

The Wire

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Civilians' lives shattered in Lebanon and Israel

A UN-brokered ceasefire came into effect on 14 August following weeks of fighting between Israeli forces and Hizbullah. Since the conflict began on 12 July, hundreds of thousands of people – up to one quarter of Lebanon's population – were forced from their homes by Israeli bombardments. Most sought shelter in schools and public parks as Israeli forces bombed their villages and neighbourhoods. Their homes smashed to dust, scores will return to nothing but rubble. In Israel, the onslaught of rockets fired by Hizbullah into the country has similarly uprooted many from their homes.

On 7 August more than 50 civilians were killed in their homes when Israel's air force bombarded a building in the residential neighbourhood of Shiyah in Beirut. No prior warning had been issued about the impending air strike against the area, which initially had been considered "safe". People fleeing Israeli bombardments in other parts of the country had sought refuge in the Shiyah neighbourhood. AI delegates who visited the site of the Shiyah attack witnessed the destruction and heard from survivors and witnesses.

For over a month, Israeli forces pounded buildings into the ground, reducing entire neighbourhoods to rubble and turning villages and towns into ghost towns, as their inhabitants fled the bombardments. In village after village in South Lebanon, the story was the same. Main roads, bridges and petrol stations were blown to bits. Entire families were killed in air strikes on their homes or in their vehicles while fleeing the aerial assaults on their villages. Scores lay buried beneath the rubble of their houses for weeks, as Red Cross and other rescue workers were prevented by continuing Israeli strikes from accessing the areas. Sometimes, the only clue to their location was provided by dogs rummaging in the rubble.

In Israel, about one third of the population of the northern town of Carmiel had to flee Hizbullah's rocket attacks. The nearby town of Nahariya, about five miles from the Lebanese border, was struck by hundreds of rockets. It was almost deserted when AI delegates arrived. AI visited one shelter in the city which had become "home" to about 40 people following the first round of rocket attacks. Most did not dare leave the shelter for fear of being caught up in an attack. In all, about one third to one half of the population of northern Israel had to seek safety elsewhere at some point.

AI delegates in Lebanon and Israel investigated allegations of war crimes committed by both sides, including disproportionate and indiscriminate attacks. Israel's bombardments of villages and residential neighbourhoods have levelled or damaged tens of thousands of homes, reportedly killing some 1,000 civilians and preventing relief and rescue operations. Hizbullah's attacks against towns and villages in Israel killed some 40 civilians and destroyed or damaged thousands of houses.

AI members worldwide joined in calling for a ceasefire, an arms embargo on both sides and an investigation to be carried out to ensure that those responsible for the violations are held accountable.

At the time of writing, both parties continued to observe the fragile ceasefire.

[Picture caption: Paramedics carry a Lebanese man from the rubble of a building destroyed by an Israeli air strike, Qana, near Tyre, July 2006 © EMPICS]

Injustice for women in rural Sierra Leone

Violence and discrimination are a part of daily life for many women in rural Sierra Leone. Those who are abused by their husbands are often also denied proper redress by local chiefs who routinely over-step the boundaries of their legal authority and illegally impose fines and punishments.

In some cases, chiefs have even been found to collude with male accusers, evicting women and children from their homes, imposing onerous fines on them or arbitrarily detaining them. Some chiefs go further, levying capricious charges – like witchcraft – against women, and determining guilt without any evidence.

A woman in a village near Makeni town, Bombali district, told AI how she was accused of witchcraft by her husband because her teenage son had epilepsy. “My husband brought this charge to the chief,” she said. “[T]he chief charged both me and my son with witchcraft. He said that we each had to pay him five gallons of palm oil, 50,000 leones [US\$15], one goat and a 20-foot pan of straw rice.”

Under Sierra Leonean customary law, women are accorded the status of minors. While customary law forms part of the common law, it is largely unwritten. The constitution defines it as “the rules of law which by custom are applicable to particular communities in Sierra Leone.” Customary law affects women most as it regulates such matters as marriage, inheritance, divorce and property.

On 1 August, AI launched a campaign highlighting the problems faced by Sierra Leonean women in accessing justice through traditional mechanisms. Activists in the country, led by AI Sierra Leone, are working to raise awareness about the issues and agitate for stronger legal protections.

In particular, AI calls on the Sierra Leonean government to accelerate the law reform process, which started in 2003, and amend draft laws on marriage, inheritance, sexual offences and succession. It asks that the government actively monitor the actions of chiefs and local court officials, ensuring that illegal and discriminatory rulings against women are prevented. AI also recommends that paralegal and legal aid support to women in rural areas be increased as this has been instrumental in informing women of their rights and, in some instances, has secured the successful repeal of unfair decisions.

On 17 May, AI launched its report *Women face human rights abuses in the informal justice sector* (AFR 51/002/2006). That same day, women and men across Sierra Leone marched to the nation’s capital to present the report to the Minister of Justice. “Human rights abuses shame your government,” said one activist as she handed the report to the minister. “End the abuses,” chanted others. Through a sustained campaign in Sierra Leone and with its membership internationally, AI will ensure that these cries are heard.

[Picture caption: Activists present Sierra Leone’s Minister of Justice with AI’s report, May 2006 © AI]

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30 August Day of the ‘disappeared’

[Standfirst]

Across the world, individuals are abducted by state agents and never seen again. Their relatives can spend decades looking for answers without success. The UN Working Group on

Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances has over 40,000 outstanding cases of “disappearances” on file. Iraq accounts for the most cases – 16,387 – followed by Sri Lanka (5,708) and Argentina (3,375).

But changes may be afoot. Later this year the UN General Assembly – on the recommendation of the new UN Human Rights Council – is expected to adopt a new International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

Hundreds missing in Ingushetia

Enforced disappearances used to be most readily associated with Chechnya, where AI has recorded widespread cases of such violations. However, the borders between Ingushetia and Chechnya have blurred when it comes to serious human rights violations. AI caught a glimpse of this reality during a visit to Ingushetia in June.

One woman, Kazban Bersanova, told AI how her son, Adam Bersanov, was taken from her home by armed men on 5 December 2004. Shortly after midnight, Kazban Bersanova woke up to screams in her house. Armed men wearing masks had entered the room where Adam had been watching TV, forced him to lie down and handcuffed him. When she asked the men why they were detaining him, they told her to “shut up” and shoved a gun into her chest; she lost consciousness. Adam’s wife, Leila, gave birth to their first child a week after her husband “disappeared”.

Kazban has sent countless letters, appeals and complaints to the authorities with little success. The information she has received suggests that her son was taken by law enforcement officials. However, while a criminal case has been opened into his “disappearance”, the authorities have yet to identify who took him away or what has happened to him.

This is not the only tragedy to hit the family. Adam Bersanov’s cousin, Bekkhan Velkhiev, told AI how he and his brother Bashir had been detained in July 2004 and tortured in police custody. Bashir died in detention that night.

Bekkhan Velkhiev described how he was kicked, punched, threatened with rape and electrocuted during an interrogation at the Department for the Fight Against Organized Crime in Nazran. “I could hear people screaming in other rooms and I was screaming at the top of my voice. Then they put a plastic bag over my head and closed it tightly. They tried to prevent me from hearing or seeing what was happening to my brother. They told me he had signed a confession and now it was my turn.”

Later that night, Bekkhan Velkhiev was put in a car and dumped near the police station. Two police officers found him and told him that his brother, Bashir, had died.

For two years, the family has been trying to find out why and how Bashir died. A murder investigation was opened, but has been suspended – on the grounds that the investigators could not identify a suspect.

Ineffectual investigations of the many serious human rights violations in Ingushetia is the norm. So after Bashir Mutsolgov “disappeared” in Ingushetia in December 2003, his brother Magomed set up the NGO Mashr (“peace” in Ingush). Mashr is dedicated to uncovering the truth behind Ingushetia’s “disappeared”, abducted and missing. The organization’s website lists over 100 cases.

Such efforts are vital in providing information on human rights, legal assistance, as well as moral support to the relatives of “disappeared” people. They fill the gap where the Russian authorities dismally fail to demonstrate real commitment to the protection of human rights.

ACT NOW!

Please continue to urge the Russian Federation authorities to investigate the “disappearances” in Ingushetia of Adam Bersanov, Adam Medov (see *Worldwide Appeal* January 2006) and Bashir Mutsolgov (see *Worldwide Appeal* May 2004). Urge the authorities to ensure that “disappearances” cease in Ingushetia and the North Caucasus.

Please write to: Procurator General of the Russian Federation, Yuri Chaika, General Procuracy of the Russian Federation, Ul. B. Dimitrovka 15a, 103793 Moscow K-31, Russian Federation. Fax: + 7 495 692 1725.

Russian Federation rebuked by European Court

On 27 July the European Court of Human Rights issued its first ruling on “disappearances” in Chechnya. In *Bazorkina v Russia* the European Court ruled that the Russian Federation had violated the rights to life, liberty and security as well as the right to an effective remedy and the prohibition of inhuman treatment. Fatima Bazorkina brought the case following the “disappearance” of her son, Khadzhi-Murat Yandiev.

In February 2000, Khadzhi-Murat Yandiev was detained by Russian federal forces near Grozny, Chechnya’s capital. A Russian general searched and interrogated him, then gave an order to “finish him off”. Nobody has seen or heard from Khadzhi-Murat Yandiev since.

Croatia fails relatives of ‘disappeared’

The Croatian authorities have failed to thoroughly investigate “disappearances”, unlawful killings, extra-judicial executions and other human rights violations allegedly committed by members of the Croatian Army and police forces during the 1991-95 armed conflict. Few people have been brought to justice. Of those who have, almost all have been low-level perpetrators.

Between 1991 and 1992, for example, more than 100 Croatian Serbs reportedly “disappeared” or were killed in and around the town of Sisak, located about 50km southeast of Zagreb. They were victims of a campaign of killings and “disappearances”, as well as assaults and threats. In several cases, the suspected perpetrators were members of the Croatian Army or police forces.

Among those killed was Croatian Serb Petar Pajagic, an employee at the Sisak oil refinery, who was murdered following his arrest in September 1991. After having lunch at his daughter’s house, Petar Pajagic walked to his nearby flat and was reportedly arrested by three men in Croatian police uniform. The family knew nothing of his fate or whereabouts until his body was found in 2002 in the River Danube near Novi Sad, in the territory of the then Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It seems likely that his body was thrown into the river in Croatia and had floated down the river.

His family told AI that there has been no apparent progress in the investigation into his “disappearance” and murder.

Not a single perpetrator has been convicted for the killings and “disappearances” of Croatian Serbs in Sisak, and no progress has been made in investigations that the Croatian authorities

claim were initiated. Fifteen years after these crimes were committed, the victims and their families continue to be denied justice and redress.

ACT NOW!

Call on the Croatian authorities to thoroughly and impartially investigate the murder of Petar Pajagic who “disappeared” after reportedly being arrested by men in Croatian police uniform in Sisak on 20 September 1991, and whose body was found 11 years later in the River Danube. Express your concern that Petar Pajagic’s case was part of a pattern of “disappearances” and murders of Croatian Serb civilians in the Sisak area, which occurred in 1991-92 and which in several cases were allegedly committed by members of the Croatian Army and police forces. Urge the Croatian authorities to ensure that the perpetrators of the many other unresolved murders and “disappearances” of Croatian Serbs in Sisak are brought to justice.

Please write to: Minister of Justice, Ana Lovrin, Ministarstvo Pravosudja, Dežmanova ulica 10, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia. Fax: + 385 1 3710-612. Email: ministar@pravosudje.hr

South Asia in brief

Sri Lanka

During the past seven months, more than 150 people “disappeared” after being arrested by security forces in the north of the island. Eight Tamil men “disappeared” on 6 May in Jaffna, northern Sri Lanka, when they went to decorate a Hindu temple for a religious festival. Sri Lanka army personnel were reported to have been seen at the temple during the night. The men’s whereabouts remain unknown.

Pakistan

The “war on terror” has accounted for possibly hundreds of “disappearances” in the country. Analysts have stated that 66 per cent of prisoners at Guantánamo Bay were captured in Pakistan at a time when the USA apparently paid large sums of money for the capture of suspected enemies. Until they resurfaced in Guantánamo Bay, most or all were victims of enforced disappearances in the “war on terror”. This practice is increasingly being used against members of other groups: Baloch and Sindhi nationalists, members of the Shi’a minority and others.

Nepal

A government committee announced in July that it was investigating more than 600 outstanding cases of “disappearances”, but local activists say there are more than 1,000 individuals who are still unaccounted for. Meanwhile, the families of those missing continue to demand answers from the authorities – answers which they say are long overdue.

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Worldwide Appeals

Cambodia

Imprisoned after unfair trial

“In the case of Chea Vichea, there are many indications that the accused men have been chosen to take the blame, regardless of what the evidence suggests. Few believe that they are responsible for the crime, further diminishing public confidence in the administration of justice.”

Mr Peter Leuprecht, UN Special Representative of the Secretary General for Human Rights in Cambodia, 8 July 2004

Born Samnang and Sok Sam Oeun were sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment after a deeply flawed criminal investigation followed by an unfair trial on 1 August 2005. The Phnom Penh Court convicted the two men of murdering prominent trade unionist Chea Vichea on 22 January 2004, despite no evidence linking them to the murder.

Chea Vichea, President of the Free Trade Union of Workers in Cambodia, was shot dead at point blank range while reading at a news stand in central Phnom Penh. Eye witnesses reported that the unmasked killer fled the scene on a motorbike driven by an accomplice.

Both Born Samnang and Sok Sam Oeun had alibis for the time of the shooting. However, police threatened and arrested witnesses and those who provided alibis for the suspects. Born Samnang alleges that he was beaten, coerced and bribed into making a confession which was used as evidence against him.

Eyewitnesses to the murder were never asked to identify the arrested suspects and when shown their photographs said they bore no similarities to the men at the scene of the crime. In March 2004, a judge dismissed the case for lack of evidence admitting that he had been subject to political pressure. Within days, he was removed from his position. After prosecutors appealed the dismissal, the trial continued under another judge who found the two men guilty.

Please write, calling for a fresh and independent investigation into the murder of trade unionist Chea Vichea. Call for Born Samnang and Sok Sam Oeun to be released without delay unless there is sufficient evidence to bring charges against them, in which case they should receive a prompt and fair retrial.

Send appeals to: Sar Kheng, Deputy Prime Minister and Co-Minister of Interior, Ministry of Interior, 275 Norodom Blvd, Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Fax: + 855 23 726 052. E-mail: moi@interior.gov.kh

[Picture caption: Born Samnang (*right*) and Sok Sam Oeun (*left*) © Heng Sinith]

Turkey

Jailed despite innocence

"I'm tired of repeating the same things, the witnesses have been heard and it turned out that I'm innocent. Therefore I want to be acquitted and released."

Turgay Ulu, 33, has spent over a decade in prison. Detained in May 1996, he was convicted in 2002 on charges of colluding in the attempted escape of an alleged militant from custody. His death sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment. Although he won an appeal, his retrial is ongoing.

In 1996, Turgay Ulu found himself accused of supporting the activities of two ideologically distinct armed political groups. His case has been marked throughout by failures in the judicial system amounting to a violation of his right to a fair trial. During his initial eight-day incommunicado detention, police allegedly subjected him to torture. This allegation was never investigated. The case against him relies on the testimony of others allegedly extracted under torture. Two of three eye-witnesses (both police officers) have testified in court that he is not the man that they saw at the crime scene. Shockingly, the two courts that have heard the case have failed, over eight years, to call the third witness to testify.

In 2000, one of the prosecutors involved in the case stated that "clear, concrete and credible evidence that the defendant committed the crime does not exist". Further, the prosecutor from

the Court of Cassation called for the original conviction to be quashed due to lack of evidence. Yet, Turgay Ulu remains in Kandira F-Type prison.

Please write to the Minister of Justice, calling for Turgay Ulu to be released on bail pending a verdict and any subsequent appeal.

Send letters to: Mr Cemil Çiçek, Minister of Justice, Adalet Bakanligi, 06659, Kizilay, Ankara, Turkey, Fax: +90 312 418 4119.

Write to Turgay Ulu, 2 Nolu F Tipi Cezaevi, K:145, B 2-5-63, Kandira, Kocaeli, Turkey, telling him of your appeal on his behalf.

[Picture caption: Turgay Ulu © Private]

Ethiopia

Journalist gives birth in jail

Journalist Serkalem Fasil was pregnant at the time of her arrest in November 2005 and recently gave birth to her son in the police hospital. She is having to care for him in inhumane conditions in Kaliti prison, Addis Ababa. Her cell is infested with rats, cockroaches and fleas. Born prematurely, her son was severely underweight. Doctors advised that he should be put in an incubator in a hospital intensive care unit, but this was blocked by the authorities, who refused to release Sarkalem or her partner from jail to be with their son. Serkalem's partner, Eskinder Negga, was also arrested in November 2005 and is detained at Kaliti prison, but the couple have only been able to see each other a few times since their arrest. AI is concerned about Serkalem Fasil's and her baby's dire prison conditions and the denial of adequate medical care.

Co-owner and publisher of Asqual, Menilik and Satenaw news-papers, Serkalem Fasil was arrested, along with 13 other journalists, after publishing articles critical of the government's actions during the May 2005 parliamentary elections. The government conducted mass arrests of opposition members and journalists after demonstrations in June and November 2005 protesting against alleged election fraud. More than 80 opposition supporters were killed by the security forces, and seven police officers were killed by demonstrators during these protests.

Serkalem Fasil is charged with treason, outrages against the Constitution and incitement to armed conspiracy. If found guilty, she could face the death penalty. AI believes that she is a prisoner of conscience, detained on account of her opinions and for exercising her legitimate professional activity as a journalist and publisher.

See AI's report *Ethiopia – Prisoners of conscience on trial for treason: opposition party leaders, human rights defenders and journalists* (AFR 25/013/2006).

Please write, calling on the Ethiopian authorities to ensure that Serkalem Fasil and her baby receive adequate medical care and appropriate living conditions, pending the outcome of her trial.

Send appeals to: Minister of Justice, Assefa Kesito, Ministry of Justice, PO Box 1370, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Fax: + 251 11 552 0874. Email: ministry-justice@telecom.net.et

[Picture caption not used in printed version: Serkalem Fasil © Private]

USA

Man with serious mental illness facing execution

Scott Panetti was sentenced to death in 1995 for killing his parents-in-law and is currently on death row in Texas. He has a long history of serious mental illness, including schizophrenia. He was hospitalized more than a dozen times before the crime.

In September 1992 Scott Panetti broke into his parents-in-law's house where his wife and three-year-old daughter were staying. He shot his parents-in-law at close range with a rifle, allowing his wife and their daughter to leave. Giving himself up to the police he said that "Sarge" (an auditory hallucination) controlled him at the time of the crime, that divine intervention had meant that the victims did not suffer, and that demons had been laughing at him.

A jury concluded in September 1994 that Scott Panetti was competent to stand trial despite a psychiatrist, testifying for the prosecution, agreeing with previous diagnoses of schizophrenia, and saying that his delusional thinking could interfere with his communications with his legal counsel.

Scott Panetti waived his right to counsel and acted in his own defence at his trial in September 1995. Dressed as a cowboy during the proceedings, he gave a rambling presentation in his defence. Numerous people, including doctors, lawyers and witnesses, have variously described the trial as a "farce", a "joke", a "circus" and a "mockery". Most concluded that Scott Panetti was incompetent to stand trial and that if he had been represented by attorneys, because of his mental illness he would not have received the death penalty.

Please write, urging the Governor of Texas to intervene in the case of Scott Panetti to ensure that his death sentence is commuted.

Send appeals to: The Honourable Rick Perry, Governor of Texas, State Capitol, PO Box 12428, Austin, TX 78711, USA. Fax: +1 512 463 1849. Send copies to the diplomatic representatives of the USA in your country.

[Picture caption: Scott Panetti © Private]

Updates

Democratic Republic of Congo

On 30 July the Democratic Republic of Congo held its first democratic elections in more than 40 years. Despite outbreaks of violence and a number of election-related human rights violations in the build-up to elections, polling day itself passed peacefully. Voters chose from 32 presidential candidates and more than 9,000 parliamentary candidates. The final result will not be known for several weeks.

None of the political parties offered convincing plans for how they would promote human rights, accountability and the rule of law. AI urged them to use these landmark elections as an opportunity to address the country's most pressing human rights challenges, including those stemming from the country's recent past such as impunity for war crimes, crimes against humanity and other serious human rights violations.

Senegal must try Hissène Habré

On 2 July 2006, Senegal accepted the African Union's request to try former President of Chad, Hissène Habré, who has been given a safe haven in Senegal since 1990. Crimes against

humanity, including torture, were perpetrated during his presidency from 1982 to 1990. Senegal must now promptly include these crimes in its penal code and begin fair criminal proceedings without delay.

AI members worldwide have campaigned for many years for the victims of these crimes to be given justice. They must be permitted to participate at all stages of the trial and to obtain reparations.

Honduras

AI welcomes the release of prisoners of conscience Marcelino Miranda and his brother Leonardo Miranda who were acquitted of murder on 23 June. Both brothers were unconditionally released, Marcelino on 12 July and Leonardo on 15 August.

On his release Marcelino thanked all those who supported him in the different campaigns for his release, as well as all those who sent their wishes through letters, drawings and postcards, all of which helped alleviate his suffering.

Indigenous leaders of a community in Montaña Verde, the brothers were convicted on evidence fabricated in reprisal for their attempts to secure recognition of communal land titles for their community. They had served more than three years of a 25-year sentence.

See *Worldwide Appeal* February 2006.

[Picture caption: Marcelino Miranda (*top*) and Leonardo Miranda (*bottom*)

[Caption for *Terror and counter-terror* leaflet image:]

Terror and counter-terror: defending our human rights (ACT 40/009/2006), documents AI's work in this area over the last five years.

It will be available from mid-September for sections to use in recruitment and with local groups.

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Time is running out for USA in Guantánamo

[Two poems by Guantánamo detainees]

IS IT TRUE?

Is it true that the Grass grows again after rain?
Is it true that the Flowers will rise up in the Spring?
Is it true that Birds will migrate home again?
Is it true that the Salmon swim back up their stream?
It is true. This is true. These are all miracles.
But is it true that one day we'll leave Guantánamo Bay?
Is it true that one day we'll go back to our homes?
I sail in my dreams, I am dreaming of home
To be with my children, each one part of me;
To be with my wife, and the ones that I love;
To be with my parents, my world's tenderest hearts.
I dream to be home, to be free from this cage
But do you hear me, oh judge, do you hear me at all?

We are innocent, here, we've committed no crime
Set me free, set us free, if anywhere still
May justice, compassion remain in this world!

Usama Abu Kabir, Jordanian prisoner still held in
Guantánamo Bay after four years

FIRST POEM OF MY LIFE

Be careful, my brother, when in Pakistan;
They understand money – the price of a man.

I came here to study, I learned just deceit;
The Mosque was a war zone, surrounded. Police

Were shouting for silence: “Hands up! Come in peace!”
They took us by truckloads, thrown, bound hand and feet;

Then marched us eight hours, then eight hours more –
We cried for relief, but we suffered, footsore.

They kicked us, they beat us, they told us – their guests –
They'd sell us for money, and Yankees paid best.

We're slaves of our century, the slave ship a plane
To humiliation, abuse and disdain.

Respect was abandoned, the Holy Koran
Downtrodden there with us. Their madness, a plan

To torture us, beat us, encouraged by drink –
Send priests with their crosses to save us, they think

They take us to Cuba, pursue without qualm
Crusades of injustice, their war on Islam.

Mohammed al-Gharani, born in Chad and brought up in Saudi Arabia, went to Pakistan in 2001. He was arrested, aged 15, and handed over to US forces who sent him to Kandahar, Afghanistan. Transferred as an “enemy combatant” in January 2002, he is still held in Guantánamo.

[Caption for “Are you afraid of flying?” postcard:]

Winning postcard design produced for a competition organized by AI Greece, in cooperation with the photo agency Apeiron Photos, to help promote AI's campaign against torture. The reverse of the card is addressed to US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, urging the USA to stop the practice of rendition and secret detention, and to denounce torture and other ill-treatment in the strongest possible terms.

© Adel/Saatchi & Saatchi Photo courtesy of Angelo Cavalli/Corbis/Apeiron Photos

UN experts criticize USA

Once again a body of UN experts has found serious deficiencies in the USA's human rights record at both the domestic level and in the context of the “war on terror”.

The USA appeared before the UN Human Rights Committee in Geneva in July, for the first time since the attacks of 11 September 2001 in the USA.

In its concluding observations on the USA's compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Committee expressed concern at a wide range of US practices. These included secret and incommunicado detentions, the use of interrogation methods that violate the prohibition on torture and on cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the practices of "rendition", police brutality, gender discrimination and the use of electro-shock weapons such as tasers.

The abuse of detainees in Guantánamo Bay, Afghanistan and Iraq, the use of secret incommunicado detentions in the "war on terror", the execution of mentally ill prisoners, the abuse of electro-shock weapons, the sentencing of children to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole, the long-term isolation of inmates in prisons and the shackling of women prisoners during labour, show that there is much work to be done to ensure that the ICCPR's guarantee of respect for human dignity becomes a reality for those men, women and children in US custody.

The Committee also concluded that the USA applies an unacceptably "restrictive interpretation" of its obligations, including a refusal to accept the applicability of the ICCPR to its operations abroad.

AI is calling on the US authorities to give full and serious consideration to the Committee's observations and set about implementing its recommendations as a matter of priority.

For more information see *USA: Updated briefing to the Human Rights Committee on the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (AMR 51/111/2006).

Next leader must keep rights at UN's core

The UN will appoint its eighth Secretary-General before 31 December. It is crucial that she or he consolidates and builds upon the human rights achievements agreed by the international community under Kofi Annan's tenure. At the 2005 World Summit, world leaders acknowledged that peace and security, development and human rights are the pillars of the UN system. AI will look to the next Secretary-General to keep human rights central to UN activities.

The new Secretary-General must provide firm support to the UN Human Rights Council, as well as to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the International Criminal Court. She or he should strongly advocate for the UN Charter's human rights provisions by:

- protecting populations from grave human rights violations
- emphasizing the need to respect human rights in countering terrorism
- mainstreaming human rights throughout the UN's work
- safeguarding the human rights of women and vulnerable people.

The new Secretary-General should also develop human rights standards for peacekeeping operations, maintain and support the Special Adviser on genocide, and increase the contribution of civil society and NGOs to the UN system.

AI has joined with other NGOs in calling for a transparent, accountable and inclusive process in selecting the next UN Secretary-General.

In particular, UN member states are urged to introduce the following into the current selection process:

Formal candidate qualifications

An official timetable with systematic reporting for nominations, shortlists and final selection

Procedures for assessment of candidates

Consideration of gender and geographic diversity.

Visit www.UNSGselection.org to see details of AI's basic proposals for improving the selection process.

ACT NOW!

Write to your Minister of Foreign Affairs and ask that these procedures be incorporated into the current selection process and that a candidate with a demonstrated commitment to promoting and protecting human rights be selected.

For model letter and further information see appeals for action on www.amnesty.org/act-now

Discriminatory health services fail Peru's poorest

"Stop bothering us... you should not have children if you are poor."

A doctor shouted these words at María Luz, a young Quechua speaker from Huánuco, Peru, when she asked what was happening to her baby. María Luz had brought her premature infant to the hospital for treatment. A few days later, the baby died.

Discriminatory maternity and infant health services are letting hundreds of women and children die every year. In 2000 alone, 71 out of every 1,000 babies died at birth in Huancavelica, one of Peru's poorest areas. By contrast, the corresponding rate for Peru's richest city, Lima, was 17 out of every 1,000. The World Health Organization estimated that 410 out of 100,000 women died during labour in Peru in 2004. This figure is surpassed only by Haiti, Guatemala and Bolivia, the three poorest countries in the Americas.

For many Peruvians, health care is the privilege of those who can afford it. In a country where 49 per cent of the population live in poverty, this means that almost half of all Peruvians are effectively denied adequate health care. According to a report issued by the Peruvian Ministry of Health in 2002, 25 per cent of the population – some 6.5 million people – have no access to primary care.

Peru has one of the lowest levels of investment in health in Latin America. In 2003, it invested just 2.1 per cent of its gross domestic product in health. Bolivia, whose per capita income is less than Peru's, invested twice that.

An overall lack of investment and unequal distribution of allocated funds has left health centres relying on users to pay for services. Despite the Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme designed to provide the poorest and most marginalized with free medical care, the destitute are still being asked to pay for treatment. This is in part because neither health personnel nor users are sufficiently aware of the scheme. Consequently women attending health centres are less likely to ask for, or be offered, these services.

Elisabet is from Iquitos, a rural, impoverished community of indigenous origin where the entire population should be eligible under the insurance scheme. When she took her baby to

the health centre for treatment, she had to pay for the gloves used by the health personnel, transfer costs to the regional hospital and US\$200 for seven nights' stay there.

Not only are the poorest asked to pay for treatment, but many are fined for allowing their children to be born at home. Without paying the fine, parents cannot obtain a certificate of live birth from the health centre, which in turn is needed to obtain a birth certificate. Without an official birth certificate, a child effectively has no identity. Fidencio, from Huánuco, was fined US\$30 by the local health centre because his baby was born at home. For Fidencio, a potato farmer, the amount is equivalent to selling 1,000kg of potatoes.

See *Peru – Poor and excluded women: Denial of the right to maternal and child health* (AMR 46/004/2006).

ACT NOW!

Please write, calling on the Peruvian government to guarantee that all new-born babies are granted a certificate of live birth without discrimination. Call on the government also to ensure that information about the free maternal and infant health service available for socially excluded people reaches those who need it.

Send appeals to: Presidente Alan García Pérez, Presidente de la República del Perú, Palacio de Gobierno, Plaza Mayor S/N, Lima 1, Peru. Fax: + 51 1 311 3913.

[For translators: a certificate of live birth = certificado de nacimiento vivo]

[Picture caption: Residents of Huitoto Murauy, Iquitos, a rural community of indigenous people. July 2005.]