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HUMAN LIFELINE - FORMER PRISONER MEETS THE INVENTOR OF THE TECHNIQUE THAT SAVED HIS LIFE

At a seminar organized by Amnesty International in Sao Paulo on the occasion of Human Rights Day, former prisoner of conscience Luiz Basilio Rossi will for the first time meet the woman who issued the appeal that saved his life, Tracy Ulltveit-Moe.

Professor Rossi was the first human rights victim to be helped by Amnesty International's Urgent Action Network, a technique invented by Amnesty International researcher Tracy Ulltveit-Moe in 1973 which, today, involves 80,000 people around the globe. Each action generates up to 5,000 appeals and puts considerable international pressure on national authorities that perpetrate human rights abuses.

"Every day is human rights day for the 80,000 members of the Urgent Action Network who make a commitment to send urgent appeals on behalf of victims around the world," Tracy Ulltveit-Moe said.

The Urgent Action technique is used approximately 800 times every year and, in about one third of cases, brings an improvement in a prisoner's situation: torture stops, a "disappeared" person reappears, a death sentence is commuted, medical treatment is provided, detention is acknowledged, or a prisoner is released.

Professor Rossi, who was tortured and spent several weeks in prison in 1973 with no charge against him, was released shortly after the Urgent Action was issued. A few days later, Amnesty International received a letter from his wife saying that several hundred protests had arrived and that Amnesty International had saved his life.

Since then, over 80,000 letter-writers in 84 countries have sent millions of airmail letters, telexes, faxes, and telegrams on behalf of thousands of people in imminent danger throughout the world.

The surprise factor was obviously important in the success of the first ever Urgent Action but, today, the potential scale of the protest that Amnesty International organizes is a strong weapon in the arsenal of the human rights organization.

One recent example of the efficiency of the technique is the case of Wagner dos Santos, a young Brazilian that witnessed the *La Candelaria* massacre in 1993, in which he was injured and eight children were killed. As a result of his testimony, three agents of the military police are being tried for the killing. Following his deposition Wagner received several death threats. The Urgent Actions launched by Amnesty International helped him get better medical treatment and protection from the state.

Last April, Mahmut Sakar, a Turkish lawyer imprisoned after having been investigating a series of human rights violations, was released following a long Urgent Action campaign from Amnesty International. Shortly after, the organization received a letter from Mahmut acknowledging its efforts.

Since this mechanism was developed to respond to cases of torture in Brazil, it has been extended to include other circumstances in which the human rights of a person are being threatened and where only urgent action can protect them. Tracey Ulltveit-Moe developed the Urgent Action network as a response to a changing pattern of human rights abuses. Today, Amnesty International continues adapting its campaigning techniques to the changing circumstances in which human rights violations occur.

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A meeting of the Latin American Urgent Action Network, including members from Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Peru, will take place in Sao Paulo on 9 and 10 December at the following address:

Instituto Pio XI
Rua Pio XI 1100
Bairro da Lapa
Sao Paulo - Brazil
Tel: 55-(0)11-8318266

Professor Rossi, Tracy Ulltveit-Moe and the Latin American Urgent Action teams will be available for interviews at the address above from 11:00 h on 10 December.

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