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This short clip shows the terrible price that ordinary people are paying for the failures of their leaders to uphold human rights.

The purpose of beginning with this video is to underline the point that the real test of the state of the world human rights lies in the voices and lived experience of ordinary people.

Amnesty International Report 2007 contains many such stories. It is a commentary on the state of human rights during 2006, from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, based on extensive research and analysis by Amnesty International.

Some of you are aware of a video that is on the internet which shows Du'a Aswad, a young Yezidi girl, being stoned to death for falling in love with a Sunni man. It is a revolting video but unfortunately many women live with the daily fear of violence. Our report is replete with data on violence against women, underlining its widespread prevalence in times of peace as well as war, in rich as well as poor societies. Billions of dollars are being spent on the "war on terror", but there seems to be little political will or the resources to fight sexual terror against women.

Our report also lays bare the fears of millions of people who are being tipped into poverty and trapped there by policies and practices peppered with human rights abuses engineered by corrupt governments and greedy businesses.

Human rights are about justice and dignity and neither can be achieved if women and the poor are excluded.

But our report shows that their concerns were sidelined and ignored as **powerful governments and armed groups deliberately fomented fear to erode human rights and create an increasingly polarized and dangerous world.**

In 2006 short sighted, fear-mongering policies undermined the rule of law and human rights, fed racism and xenophobia, fuelled discrimination, suppressed dissent, intensified conflict and sowed the seeds for more violence.

Fear, distrust and divisions ran so deep in the international community that it was virtually dysfunctional in the face of human rights crises in 2006.

Forgotten conflicts like Sri Lanka and Chechnya received scant attention.

It took the Security Council four weeks to muster the will to call for a ceasefire in the Lebanon war last year. There was no investigation of the flagrant violations of international humanitarian law, including war crimes committed by both the Israeli army and the Hizbollah forces, no accountability, justice or reparations for the victims.

In a country where there has been no justice for past human rights crimes going back decades, it added yet another layer to the grievances, deepened the sectarian divisions and increased political instability. The risk of more violence and human rights violations is all too apparent given the events that are taking place in Northern Lebanon this week.

A divided Quartet – representing the US, UN, EU and Russia – had no stomach for leadership on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. In 2006 the death toll for Palestinians increased three fold compared to the year before, including 120 children.

With widespread violence, a strangled economy and a collapsing state, a human rights nightmare is unfolding under our very eyes while the international community remains complacent.

Darfur is a bleeding wound on the world's conscience, with over 200,000 people dead and over twelve times that number 2.5 million displaced. Barred by the Sudanese government from access to Darfur, Amnesty International visited eastern Chad in 2006 and recorded testimony of attacks, murder, pillage and rape by Janjawid militia that indicate the conflict has now spread across the border.

The US government has been outspoken on the need to protect civilians. That is very welcome but nothing proves more clearly the loss of US moral authority than its failure to persuade the Sudanese government to accept the UN peacekeepers. The Sudanese government is running rings around the UN, safe in the knowledge of an UN Security Council made weak not only by distrust of the US, but also by the double dealing of Russia and China. Both these governments have not only retained close ties with Khartoum but our research suggests they have supplied arms under circumstances that may have breached the UN arms embargo.

Amnesty International is calling on the UN to tighten the arms embargo and make it comprehensive so that no arms can enter Sudan, no matter the side for which they are destined.

Thriving in the instability and insecurity created by weak governments and failing states, violent and extremist groups are posing a major threat to human rights from the borders of Pakistan to the Horn of Africa and across parts of the African continent.

Unless governments address the grievances on which armed groups feed and provide effective leadership to bring them to account for their abuses and show a commitment themselves to accountability, the prognosis for human rights is dire.

Iraq is a prime example. The Iraqi security forces are inciting rather than stopping sectarian violence. The Iraqi justice system is woefully inadequate, and the worst practices of Saddam Hussein's regime – torture, unfair trials, capital punishment and rape with impunity – are very much alive today. There have been frequent allegations of human rights violations by British and American soldiers but few prosecutions and convictions. The Iraqi government, and its military allies must set some clear human rights benchmarks against which their performance can be measured such as the reform of the police and security forces, review of the justice system, end to discrimination along sectarian lines and ensuring equality and safety of women.

Afghanistan is another example of how the government and the international community has squandered the opportunity to build an effective state based on human rights and the rule of law, and in the environment of insecurity, impunity and corruption, the Taliban has reasserted itself through a strategy of fear and intimidation.

Powerful governments are using the politics of fear to create a downward spiral of human rights abuse in which no right is sacrosanct.

People have the right to be safe and governments have the duty to provide safety. But ill conceived counter terrorism strategies have done little to reduce the threat and much to stoke fear, undermine human rights and the rule of law.

Six years into the so-called “war on terror”, governments are playing upon public fear to introduce ever more restrictive laws. The effort of governments like the UK and the US to roll back the ban on torture is morally outrageous, legally untenable and politically dangerous.

The US Administration is treating the world as one giant battlefield for its “war on terror” and more evidence has surfaced in 2006 to show how suspects are kidnapped, arrested, detained, tortured and transferred from one secret prison to another across the world with impunity and with the help of allies.

Amnesty International has found evidence that earlier this year around 100 persons seeking to enter Kenya from Somalia were unlawfully transferred to Ethiopia, detained and interrogated by US officials. Some are still in detention, others have been released while still others have disappeared. Among them were pregnant women who gave birth in detention.

Heightened fears about national security are reducing the space for tolerance and dissent, and many independent voices on human rights are being silenced.

Fear of terrorism has given old fashioned repression a new lease of life in authoritarian states. Western countries that were once the strongest proponents of free speech are now muted in their protests. Authoritarian governments have found new justification and new means to silence their critics. In an environment of fear and fundamentalism, extremist groups are also more openly targeting those who dare to protest.

Journalists, writers, trade unionists, activists and human rights defenders are today the strongest, most courageous champions of human rights and for that they are paying a heavy price from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, Myanmar to Iran, Cuba and Ethiopia. A range of methods are being used to silence them, from political killings in the Philippines to new laws regulating non-governmental organisations in Russia, from constant surveillance in China to travel bans in Saudi Arabia. In countries like China, Vietnam, Egypt and Belarus, the Internet has become the new frontier in the struggle for dissent.

The goal is not just to silence protest but to make yesterday’s prisoner of conscience today’s prisoner of fear. That is why dissent is being suppressed with audacity and impunity. In Turkey a Nobel prize winning author was prosecuted. In Russia a fearless journalist was shot dead by unknown assailants. Colombia tops the list of the year for the highest number of trade unionists killed.

Journalists are particularly hard hit, with 60 killed in Iraq alone. One of the most prominent cases is that of Alan Johnston the BBC correspondent who was abducted in Gaza. Amnesty International has issued an appeal for his release. I take the opportunity today to renew that call.

In far too many countries, the politics of fear is being used to fuel discrimination and division.

Nourished by discriminatory counter-terrorism strategies, aggravated by fears of uncontrolled migration and inflamed by irresponsible politicians and populist media, intolerance, discrimination and racism were on the rise last year.

Incidents of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism have increased in many western countries. In many Muslim countries and communities, anti-western and anti-American sentiments are at an all time high, and easily manipulated by extremist groups into violence.

In Russia nationalist ideologies are breeding hate crimes against foreigners and minorities. Discrimination, segregation and exclusion of the Roma community is rampant throughout Europe.

What our report shows is that cowardly and myopic leaders are undermining human rights and avoiding accountability. In Russia there is a perceptible authoritarian drift, China's human rights footprint leaves much to be desired at home and abroad. The USA relentlessly pursues its own security no matter what cost to human rights and universal values. The EU promotes double-standards of championing human rights abroad and violating them at home. While the African Union uses sovereignty as a shield to avoid tough action against those such as Zimbabwe.

The real champions of change and hope have been civil society. In the face of all odds they have campaigned successfully for a treaty to control the sale of conventional arms; they have supported the process of international justice and demanded an end to impunity.

What civil society has shown is that, just as global warming requires global action and sustainable strategies, the human rights meltdown needs to be tackled through global solidarity and respect for global values.

Our report speaks of the need for a sustainable approach to human rights: one that invests in institutions of justice, accountability and transparency, a long term approach that emphasises human rights principles and the rule of law and not just holding of elections.

As new legislatures and leaders take power in key countries and institutions, they have the chance to do things differently, to shift from fear to hope.

Therefore we call on the new US Congress to repeal or revise substantially the Military Commissions Act to bring it into line with international standards.

With changes of leadership in France and the UK we call on the new leaders to take a stand on Palestine and the conflict in the Middle East.

The new UN Secretary General should press hard for a comprehensive – not piece meal - approach to Darfur, urgently deploying an international peacekeeping operation and opening up a peace process based on justice and human rights for all. By doing so he would reaffirm the unique role of his office and the UN as the guardian of human rights.

In Europe new leaders are taking over in France and the UK. This new leadership should better leverage its influence and take a more proactive role on Israel/Occupied Territories. It is time Europe stopped playing second fiddle to the US and lived up to its responsibilities as a global power.

To watch the press conference, please go to: <http://thereport.amnesty.org/page/5471>

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