



Systematic use of torture in Guinea

A recent AI visit to Guinea revealed torture and abuse is widespread in pre-trial detention

At least 136 people died and 1,700 people were injured when Guinean police crushed anti-government demonstrations in January and February this year. Several people were tortured after being arrested during the crackdown. Their experience was not unique. An AI visit to the region in April found clear evidence of the systematic use of torture by Guinea's security forces.

"On 24 February, the police broke into my house at 4am and beat me up," an activist of the Young People's Union of Guinea told AI. "They accused me of being a leader of the strikes [asking for the departure of President Conté]. They continued to beat me in their vehicle and later at the police station." He was released without charge after paying a sum of money but was rearrested on 21 March and detained in the capital, Conakry.

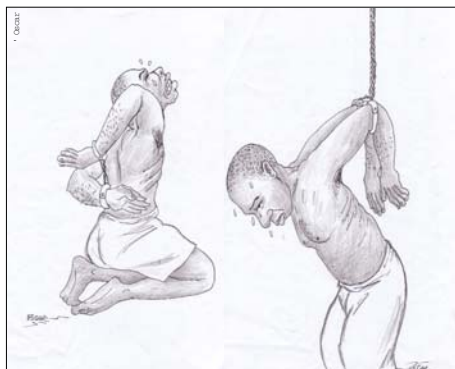
"I was handcuffed with my hands behind my back using a method called 'Chinese handcuffs' [see drawing]. The police trampled me saying: 'You want change, you'll have it now.' They then put a stick in my back with a rope around my elbows and they tied up my arms. Other detainees were suspended from the ceiling with a rope."

Forced 'confessions'

Not only are detainees tortured, but they are held in cramped conditions and denied even the most basic necessities. AI spoke to a 50-year-old driver and member of an opposition party who was arrested in February. "I've been held with three other people for four days in a 1m² cell without receiving any food," he said. "I had to pay to be transferred to a larger cell."

In Kindia and Conakry, AI met numerous prisoners sentenced to death who said that they had been tortured in pre-trial detention, in some cases until they confessed to crimes they had not committed. "When I was arrested by the gendarmerie, I was handcuffed in the back with my arms crossed ['Chinese' handcuffs] every day from 6pm to 2am," explained one inmate at Conakry's civil prison. "I was put in a 'brochette' [skewer]. I was handcuffed with a chain with my hands below my thighs. They pushed my head downwards and put my feet upwards. I finally confessed and gave the names of some of my friends." He and five others, including one juvenile, were sentenced to death for murder on the basis of this so-called confession.

AI raised the issue of torture with the new Minister of Justice. She acknowledged that torture was a real problem, saying that her priority was to ensure that lawyers be present during the first hours following arrest. According to the Minister of Security, enquiries had been opened into some allegations of torture. However, none of the officials AI met committed themselves to prosecuting the perpetrators of such acts. Until that happens, torture will remain the norm in Guinea.



'Chinese' handcuffs (left) and being hung from the ceiling are two examples of stress positions described by those who have been held in detention in Guinea.



The 700km fence/wall being built by Israel in the occupied West Bank snakes between towns and villages. It is the latest in a series of restrictions placed on Palestinians, barring tens of thousands of them from their land, jobs and essential services.

40 years of occupation

Palestinians are increasingly hemmed in and squeezed off their land as Israel's foothold strengthens in the West Bank

On its 40th anniversary, Israel's occupation of the Palestinian Territories is becoming increasingly entrenched. Scores of UN resolutions and calls by the international community for an end to the most crucial aspects of the occupation – notably the relentless expansion of Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) – remain unheeded.

For four decades Israel's occupation of the OPT has been characterized by so-called "temporary" measures which appear, in fact, to be intended to bring about long-term demographic changes. They have had the effect of establishing or increasing the Israeli presence and appropriation of land in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, while at the same time reducing or removing the presence of Palestinians in these areas.

The Israeli authorities have implemented this policy in the OPT through three main measures: by supporting openly and also covertly the establishment of Israeli colonies – commonly known as settlements – throughout the OPT, by confiscating large areas of Palestinian land, and by confining the Palestinian population to ever smaller and increasingly disconnected pockets of land. This last measure is achieved by declaring certain areas to be "closed military areas" and impeding access to Palestinians by building fences and walls, and blocking roads.

In the occupied West Bank – a relatively small territory of less than 6,000km² – almost half of the land has been appropriated by Israel. Some 550 Israeli military checkpoints and blockades ensure that Palestinians have no opportunity to move about freely. They are barred from using hundreds of kilometres of roads reserved for Israeli use. Palestinians must also obtain special permits from the Israeli army to move between different parts of the West Bank. The latest addition to this complex regime of restrictions is the 700km fence/wall

which Israel is currently building, mostly (80 per cent) inside the West Bank. It encircles towns and villages, cutting off tens of thousands of Palestinians from their land and jobs as well as from education and health facilities and other crucial services.

These restrictions are imposed on the Palestinian population to facilitate the existence and expansion of Israeli settlements in the OPT – not, as Israel claims, to prevent Palestinians from entering Israel. If the latter was the objective the fence/wall and other restrictions would be placed between Israel and the West Bank and not deep inside the West Bank.

The direct result of these restrictions is growing poverty and economic paralysis for the Palestinian population and increasing despair at the lack of future prospects for its youth. In February 2007 the World Bank warned that "under the current set of restrictive measures the Palestinian economy will remain moribund... Movement restrictions and border closures continue to stifle the normal conduct of commercial activities."

At the same time both the World Food Programme and the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization expressed concern that "new population groups have become food insecure... Several factors account for this deterioration in economic conditions... [T]he most significant factor is the system of movement restrictions imposed by Israel on the free movement of Palestinian goods and labour."

To find out more, see *Enduring occupation: Palestinians under siege in the West Bank* (MDE 15/033/2007). View interactive maps and take action at www.amnesty.org from 4 June.



Inside



Worldwide Appeals

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- One year in jail for political prisoner in Belarus

ACCESS DENIED! CLOSING BORDERS DEPRIV

Australia to 'swap' refugees with USA

In April, the Australian government agreed to a controversial refugee "swap" with the USA. The agreement authorizes the exchange of mainly Cuban and Haitian refugees, currently held by the US authorities at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, with refugees, including Rohingya and Sri Lankans, "outsourced" by Australia to the Pacific island of Nauru. All the individuals affected by the deal already have formal refugee status.

While the swift resettlement of recognized refugees in safe countries is a good thing, the proposed "swap" is a poor solution and appears to be specifically designed to deter refugees from rightfully pursuing claims for protection by shuttling them from one region of the world to another, potentially separating families. UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) guidelines clearly state that governments should endeavour to reunite refugee families. However, this agreement may well do the exact opposite.

The Australian government has for some years introduced measures designed to keep refugee families apart in order to deter refugees from coming to Australia. The temporary protection visa system introduced in 1999 denies refugees the ability to sponsor family to come join them and to

Even if Australia recognizes a person as a refugee, the USA may then reject the individual on the basis of domestic restrictions on admission.

travel outside Australia, thereby keeping them separated from family overseas. Later "refinements" to the scheme have meant that some refugees may be on such a visa for the rest of their lives. Australia has also previously kept the wives and children of recognized refugees in Australia stranded in Nauru. With the latest proposal it is looking to potentially send refugees far away from any family they may have in Australia.

In the USA, immigration reform negotiations currently revolve around the US government's wish to restrict immigration for the purpose of family unity. Sending recognized refugees to the other side of the world is yet another way of keeping families apart.

Serious questions remain over the practicalities of any proposed swap, given the different emphasis and legislation each country has relating to who is and who is not a refugee. Even if Australia recognizes a person as a refugee, the USA may then reject the individual on the basis of domestic restrictions on admission. The US Department of State admits that blanket "material support of terrorism" laws are preventing thousands of legitimate refugees from entering the USA, and it has proposed legislation to address this anomaly. If a person already recognized as a refugee in Australia is part of the "swap" but is barred from US refugee protection due to poorly crafted law, will that person then be denied settlement in Australia?

Shuttling persecuted people from one shore to another is unacceptable. The USA and Australia must accept full responsibility for the refugees who risk their lives to secure protection in these countries.



Across the world states are finding ways, whether subtle or overt, of erecting obstacles that deny refugees and asylum-seekers access to their territory and to the protection they so desperately need.

Physically preventing refugees and asylum-seekers from crossing a border, as has been the case in Kenya (see article, right), is an extreme measure, and is a violation of the human right to seek asylum in another country. At the same time, in circumstances where asylum-seekers and refugees do manage to cross a border, they are often denied the right to have their asylum claims heard. Forced back to where they came from, they are thrust into an uncertain future where their human rights, and sometimes their lives, are at serious risk. In Spain, thousands of people trying to enter the country, including asylum-seekers, have been forcibly returned to Morocco and Algeria. In Israel, asylum-seekers attempting to cross the border from Egypt have been forced back, sometimes at gunpoint.

This gradual decline in commitment to international refugee protection is also shown in less direct ways. A recent "deal" between Australia and the USA in which Australia will "swap" Sri Lankan and Rohingya refugees detained in Nauru for Haitian refugees detained in Guantánamo, appears to be aimed at deterring people from seeking asylum in these two countries (see article, left). The last year has seen a steady decline in the numbers of those seeking asylum in Australia.

Left: Migrants' clothing caught on the razor-wire fences separating the Spanish enclave of Melilla from Morocco. Each year thousands of migrants and asylum-seekers, many of them from sub-Saharan Africa, try to cross into Europe via the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. Centre: Sri Lankans are brought ashore to the Australian detention centre at Christmas Island before being transferred to Nauru, March 2007. In the last 12 months, just 134 people have travelled by boat to Australia in search of protection. Right: Somali refugee family in Dadaab refugee camp, Kenya.

AI has produced a series of articles, reports and actions to mark World Refugee Day, celebrated on 20 June. Go to www.amnesty.org/refugees to find out more about refugee rights and what you can do to help protect them.

In comparison, Jordan and Syria are hosting nearly 2 million Iraqi refugees who have fled their war-stricken country (see article, far right). These states continue, for the time being, to keep their borders open. But Iraq's two neighbours are struggling to cope with the influx of refugees and there is an urgent need for immediate financial, technical and other assistance, as well as resettlement programmes, from the international community.

Keeping borders open is only the first step to protecting refugees. This has to be complemented by proper access to fair and satisfactory asylum procedures and a durable solution to those in need of international protection.

USA

More than 15 years on death row

Troy Anthony Davis (pictured with his mother) has spent more than 15 years on death row in Georgia, USA. In August 1991 he was convicted of the 1989 murder of Mark Allen McPhail, a police officer, in the car park of a fast food restaurant. Although he admits being at the scene, Troy Davis has always maintained that he did not commit the murder.

All but three of the non-police witnesses who testified against Troy Davis at his trial have since recanted or contradicted their testimony amid allegations that some of it was obtained under police duress. The case against him consisted entirely of witness testimony which contained inconsistencies even at the time of the trial.

AI believes that there are serious and unanswered questions surrounding the reliability of the conviction in Troy Davis' case and the State of Georgia's conduct in obtaining it. As the case stands, the government's pursuit of the death penalty contravenes UN safeguards which prohibit the execution of anyone whose guilt is not based on "clear and convincing evidence leaving

no room for an alternative explanation of the facts".

Procedural complexities and obstacles have meant that Troy Davis has not had a hearing in a federal court on the reliability of the witness testimony used against him. The rejection in December 2006 of his appeal for a rehearing in front of the full 11th Circuit Court of Appeals means that his judicial avenues are all but exhausted.

See USA: 'Where is the justice for me?' The case of Troy Davis, facing execution in Georgia (AMR 51/023/2007). Also see www.amnesty.org/deathpenalty

➔ Please write, calling on the Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles to grant clemency in the case of Troy Davis, noting that almost all of the witnesses at his trial have since recanted or contradicted their testimony.

Send appeals to: Board Members, State Board of Pardons and Paroles, 2 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, SE, Suite 458, Balcony Level, East Tower, Atlanta, Georgia 30334-4909, USA. Fax: +1 404 651 8502. Email: webmaster@p.p.state.ga.us Salutation: Dear Board Members



UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Engineer arrested, at risk of torture

Agricultural engineer 'Abdullah Sultan al-Subaih, aged about 46, was arrested while at work on 8 February by officers of Amn al-Dawla (State Security), the United Arab Emirates' (UAE's) security police. They took him to his house, searched it and confiscated some books, then took him away handcuffed and blindfolded. He is thought to be held in the capital, Abu Dhabi, but this has not been confirmed. He has not been charged with any offence and is being held incommunicado. He is at risk of torture or other ill-treatment while in custody.

'Abdullah Sultan al-Subaih is the head of the agricultural administration department in the Emirate of 'Ajman.

He was previously arrested in August 2005, along with two other people. All three were detained without charge or trial and held incommunicado until their release in October 2005. Thereasons for his arrest and detention on both occasions are unknown and the authorities have provided no explanation.

Political suspects in the UAE are commonly held incommunicado and in undisclosed locations. Those detained by Amn al-Dawla are reportedly often also kept in solitary confinement and may be subjected to torture or other ill-treatment, including sleep deprivation, suspension by the wrists or ankles followed by severe beatings to various parts of the body. Some former detainees have alleged that at times their food was drugged, causing them to lose consciousness, and that they were denied access to the toilet.

➔ Please write, calling on the authorities to release 'Abdullah Sultan al-Subaih immediately unless he is to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and brought to a prompt and fair trial. Urge that in the meantime he be given access to lawyers of his choice, his family and any medical care necessary.

Send appeals to: Vice President and Prime Minister, His Highness Shaikh Mohammad bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, Office of the Prime Minister, POB 73311, Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Fax: +971 4 330 4000. Salutation: Your Highness

ES REFUGEES OF THEIR RIGHTS



Kenya closes border with Somalia

Thousands of Somali asylum-seekers and refugees have been left stranded by Kenya's decision to close the border with its war-torn neighbour. The decision has put them at risk of grave human rights violations.

Kenya closed its border with Somalia on 3 January 2007, citing "security concerns" in the wake of the resurgence of Somalia's armed conflict. On the same day, at least 420 Somalis, who had already crossed into Kenya and were waiting at the transit centre in Liboi, were forcibly returned to Somalia by the Kenyan authorities.

Since then, thousands more Somali asylum-seekers have been unable to cross the border into Kenya and exercise their right to seek refuge from the violence that has soared since June 2006.

For the estimated 2,000 asylum-seekers who have managed to cross the border, there are additional risks and hardship along the way. Hiking through the bush exposes families to the threat of killings, rape and torture by armed groups. Those who make it to the Kenyan refugee camps in Dadaab live in fear of being sent back, if it is discovered they arrived after the border closure.

Among those trying to escape Somalia on the day of the closure was Khadija, a 24-year-old mother of four.

She told AI: "We were driven back to Somalia and dropped in the middle of nowhere. Some of us decided to come back to Kenya illegally, through the bush."

On the way, her group encountered a low-flying helicopter, thought to be Kenyan security forces. "There was confusion and panic and everyone started running to hide. I lost all my children and have not been able to trace any of them."

"We were driven back to Somalia and dropped in the middle of nowhere"

Khadija also lost contact with her husband after he went looking for their children.

The right to seek international protection in another country is enshrined in international law. Kenya's refusal to allow Somalis across its border is a violation of its international obligations, including the 1951 UN Refugee Convention to which Kenya is a state party.

The Kenyan government must re-open the border immediately and ensure that all individuals seeking refuge in the country have access to proper and effective protection.

See *Denied refuge: The effect of the closure of the Kenya/Somalia border on thousands of Somali asylum-seekers and refugees* (AFR 32/002/2007).

Iraq crisis looms

Nearly 4 million Iraqis have been displaced by the continuing conflict in the country.

In the past 12 months alone, hundreds of thousands of people have poured out of the country, desperate to escape the sectarian and other violence that has intensified there since February 2006 when insurgents bombed one of the holiest Shi'a shrines in Iraq, the al-Askari Mosque, in Samarra.

About 1.9 million Iraqis remain as internally displaced persons (IDPs) within Iraq. The rest – some 2 million – have mostly sought refuge in Jordan and Syria, leaving both states struggling to cope with the economic and other demands placed on them by a growing refugee population. In both countries, the strain of trying to meet the needs of such numbers has prompted a surge in anti-Iraqi sentiment among locals.

In Jordan, while the authorities and local non-governmental organizations are making significant efforts to assist refugees, these are simply not enough given the scale of the problem and the protracted violence and instability which prevails in Iraq.

Further, there are reports that some refugees – including those not registered with the UNHCR – have been deported to Iraq, a violation of the principle of not returning people to countries where they are at risk of human rights violations. On a visit to Jordan in March 2007, AI heard of the case of seven Iraqi Shi'a men from Samawa who were said to have been forced to return to Iraq in December 2006. Once there, all but one of them were reportedly beheaded by insurgents near Ramadi.

Amid fears that a full-blown humanitarian crisis is developing, the UNHCR convened an international conference in Geneva in April to address the needs of Iraqi refugees and IDPs. AI called on states that have the means – notably the USA and European Union countries – to help resettle Iraqis from Jordan and Syria, giving priority to the most vulnerable cases. These and other states should provide financial, technical, and in-kind assistance to the governments of Iraq, Jordan and Syria to help them provide vital health and education services to those displaced by the violence in Iraq.

UPDATES

Viet Nam

Father Nguyen Van Ly, a 60-year-old Catholic priest who helped set up an internet petition calling for democratic change, was sentenced on 30 March to eight years' imprisonment for "conducting propaganda" against the state. This will be his fourth period as a prisoner of conscience in two decades.

Father Nguyen Van Ly has been a peaceful critic of the Vietnamese authorities since the late 1970s. He is a founding member of Bloc 8406, which in April 2006 launched an on-line petition signed by 118 democracy activists calling for peaceful political change and respect for human rights in Viet Nam.

Father Nguyen Van Ly has spent around 15 years in prison for peacefully advocating for greater respect for human rights in Viet Nam. He had been released from his last period of imprisonment in 2005 (see *Worldwide Appeal* September 2001).

Please write, calling on the Vietnamese authorities to release Father Nguyen Van Ly immediately and unconditionally as a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for the peaceful expression of his dissenting political beliefs.

Send appeals to: Nguyen Tan Dung, Prime Minister, Office of the Prime Minister, Hoang Hoa Tham, Ha Noi, Viet Nam. Fax: +84 4 823 1872 (c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Email: banbientap@mofa.gov.vn. Salutation: Dear Prime Minister.

Syria

Human rights lawyer Anwar al-Bunni was sentenced in April to five years' imprisonment for "spreading false information harmful to the state". The charge relates to a statement he made about someone who had died in custody, possibly as a result of torture. AI condemned the sentence, which followed an unfair trial during which Anwar al-Bunni was not given full access to his lawyers. See *Worldwide Appeal* February 2007.

USA

US army medic Agustín Aguayo was released in April from a US military prison in Germany. He had been sentenced in March to eight months' imprisonment solely for his conscientious objection to participating in the war in Iraq. He served six weeks of his sentence, as the time he had spent in custody awaiting trial was taken into account. His lawyers have filed an appeal against his conviction. See *Urgent Action* 60/07 (AMR 51/041/2007 and AMR 51/075/2007).

UK / IRAQ

No justice for Iraqi man killed in UK custody

Baha Mousa, a 26-year-old Iraqi hotel receptionist and father of two, died on 15 September 2003, after being tortured over a period of 36 hours while detained by British troops in Basra, southern Iraq. A post-mortem examination revealed 93 separate injuries on his body. The ill-treatment of Baha Mousa occurred both during his arrest at the hotel where he worked, and during his subsequent detention at the British military base in Basra.

The court martial in the UK of seven UK military personnel in relation to the case of Baha Mousa, concluded in March 2007. By the end of the proceedings, six of the seven defendants had been acquitted of all charges. One soldier had pleaded guilty to a charge of inhumane treatment – a war crime – and was acquitted of the remaining charges.

The court martial confirmed that numerous individuals had been responsible for inflicting unlawful violence on Baha Mousa and other detainees. However, as the judge remarked, many of those responsible were "not charged with any offence simply because there is no evidence against them as a result of a more or less obvious closing of ranks".

The proceedings also confirmed that interrogation techniques such as hooding detainees, keeping them in stress positions and depriving them of sleep had been "standard operating procedure" at the base, owing to what the judge called "a serious failing in the chain of command".

Such practices have been banned by the UK since the 1970s, when their use was widespread in Northern Ireland. AI considers that these techniques, particularly when applied simultaneously or cumulatively, amount to torture.

➔ Please write, calling for an independent, impartial and effective investigation into the death of Baha Mousa; for his family to receive full and effective reparation; and for an inquiry into the use of the above-mentioned techniques by UK armed forces, including how, when, where, why and by whom they were authorized.

Send appeals to: Secretary of State for Defence, Floor 5, Main Building, Whitehall, London SW1A 2HB, United Kingdom.

Fax: +44 (20) 7218 7140.

Email: defencesecretary@mod.uk

Salutation: Dear Secretary of State



BELARUS

First year in jail for political prisoner

Former presidential candidate, Alyaksandr Kazulin (pictured, front), was sentenced in July 2006 to five and a half years in jail. A prisoner of conscience, he is held solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of assembly, association and expression. AI continues to call for his immediate and unconditional release.

Alyaksandr Kazulin and his campaign team were repeatedly harassed and intimidated in the run-up to the presidential elections in March 2006. On 25 March 2006, Alyaksandr Kazulin led people from a public meeting in Minsk to Akrestina prison, where hundreds were being detained after the violent dispersal of demonstrations that had followed the presidential elections on 19 March. Government security forces reportedly used excessive force to break up the march, at which point Alyaksandr Kazulin suggested that the demonstrators head to a nearby church to pray. As he turned away, he was reportedly struck repeatedly on the back by security officers. He was then detained at Akrestina prison.

Alyaksandr Kazulin was subsequently charged with "hooliganism" and "the

organization of group activities that breach public order or active participation in similar activities".

The charges related to the events of 25 March, as well as two previous incidents, on 17 February and 2 March 2006. On 2 March, Alyaksandr Kazulin and his supporters had been beaten by plain clothes law enforcement officers when he tried to register as a participant of a conference which he was legally entitled to attend. Following this, he reported that he was driven around in a police van and "placed between the seats, on my back, with my legs pressed against my head. I was drowning in my own blood".

➔ Please write, calling on the authorities to ensure the immediate and unconditional release of Alyaksandr Kazulin, in compliance with their obligations under international standards, in particular Articles 19, 20 and 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Belarus is a state party.

Send appeals to: President Alyaksandr Lukashenko, ul. Karla Marxa 38, 220016 Minsk, Belarus. Fax: +375 172260610, +375 172223872.

Salutation: Dear President Lukashenko

The state of the world's human rights



The *Amnesty International Report 2007* was launched simultaneously in London and Moscow on 23 May. At the same time, press conferences took place in every region of the world, in countries including Chile, Israel, Nepal, Senegal and Slovenia.

The report documents human rights abuses in 153 countries around the world and is based on in-depth research, individual testimony and analysis of major international events. It reveals a world ravaged by armed conflict, repression and discrimination, where women are at constant risk of violence, where entire communities are mired in poverty and social exclusion.

However, the report also presents good news and grounds for hope and optimism. It reveals the extent to which AI's 2.2 million members

and supporters exert influence on governments and how they can change the lives of individuals – of victims and survivors of human rights abuses, of human rights activists and defenders, and even of the abusers.

Featuring full-page colour photos and updated presentation of the international and national human rights treaties, the report is an accessible and powerful human rights resource.

To obtain a copy of the *Amnesty International Report 2007* (POL 10/001/2007), contact your local AI office or email: orderpub@amnesty.org. The report and other materials are available in Arabic, English, French, Russian and Spanish at <http://thereport.amnesty.org>



The price of defiance

Former prisoner of conscience speaks to AI

Ali-Salem Tamek has an unenviable record as a human rights defender.

Since 1992, the Sahrawi activist and former prisoner of conscience

has been detained five times. During the course of those detentions, he says he was on hunger strike 22 times. But with grave human rights violations continuing to afflict Western Sahara, his work and that of other human rights defenders like him is far from over.

Speaking to AI in February, he described the recent imprisonment of several of his colleagues in the Sahrawi human rights community and protests that they and other political prisoners had been carrying out against their treatment by the Moroccan authorities while in jail. "These days, hunger strikes are taking place," he said.

Imprisonment is just one weapon in a sustained campaign of harassment and intimidation waged by the Moroccan authorities against Sahrawi human rights defenders and other dissident voices in Western Sahara. Since Morocco's controversial annexation of the territory in 1975, many Sahrawis have been demanding the right to self-determination. Between the mid-1970s and early 1990s those who did so publicly, or dared to expose human rights violations perpetrated by the state, put themselves at risk of enforced disappearance. The situation has significantly improved since then, but such individuals are still singled out for persecution, generally through the judicial system.

Ali-Salem Tamek knows only too well what extremes the authorities will go to, to crush dissent. Not only has he been

imprisoned several times, but he says that he has also been tortured while in detention, forcibly admitted into a mental hospital and on one occasion, "injected with a substance" which caused "strange symptoms on my body." His family, too, has been targeted for abuse.

"My family has been intimidated into issuing public statements denouncing me as an ungrateful son and disowning me because of my political and human rights views," he said. "The Moroccan secret service tried to recruit my wife to spy on me and on my friends. When she refused, she was abducted near the jail while she was accompanying my daughter. She was raped."

Such challenges, admits Ali-Salem Tamek, are distressing and deeply stressful. "It is difficult to withstand some practices that

"The Moroccan secret service tried to recruit my wife to spy on me and on my friends. When she refused, she was abducted near the jail while she was accompanying my daughter. She was raped."

hurt you deep inside, like the crime of rape that my wife suffered... This incident is engraved in my memory. I was shocked when I learned about it. When I used to recount the details of this problem, I had difficulty carrying on."

Ali-Salem Tamek remains an outspoken critic of Morocco's human rights record in Western Sahara. His latest period in detention lasted about nine months, ending in April 2006, when he was granted a royal pardon. He had been sentenced to 10 months' imprisonment after an unfair trial, accused of inciting violent protest activities, among other charges. For years, AI has followed his case, issuing *Worldwide Appeals* (see December 2002 and *Updates* June 2006) and other actions on his behalf.

For him, such support is vital. AI has played a crucial role, he says, "in redressing part of the injustice that has been inflicted upon the Sahrawis by the Moroccan state... I believe AI should continue with its campaigns vigorously, because this will substantially contribute to the reduction of such grave violations."

Still, such an impact can only be possible thanks to the bravery and commitment of human rights defenders like Ali-Salem Tamek.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Execution rate falls in 2006

Recorded executions worldwide fell by more than 25 per cent in 2006. AI figures show a drop in the total number from 2,148 in 2005 to 1,591 in 2006. Speaking in Rome during a press conference in April to release the statistics, AI's Secretary General stated that AI is calling for a universal moratorium on executions as a step towards full abolition. "Only six countries – Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Pakistan, the USA and China – were responsible for 91 per cent of all executions carried out in 2006. These hard core executioners are isolated and out of step with global trends," she said.

Violence mars elections in Nigeria

More than 200 people lost their lives in election-related violence during the recent electoral process, according to the European Union electoral observation mission. On 14 April, the day of the state assembly and state governorship elections, at least 50 people were reportedly killed in political violence. Thousands of AI supporters from all over the world have signed a petition to the Nigerian authorities and political candidates calling for violence-free elections. The newly chosen representatives of the Nigerian people should clearly demonstrate their will to promote and protect human rights by ensuring that abuses during the electoral campaign are not left unpunished. See *the Wire*, April 2007.



Your letters make a difference

"I never knew that the kinds of people who would write letters to a stranger to show their support existed," said Shafaoat Zakirova to AI. Her cousin, Umida Niazova, was handed a seven-year jail sentence on 1 May by an Uzbekistani court. The trial lasted just two days, witnesses were interrupted and prompted by the judge and no attenuating circumstances (Umida Niazova is a single mother of a two-year-old

boy) were taken into account. She was later released on appeal and is serving a three-year suspended sentence.

AI members sent letters and cards to Umida Niazova and Shafaoat Zakirova. "I am so thankful for... the support that was shown to Umida and to us, her family," said Shafaoat Zakirova. "The letters that are sent to us give us hope and help us believe in goodness... I am particularly thankful for the children who sent us postcards decorated with their own drawings and pictures. I am sure that Umida's son, Elbek, will understand the drawings when he sees them."



Opinions wanted

- Are you an international member?
- Do you live in a country that is not served by an AI office?
- Do you want to help improve *the Wire*?

If so, we want to hear from you. Many of you responded to our 2005 survey – thank you! We are now looking for individuals to take part in a reader's panel to help us improve the way we bring news stories to you. If you are interested in being a part of this process, please email us at newslett@amnesty.org (using the subject header: "Reader's panel"), or write to *the Wire* at the address below.

Balkans youth poised to take on 'war on terror'

A core group of young activists from across the Balkans took part in a two-day workshop designed to help them campaign against human rights abuses carried out in the "War on Terror". Organized and funded by AI, the workshop ran from 13-15 April in Ljubljana, Slovenia, and was attended by 17 young people from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Macedonia, Serbia (including Kosovo) and Slovenia.

Since 2001, the Balkans region has been increasingly drawn into the "War on Terror". Several Balkan countries have been involved in the transfer of suspects into secret detention as well as in rendition flights. Such cases include the unlawful transfer of six men from BiH to the US detention centre at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. People alleged to be involved in "terrorism" have been unlawfully detained in the US army base Bondsteel in UN-administered Kosovo.

Among those invited to speak to participants at the workshop was Nadja Dizdarevic, wife of detainee Boudella al-Haji, currently held with five of his friends at Guantánamo. She spoke about her experience campaigning for the rights of Guantánamo detainees.



In a later communication with workshop members and AI, Nadja Dizdarevic wrote: "Thank you for every second you spend dealing with this case. You have no idea how it feels looking at your children, crying and writing letters to their father. Letters which I am afraid to send him, as they are full of sorrow and pain."

Since attending the workshop, the young activists have begun to organize campaigning activities in their own countries, focusing on the case of the six BiH citizens while calling for Guantánamo's closure.

The Balkans workshop is one of five regional youth activist workshops organized by AI. All are focused on one of AI's global campaigns. Others have taken place in Benin, South Africa and India, and another has been planned for Paraguay.

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