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In 2002 Amnesty International (AI) learned of the release of many prisoners of conscience, commutations of death sentences and improvements in the situation of many other victims of human rights abuse. Countless other people are still in need of our help.

AFRICA

Equatorial Guinea

Fabián Nsué Nguema Obono was released from prison on 16 October under the terms of an amnesty to commemorate Equatorial Guinea's independence. A lawyer and opposition politician, he was arrested following the publication on the internet of a communiqué critical of the government. While in prison he was reportedly tortured severely on several occasions, sustaining broken wrists. On his release Fabián Nsué Nguema Obono thanked AI and said that while in prison he was aware of AI's work on his behalf and believes that it contributed to his release.

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

Hassan Bility, a journalist with The Analyst newspaper, who was held incommunicado and without charge or trial following his arrest on 24 June 2002, was finally released by the Liberian government and handed over to United States embassy officials on 7 December. He had been accused of supporting the armed opposition Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD). The authorities initially threatened to try him under military jurisdiction. He was tortured, denied access to defence lawyers and was not brought before any court, despite several writs of *habeas corpus* submitted on his behalf. Following months of national and international pressure, Hassan Bility was released and flown out of the country to Ghana and thereafter to the United States.

Togo

Opposition leader Yawovi Agboyibo was freed after a six-month jail sentence. President Eyadéma said he was releasing Yawovi Agboyibo as a "gesture of appeasement". The opposition leader, jailed for six months in August for libelling the Prime Minister, was kept in prison as new accusations of criminal conspiracy were brought against him. Opposition parties refused dialogue with the government until he was freed. The deadlock helped lead to a postponement of a parliamentary election due in March.

AMERICAS

Argentina

A federal judge ordered the preventive detention of former general Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri and 25 former members of the armed forces and ordered their assets to be frozen. They were accused of responsibility for the kidnapping, illegal detention, torture, "disappearance" and murder of 20 members of the Montoneros armed group in 1978 and 1980. In his ruling, Judge Claudio Bonadio stated that the Full Stop and Due Obedience Laws - two laws which obstructed judicial investigations into thousands of "disappearances" in the late 1970s and early 1980s -- were unconstitutional and void. A final ruling on these two laws by the Supreme Court was pending at the end of 2002

Argentina

In October, the US-German car maker DaimlerChrysler set up a commission to examine the conduct of Mercedes-Benz and its officials in Argentina between 1975 and 1978. The commission was expected to investigate the "disappearance" of about 14 workers from the Mercedes-Benz factory - now owned by DaimlerChrysler - at Gonzalez Catán, Buenos Aires Province, in 1976 and 1977.

Guatemala

AI's campaigning helped bring about the appointment of a special prosecutor to investigate attacks against human rights defenders in Guatemala, and as a result of several years of lobbying, a Special Unit for Human Rights Defenders was set up within the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights.

Mexico

General José Francisco Gallardo, a prisoner of conscience detained for more than eight years, was released in February after President Vicente Fox ordered that his sentence be reduced to time served. He was arrested in 1993 in connection with the publication of an article in which he accused Mexico's armed forces of human rights violations and called for the appointment of a military ombudsman. AI members have campaigned for his release over many years and it is this ongoing pressure on the authorities that has contributed to securing his release. General Gallardo's family have expressed their gratitude for all our help: "We are all very happy that our father has been released and we are profoundly grateful to Amnesty International. Without your support my father's release would not have been possible."

Peru

There was progress in the fight against impunity, as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission -- set up in 2001 to establish the circumstances surrounding human rights violations committed by the state

and abuses committed by armed opposition groups between May 1980 and November 2000 - held seven public hearings.

Uruguay

A former Minister of Foreign Affairs was charged with the unlawful imprisonment of Elena Quinteros Almeida who "disappeared" in 1976 after having been forcibly taken from the Venezuelan Embassy where she had taken refuge. This was the first time anyone had been detained for human rights violations committed during military rule.

ASIA

Bangladesh

Bahauddin Nasim and Dr Mohiuddin Alamgir, senior members of Bangladesh's main opposition party the Awami League, had been detained in 2002. Bahauddin Nasim was released on bail on 6 January after the High Court declared his detention illegal. Dr Mohiuddin Alamgir was released on bail on 18 September 2002. There were credible reports that both were tortured while in custody.

China

Xu Wenli, a prisoner of conscience, was released early on medical parole on 24 December 2002. Xu Wenli's health had deteriorated during his detention and he was suffering from hepatitis. Xu Wenli had been sentenced to 13 years' imprisonment. He was one of China's most prominent dissidents and one of the founders of the banned China Democracy Party. In a letter to a US Amnesty group who had worked for his release, Xu Wenli said "all thanks to your efforts, I have reached the other side of the Pacific your friend Xu Wenli."

Myanmar

Daw aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the main opposition party, the National League for Democracy, was released from de facto house arrest in May. Additionally, over 300 political prisoners were released during the year, bringing the total of those released since January 2001 to 500.

South Korea

Kim Kang-phil, 35, worked as a computer programmer with an IT company in Busan when he was arrested on the 25 July 2002 and detained in Seoul Detention Centre, charged under Article 7(5) of the National Security Law (NSL) for possessing "enemy-benefiting materials" and "for the worship and praise of an enemy benefiting/anti-state group". Kim Kang-phil had developed his own website and enjoyed talking to people, exchanging information on film and books. In September 2002, he was sentenced by the Seoul District Court for one year's imprisonment and one year suspended sentence. Kim Kang-phil appealed against the sentence to the Seoul High Court. AI had raised his case in a document summarizing Concerns and Recommendations to Candidates for the Presidential Elections in December 2002" and a follow-up document focussing on those detained under the National Security Law. He was released in December after the Seoul High Court changed the sentence to a two year suspended prison term. He lodged an appeal against this sentence before the Supreme Court.

EUROPE

Belarus

Nikolai Markevich, editor of *Pagonia* newspaper, and Pavel Mozheiko, a staff writer, were sentenced to two-and-a-half and two year terms of "restricted freedom" respectively for allegedly slandering the Belarusian President, Alyaksandr Lukashenka, in an edition of *Pagonia* in the run-up to last September's presidential elections. On 4 March a District Court in Asipovichy, Mogilev Oblast, commuted the sentence of Nikolai Markevich from "restrictive freedom" to "corrective labour". On 21 March Pavel Mozheiko was conditionally released by the Zhlobin District Court. Both men have returned to Grodno.

The six-year prison sentence of Andrey Klimov came to an unexpected but welcome end on 25 March when he was released from the UZ 15/1 labour colony in Minsk after serving four years of his sentence. AI adopted the high-profile member of the dissolved Belarusian parliament as a prisoner of conscience after he was arrested for his opposition activities in February 1998. According to the news agency INTERFAX, he emerged from the labour colony carrying a bagful of letters of support which he had received from people abroad.

Turkey

On 26 December 1995, 15 children and one of their teachers were taken into custody by policemen from the Anti-Terrorism Branch of the Manisa Police Department and charged with being members of an illegal organization. After an eleven-day detention, the trial of the defendants began in March 1996. Throughout this period, according to the report issued by the detainees, all of the 15 students and the teacher were subjected to degrading treatment and torture. The case against ten police officers charged with torturing 16 juveniles in detention in 1995 had started in 1996 and on 12 March 1998 resulted in acquittal. Finally, on 16 October 2002, Manisa Criminal Court sentenced the police officers to terms of between five and ten years imprisonment.

MIDDLE EAST

Iran

Prisoner of conscience Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, a religious leader who is 80 years old and in poor health, was freed from house arrest on 29 January.

His detention began in March 1989, after his criticism of the mass executions of political prisoners the previous year led to his dismissal as the successor to Grand Ayatollah Khomeini, the then Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Kuwait

Four women prisoners of conscience were granted a pardon by the Amir of Kuwait on 15 September. Ibtisam Berto Sulaiman al-Dakhil, Intisar Rasan Khallati, Zannuba 'Abd al-Khadr 'Ashur and Samira Juma, charged with collaboration with Iraqi forces, were convicted in unfair trials before the Martial Law and State Security Courts in 1991.

Syria

"Whatever you think the impact of your work may be, it will be greater than you can imagine", said Faraj Ahmad Birqdar, a poet and journalist. He was one of two Syrian former prisoners of conscience who visited AI and thanked everyone who had contributed to their release. Faraj Ahmad Birqdar was arrested in 1987, held incommunicado for nearly seven years, then sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment for belonging to a banned organization. He was tortured, yet expressed sympathy for some of his torturers, explaining that the horror of torture dehumanizes and oppresses not just the victims but also the perpetrators. Hassiba 'Abd al-Rahman, also a writer, was imprisoned several times, the last in 1993, because of her involvement in human rights work.

Prisoner of conscience Riad al-Turk, aged 72, lawyer and leading opposition activist, was freed from 'Adra Prison in Syria on 16 November 2002 following a personal Presidential amnesty. Riad al-Turk had been sentenced to two and a half years in prison on charges of "attempting to change the constitution by illegal means".

In December 2002, Kurdish activist and prisoner of conscience Hussain Daoud was released after two years in prison in Syria. He said he had been tortured while in prison. On his release he thanked AI members for all their efforts on his behalf.

GOOD NEWS - RUSSIA CAMPAIGN

On 23 January prisoner of conscience Grigory Pasko was conditionally released, having served two thirds of his four-year sentence on treason charges in a prison colony in the Russian Far East. Grigory Pasko is a journalist and environmentalist. In 1993 he filmed a Russian navy tanker illegally dumping radioactive waste and ammunition in the Sea of Japan. In this film and in a series of articles he exposed the threat to the environment caused by ships of Russia's decaying Pacific Fleet, including nuclear submarines. He also reported on corruption in the fleet. In 1997 Grigory Pasko was arrested for passing allegedly sensitive information to the Japanese media. In December 2001 a military court in Vladivostok, Russia, gave him a four-year sentence for treason and espionage. At the time of his release, he said, "Guards at the labour colony were overwhelmed with the amount of cards from supporters I received. The few cards that reached me directly in the colony brightened the greyness of my existence."

SPECIALIST NETWORKS

Urgent Action Network

During 2002, Amnesty International initiated 468 Urgent Action cases on behalf of people in 83 countries and territories. They called for action on behalf of people who were either at risk of or had suffered human rights violations including torture, "disappearances", the death penalty, death in custody, or forcible return to countries where they would be in danger of human rights violations. There were also 346 updates to previous Urgent Action appeals, 130 of which recorded good news about the case.

At least two other prisoners of conscience who were the subject of AI Urgent Actions were released from prison in 2002: General Jose Gallardo of Mexico and Saad Eddin Ibrahim of Egypt were both imprisoned because of non-violent political acts.

International Lawyers' network

The International Lawyer's Network (ILN) is one of many networks and sections and structures working for the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC). Following the 60th ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which occurred in April 2002, significant progress has been made towards the establishment of the Court. The first 18 judges for the ICC were inaugurated at a ceremony in the Hague in February 2003, and the first Prosecutor for the Court was elected by the states who are party to the Statute in April 2003. The campaigning and legal work of AI working together as a movement has made a huge contribution to this achievement.

The election of a Prosecutor for the Court means that the ICC may decide to begin investigations into allegations of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in the coming months.

Health Professionals Network

During 2002, health professionals in more than 30 countries took up over forty actions and updates, involving prisoners deprived of health care, or cases involving fellow health professionals imprisoned for their non-violent human rights activities. In all regions - Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe and the Middle East - at least one prisoner of conscience featuring in a medical action was released. Some others received medical care in or outside of prison.

The Military Security and Police Network

In 2002, AI submitted proposals to the European Commission (EC) to table a draft EC regulation for all 15 Member States to prevent the trade of torture equipment and security equipment used for torture. On 30 December 2002, the draft proposal was adopted. The regulation is now in discussion at the Council of Ministers of the European Union.

As a result of lobbying, AI in the USA secured, in September, a legal requirement that the Secretary of State report annually to the US Congress "any involvement of a foreign military or defense ministry civilian" trained by the USA "in a violation of international recognized human rights". AI campaigners in the USA also defeated government efforts to remove human rights conditionality from US foreign assistance programs.

DEATH PENALTY GOOD NEWS

At the end of 2002, 76 countries had abolished the death penalty for all crimes, while 15 had abolished it for all but exceptional crimes such as crimes under military law or crimes committed in exceptional circumstances, such as wartime crimes. A further 20 countries were abolitionist in practice: they retained the death penalty for ordinary crimes such as murder but had not executed anyone during the past 10 years and were believed to have a policy or established practice of not carrying out executions, or had made an international commitment not to use the death penalty. Eighty-four other countries and territories retained the death penalty for ordinary crimes.

Cyprus

The Military Criminal Code was amended on 19 April to remove the death penalty for the military offences of treason and piracy, thus making Cyprus wholly abolitionist. The death penalty had been abolished for murder in 1983. The last execution was in 1962.

Turkey

On 3 August the Turkish parliament adopted a law abolishing the death penalty except in time of "war or imminent threat of war". The new law replaced the death penalty with life imprisonment, with no possibility of release for certain prisoners. The law was approved by President Ahmet Necdet Sezer on 8 August and entered into force with its publication in the Official Gazette the next day.

Yugoslavia

On 19 June the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia became free from the death penalty when the Montenegrin Assembly adopted changes to the criminal code removing the penalty from the laws of Montenegro, the only part of the country where it still existed. The death penalty in Montenegro was replaced by a 40-year prison sentence for people aged 20 or over at the time of the offence.

Philippines

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has suspended all executions while the Philippine Congress debates a bill abolishing the death penalty.

Fiji

On 11 March the death penalty was removed from the Penal Code when President Ratu Josefa Iloilo Uluivuda assented to the passage by the Fijian Senate of the Penal Code (Amendment) Act No. 5 of 2002.

Saudi Arabia

The Saudi Arabian Minister of the Interior, Prince Naif bin 'Abdul 'Aziz, announced on 4 December that King Fahd bin 'Abdul 'Aziz had commuted the death sentences of 17 men from the Ismaili community to 10 years' imprisonment.

USA (Indiana)

On 26 March Governor Frank O'Bannon signed into law a bill which prohibits imposing the death penalty on defendants who were under 18 at the time of the crime. Indiana is the sixteenth US state to prohibit the execution of child offenders.

USA (Georgia)

On 25 February the Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles commuted the death sentence of Alexander Williams to life imprisonment without parole.

USA (Maryland)

On 9 May Governor Parris Glendening announced a moratorium on executions pending the outcome of a study by the University of Maryland into the fairness of the state's death penalty, particularly with regard to racial and geographic bias. At the same time, the governor issued a stay of execution for Wesley Baker who was due to be put to death during the week of 13 May.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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