Guerrero state. The authorities rarely investigate such incidents leaving the communities afraid to report them. The impunity for the rape of the two women has left women in the indigenous communities of Guerrero living in fear.

Please write, calling on the authorities to ensure the safety of Otilia Eugenio Manuel and her family. Call for an impartial investigation, in the civil justice system, into the death threats and alleged rape by soldiers of Valentina Rosendo Cantú and Inés Fernández Ortega.

Send appeals to: President of the Republic, Lic. Vicente Fox Quesada, Presidente de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, Residencia Oficial de “Los Pinos”, Col. San Miguel Chapultepec, México D.F., C.P. 11850, Mexico. Fax:+ 52 5 2 77 23 76

[Picture caption] Otilia Eugenio Manuel © AI

## China

### Woman sentenced to ‘re-education’

Mao Hengfeng, a mother of two, was forced to have an abortion and dismissed from her job when she became pregnant for a third time 15 years ago, in contravention of China’s family-planning policies. Since then, she has repeatedly followed official procedures to petition the authorities about her dismissal and the treatment she suffered at the hands of the police. Because of this, she has been detained several times, and confined in psychiatric hospitals where she has been forced to undergo shock therapy.

In April 2004, Mao Hengfeng was sent to 18 months’ ‘re-education through labour’ because of her continued petitioning of the authorities. She has reportedly been tortured on at least two occasions. Once she was tied up, suspended from a ceiling and beaten. In November 2004 she was strapped at her wrists and ankles for two days, while officials pulled her limbs in different directions, demanding she acknowledge her “wrongdoing”.

In late December 2004 Mao Hengfeng’s sentence of 18 months in a “re-education through labour” camp, imposed without charge or trial, was extended by three months. The extension was reportedly authorized by “people in a senior position”. Mao Hengfeng and her family were not allowed to see the authorizing documents. Therefore, it is not known precisely why or by whom the sentence was extended.

It is thought, however, that Mao Hengfeng’s refusal to confess to any “wrongdoing”, even under torture, or to sign documents acknowledging that she had undergone “thought reform” in detention, are factors which may have contributed to the

extension. Officials at the camp have also threatened her with reduced family visits if she continues to refuse to “confess”.

AI fears that Mao Hengfeng’s extended sentence puts her at grave risk of further torture.

Please write, calling for Mao Hengfeng’s immediate and unconditional release, and the abolition of “re-education through labour”. Ask that she be allowed to continue to lawfully petition the authorities without interference. Urge the authorities to investigate and punish those found responsible for her torture.

Send appeals to: Prime Minister, Wen Jiabao Zongli, Guowuyuan, 9 Xihuangchenggenbeijie, Beijingshi 100032, China.

## Updates

### Cuba

Seventy-three prisoners of conscience remain imprisoned on the second anniversary of the Cuban government’s crackdown on dissent in which dozens of people were arrested, swiftly tried and sentenced to prison terms of up to 28 years. Most were accused of activities such as publishing articles critical of the government; involvement in unofficial groups considered by the authorities as counter-revolutionary; or having contacts with individuals or organizations viewed as hostile to Cuba’s interests.

Eighteen prisoners of conscience were released in 2004. Fourteen were granted conditional release [translators: *licencia extrapenal*] to serve the rest of their sentences outside prison for health reasons.

AI continues to call for the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience and for the authorities to provide prisoners with adequate medical care and treatment when necessary. A report, *Cuba: Prisoners of conscience* (AMR 25/002/2005), will be issued by AI on 18 March.

### Viet Nam

The Vietnamese government released several high profile political prisoners, including four prisoners of conscience, in February, as part of a major prisoner amnesty to mark Tet, the Vietnamese Lunar New Year. AI members have campaigned for the release of the four men for many years. These releases are a result of international pressure and, in large part, the work of AI members.

### **Dr Nguyen Dan Que**, 62 years old

A distinguished doctor and long-time human rights activist, Dr Que has spent 20 of the last 27 years in prison for criticizing the government’s human rights record. During one brief period of freedom, Dr Que, determined to continue advocating for human rights, became an international member of AI. See *Worldwide Appeal* June 2003.

[Picture caption] Dr Nguyen Dan Que © Private

**Nguyen Dinh Huy**, 73 years old

Nguyen Dinh Huy, a former English and History professor, was arrested in November 1993 for planning an international conference in Ho Chi Minh City on democracy and human rights. He was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment, having previously spent 17 years in prison for "re-education", without charge or trial.

**Thich Thien Minh**, 51 years old

Thich Thien Minh, also known as Huynh Van Ba, a member of the underground Unified Buddhist Church of Viet Nam, was arrested and imprisoned in 1979 after protesting at the government takeover of the pagoda where he lived. He was sentenced to life imprisonment. He has been subjected to long periods of solitary confinement and was reportedly shackled hand and foot for a continuous three-year period, during which time he needed assistance from other prisoners to eat and relieve himself. See *Worldwide Appeal* June 2001.

**Father Thadeus Nguyen Van Ly**, 58 years old

Catholic priest Father Ly has been a persistent and outspoken critic of government religious policies, in particular the confiscation of church property, since 1975. He was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment on account of his peaceful, dissenting views in 1983 following an earlier brief period in prison. AI adopted Father Ly as a prisoner of conscience on both occasions. See *Worldwide Appeal* September 2001.

[Picture caption] Father Thadeus Nguyen Van Ly © Private

[Page 4]

## Overcoming obstacles in Russian Federation

For the past two years, Anna Vanina has coordinated an AI human rights education project in the Pskov region of Russia, working to include human rights in the school curriculum. In that time, she has almost single-handedly built up a network of over 500 teachers, organized over 15 training workshops, and distributed over 5,000 teaching resource materials. The Pskov educational establishment, if once sceptical and obstructive, has now had to accept her as part of the furniture; teachers embrace her with open arms.

Anna has found time to coordinate this project in addition to her other activities as a local human rights activist. Anna's mission is to inform the public – in particular, the rural public – about their rights. She sees empowerment of the individual as the most effective way to challenge the corrupt and powerful structures in today's Russia.

Earlier in her life, Anna Vanina worked for those very structures – as a detective for the St Petersburg police force. But her sense of justice was tested to the limit by the "law and order" she was told to implement, where, according to Anna, criminal gangs inter-mingled with state offices, where officials higher in the chain would warn her off the cases she felt needed to be investigated, and where individuals for whom a crime "had to be made to stick" were pointed out to her before the crime itself had even been committed.

So Anna left St Petersburg, left the police force, and set up her own human rights organization. She runs it from a flat in Pliussa, a small town in the impoverished Pskov region, where communists and nationalists vie for power. Here she holds consultations for anyone and everyone – from the head of the local Romani community, whose house has been torched again by local skinheads; through young men trying to avoid the draft, or who have fled the brutal conditions in the army; to single mothers, teachers, pensioners, or refugees from Chechnya, none of whom have received whatever small allowance the government should secure for them.

Calm, understated and persistent, Anna makes light of obstacles, laughing, and even using them to her advantage: “Bureaucrats love bits of paper”, she says, “but bits of paper frighten them”. So she bombards the bureaucrats with bits of paper. She even sends them thankyou letters when they do nothing to help, so that next time round, they will do nothing to obstruct.

Sometimes she is successful – like when teachers finally received their back-pay, after a deluge of over 1,000 letters. Or when the woman who walked 20 kilometres for a consultation – the bus fare was too expensive – was eventually allocated her state allowance. Or when a young man is certified as unfit to serve in the Russian army. But more often than not, such work is painstaking, and results are incremental and barely visible – while the obstacles only increase. In the light of all of that, Anna’s dogged persistence, her selflessness, and her continuing belief in humanity seem all the more remarkable.

[Picture caption] Anna Vanina (*right*) takes part in an AI workshop, painting candles on tunics for an AI street action © AI

## [Gujarat, India]

[picture caption © Vishwajyoti Ghosh/invertedcommas]

February 2005 marked the third anniversary of the outbreak of widespread violence in the Indian state of Gujarat in which 2,000 people, mostly Muslim, were killed. Local observers believe that between 250 and 330 girls and women were among the dead. Most of them had been raped or gang-raped before their deaths.

In reaction to the violence, artists across India created images which reflected their horror. The image above is an illustration by Vishwajyoti Ghosh, an artist from West Bengal. An exhibition of artwork focusing on human rights issues, including those in Gujarat, was held at the Indian Habitat Centre in Delhi to coincide with AI Secretary General Irene Khan’s visit to the city in February.

In January AI released a new report *India: Justice, the victim – Gujarat state fails to protect women from violence* (ASA 20/001/2005). The report focuses on the consistent failures of the Gujarat authorities to fulfil their obligations under national and international law to protect the state’s Muslim minority, particularly girls and women.

**Beijing + 10 – act now!**

At the 4th World Conference on Women in 1995, 189 countries committed to upholding equal rights for women by adopting the Beijing Declaration and the Beijing Platform for Action. Ten years later, gender inequality remains a major obstacle to women fully enjoying their human rights. Violence against women continues unabated, in war and peace time – in public and in private. Impunity for the perpetrators continues and many governments have done little to eradicate the problem they promised to tackle a decade ago.

At the March session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York, AI will raise concerns at the failure of governments to implement the Beijing Platform for Action and the commitments made at the five year review in 2000. AI is calling for the full reaffirmation of these commitments with immediate implementation.

AI will also pay tribute to the pioneering and sustaining work of women activists defending human rights. AI will demand that governments and the international human rights community acknowledge the challenges and risks faced by human rights defenders. Governments must promise to protect all those who defend women's rights. In the spirit of furthering AI's partnerships with the global women's movements, AI's activities in New York will include meetings with a wide range of NGOs, including Equality Now, and government delegates. AI will be lobbying with them for the creation of a UN Special Rapporteur on laws that discriminate against women.

The report *The impact of guns on women's lives* (ACT 30/001/2005) will be launched in New York with partner organizations IANSA and Oxfam on 7 March. Also, as part of AI's campaign to Stop Violence Against Women, it will join with the Centre for Women's Global Leadership to hold a workshop introducing the activists' toolkit, *The duty of states to address violence against women* (ACT 77/049/2004), to help activists campaign for women's rights.

For more information on AI's engagement with CSW and the Beijing review see *Beijing plus 10* (IOR 41/002/2005).

## Activists in Gulf states combat gender violence

*“All governments must send a strong message to those responsible for violence against women, that such violence is a crime and will not be tolerated. Violence against women – whether perpetrated by state or non-state actors – must be criminalized.”*

Abdel Salam Sidahmed, AI's Director of the Middle East and North Africa Programme

Human rights activists agreed that governments of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – must wait no longer to address inherent violence and discrimination against women. Activists gathered in Bahrain in January for a two-day conference organized by AI in co-operation with the Bahrain Social Partnership and under the patronage of the Supreme Council for Women.

Some 60 human rights activists from the GCC, Yemen and Morocco came together for the first time to work collectively to stop violence against women. Participants agreed that to stop violence against women their governments must reform the existing laws that discriminate against women and introduce and implement laws that offer them safeguards.

The conference sent a set of recommendations to the Secretary General of the GCC and to the governments of the GCC that included calling on them to ensure that:

- there is no impunity for those responsible for violence against women;
- governments review existing laws on nationality, housing, social security and other laws or introduce new legislation where appropriate to ensure equality and non-discrimination;
- appropriate housing is provided for women who face violence and that hotlines are created to offer women protection;
- women are allowed to actively participate in political and public life;
- all GCC countries ratify the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and if necessary, lift all reservations.

During the two-day conference, experiences were shared and workshops held enabling participants to listen and learn from others. It was concluded that building and strengthening partnerships at local and regional levels was a crucial step for NGOs engaged in campaigns to combat violence against women.

[Picture caption] Participants at the conference of human rights activists, Bahrain, January © AI