



Torture: Egypt's open secret

Emad al-Kabir, the 21-year-old taxi driver whose rape by police officers was captured on a widely circulated film, testified for the first time against his aggressors on 2 April. The trial, which began in March, is unusual in a country where torture and abuse of detainees have become routine practice.

Emad al-Kabir was tortured at the Bulaq Dakrur Police Station, Giza, after being arrested in January 2006 for trying to stop an argument between police officers and his cousin. Officers tied his hands and feet, forced him to sit on the floor, and whipped him. They then removed his trousers and raped him with a stick, recording his ordeal on a mobile phone.

The graphic footage exposed the abuses that prevail within the Egyptian criminal justice system. It provoked outrage among human rights groups and, most likely, led to the trial of the two officers allegedly involved in Emad al-Kabir's torture. However, Emad al-Kabir's case is not an isolated one; thousands of people continue to be tortured with impunity in Egyptian detention. The trial, although welcome, is unlikely to have any impact on their plight.

In March, Egypt's parliament approved amendments to the Constitution that were later endorsed in a controversial referendum. One amendment in particular effectively fixes emergency-style powers into law. It excludes terror suspects from existing protections against arbitrary arrest and detention. It also allows the President to bypass ordinary courts and refer such people to any judicial authority he likes, including military and emergency courts.

Torture and other ill-treatment, arbitrary arrests and detention, and grossly unfair trials before emergency and military courts have all been key features of Egypt's 40-year state of emergency and counter-terrorism campaign. The extensive powers granted to law enforcement officials have played a key role in facilitating such abuses, particularly torture.

In the wake of attacks by armed groups, security police have carried out mass arrests without recourse to due process. Relatives of suspects have been rounded up too, and then threatened and abused. A combination of incommunicado and secret detention has meant that some of those arrested have become victims of enforced disappearance for weeks or months. Some have died as a result of torture.

Around 18,000 people continue to be held without charge or trial under orders issued by the Interior Ministry. Some have been held for more than a decade, including many whose release has been repeatedly ordered by courts.

Yet despite Egypt's well-documented and appalling record of serious human rights violations, governments in other countries, notably the USA, continue to send "war on terror" detainees there – perhaps as a convenient and expedient means of gathering the "intelligence" they are looking for.

See AI's report *Egypt – Systematic abuses in the name of security* (MDE 12/001/2007).



Egyptian activist Mohammed el-Sharqawi, who was arrested in May 2006 and tortured by police, at an anti-torture protest in Cairo, Egypt, in January 2007.



Poster produced by Spirits of Hope coalition. Spirits of Hope provides training to tribal and non-tribal programmes on domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking in Oklahoma Indian country, USA. It also provides counselling and referral services.

A legacy of sexual violence

Indigenous women in the Americas face high rates of rape and other forms of sexual violence with little recourse to justice

More than one in three Native American and Alaska Native women will be raped during their lifetime, according to US Department of Justice figures; the comparable figure for women in the USA as a whole is less than one in five. While the reasons why Indigenous women are at particular risk are varied and complex, a key factor identified by Indigenous women themselves is the legacy of impunity for past atrocities.

"Sexual assault rates and violence against Native American women did not just drop from the sky. They are a process of history," says Jacqueline Agtuca, of the National Congress of American Indians.

Today, most perpetrators of sexual violence against Indigenous women across the Americas are still getting away with it. A major barrier preventing these women from reporting such violence is a lack of confidence that they will be believed and that perpetrators will be brought to justice.

For survivors, sexual violence has its own legacy and can remain hidden from public view for years or even decades. In Guatemala, sexual violence against Indigenous women was an integral part of the counter-insurgency strategy during the conflict in the 1980s. Yet, although some survivors still suffer the psychological effects of their abuse, they attribute these to a vague "sadness" (*tristeza*) rather than acknowledge even to themselves the brutality they have endured.

Inaction and indifference characterize many government responses to sexual violence against Indigenous women throughout the region. In some cases, far from eliminating the barriers to justice, the authorities are actively supporting laws and practices which effectively deny Indigenous women justice.

In the USA, Indigenous women face a jurisdiction maze where up to three justice systems – tribal, state and federal – are potentially involved in responding

to sexual violence. The result too often is confusion, delay and denial of justice for survivors.

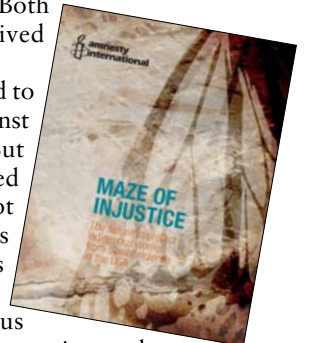
In Mexico, two Indigenous women raped by Mexican soldiers in 2002 are being forced to lodge their complaints before the military prosecutor. Inés Fernández Ortega and Valentina Rosendo Cantú of the Tlapaneca Indigenous community have so far refused to do so, arguing that as long as their cases remain under military jurisdiction, real justice cannot be served.

Indigenous peoples in the Americas maintain an immense diversity of cultures, customs and histories. However, all, to varying degrees, experience persistent negative stereotyping. Indigenous women are discriminated against as women and as Indigenous peoples. The resulting prejudice can affect police attitudes, posing another barrier to obtaining justice.

In 2003, a Native American woman in the USA was raped, beaten and thrown from a bridge by two white men. She was seriously injured but survived the attack. But when the case first went to trial in a state court, jurors were unable to agree on a verdict. Asked why, one of the jurors replied: "She was just another drunk Indian." Both men eventually received custodial sentences.

Urgent action is needed to stop sexual violence against Indigenous women. But action must be shaped by understanding, not prejudice. Indigenous women's organizations and tribal authorities have launched numerous initiatives throughout the region on how they can best be protected from sexual violence. It is time for governments to listen and act.

See *Maze of injustice* (AMR 51/035/2007).



Inside



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1 May – International Workers' Day

Workers around the world are being threatened, harassed, even killed for standing up for their basic rights. According to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, at least 100 trade unionists are killed every year for trying to promote better pay and working conditions for employees. Many states have signed international laws safeguarding the right of trade unionists to act freely, yet some states are consistently failing to uphold their responsibilities under these laws.

Trade unionist gunned down in Cambodia



Hy Vuthy, a prominent member of the Free Trade Union of Workers in the Kingdom of Cambodia (FTU), was shot dead while riding his motorbike home on 24 February. The FTU president at the Suntext garment factory had just finished his night shift when he was gunned down within a kilometre of his workplace in the Dangkao district of the capital, Phnom Penh. To date, no one has been arrested for the killing.

He is the third FTU official to be killed in three years. Chea Vichea, president of the FTU, was shot dead in January 2004 in a contract-style killing. Two men, Born Samnang, 25, and Sok Sam Oeun, 38 (pictured above), were arrested for the crime and sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment in 2005 after a grossly unfair trial (see *Worldwide Appeal* September 2006). Their appeal against the conviction was rejected in April 2007. In May 2004, Ros Sovannareth, FTU president at the Tringgal Komara factory, was murdered.

In recent years, attacks on FTU activists have intensified, with perpetrators going unpunished and the government failing to take any action to reverse the trend of violence. The FTU is one of the largest trade unions in Cambodia and is especially active within the garment industry, campaigning against the exploitation and substandard working conditions of garment workers. With high profits at stake, FTU's actions have been met with a ruthless counter-campaign of harassment and intimidation.

Throughout 2006, FTU representatives at Suntext and the neighbouring Bright Sky factory, lobbied the owner of both sites for improvements in employment conditions, particularly contract periods. Violent assaults on FTU officials at both factories ensued. In May 2006, Chey Rithy, FTU vice-president at Suntext, was attacked while he was riding home from work. In October, Em Chhay Tieng, FTU vice-president at the Bright Sky factory, was hit in the face and threatened with arrest during a strike there. They were just two of several FTU officials to be targeted that year.

Such a disturbing pattern of violence sends a chilling message to trade union activists across Cambodia. "Firstly, the killings spread fear among our members," FTU President Chea Mony told AI. "Secondly, perpetrators of such violence can just continue since no one is brought to justice."

One result is a stifling of union activity with workers prevented from demanding their basic rights. "As members of civil society we don't have the means to protect our people, so many local FTU leaders don't dare to stand up against malpractices in the factories," he added.

Cambodia is a party to all major International Labour Organization conventions, notably those relating to freedom of association and collective bargaining. It is also a party to international treaties guaranteeing the right of trade unions to function freely.

The government must ensure that the killing of Hy Vuthy is thoroughly and independently investigated, and that all persons responsible are brought to justice. It must find the real killers of Chea Vichea, while freeing the two men convicted in an earlier unfair trial, unless there is sufficient evidence against them. Only once all such killings are properly investigated and the persons responsible brought to justice in accordance with international standards, will the government send out a clear and credible signal that violence against trade union activists will not be tolerated.

Labour activists killed in Colombia

It has been described as one of the most dangerous places on earth to be a trade union activist. Since 1991, Colombia's largest labour organization, the Trade Union Congress (CUT), has documented 2,245 killings, 3,035 threats and 182 enforced disappearances of trade unionists. More than 90 per cent of these cases remain unsolved.

On the surface, Colombia has made some moves towards improving its shameful reputation. In June 2006, the Colombian government agreed to a permanent International Labour Organization (ILO) presence in the country to promote and defend the basic rights of Colombia's trade unionists. It also agreed to monitor the progress of investigations into killings and enforced disappearances.

Successive governments have offered trade unionists protective measures, including bodyguards, armour-plated vehicles and mobile telephones. However, in some cases, these measures have been restricted or withdrawn even at times when the affected individuals have been most vulnerable to attack.

Despite Colombia's putative attempts to improve the security situation of trade unionists, the killings and death threats continue and impunity has prevailed. A substantive and sustainable improvement in the security situation faced by trade unionists will not be possible unless decisive action is taken to end impunity.

Further, there is evidence that state security forces and paramilitary operations – the latter of which were supposed to have given up their weapons in a much-vaunted national disarmament process – have colluded to target trade unionists whom they brand as subversives and allies of guerrilla groups.

'We have decided to defend ourselves undertaking a well planned military operation to once and for all locate, exterminate, disappear and finish off this trade union cell.'

Threat sent to the Trade Union Congress offices in Santander Department by the Bloque Central Bolívar army-backed paramilitary group, 31 August 2006

Héctor Díaz Serrano, a member of the Oil Workers' Union (USO), was shot dead on his way to work on 2 March 2006 in Barrancabermeja. That same day, a newspaper reported that a paramilitary group calling itself the Magdalena Medio Regional Command issued a statement threatening to kill trade unionists and other social activists running in the March 2006 elections, including members of the USO. The group stated it was committed to the demobilization process, but that "Notwithstanding, we will continue with this fight until we have eliminated the last guerrilla terrorist and their infiltrated auxiliaries."

The Colombian government must act to end impunity in the killings of trade unionists and other human rights defenders. As the committee on freedom of association of the ILO has made clear, labour organizations can only exercise their fundamental rights in a climate free from threats and violence.

The decision to appoint an ILO permanent representative to monitor freedom of association in Colombia provides a crucial opportunity for companies operating in Colombia, the international labour movement and the international community to insist that the Colombian government finally takes decisive action to protect trade unionists.

ZIMBABWE

Systematic repression of trade unionists

On 13 March Gilbert Marembo and Michael Kandukuti, officers of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), were assaulted by members of the Zimbabwe Republic Police during a search of the ZCTU offices. The police had a warrant to seize all "subversive materials" found on the premises. The assault was witnessed by lawyers from the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights who arrived to find the police officers searching the offices, having detained ZCTU staff and visitors.

Members of ZCTU have been systematically harassed by the authorities for several years. They have been arbitrarily arrested and detained and some have been tortured and otherwise ill-treated while in custody.

Lovemore Matombo (pictured right), Wellington Chibembe and Lucia Matibenga, leaders of the ZCTU, were three of 15 members arrested in September 2006 while peacefully protesting against the deteriorating social and economic conditions in Zimbabwe. They were taken to Matapi Police Station where they were systematically tortured. The beatings were so severe that Lucia Matibenga suffered a perforated eardrum as a result.

Medical care was only provided after pressure from their lawyers.

Doctors confirmed that the group's injuries were consistent with beatings with blunt objects heavy enough to fracture hands and arms. Eight of the activists appeared to have been tortured by a method called *falanga* (beating on the soles of the feet) which leaves a victim permanently unable to walk normally.

The ZCTU called on its members to stay away from work from 3 to 4 April in protest at the government's failure to take steps to address the economic meltdown and to provide basic services to the people of Zimbabwe. Although the actual protest was relatively peaceful, it is feared that in its aftermath, the authorities will target those who they believe organized and participated in it.



→ Please write, calling on the authorities to allow ZCTU members to exercise their right to freedom of expression, association and assembly. Call for an end to arbitrary detention and intimidation of trade unionists.

Send appeals to: Police Commissioner Augustine Chihuri, Zimbabwe Republic Police, Police Headquarters, PO Box 8807, Causeway, Harare, Zimbabwe. Fax +263 4 253 212
Salutation: Dear Police Commissioner

VIETNAM

Farmers' union crushed

Five leading members of the newly formed United Workers-Farmers Organization (UWFO) have been arrested and remain in detention. It is not known if any of them have been charged with any offence. Independent trade unions are banned in Viet Nam.

The UWFO was formed in October 2006 to protect and promote workers' rights, ahead of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit held in the capital, Ha Noi, in November. At the summit leaders of the 21 APEC nations discussed economic, political and security challenges facing the region.

UWFO advocates for the right to form and participate in trade and labour unions, independent of

government interference. They also call for justice for people whose land and property have been unlawfully confiscated by government officials, and an end to exploitation of cheap labour and dangerous working conditions.

Tran Quoc Hien was arrested in January 2007 in Ho Chi Minh City, as soon as he publicly announced that he had been selected as spokesperson of the UWFO. He is detained in a prison in Ho Chi Minh City. Before his arrest he had signed his support for Bloc 8406, a movement calling for democracy and human rights which was launched in April 2006 with an Internet-based petition. Since then, the Bloc 8406 petition has been signed by around 2000 people throughout Viet Nam.

Founder members of the UWFO Nguyen Tan Hoanh, Tran Thi Le Hang, Doan Huy Chuong and his father Doan Van Dien were arrested just before the APEC summit began.

→ Please write, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of these five members of UWFO, arrested for exercising their legitimate right to peacefully participate in trade union activities.

Send appeals to: Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, Office of the Prime Minister, Hoang Hoa Tham, Ha Noi, Viet Nam. Fax (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs): +844 823 1872
Email (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs): banbientap@mofa.gov.vn
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

15 years with no justice for workers sacked in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Reportedly, more than 60,000 people in the Republika Srpska are still waiting for reparations after they were unfairly dismissed from their jobs during the 1992-95 war between Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim), Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Croat forces.

Among them were Bosniak and Bosnian Croat workers at the then state-owned Ljubija mines, who were ordered not to return to work via a radio announcement on 22 May 1992. At least 2,000 non-Serbs were dismissed from the mines solely on the basis of their ethnicity (see *the Wire* February 2006).

The mass sackings were followed by further persecution in which workers were killed by the Bosnian Serb Army while others were taken to concentration camps – one of which was at the Ljubija mines – and tortured. To this day, the Ljubija mines contain mass graves of those who were tortured and killed there.

Fifteen years on and little is on offer for those who survived and decided to come back. In the Republika Srpska (one of the two semi-autonomous entities which comprise Bosnia and Herzegovina), where the Ljubija mines are based, compensation proceedings have been unnecessarily delayed. Disturbingly, no financial allocation has been made to cover the cost of compensation claims in the entity's 2007 budget – an indication of the authorities' lack of commitment to those whose rights have been so callously violated.

Towards compensation

Compensation claims of workers unfairly dismissed from Aluminij Mostar, an aluminium manufacturing plant, have had greater success. Like so many others, non-Croat workers at the plant were sacked during the war because of their ethnicity. Thanks to campaigning by AI and others, some of Aluminij Mostar's foreign contractors have questioned the company about the dismissals and have entered into discussions about its anti-discrimination policy.

In August 2006, the company signed an agreement with the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, dealing with the issue of pre-war employment. According to the agreement, all workers listed as employed on 31 December 1991, who were later unfairly dismissed, could claim recognition of their working years if they registered before 14 October 2006. Recognition of working years has a direct impact on the amount of social benefits that the unemployed can claim.

According to Aluminij Mostar, it has received and is processing more than 3,000 claims from former employees. Media sources, however, put the figure at a more modest 500.

AI will continue to monitor the company closely to determine true figures and to support any further positive steps.

Meanwhile, the 15th anniversary of that fateful radio broadcast draws near. And tens of thousands of unfairly dismissed and unemployed workers in the Republika Srpska are still waiting for the authorities to recognize their plight and help them to re-build their lives.

ACT NOW! Go to www.amnesty.org/actnow and remind the Republika Srpska of its duty to the thousands who were sacked simply because of their ethnic background.

Afghans still suffering at hands of ousted Taliban

Suspected Taliban insurgents broke into a house in Kunar province in eastern Afghanistan killing two sisters who were teachers, along with three other relatives on 9 December 2006. The sisters had reportedly received a threatening letter from the Taliban warning them to stop teaching or "face the death penalty".

Targeting teachers is explicitly sanctioned by the *Laheya*, a Taliban military rule book. Rule 25 states that teachers who ignore warnings from the Taliban "must be beaten". Should they "continue to teach contrary to the principles of Islam, the [Taliban] district commander or group leader must kill him".

In the ongoing armed conflict in Afghanistan, the Taliban, the hardline Islamist group who were ousted from power following the US-led intervention in October 2001, demonstrate a scant regard for civilian life.

During the past two years the Taliban have singled out and killed Afghan civilians perceived as "spies" or "collaborators". Election candidates, teachers, health workers, government administrators and women's rights activists have all been targets for attack.

Indiscriminate attacks such as suicide bombings are a routine tactic of warfare used by the Taliban, causing deaths and injuries to scores of locals caught up in the incidents. Targeting civilians and indiscriminate attacks are prohibited under international humanitarian law and amount to war crimes.

The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission estimates that around 600 civilians were killed or injured between January and July 2006. About 70 per cent of these casualties were reportedly linked to Taliban attacks.

In the Taliban-controlled areas of Afghanistan, incidents of threats, killings and beatings have been reported. Locals from Zabul province told AI that Taliban insurgents threatened and beat villagers if they did not provide them with food, petrol, vehicles and other supplies. In Shahjou'i, the Taliban reportedly forced farmers to pay a tax either in money or in kind. If demands were refused, then locals faced the possibility of being beaten, shot or having their sons abducted.

"We came here to free ourselves from the *azaabs* (suffering). We did

not wish to join [the Taliban] and die for their money," said an Afghan man at a makeshift refugee camp in southern Afghanistan who fled his village when the Taliban arrived.

A worrying development is the use of "shadow" judicial bodies charged with dispensing Taliban "justice". Information about the proceedings is limited. Many individuals who come before such "courts" have been abducted by insurgents. Some have been "charged" with spying, others with murder and prostitution. In many cases, death sentences have been issued and carried out, with individuals being beheaded or shot.

In its report, *Afghanistan: All who are not friends, are enemies – Taliban abuses against civilians* (ASA 11/001/2007), AI recognizes that many Afghans oppose the continuing presence of foreign forces in their country, and that these forces themselves have committed grave violations.

However, abuses committed by one side of the conflict in Afghanistan cannot be justified by the abuses or poor conduct of the other. Ordinary Afghans – women, children and men – are tragically the main victims in the ongoing conflict.



Human rights defender killed as Somalia's conflict worsens

Isse Abdi Isse, aged 42, a well-known Somali human rights defender, was shot dead by unknown assailants on 14 March in the capital, Mogadishu. He was killed by a group of three men near a hotel where he was attending a conference on psycho-social support for children affected by civil war, drought and floods. AI condemns this murder which appears to have been carried out by an armed opposition group.

In the past few months, tens of thousands of civilians have fled the violence in Mogadishu which has escalated as the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) forces, and the Ethiopian army forces supporting them, try to regain control of the city from armed opposition groups. Journalists and other human rights defenders face harassment, arrests and threats from both the TFG and other groups. In February, Ali Mohamed Omar, a radio presenter for Radio Warsan, was gunned down in Mogadishu and several journalists were arrested and detained in March.

Isse Abdi Isse was a founder of KISIMA, a leading independent non-governmental organization based in the south-western port of Kismayu. Married with four children, he actively led KISIMA's advocacy work, in particular for the rights of internally displaced persons, women and minorities, as well as for peace-building and reconciliation.

He worked independently without any political or clan affiliation in conducting his human rights defence work, but had recently received threats from unidentified sources.

His tragic death highlights the increasing risk for human rights defenders working in the country. AI urges the authorities to investigate the killing of Isse Abdi Isse and bring the perpetrators to justice, and to provide protection for human rights defenders working for peace and justice in Somalia.

USA

Jailed for refusing to fight in Iraq

"[W]hat does it say of our nation when we kill innocent Iraqis in cold blood and torture prisoners?"

from Mark Wilkerson's application for conscientious objector status

Mark Wilkerson was sentenced to seven months' imprisonment for refusing to go on a second tour of duty in Iraq in 2005, by a US court martial in February. He was also discharged from the army for bad conduct for going absent without leave (AWOL). AI considers Mark Wilkerson to be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for his conscientious objection to participating in the war in Iraq.

When Mark Wilkerson was in Iraq from March 2003 to March 2004, he refused to return fire on a man who was shooting at him, because, he says, "there were so many people around him; I did not want to kill innocents."

Returning to the USA in March 2004, he immediately applied for conscientious objector status. While this was being processed, he learned that his unit would be returning to Iraq in January 2005. In November 2004, his application was

refused on the grounds that he did not present clear and convincing evidence that he was opposed to all wars. US army regulations stipulate that applicants for conscientious objector status must be opposed to war in any form.

He was told that an appeal could not be re-considered until his return from a second tour of duty in Iraq, more than a year later. At this point he decided he had no option but to go AWOL. He finally turned himself in to the military authorities in August 2006.

➔ Please write, calling for Mark Wilkerson's immediate and unconditional release, explaining that AI considers him to be a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for his conscientious objection to participating in war, and pointing out that he took reasonable steps to secure release from the army through applying for conscientious objector status.

Send appeals to: The Honorable Peter Geren, Acting Secretary of the Army, 102 Army Pentagon, Room 3E588, Washington DC 20310-0102, USA. Fax: +1 703 697 0720

Salutation: Dear Secretary



UPDATES

Iran

Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh and Shadi Sadr were released on bail on 19 March. They are likely to face trial in the future but it is not known if they have been formally charged. They were among 33 women detained during a peaceful protest in the capital, Tehran, on 4 March. (See *the Wire* March and April 2007.)

Morocco/Western Sahara

Two Sahrawi human rights defenders, Brahim Sabbar and Ahmed Sbai, were sentenced to one year in prison on 6 March. Charged with belonging to an unauthorized association and inciting violent protests against the Moroccan administration of Western Sahara, AI believes that they may be prisoners of conscience detained for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression and association.

Brahim Sabbar is the Secretary General of a Sahrawi human rights association which has been unable to register with the Moroccan authorities due to politically motivated administrative obstacles. (See *Worldwide Appeals* November 2006.)

Brahim Sabbar was previously sentenced in June to two years' imprisonment for assaulting and disobeying a police officer. His conviction appears to have been based

exclusively on the record of a police interview with him and he denies the accusation, maintaining that the police officers kicked and slapped him on arrest.

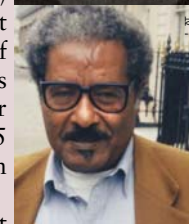
Ethiopia

AI welcomes the news that Serkalem Fasil (*top right*) and her partner Eskinder Negga have been released. Serkalem Fasil gave birth while in prison. (See *Worldwide Appeal* September 2006.)

The government arrested hundreds of opposition members and journalists after demonstrations in 2005 against alleged election fraud.

The judge ruled that 25 of those detained had no case to answer and should be released, and that the charges of high treason and genocide against the remaining defendants be dropped. Professor Mesfin Woldemariam (*pictured above*; see *Worldwide Appeal* March 2006) remains charged with "outrage against the constitution".

The court is scheduled to reconvene on 30 April. Please continue to send appeals on behalf of those still detained.



Disregard for basic rights in Belarus

"It is important for the people of Belarus to know that they are not alone, and to know that there is pressure on their government, which continues to ignore human rights," said Franak Vyachorka, a Belarusian human rights defender and opposition youth activist. He was speaking at the screening of a documentary at AIUK on 3 April on the occasion of the first anniversary of the presidential elections in Belarus. Joining him was the British playwright, Tom Stoppard, who spoke about the fundamental importance of freedom of expression.

The film, *A Lesson of Belorussian*, by Polish director Miroslaw Dembinski, centres on Franak Vyachorka whose father was imprisoned for running a school that taught in Belarusian. President Alyaksandr Lukashenka had previously banned Belarusian, making Russian the official language. Focusing on last year's elections the documentary shows how one political youth group, as well as civil society as a whole, face harassment, intimidation and obstruction in their everyday work. President Lukashenka declared an election "victory" of more than 80 per cent, prompting widespread international criticism. Lack of respect for the democratic electoral process, and the arbitrary and heavy-handed use of state power exposed a disregard for the basic rights to freedom of assembly, association and expression.

The mass demonstrations that followed the elections, when hundreds of thousands of Belarusian citizens took to the streets in harsh, freezing conditions, were violently broken up by the security forces. Hundreds were imprisoned. Many civil society activists continue to be harassed. Zmitser Dashkevich, leader of a youth opposition movement, is serving 18 months following a flagrantly unfair trial. He was accused of "organizing or participating in an activity of an unregistered non-governmental organization". (See *Worldwide Appeal* January 2007.)

After the screening, Franak Vyachorka spoke of the hope created by the demonstrations, observing that Belarusians were overcoming their fear and increasingly understanding the value of democracy, independence and freedom.

As Tom Stoppard remarked, "Freedom of expression is the fundamental freedom. You can't work towards other freedoms unless you have the freedom to express an opinion and express it out loud. Everything flows from the sense of being free to speak and to meet."



Writing about Belarus in an article in the *Times* to accompany the film screening, Tom Stoppard compared the country with the former USSR saying: "...one corner of the former Soviet Union is stuck in a time warp. Here you will find the last KGB of the old empire, the last collective farms and the last dictator in Europe, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka."

MAKE SOME NOISE!

Call for the release of prisoner of conscience, Zmitser Dashkevich now!

Join AI's campaign at <http://noise.amnesty.org/belarus>



Oppressive conditions intensify at Guantánamo

In March, after more than five years in Guantánamo, Australian national David Hicks (*right*) pleaded guilty to one specification under the charge of "providing material support for terrorism". His plea came three months after he was transferred to Camp 6, a new detention facility at the US naval base in Cuba.



Over one third of the Guantánamo detainee population - 165 men - are currently held at Camp 6. Described by the US authorities as a "state of the art modern facility", the camp provides even harsher conditions of extreme isolation and sensory deprivation than other parts of the detention centre.

Detainees in Camp 6 are reportedly confined for a minimum of 22 hours a day in individual, steel cells with no natural light and virtually no human contact. One detainee described the camp as a "dungeon above the ground". Concerns remain over the impact such severe isolation is having on the mental and physical health of inmates.

Lawyers visiting David Hicks in January 2007 described their shock at how much he had changed after just one month at Camp 6. Chained to the floor in the visitation room, he reportedly had aged dramatically, was hollow-eyed and dishevelled. He was extremely despondent and had difficulty in communicating. His lawyers said he was suffering the effects of prolonged isolation and a lack of privacy, being forced to use the toilet in his cell in full view of the guards.

David Hicks is the first Guantánamo detainee to be convicted by military commission under the Military Commissions Act of 2006. He was

sentenced to seven years, all but nine months of which were suspended, and was due to be returned to Australia within 60 days.

The authorities have suggested that up to 75 detainees could eventually be tried by military commission. AI is deeply concerned that any such trials will fail to comply with international standards and that defendants could face execution.

Join AI's call to close Guantánamo at www.amnesty.org/stoptorture



Life-size replica of a Guantánamo Bay prison cell which will tour Australia for several months, pictured here at Martin Place, Sydney. Outside the cell visitors were asked to sign an electronic petition for David Hicks to be brought home.



Human rights monitors for Sri Lanka now!

Students at Joseph School, Kathmandu, Nepal (*below*) and renowned Australian fast-bowler, Brett Lee (*right*), add their names to AI's *Play by the Rules* campaign. AI is calling on the Sri Lankan government and armed groups to allow independent human rights monitors into the country. Hundreds of thousands of people continue to be displaced, killed and abducted with impunity by all parties to Sri Lanka's decades-long conflict.



AI calls for equal rights for domestic workers

Postcards produced by AI in partnership with a local NGO network, Jala PRT, are distributed for people to send to their government during a public demonstration in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The postcards call for the current draft of legislation on domestic workers to be amended to safeguard this vulnerable group's basic rights as workers. They call on the government to end the exploitation, violence and inhuman working conditions many have to endure.

Ensuring an effective European Court of Human Rights

The ability of the European Court of Human Rights (the Court) to issue judgments promptly is being impeded by a huge backlog of pending cases and limited resources.

The Council of Europe mandated a "Group of Wise Persons" (GWP) to draw up a strategy to ensure the long-term effectiveness of the Court. The GWP published its recommendations in November 2006 thus re-opening discussions on reform of the Court. AI, together with non-governmental organization (NGO) partners, published comments on the GWP report.

AI agrees that changes are needed but is concerned that the new reform process may lead to further erosion of the right of individuals (who submit complaints directly to the Court) to obtain a binding judgment on whether their rights under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) have been violated.

Previous discussions of reform, from 2000-2004, resulted in the adoption of Protocol 14 to the ECHR aimed at streamlining the Court's work. Although Protocol 14 contains some welcome changes, an amendment to the current admissibility criteria means that the Court will likely provide redress on fewer cases than it does now.

In March, AI and NGO partners participated in a discussion on the GWP report hosted by the Council of Europe, with international experts and government representatives. AI is calling on Council of Europe member states to ensure that individuals maintain their unique right to petition the Court in this new reform process and to consult with civil society before deciding on further reform to the Court.

AI considers that applicants to the Court have an equal interest to that of states in the long-term effectiveness of this unique institution for the protection of human rights.

See *Council of Europe: Ensuring the long-term effectiveness of the European Court of Human Rights - NGO Comments on the Group of Wise Persons' Report* (IOR 61/002/2007).

Poverty is a violation of human dignity

As we near the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the aspiration of a world free from want as well as fear is unrealized for millions of people living in poverty. Poverty is the denial of access to the resources, capability, security and power that people need to secure their right to live with dignity.

Behind the bald statistics of poverty are individual and usually untold stories of discrimination and abuse by governments and others in power. Those responsible for human rights violations that drive poverty are not held accountable, and those affected are denied the knowledge and power to shape their future.

AI is preparing a global Campaign for Human Dignity demanding that those who violate the human rights of people in poverty are held accountable for their actions. AI will also promote equal access to rights for people living in poverty as well as their right to information, freedom of expression and to defend their own rights.

To achieve these goals we will highlight cases of human rights violations that drive poverty, including forced evictions, the denial of Indigenous peoples' land rights, and violations related to maternal health and HIV/AIDS.

These issues are not new to AI. For at least 15 years, we have highlighted human rights violations associated with the denial of Indigenous peoples' rights in the Americas (see *the Wire* May 2005). In the last four years, we have campaigned against forced evictions in Africa, from Angola to Zimbabwe (see *the Wire* October 2006). And in our first research project on human rights and maternal mortality, AI is campaigning for the right to health of poor, rural and Indigenous women in Peru (see *Peru: Denial of the right to maternal and child health* (AMR 46/004/2007, AMR 46/005/2007, AMR 46/006/2007 and AMR 46/007/2007), a set of information sheets launched on 28 May, the International Day of Action for Women's Health; and *the Wire* September 2006).

See *Amnesty International's global campaign for human dignity* (ACT 35/003/2007) at web.amnesty.org/pages/poverty-index-eng

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