

Sudan

The real cost of oil

Sudan has been at war with itself for much of the last half a century and the toll of human suffering during that time has been immense. Around two million people are estimated to have lost their lives in the war since 1983 alone, and more people are internally displaced in Sudan – around 4.5 million – than anywhere else in the world.

In a conflict where the rules of war are routinely contravened, civilians are the main victims – mostly women and children. They are killed, they are raped, they are robbed, they are forced from their homes, they are abducted and they are enslaved. Children are forced to become soldiers. Nobody is brought to justice for these crimes. The international community has largely lost interest and stands idly by.

The reasons behind this disastrous state of affairs are complex, but there is no doubting that oil – the question of who owns it and who benefits from it – is a central factor. It came as no surprise when the new 1,600km oil pipeline, which channels oil from the centre of Sudan to the Red Sea coast, was attacked and damaged by armed opposition groups just weeks after it came into operation in August 1999. The government of Sudan and its militia allies have, for their part, been ruthlessly engaged in what appears to be a systematic operation to clear civilians from the areas around the oilfields. This has meant forcibly displacing tens of thousands of people from their homes in western Upper Nile state. Whole villages have been burned to the ground and livelihoods destroyed. In the process, hundreds of civilians have been extrajudicially executed. Thousands more remain unaccounted for and, if still alive, may be facing starvation in view of the government ban on all humanitarian relief flights to the area.

The government cynically claims that civilian deaths and the massive displacement in these areas are the result of fighting between local ethnic groups over whom they have no control. The foreign companies with the largest stakes in Sudan's oil – which include Canada's Talisman Energy, the China National Petroleum Corporation and Malaysia's Petronas (both state-owned), Sweden's IPC/Lundin and Austria's ÖMV – have also played down reported abuses. Many of them, however, are reliant on the government of Sudan for their security and must therefore acknowledge some responsibility for acts committed on their behalf.

The situation of civilians in the war zones will remain critical for as long as the government of Sudan and other forces are allowed to violate their human rights with impunity. If human rights abuses on such a massive scale are to be prevented in the future, the international community must publicly condemn these abuses now and bring concerted pressure to bear on all parties to the Sudanese civil war to abide by the Geneva Conventions and protect the civilian population. The role of companies involved in the oil production must also be closely scrutinized with a view to ensuring that they actively promote and protect human rights within their sphere of activity and that their involvement in Sudan is consistent with international human rights standards.

What you can do:

Write to President Omar Hassan al-Bashir, People's Palace, PO Box 281, Khartoum, Sudan, urging him to publicly condemn the deliberate targeting of civilians in western Upper Nile, resulting in the forcible displacement of thousands and the extrajudicial executions of hundreds of civilians during 1999, and to publicly reiterate his government's commitment to abide by the Geneva Conventions at all times and to bring perpetrators of abuses to justice.

Write to Dr John Garang de Mabior, Commander-in-Chief of the opposition Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army, PO Box 73699, Nairobi, Kenya, urging him to publicly reiterate his movement's commitment to abide by the Geneva Conventions at all times and to bring perpetrators of abuses to justice.

Write to your own government, asking them to raise urgently with the Sudanese government the plight of the civilian population in the war zones, particularly in the areas around the oilfields, and to scrutinize all commercial involvement in Sudan's oil.

Caption: Formal opening of 1,600km oil pipeline, May 1999 ©AP

India

Human rights defenders speak to AI about risks faced

Human rights defenders in India work on a range of concerns across the entire rights framework, facing enormous challenges. In Madhya Pradesh on 8 March 2000, around 200 women were among several hundred peaceful protesters who were beaten by police and dragged from the site of their protest. They were there to demonstrate against the construction of the Maheshwar Dam which threatens to displace them and their families. The previous day the authorities had imposed an order prohibiting assemblies in the area – an order used repeatedly by the authorities in India to ban peaceful protests.

The following day marked the fourth anniversary of the abduction of human rights defender Jalil Andrabi by security forces in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. His dead body had been found 19 days later. On 9 March 2000, a court hearing in the case against those responsible was postponed, once more delaying the process of holding them to account for his death.

The risks faced by human rights defenders from dalit communities (a disadvantaged group determined by caste hierarchies) are compounded by the discrimination they face within society. In July 1998 a dalit activist from Jalma district of Maharashtra was attacked and killed by upper caste members of his village when he returned in the middle of the night to visit his wife and new-born child. He had been banned from the district for two years after several criminal cases were registered against him by police (reportedly at the instigation of a local factory owner opposed to his activities in raising awareness amongst the dalit community of their rights). He reportedly had his tongue cut out and his hands and legs cut off before his body was set alight.

During 1999, as part of AI's South Asia Human Rights Defenders Project, human rights defenders from all over India were approached to discuss the difficulties they faced, including the detention of peaceful protesters, torture and ill-treatment, threats and harassment, the filing of false criminal cases, "disappearance" and extrajudicial execution. These concerns are set out in a new report, India: Persecuted for challenging injustice – human rights defenders in India (ASA 20/08/00).

caption :

Torch-lit procession against human rights violations, Manipur, India © Human Rights Alert, Manipur

Kuwait

'Justice and Human Dignity' seminar

AI's first seminar in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula was held in Kuwait in February, on the theme of Justice and Human Dignity. It was co-organized with the Kuwait Lawyers' Association and attended by lawyers, women's rights activists, judges and AI members from Kuwait, Yemen and Egypt.

Debate focused on: women and decision-making; the role of judges and lawyers in creating a culture of human rights and the rule of law; the independence of the judiciary, and discrimination in labour laws affecting women and migrant workers.

Recommendations resulting from the seminar included a call on all governments of the region to initiate programs of action to encourage and enable women to enjoy the full range of human rights without discrimination, including the right to vote and participate in decision-making at all levels, and the right to work as judges. Such measures would require legislative amendments which would give substance to constitutional guarantees of equal treatment as well as the provisions of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The participants emphasized the importance of mechanisms to ensure the independence of the judiciary and transparency in the administration of justice. They stressed the need for public awareness of international standards for fair trial and for their compatibility with principles of the Shari'a (Islamic law) to be fully acknowledged. They encouraged lawyers in the region to play a full and active role in defence of human rights, and called on AI to build and develop networks for lawyers and women's

rights activists, stressing the need for human rights awareness and training programs in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula.

caption:

From left: Dr Badrya Al-Awadi (Kuwaiti lawyer), Dr Ghanim Al-Najjar (Professor, Kuwaiti university), Ilham Abdel Wahab (member of AI Yemen and women's rights activist) © AI

Colombia

Paramilitary groups allowed to act with impunity

Edgar Quiroga and Gildardo Fuentes were forcibly abducted by paramilitaries in the Caño Azul area of the municipality of San Pablo, in the central Colombian department of Bolívar, on 28 November 1999. On 4 December the United Self-Defence Groups of Colombia (AUC), a paramilitary organization, reportedly told a humanitarian commission set up to investigate the abduction that it was holding the two men. Since this time their whereabouts have remained unknown.

According to eyewitnesses, the two men were forced into a paramilitary helicopter; the same helicopter is thought to have bombed and strafed the community of Villanueva, near Cerro Azul, on 26 November. In both incidents no action was taken by security forces maintaining a heavy presence in the area.

Edgar Quiroga is a peasant farmer leader who had denounced serious human rights abuses taking place in south Bolívar and demanded government action. His negotiations with the government in 1998 had resulted in a governmental commitment to take action to combat paramilitary groups. Gildardo Fuentes had denounced to judicial authorities a previous abduction by paramilitaries on 8 October, in full view of an army checkpoint.

Their abduction is a tragic illustration of the government's failure to fulfil its commitments to combat paramilitary groups and take action to end human rights abuses against the civilian population in south Bolívar.

What you can do: Please write, urging that effective action is taken to establish the whereabouts of Edgar Quiroga and Gildardo Fuentes. Call also for immediate action to be taken to combat paramilitary groups operating in the department of Bolívar. Send appeals to: Señor Presidente Andrés Pastrana, Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8, No. 7-26, Bogotá, Colombia (fax: +57 1 286 6842/286 7434). Write also to your own government urging them to monitor efforts to establish the whereabouts of the two men and to combat paramilitary groups in the region.

World wide appeals - May 2000

Turkey

Lawyer imprisoned for speaking out

Esber Yaşar Mudereli, a lawyer and human rights activist, is currently serving a sentence of 17 years' imprisonment. He was

sentenced to 10 months' imprisonment for a speech he made in 1991 in which he challenged the Turkish government on the status of the Kurdish population in Turkey. A life sentence he received in 1978 was reactivated when the second sentence was passed. It had been imposed as a result of an unfair trial and was suspended in 1991 on condition that he did not commit any further offences of a political nature.

Esber Ya™mudereli, blind since childhood, is one of a group of Turkish intellectuals who, by confronting the state publicly on the issue of freedom of expression, have put their own liberty at risk. He hoped that his actions would help to bring about reform of Turkish laws which restrict the right to freedom of speech. His commitment to human rights was acknowledged when in March, he was awarded the Ludovic Trarieux International Human Rights Prize. AI considers Esber Ya™mudereli to be a prisoner of conscience.

Please write, calling for Esber Ya™mudereli's immediate and unconditional release and urging the authorities to make legal reforms preventing restrictions to freedom of expression. Send appeals to: Bülent Ecevit, Prime Minister, Başbakanlık, 06573 Ankara, Turkey (fax:+ 90 312 417 0476).

Caption: Esber Ya™mudereli with his son © private

Indonesia

Three protesters dead and nine injured

A series of incidents in Nabire town, Papua (formerly Irian Jaya) between 28 February and 2 March 2000, left three protesters dead and nine injured from gunshot wounds.

Menase Erary died after being shot in the head at close range during clashes which broke out between a group of approximately 400 armed people and members of the Police Mobile Brigade (Brimob) on 28 February. Six others were reportedly treated in hospital for gunshot wounds following the incident. The group had been on their way to assemble around the Papuan flag – a symbol of local desire for independence.

According to Willem Manimnwarba, an eyewitness, Menase Erary was shot by a member of Brimob although this was denied by the military authorities. Three days later, Willem Manimnwarba was himself shot, reportedly by the security forces firing from trucks. He later died from his injuries.

A protest on 1 March against the killing of Menase Erary resulted in another death. Maksimus Bunay, who had also been injured on 28 February, is reported to have been shot in the back during a protest at a police station against the original killing. Four others were injured.

Please write, urging the Indonesian authorities to ensure that full, prompt and impartial investigations are carried out into the deaths of Menase Erary, Maksimus Bunay and Willem Manimnwarba, and those responsible brought to justice; to issue instructions to all members of the security forces to abide by international standards on the use of force and firearms, and to ensure that the families of those killed and injured receive fair and adequate compensation.

Send appeals to: Megawati Sukarnoputri, Vice-President (responsible for Papua) Jl. Medan Merdeka Selatan No. 6, Jakarta 10110, Indonesia (fax: +62 21 345 2685).

Liberia

Human rights defender charged with sedition

James Torh may face up to five years in prison for nothing more than speaking his mind. He was arrested on charges of sedition on 15 December 1999 after criticizing the government in a talk to secondary-school students.

James Torh, the executive director of Forerunners of Universal Rights for Growth and Development (FOCUS), has frequently been outspoken about human rights concerns in Liberia, in particular on children's rights. In the weeks leading up to his arrest, he publicly clashed with the President about the need for a truth commission to be established in the country to look into violations committed during Liberia's seven-year civil war.

In 1997 the Liberian civil war ended with the signing of peace accords by all parties to the conflict. The elected government, headed by Charles Taylor, a former armed opposition leader, assumed control of the country. Since the end of the war there has been a significant decrease in the level of human rights abuses. However, the human rights situation remains fragile, and threats to journalists and human rights defenders continue.

Please write, urging the government to drop the charges against James Torh, adding that, if convicted and imprisoned, AI would consider him a prisoner of conscience. Also urge the Liberian government to end political use of the sedition law and other criminal charges against human rights defenders. Send appeals to: His Excellency President Charles Taylor, Office of the President, Executive Mansion, PO Box 9001, Capitol Hill, Monrovia, Liberia.

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Bhutan

Tek Nath Rizal

Tek Nath Rizal, who featured in the December 1999 Worldwide Appeals (WWAs), has been released following an amnesty granted by King Jigme Singye Wangchuck.

Thanks to all who sent appeals.

Cameroon

Nana Koulagna

Nana Koulagna (WWAs, February 1999) was not in fact released in July as had been reported to AI. He remains in detention in Garoua Central Prison. Please continue to send appeals, calling for his immediate and unconditional release, to: President Paul Biya, Président de la République, Palais de l'Unité, 1000 Yaoundé, Cameroon.

Syria

`Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout

Sadly, `Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout (WWAs, January 1999) died of cancer in a military hospital on 15 February 2000, after more than 33 years' imprisonment. AI considers that his continued detention – despite a ministerial ruling ordering his release, and while he was known to be terminally ill – amounted to cruel and inhuman treatment.

Eastern Europe

Belarus resists collapse of the death penalty

The International Secretariat received a desperate call last July from a Belarusian woman pleading for AI to help her son. Anton Bondarenko was awaiting execution on death row in Minsk, his plea for presidential clemency rejected. His mother had visited the prison where her son was being held every day, for several weeks, to see if he was still alive. In Belarus the death penalty is a state secret and the prison authorities refused to inform her of the date of execution.

She and a friend staged a picket near the Presidential Administration building in the capital to plead for the 19-year-old's sentence to be commuted, only to be arrested by police officers. Ten days later, on 24

July, she was informed that Anton Bondarenko had been executed. She never received the body and does not know where exactly he is buried. At least 29 other such executions were reportedly carried out that year.

Elsewhere in eastern Europe the inexorable momentum towards worldwide abolition of the death penalty is evident. In February 2000 an overwhelming majority of members of the Ukraine parliament consigned capital punishment to history after the Ukrainian Constitutional Court ruled it unconstitutional, as it violates the right to life.

In April 1999 Latvia abolished the use of the death penalty in peacetime, and in June Lithuania abolished it completely, following the example of its neighbour Estonia in March 1998. Two months earlier, in February, Russia – spanning the chasm between eastern Europe and Asia – had made progress towards this goal when the Russian Constitutional Court decided to ban ordinary court judges from imposing death sentences until the system of trial by jury was available nationwide. This led to a de facto moratorium on executions.

In fact, with the exception of Belarus, eastern Europe is free of the death penalty; Romania abolished it in 1989; Hungary's turn came in 1990, Poland in 1997 and Bulgaria in late 1998 – which poses the question: for how long can Belarus resist this eastern European sea change?

What you can do:

Please write, urging the Belarusian government to establish a moratorium on executions pending abolition of the death penalty. Send appeals to: President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, Administratsia Prezidenta, ul. Karla Marksa, 38, 220016 g. Minsk, Belarus (fax: 375 172 26 06 10).

Cuba

Harassment of dissidents continues

José Aguilar Hernández was detained in December 1999 while taking part in a march to demand the release of political prisoners and respect for human rights. José Aguilar, a member of the Movimiento 13 de Julio (13 July Movement), had already been detained several times in 1999 for taking part in peaceful anti-government activities. His case is not an isolated one: some 260 Cuban dissidents were detained in Havana in November and December 1999 around the time of the Ibero-American summit. Others were placed under house arrest.

Freedom of expression, association and assembly are severely limited in Cuba, both in law and in practice. Political dissidents are increasingly subjected to harassment and punitive measures that can include short-term detention, interrogation, threats, and physical and verbal acts of aggression carried out by government supporters.

Although the number of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience has decreased in recent years, and long prison sentences for those considered by the government to be counter-revolutionaries are less common than in the past, other forms of punishment such as those mentioned above have become more frequent. Some dissidents, including journalists, members of independent political parties and human rights defenders, have gone into exile to escape continual persecution.

Following Pope John Paul II's visit to Cuba in January 1998, there was a brief improvement in the human rights situation and about 100 political prisoners were released, including 19 prisoners of conscience. However, in late 1998 frequent detentions and harassment resumed.

For further information, see Cuba: Short term detention and harassment of dissidents (AMR 25/04/00).

Caption: Dissidents marching in Havana, Cuba, 4 December 1999, to call attention to human rights concerns © Reuters

Lebanon

AI office to open

The Lebanese Cabinet formally approved, on 8 March, AI's application to open a regional office in Beirut. This will be the organization's first regional office for the Middle East and North Africa and will focus on human rights education.

"This is a very exciting step for us", said AI Secretary General Pierre Sané, "it offers us an opportunity to contribute more fully, here as elsewhere, to the movements in the Middle East actively engaged in building up a human rights culture in the region. We regard this decision as further consolidation of the Lebanese government's positive opening towards human rights."

Saudi Arabia

End Secrecy, End Suffering

Fear and secrecy permeate almost every aspect of the state in Saudi Arabia. Millions live in fear of arbitrary arrest and torture; of a range of harsh punishments that includes amputation, beheading and floggings; of a religious police force – the mutawa'een – who are able to harass and detain anyone they believe to have breached the strict moral codes, and in the fear that anyone who is arrested will be denied access to a lawyer or their families.

All of this is shrouded in the secrecy maintained by a government which does not allow political parties, elections, trade unions, independent legal associations or human rights organizations. All media, and access to the Internet, satellite television and other forms of communication is strictly controlled. The secrecy is perpetuated by a justice system that operates behind closed doors and a refusal to allow international non-governmental human rights organizations access to the country.

Even in cases involving capital crimes or those punishable by flogging or amputation of the limbs, court hearings are secret and summary, generally lasting between five minutes and two hours. Behind the wall of secrecy, the rules of evidence are extremely prejudicial to the defendant. Confessions extracted by torture, coercion or deception are frequently used as evidence in court and defendants have no right to a lawyer or adequate opportunity to mount a defence.

All of this is compounded by the international community's silence about Saudi Arabia's appalling human rights record. The human rights of people living in Saudi Arabia have been subordinated to economic and strategic interests. While this silence continues, the violations and the suffering will continue.

Executions

Hassan bin Awad al-Zubair, a Sudanese national, was beheaded on 28 February 2000 for practising "sorcery". AI had no way of knowing that Hassan had even been sentenced to death as the government keeps such information secret. The secrecy which surrounds the criminal justice system is such that Hassan himself may not even have known that he was facing execution.

Hassan is one of 13 people – including one woman, Fayzeh bint Hamoud bin Khalaf al-Joufi – to be executed so far this year, and of more than 1,100 executed over the last 20 years, according to reports. The true total is probably far higher. It is almost certain that all were sentenced to death after secret and summary hearings and with no meaningful appeal, each case marked by indifference towards the human rights and dignity of the defendant.

"I thank Allah, and all I need is to be with you... Regarding my problem, do not worry. Time will solve it and I will soon be with you,

God willing... I have asked the messenger of this letter to find me a house in Damascus."

Shortly after he wrote this letter, Abdul-Karim al-Naqshabandi, a Syrian national, was executed on charges of witchcraft. A shocking example of how the criminal justice system operates, he clearly had no idea that he faced imminent execution, and neither his family nor apparently the Syrian embassy knew that he was under sentence of death.

Often, the first warning prisoners have of their imminent execution is when they are taken out of their cell in handcuffs on a Friday, the day executions are normally carried out. They are taken to a public square, blindfolded and forced to kneel. The executioner raises a sword, then brings the blade down across the prisoner's neck. Sometimes more than one stroke is needed to sever the head. A doctor certifies that the prisoner is dead, then the body and head are removed and buried.

AI does not know whether condemned prisoners are given tranquillizers. It does not know whether they are allowed to see a representative of their religious faith, or whether an appropriate religious ceremony is conducted before, during or after death. What it does know is that foreign nationals are rarely, if ever, allowed to see their loved ones before they are executed, and are never given advance warning of their execution.

For those awaiting execution, the psychological torment is extreme. Sa'ad al-Din 'Izz

al-Din Muhammad, a Sudanese national, was executed in 1996 for a murder he denied having committed. A cellmate described his anguish:

“He is in a frenzy every Thursday afternoon, Friday morning in anticipation of execution... All his family have been told that he is already executed. But he is still inside.”

A woman currently held on a murder charge wrote to a former cellmate:

“I cannot stop asking you to help me because here they do not give us the date of execution. Early in the morning they come and take you to a big square and cut your head off. Afterwards they inform your family and your embassy. This is why I am scared.”

Flogging and amputation

Flogging and amputation of limbs are used extensively in Saudi Arabia as judicial punishments. They are prescribed by Saudi Arabian law despite the fact that such punishments contravene the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. They are applied to many offences, ranging from alcohol and “sexual offences” to theft, and can be handed down by courts with little regard to fair trial procedures.

Men, women and children are flogged in prisons as well as as well as in public squares throughout the country. Flogging has almost unlimited scope of application and there appears to be no upper limit on the number of lashes judges can impose, despite the severe physical and psychological consequences. The most lashes recorded in a single case by AI is 4,000. These were imposed on Muhammad ‘Ali al-Sayyid, an Egyptian national who was convicted of robbery in 1990. The sentence was carried out at a rate of 50 lashes every two weeks. He told AI that each time he received the lashes he was left with bruised or bleeding buttocks, unable to sleep or sit for three or four days afterwards. He also received seven years’ imprisonment. He also described how he had been taken before a judge to ratify his confession which he claimed was tortured out of him:

“The judge asked me, ‘Did the theft happen?’ I said ‘No.’ He asked the police to take me back, and as soon as he said that I changed my plea and said, ‘Yes, it did happen.’ I did that in order to avoid returning to the police station and torture... and that is how I signed my statement.”

Judicial amputations are still being carried out with disturbing frequency in Saudi Arabia – at least 90 have been reported in the past 18 years. Six amputations have been carried out so far this year. Four of these were cross-amputations (right hand and left foot), three of which were for assault and theft.

Political prisoners

Anyone with no power or influence is at risk of human rights violations in Saudi Arabia. Anyone who dares voice dissent is likely to be imprisoned because the government will not allow any criticism or independent thought or activity. Anyone perceived to be a political or religious opponent of the government, and activists promoting rights for the country’s minority Shi’a Muslim community can face indefinite detention without charge or trial. They are often released only after pledging to stop their activities.

Thousands of political detainees have been arbitrarily detained over the years. They have included individual critics and members of banned political and religious movements, as well as relatives and friends of such people. Today there are thought to be between 100 and 200 political prisoners in Saudi Arabia, including possible prisoners of conscience. Most are held without trial.

For example, Dr Sa‘id bin Zua‘ir, head of the Department of Information at Imam Muhammad Ibn Sa‘ud University, was arrested in early 1995 at his home in Riyadh by members of al-Mabahith al-‘Amma (General Investigations). He is believed to have been denied visits from his relatives and to have been pressurized to sign an undertaking to cease political activities in exchange for his release. Nevertheless, he continues to be held in al-Ha‘ir prison in Riyadh.

Waleed al-Sinani has reportedly been detained without trial since 1995. He may be a prisoner of conscience. His arrest was reported to be related to his political beliefs and criticism of the state.

The few political dissidents who are brought to trial face secret and summary hearings and harsh sentences, sometimes including judicial corporal punishments amounting to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment. Ibrahim ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Hudhayf, for example, was sentenced in 1995 to 18 years’ imprisonment and 300 lashes. He was among a group of political prisoners convicted of offences which included having links with the Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights, an organization

based abroad. Details of the trial of the whole group remain secret to this day. Ibrahim 'Abd al-Rahman al-Hudhayf and others convicted with him were released in 1998 under an amnesty.

Women

Women, whether Saudi Arabian or foreign, emerge time and again as victims of discrimination and human rights violations because of the gender bias in law, social mores and traditions. Some laws are applied in a discriminatory fashion. The offence of khilwa (being alone with a male who is not an immediate relative), for example, is punishable for both women and the men involved, but in practice appears to be more frequently enforced for women.

Nieves, a Filipina who was working as a maid in Riyadh in 1992, was invited by a married couple to celebrate the wife's birthday at a restaurant. She and a female friend decided to go. At the restaurant they were joined by a male friend of the couple. A group of mutawa'een entered the restaurant, saw the group and arrested them. They suspected Nieves of being there for an introduction to the male friend of the couple.

Nieves was convicted of prostitution and sentenced to 25 days' imprisonment and 60 lashes after being deceived into signing a "confession" written in Arabic. She had understood this to be a release order.

That "confession" was the sole basis of her

conviction and sentence. Her trial, she said, lasted "a matter of minutes". She described the flogging:

"I thought it would be fast but no, it was done one at a time. [The policeman] really takes his time before striking. I started counting and when it reached 40 I thought I could not make it... I prayed so hard... At last it reached 60... I could not explain the pain I experienced. The stick he used was like a bamboo, round but hard."

Like other migrant workers, particularly those from developing countries, Nieves was particularly vulnerable to violations. Migrant workers are vulnerable to abuse by their employers and have no trade unions to defend them. If arrested they may be tricked into signing a confession in Arabic, a language they may not understand, and be unable to contact anyone to intervene on their behalf, including consular staff.

Torture

Many traumatized men and women have spoken to AI over the years about their suffering at the hands of the police. Their testimonies illustrate a culture of brutality, torture and ill-treatment in many police

stations, prisons and detention centres across the country. Despite having acceded to the UN Convention against Torture in 1997, the Saudi Arabian government allows torture to continue unabated. Torture methods range from beatings to electric shocks, cigarette burns, nail-pulling and threats of sexual attack on the detainee or relatives. Torture and ill-treatment are used to extract confessions and to enforce discipline. They are also inflicted apparently without reason – simply because it is the culture of the prison. Sometimes, prisoners die as a result.

Muhammad al-Hayek, a 29-year-old Saudi Arabian, was reportedly arrested in 1996 and detained for more than two years without charge or trial. He died in June 1998 while in the custody of al-Mabahith al-'Amma in circumstances that suggest that torture may have been a factor. Relatives were reportedly only informed of his death the following month, on 20 July, by members of al-Mabahith al-'Amma. The family was refused permission to collect Muhammad al-Hayek's body, and was told that it had already been buried in an undisclosed location. To AI's knowledge no independent investigation has been conducted into the cause of Muhammad al-Hayek's death and his relatives are not known to have been provided with an explanation.

Torturers in Saudi Arabia will continue torturing for as long as the criminal justice system fails to provide safeguards. Incommunicado detention, the lack of effective mechanisms for reporting torture, and the lack of investigations into allegations, all foster a climate of impunity. AI has, over the years, submitted many cases of allegations of torture to the government, but is not aware of any having been successfully investigated or of any perpetrator having been brought to justice.

AI's Program of Action

On 28 March 2000, AI launched a Program of Action against human rights violations in Saudi Arabia. In particular, it is calling on the Saudi Arabian authorities to take steps that would make the criminal justice system conform with international human rights standards.

The following day, the European Union made a statement at the UN Commission on Human Rights expressing its deep concern at the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia. In response to this, the Saudi Arabian delegation at the Commission expressed its desire to cooperate with the Commission “on the basis of transparency, clarity and objectivity in the discussion of these issues.” The delegation also pointed out that Saudi Arabia has invited the UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of the judiciary to visit the country.

AI has welcomed such a positive statement and hopes that it is a step towards dialogue and commitment by the Saudi Arabian authorities to improving the human rights situation in the country. AI is calling on the government to ensure, among other things, that:

- Every detainee has access to a lawyer from the moment of arrest to final appeal;
- Every detainee has prompt access to their family, and medical attention as required;
- Torture is clearly banned in law and practice, all allegations of torture are promptly investigated, the perpetrators brought to justice, and the findings made public;
- Trials are public and fair in accordance with international standards;
- All detainees who do not speak Arabic are provided with adequate interpretation and translation facilities;
- Discrimination in law and practice is ended;
- Death sentences and judicial corporal punishments are not imposed or carried out.

+What you can do:

- Write to the Saudi Arabian authorities asking them to implement the steps outlined above. Send your letters to:

The Custodian of the Two Holy Shrines,
His Majesty King Fahd bin ‘Abdul ‘Aziz
al-Saud,

Office of H.M. The King,
Royal Court, Riyadh,
Saudi Arabia, and to:

Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister &
Commander of the National Guard
His Royal Highness Prince ‘Abdullah bin
‘Abdul ‘Aziz al-Saud
Royal Court, Riyadh
Saudi Arabia

- Write to the Saudi Arabian embassy in your country expressing dismay that Saudi Arabia keeps its doors closed to human rights monitors, including AI, and calling on the authorities to reverse this policy.
- Write to trade unions and medical, legal or other professional associations, asking them to raise awareness about the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia.
- Send the text overleaf to your government.

Dear governments of the world,

Responsibility for the dire human rights situation in Saudi Arabia lies not just with the Saudi Arabian government, but also with you. You have subordin-ated the human rights of the people living in the Saudi Arabia to your economic and strategic interests in the country. It appears that you have been so dazzled by the country’s vast oil reserves and enormous spending power that you have forgotten about human rights.

- Some of you have allowed businesses based in your countries to set up joint ventures in Saudi Arabia without ensuring that the human rights of even their own employees are protected.

- Some of you have benefited from huge military contracts without ensuring that your goods and services would not be used to commit or facilitate human rights violations.
- Some of you have accepted large amounts of economic aid from Saudi Arabia while keeping silent about abuses committed against nationals of your own country working in Saudi Arabia.
- Some of you have forcibly returned home Saudi Arabian asylum-seekers, knowing that they would be at risk of serious human rights violations.
- Most of you, by your silence about human rights violations in Saudi Arabia, have helped the Saudi Arabian government maintain the secrecy about its appalling human rights record.
- Most of you have let intergovernmental organizations such as the UN avoid the issue of human rights violations in Saudi Arabia. The UN Commission on Human Rights, which has criticized the human rights record of a wide range of countries in all regions of the world, has yet to publicly address the serious human rights situation in Saudi Arabia.

It is time for you to act now!

- Publicly condemn human rights violations in Saudi Arabia.
- Ensure that military, security and police transactions with Saudi Arabia do not contribute to human rights violations.
- Urge the Saudi Arabian authorities to take immediate steps to end human rights violations.
- Take steps to protect nationals of your own country who are living in Saudi Arabia, particularly those who are arrested.
- Support Amnesty International's call for Saudi Arabia to allow human rights organizations access to Saudi Arabia to monitor the human rights situation.