

Police practice and human rights in southern and eastern Africa

AI launches a campaign to stop abuses and to strengthen police accountability in the Southern African Development Community

Human rights are under attack every day in countries in southern and eastern Africa. Police torture and ill-treat criminal suspects and political activists as a consequence of political manipulation, corruption or the pressure to deal harshly with rising levels of crime. They use excessive and unjustified lethal force to suppress peaceful protest, and arbitrarily detain government opponents. Positive examples of “community policing” show that cooperation between local communities and police can be effective in helping to combat crime. In countries such as Botswana, Malawi and South Africa, local human rights and community-based organizations have played a vital role, contributing expertise and training. Such groups have worked with the police to improve services to victims of crime, particularly women and children. They have developed partnerships to fight crime with careful intelligence and by lawful methods. Regional police chiefs have taken the lead in promoting professional policing through training in ethical and human rights standards.

Yet such efforts will fail unless accompanied both by effective systems of accountability and by training in human rights and professional skills at the national level.

These are among the conclusions of an AI report issued in July. AI members will campaign jointly with other human rights organizations for greater police effectiveness and accountability in the region of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), an intergovernmental organization.

In many countries officials and officers responsible for abuses are accountable to no one. This campaign calls on states to set up independent mechanisms to investigate police abuses, in order to break the cycle of impunity, and to encourage best practice and professional standards.

Laws that facilitate human rights violations, particularly those which allow police officers to use excessive force or to detain people incommunicado, should be reformed. Governments and police authorities need to integrate training on human rights with professional police training in operational skills.

Urgent attention is also needed to address the widespread problems of partisan policing. Several of the countries in the region have flagrantly violated the internationally recognized requirement that police conduct their duties impartially. The rights of vulnerable communities and the political opposition have been violated in countries including Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland and Tanzania.

In Zimbabwe in the past two years police have been directly involved in the torture, ill-treatment and arbitrary arrest of members of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Officers have been complicit in widespread acts of violence, arson and rape by state-sponsored militia against MDC supporters. Redressing this situation is a serious challenge to the authority and integrity of SADC and regional police chiefs.

Heightened public concern over violent crime has pushed governments and police authorities to combat crime by “all means necessary”, particularly where police officers themselves have become victims of armed criminals. In countries including Angola, Mozambique, South Africa and Zambia, this has led to criminal suspects being tortured or killed. The violent activities of some anti-crime vigilante groups in countries such as Malawi and Tanzania have contributed to an atmosphere of crisis.

Police in South Africa face the pressure to respond ruthlessly to crime while still dealing with the legacy of apartheid. However, in a significant ruling on the use of force on 21 May 2002, the Constitutional Court affirmed police officers’ right to self-defence but made it clear that the state should never allow excessive force and should uphold human rights for everyone, including suspected criminals.

These principles apply elsewhere. All governments in the region need to display greater political will in seeking solutions to violent crime that are consistent with human rights. They should encourage the

public to accept that real solutions lie in improving the ability of the police to investigate crime lawfully and effectively and in cooperation with affected communities.

AI is calling upon governments and police chiefs to ensure that respect for human rights is the guiding principle and that measures to improve the efficiency of the police are also measures which promote respect for human rights.

See *Policing to protect human rights: A survey of police practice in countries of the Southern African Development Community, 1997-2002* (AI Index: AFR 03/004/2002). The countries included in this report are Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, all SADC member states.

‘Disappearances’ still take place in Mexico

Two young men are arrested on a city street — blindfolded, handcuffed and driven away. Their relatives never see them again, cannot find out from the authorities what has happened to them, and live with the agony of not knowing whether they are alive or dead. Such “disappearances” from custody in Mexico have been documented by AI for more than 30 years.

While the number of cases of “disappearance” has declined in recent years and the majority are no longer politically motivated, “disappearances” are still taking place despite government changes and promises to end the practice.

Alejandro Martínez Dueñas, a mechanic, and José de Jesús González Medina, a driver, were arrested without warrant on 30 June 2001 in the city of Colima. Several witnesses said that men in uniform, apparently with police badges, had been in the area before the arrest.

Over the following months, relatives visited numerous state and federal institutions, vainly seeking information. The case was sub-mitted to the National Commission for Human Rights (CNDH) in July 2001. Initially, relatives were reportedly informed by the authorities that the two men were in the custody of the Attorney General’s Office in Guadalajara. Later they were told that the men were not in custody, and their whereabouts remain unknown.

Since December 2000, AI has gathered detailed evidence on at least four people who “disappeared” following detention by federal and state police. The true number of “disappearances” is undoubtedly much higher; often members of marginalized communities are too afraid of reprisals to pursue investigations.

President Vicente Fox Quesada came to office pledging to end the impunity that characterized much of the previous 70-year rule of the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party). Before taking office, he promised to set up a Truth Commission to examine past human rights violations. Instead, following the publication in November 2001 of a report on “disappearances” by the CNDH, he ordered the creation of a Special Prosecutor’s Office to investigate these crimes. The decision to appoint a Special Prosecutor, rather than a Truth Commission, will be seen as successful only if investigations result in both truth and justice.

Mexico ratified the Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons in December 2001, but entered a reservation with the effect that cases of “disappearance” involving military agents would continue to be heard in military tribunals. These have consistently provided impunity for members of the armed forces accused of human rights violations. In addition, punishment for those involved in “disappearances” would only apply in cases that occurred after the Convention came into force.

The institutions responsible for securing justice and protecting human rights continue to fail in their fundamental duties. Only the determination of relatives with the aid of human rights organizations keeps the issue of the “disappeared” on the agenda.

Police in Belarus stifle peaceful protests

Thirteen journalists were detained by police in the Belarusian city of Grodno, on the country’s western border with Poland, on 5 April. The journalists had staged a peaceful protest against the impending trial of two colleagues from the independent newspaper, Pagonia, who face up to five years’

imprisonment on charges of slandering President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. Six of the detained journalists were sentenced to prison terms of between three and 10 days. AI considered them to be prisoners of conscience.

The government has a virtual mono-poly over the printed and electronic news media and meaningful displays of peaceful protest are frequently refused by the authorities, particularly in centrally located urban areas. There are therefore few alternatives for people to voice their disquiet about their government other than to participate in unsanctioned protests. The Belarusian authorities' reaction to such collective displays of peaceful dissent has been harsh.

Exactly two weeks after clamping down on the peaceful protests of the journalists in Grodno, between 85 and 100 peaceful protestors were detained during a demonstration in the capital, Minsk. The demonstrators were protesting about the country's poor human rights record, falling living standards and failed election promises. The scale of the 19 April detentions and the brutality reportedly used by police officers resulted in a significant amount of adverse media coverage abroad. On 22 April 2002 courts in Minsk sentenced 33 people to periods of imprisonment of between three and 15 days. Many of these prisoners of conscience served their sentences at the notorious Okrestina Special Detention and Distribution Centre in Minsk, where conditions of detention were recently the subject of an inquiry by the UN Special Rapporteur on torture.

These two disturbing episodes have been anything but isolated incidents in Belarus this year. In the first four months of 2002, AI documented six different occasions in which people were deprived of their liberty as a result of peacefully expressing their concerns and frustrations with the government. More than 200 people were detained and at least 51 people subsequently imprisoned.

In other instances, when peaceful protesters escaped imprisonment, they were fined the equivalent of several hundred US dollars, which many could ill afford to pay. The number of people deprived of their liberty in 2002 gives serious cause for concern. There is an ever increasing tendency on the part of the Belarusian authorities to use repressive measures to stifle peaceful protest and little reason to believe that they are seriously taking steps to address widely held concerns about their overall human rights record.

For further information see AI's report, *Trodden Underfoot: Peaceful Protest in Belarus* (AI Index: EUR 49/008/2002) May 2002.

Political violence in Madagascar

The people of Madagascar have suffered unprecedented political violence and rapidly rising levels of poverty as a result of a ruinous power struggle. Marc Ravalomanana, mayor of the capital, Antananarivo, was officially declared President on 6 May after a court-ordered recount of the votes cast in Presidential elections in December 2001. Didier Ratsiraka, Madagascar's ruler for 23 years, refused to stand aside. From his coastal stronghold, the port city of Toamasina, his supporters blockaded the capital, creating shortages of food and fuel, and disrupting the island's trade. Didier Ratsiraka set up his own government in Toamasina, with the backing of four regional governors who declared independence from the capital.

The outside world has largely ignored the major human rights violations which have been committed during the political stand off. People have been murdered, tortured, raped and arbitrarily detained. Many have suffered death threats and intimidation, and the population in the "independent provinces" is subject to increasing restrictions on their freedom of association, assembly, expression and movement.

Supporters of Marc Ravalomanana have faced severe repression in the four provinces backing the outgoing President. At least one person was killed and several tortured after being arrested by militia loyal to Didier Ratsiraka. Many people fled into the bush or went into hiding. The news media are heavily censored and independent journalists face intimidation.

At least three suspected Ravalomanana supporters are detained in Toamasina and four in Toliara. Some have been charged with serious offences against the state, others are detained without charge. Nineteen political prisoners were detained in Antsiranana until mid-May and some of them may have

“disappeared”. Ten people were reportedly arrested near Toamasina in June, apparently in reaction to the arrest on 27 May of Tantely Andrianaverino, Didier Ratsiraka’s Prime Minister, by the Ravalomanana government. His status is unclear — no charges have been brought against him. Human rights abuses have been committed by both sides with impunity. Gaby Ratjaonarivelo, a suspected Ratsiraka supporter, died in custody from head injuries the day after being arrested on 9 April by pro-Ravalomanana security forces in Antananarivo. No autopsy or investigation was conducted into his death.

On 5 June, the army under the control of Marc Ravalomanana attacked Sambava, a strategic town in the northeastern province of Antsiranana. An estimated 17 people died in fighting between the army and soldiers loyal to Didier Ratsiraka. Reports that pro-Ratsiraka television, radio stations and tracts are inciting ethnic hatred in Toamasina fuel fears that Madagascar is on the brink of a civil war.

AI is calling on Didier Ratsiraka to publicly condemn the grave human rights abuses that have reportedly been committed by his supporters. All perpetrators of such abuses should be brought to justice. AI is also calling for detained supporters of Marc Ravalomanana to be released or charged with a recognizable criminal offence and promptly and fairly tried.

AI is also calling on Marc Ravalomanana to tell his supporters and security forces that human rights violations will not be tolerated. AI is asking him to order an independent investigation into the death of Gaby Ratjaonarivelo and to clarify the status of Tantely Andrianaverino.

Human rights still denied in Cuba despite fitful progress

Human rights violations continue in Cuba despite some improvements. There are fewer prisoners of conscience, and no executions have been carried out since 1999. However, dissidents are still imprisoned and harassed and about 50 people are on death row. The 40-year-old embargo against Cuba by the USA continues to contribute to a climate in which fundamental human rights are denied. Prisoners of conscience

Although the number of prisoners of conscience in Cuba has decreased significantly over recent years, dissidents are still targeted both by state officials and government supporters. There are at least six prisoners of conscience, such as the journalist Bernardo Arévalo Padrón who was found guilty of “disrespect” and sentenced to six years imprisonment for accusing President Fidel Castro and Vice-President Carlos Lage of lying in an interview given to a US radio station.

Harassment

There appears to be a shift from long-term prison sentences to other forms of punishment and harassment such as short-term detentions, house searches, evictions, loss of employment and restrictions on travel.

This harassment is used not just against specific individuals but to suppress larger protests and pro-change movements. For example, people attempting to collect signatures for the *Proyecto Varela* petition have been subject to threats, short-term detention and confiscation of materials by State Security agents. The *Proyecto Varela* petition calls for a referendum on legal reform, and has reportedly collected more than the 10,000 voters’ signatures required to introduce the subject before the National Assembly.

Death penalty

An unofficial moratorium has been declared on executions. However, legislation allowing the use of the death penalty is still in place and some 50 people are still on death row.

Death row prisoners have at times been subjected to extremely poor conditions. One letter from a death row prisoner says he was confined in a windowless cell, with no toilet or running water, and was denied the right to go outside for months at a time. In July 2000, non-governmental sources in Cuba reported that one death row prisoner had been held for 18 months in solitary confinement in a closed cell where temperatures often reached 32 degrees centigrade.

For further information see AI’s report, *Cuba: The situation of human rights in Cuba* (AI Index: AMR 25/002/2002).

Worldwide appeals

Algeria

Human rights activists intimidated

Human rights defender Abderrahmane Khelil and his friend Sid Ahmed Mourad were each sentenced to a six-month suspended prison term by an Algiers court on 26 May. They were convicted on the vague charge of “inciting an unarmed gathering” when they were carrying out routine fact-finding into presumed arbitrary arrests at an Algiers university. The arrests followed demonstrations organized to protest against the visit of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika to the university campus, during which stones were thrown at the presidential motorcade. Their lawyers will appeal against the judgement. The verdict is the latest in a series of measures aimed at intimidating human rights activists in Algeria and preventing them from carrying out their work. The clamp-down comes as human rights activists in Algeria investigate the circumstances surrounding the arrest, detention and trials of dozens of people in the context of ongoing anti-government demonstrations.

These obstructive measures are particularly serious in light of the continuing human rights crisis in Algeria. The Algerian authorities have made no significant progress in establishing the truth about killings, “disappearances”, torture and other grave human rights violations that have been committed during the past decade.

The Algerian authorities continue to send a clear signal of their determination to curtail the activities of the country’s human rights community.

Please write, calling for the convictions of Abderrahmane Khelil and Sid Ahmed Mourad to be overturned and for all human rights activists in Algeria to be allowed to carry out their work without hindrance.

Send appeals to: M. Ahmed Ouyahia, Ministre de la Justice, Ministère de la Justice, 8 Place Bir Hakem, El Biar, Alger, Algeria. Fax: + 213 21 92 21 95, telex: 61498.

Germany

Death of detainee in police custody

Stefan Neisius died allegedly as a result of being ferociously beaten by several police officers from Cologne’s First Police Inspectorate on 11 May. He was taken to Eigelstein police station after a domestic argument with his mother earlier the same evening. He was later admitted to hospital the same day where he fell into a coma, from which he never recovered. He died on the morning of 24 May after spending 13 days on a life support system.

This death in police custody became a major scandal after it emerged that two police officers at Eigelstein police station informed a superior officer that they had witnessed colleagues ill-treating Stefan Neisius. They stated that they saw five or six police officers surrounding him, as he lay handcuffed on the floor of the police station, repeatedly kicking him in the head, body, arms and legs. Three or four police officers were then alleged to have grabbed hold of his legs and dragged him down a corridor into a police cell, where they allegedly continued to hit and kick him as he lay on the floor of the cell.

Six police officers were suspended from service, shortly after the allegations of torture came to light, on suspicion of having physically assaulted Stefan Neisius. According to a statement made on 24 May by Cologne’s Police President Klaus Steffenhagen, a special investigative commission has been established under the guidance of Cologne’s Public Prosecutor’s Office to examine the circumstances surrounding Stefan Neisius’ death.

Please write, expressing concern about the allegations that Stefan Neisius was tortured in custody and about his death in disputed circumstances. Call for the above allegations to be promptly, thoroughly and impartially investigated and for those responsible to be brought to justice.

Send appeals to: Dr Fritz Behrens, Minister of the Interior of North Rhine-Westphalia, Haroldstr. 5, D-40213 Düsseldorf, Germany. Fax: +49 211 871 - 3355.

USA

Two child offenders to be executed

Two young African American men, TJ Jones and Toronto Patterson (above), are scheduled to be put to death in Texas in August for murders committed when they were 17 years old. They would not be facing this punishment in almost any other country in the world.

In recognition of the immaturity of young people and their capacity for rehabilitation, there is an unequivocal international legal ban on the use of the death penalty against child offenders, people who were under 18 at the time of the crime.

There are currently around 80 child offenders on death row in the USA, 30 in Texas. Since January 1993, 14 child offenders have been executed in the USA — eight of them in Texas. In the same period, AI has documented only eight such executions in the rest of the world combined — three in Iran, two in Pakistan, one in Nigeria, one in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and one in Yemen. Yemen has since abolished such use of the death penalty. In 2001, the President of Pakistan announced that he would commute the death sentences of all child offenders on death row in his country. China, which accounts for the majority of the world's judicial executions, in 1997 nevertheless abolished the use of the death penalty against child offenders.

TJ Jones, now 25, is due to be put to death on 8 August. Toronto Patterson, now 24, is scheduled to be executed on 28 August.

Please write, expressing deep concern that the state of Texas is the world's leading perpetrator of this universally condemned human rights violation and urging the Governor to do all in his influence and power to prevent the executions of TJ Jones and Toronto Patterson.

Send appeals to: Governor Rick Perry, PO Box 12428, Austin, Texas 78711, USA. Fax: + 1 512 463 1932 or +1 512 463 1849.

Updates

Ethiopia

Dr Taye Wolde-Semayat, secretary general of the Ethiopian Teachers Association and a former political science lecturer, was released from prison in Addis Ababa on 14 May. This followed the Appeal Court's reduction of his 15-year jail sentence for "armed conspiracy" to five years on a lesser charge. He had already served six years.

AI considered him a prisoner of conscience convicted in an unfair trial. He has thanked AI and international teachers' unions for their efforts in campaigning for his release.

Liberia

Morris Johnson is the name of the second student who was shot dead, with John Kpannah, by police in Gbarnga, Bong County, central Liberia, in December 2001.

The local police chief has been charged with murder and preliminary court hearings in relation to the two deaths began in April. Please continue to send appeals – see Worldwide Appeals March 2002.

Sweden

"I have been partially vindicated by the authorities' admission that the actions by the police, the public prosecutors and the medical examiners were wrong. But I will never be fully compensated until those responsible for my son's death have been punished, and proper changes in law are enacted so as to prevent other mothers' sons being killed and stop the authorities from obstructing justice."

These are the words of the mother of Osmo Vallo, who died in police custody in Sweden in 1995. Seven years after the death of Osmo Vallo, no one has been held accountable for his treatment, despite a report by a Commission of Inquiry which reviewed the investigation of his death.

News in brief

Europe adopts Protocol No. 13

In February the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers adopted Protocol No. 13 to the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. This treaty is the first legally binding

European treaty to abolish the death penalty at all times and in all circumstances. It is an important step towards making the Council of Europe a totally death penalty-free zone. Protocol No. 13 opened for signature in May 2002 and was signed by 36 states and ratified by three other states. It will enter into force once 10 states have ratified it.

Commission of Inquiry in Zanzibar

AI was given a welcome opportunity recently to present its findings and recommendations to the Commission of Inquiry which is investigating human rights violations committed during January 2001 demonstrations against election irregularities in Tanzania. The Commission is due to present its report to President Benjamin Mkapa in July. AI is urging that the report be made public without delay.

AI appeals to EU leaders

AI has appealed to European Union (EU) leaders to balance immigration measures with respect for internationally agreed human rights standards. AI pointed to a clear trend in a number of European countries for laws and practices to make it impossible for refugees to lodge their asylum claims.

Backlash against protesters in the Middle East and North Africa

Protests against Israeli incursions into Palestinian towns and refugee camps have taken place in cities across North Africa and the Middle East. The authorities in many countries have suppressed these protests violently.

AI calls on all governments in the region to respect human rights, including the rights to freedom of expression and association, when dealing with demonstrations.

AI's message is that any solution to the crisis facing Israelis and Palestinians must have human rights at its heart. (For more information about AI's response to the human rights crisis in Israel and the Occupied Territories, see AI's website <www.amnesty.org>).

Since February the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) have repeatedly entered and occupied Palestinian refugee camps and other residential areas in order "to destroy the terrorist infrastructure". Areas occupied have been declared closed military areas and placed under tight curfews. The IDF has denied access to ambulances, medical or humanitarian aid, journalists and other outsiders.

Scores of Palestinian bystanders appear to have been unlawfully killed. Many Palestinian homes have been demolished, apparently as a collective punishment. IDF soldiers have destroyed not only homes, but also the offices of Palestinian Authority institutions and of non-governmental organizations.

Thousands of Palestinians have been rounded up and arbitrarily detained; in two months the number of Palestinians held in administrative detention without charge or trial rose from under 100 to nearly 1,000.

In Bahrain thousands of people took to the streets in widespread anti-US and anti-Israel demonstrations during April. In al-Manama, the capital, demonstrators attacked the US embassy with stones and petrol bombs. Security forces reportedly used tear gas and rubber bullets to break up the demonstrations and hundreds of protesters were said to have been admitted to hospital for treatment. A 24-year-old student, Mohammad Juma'a, died reportedly after he was hit by a rubber bullet, and a human rights activist was severely beaten when he intervened to stop security forces beating a demonstrator.

Frequent demonstrations have taken place in cities around Egypt, particularly on university campuses, since the end of March. Demonstrators and security forces have clashed on a number of occasions. A demonstration in Alexandria University on 9 April resulted in the death of a 19-year-old university student, Muhammad 'Ali al-Sayid al-Saqqa, reportedly caused by buckshot fired by the security forces. Scores of others, including police officers, were injured. The demonstration was attended by thousands of students protesting against US policy in the Middle East.

In Jordan six members of the unauthorized *Hizb al-Tahrir*, Islamic Liberation Party, were arrested after submitting a memorandum to the government calling for Jordanian troops to defend Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. The memorandum was reportedly signed by 4,000 people.

In Saudi Arabia, although public demonstrations are not permitted under any circumstances, protests against Israel's military actions took place in several different cities in early April.

Hundreds of demonstrators were reportedly arrested; both the number and the conditions of their detention are secret. According to unconfirmed reports, government forces fired plastic bullets at demonstrators and beat women and children during demonstrations on 18 April in the cities of Safwa and al-Qatif.

In recent months a wave of demonstrations in solidarity with the Palestinian people has taken place across Tunisia. There were numerous reports of police using physical violence to disperse demonstrators and of multiple arrests.

On 1 May another pro-Palestinian demonstration in Tunis was violently dispersed by the security forces. Several journalists were injured.

On 11 April a gas-loaded truck exploded outside the synagogue of Ghrifa on the island of Jerba, leaving at least 18 people dead. Responsibility for the attack has not yet been established. At least one person has been arrested in Tunisia.

In March and April thousands of people took to the street in different parts of Yemen to demonstrate against Israel's attacks on Palestinian cities, villages and refugee camps. On occasion, demonstrations outside US and UK diplomatic missions were dispersed by police firing in the air and using tear gas which resulted in several people being injured.

Shot dead by soldiers in the Philippines

Benjaline Hernandez and two of her companions were shot at close range as they lay on the ground pleading for their lives, according to eyewitness accounts. A third man tried to run away and was killed. She and her three companions were about to eat lunch inside a hut when members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the CAGU (Citizens Armed Force Geographical Unit) militia opened fire on the building, forcing the occupants to flee outside where they were killed. Local residents who later inspected the bodies reported that Benjaline Hernandez' skull had been crushed and that her face was badly disfigured by bullet wounds. A photograph of her corpse shows her arms raised as if trying to protect herself. She was shot dead while visiting a village in the Arakan valley to research the impact of the peace process on the local community and to investigate reports of killings of civilians. Three local residents were accompanying her – Crisanto Amora, Vivian Andrade and Labaon Sinunday – and were also killed.

Benjaline Hernandez was the 22-year-old Deputy Secretary General of the Southern Mindanao office of the human rights organization *Karapatan* and also the editor of a student newspaper. Military officials have claimed that she was a rebel of the New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines. They claim she was killed in the course of a firefight between rebels and militia. However, AI believes she was summarily executed and was targeted as a result of her legitimate work in defence of human rights. This concern is heightened by recent statements by high-ranking military officials that members of *Karapatan* and other lawful groups critical of the government have close links to the NPA. Individuals who are publicly portrayed as active NPA sympathizers risk being viewed by the military as legitimate targets of counter-insurgency operations against armed communist rebels in the provinces. This makes them highly vulnerable to grave human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings and "disappearances".

AI is calling for immediate, impartial investigations into the killing of Benjaline Hernandez and her companions and for those responsible to be brought to justice without delay. AI has also written to the government of the Philippines expressing concern about recent killings and "disappearances" of members of the opposition party *Bayan Muna*. At least seven party organizers, including a family of three, have been killed since March. The whereabouts of four others who were abducted in February and subsequently "disappeared" remain unknown.

A safe haven for women

For women in Pakistan who are abused by family members, help is hard to find. All too often the state ignores their plight.

Shazia R.'s father arranged a forced marriage for her with a man more than twice her age. When 21-year-old Shazia refused to marry this man, her father beat her severely. Fearing that he would attempt to kill her, she ran away.

She found refuge at Panah, a women's refuge in Karachi set up with donations from several AI sections. Shazia has been staying at the shelter for two months and is extremely happy that she has been able to find safety. With the support of the shelter employees, Shazia completed her university degree, took a three-month course in computers and is taking a management course in Lahore. She has been offered a job with a non-governmental organization (NGO) which will enable her to support herself.

Panah was officially opened by AI Secretary General Irene Khan in December 2001. Panah provides temporary shelter for women where they are safe from abuse. The shelter has been welcomed by local NGOs, who have been able to refer women there knowing that they will be housed and well looked after for up to six months. The shelter is clean, welcoming, and secure, providing a safe environment for women whose human rights have been violated. In its first three months, 12 women sought refuge at the Panah shelter, three of whom were less than 18 years old.