

[Page 1]

## **Impunity for army in Nepal?**

Reports of unlawful killings by the Royal Nepal Army

At least 18 people were shot dead in Nepal by members of the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) in August. Reports of the massacre emerged on the eve of peace talks between the government and representatives of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). Ten days later, on 27 August, the seven-month ceasefire agreed by both sides collapsed.

A large group of Maoists reportedly met at the house of primary-school teacher, Yuva Raj Moktan, in Doramba village, Ramechhap district, on 17 August. The same day, a group of around 80 army personnel in civilian dress led, according to local people, by a captain and a major, went to Doramba from the district headquarters at Manthali. They stopped several people to ask about Maoist activities in the village. At about 10.30am they encircled Yuva Raj Moktan's house and shot dead Tek Bahadur Thapa Magar who was on his way to the meeting.

Several people outside the house who heard the shot managed to run away. The army then forced their way into the house and took 19 people, including Yuva Raj Moktan and his son, Leela Moktan, into custody.

Their hands were tied behind their backs. The soldiers searched the house, overturning cooking pots and breaking utensils, and found one 303 rifle, two pistols and 14 home-made grenades. An hour later the army marched the detainees to Dandakateri, about three hours' walk away. They allegedly made them stand in rows and shot them dead.

The RNA conducted its own investigation into the Doramba incident, and concluded that "the army only retaliated after being attacked first by the rebels." This was later contradicted by the independent investigation conducted by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).

A fact-finding mission conducted by the NHRC about a week later, collected forensic evidence at the scene. It examined 18 bodies (five women and 13 men) and interviewed witnesses. It concluded that most of them had been shot in the head at close range with their hands tied behind their backs.

On 25 September, the UN Acting High Commissioner for Human Rights, Bertrand Ramcharan, called on the government of Nepal to "act swiftly on the findings of the Commission and ensure there is no impunity."

AI is calling on the Nepalese government to implement the NHRC's recommendations to conduct further investigations, bring those responsible for human rights violations to justice and compensate the relatives of the victims. In order to make the process more transparent, members of the army believed to be responsible should be brought to justice under normal criminal procedures and not before a court martial. AI believes a public trial would help to prevent further human rights violations and break the cycle of impunity prevailing in Nepal.

In the light of events in Ramechhap, AI is calling on both sides to the conflict to sign

a Human Rights Accord which would give the NHRC a mandate to set up five regional offices to monitor human rights, with technical assistance provided by the UN.

### **Nigeria: Amina Lawal is free - at last!**

Amina Lawal, a Nigerian woman sentenced to death by stoning for having a baby as a result of consensual sexual relations while divorced, has had her sentence overturned and is now free.

On 25 September the judges at the Katsina *Sharia* Court of Appeal delivered the decision to a courtroom full of lawyers and international media. Four trucks carrying heavily armed riot police were on guard outside.

There were sighs of relief and cries of “*Allahu Akbar*” (God is great) as the judgment was read out. *Khadi* (judge) Ibrahim Maiangwa said that she had not been “caught in the act” and that she had not been given the opportunity to defend herself.

AI welcomes the decision to free Amina Lawal. This shows that victims of human rights abuse can successfully fight and win appeals within the *Sharia* penal system.

Amina Lawal can now return to a normal life with her family and children, including her daughter Wasilan, now almost 18 months old, after an ordeal of almost two years.

AI’s concerns in the case were about fear of the use of the death penalty and Amina Lawal’s access to justice. During her first trial, when she was sentenced to death, she did not have access to a defence lawyer. AI campaigned for her right to have legal representation. Nigerian women’s human rights organizations ensured that she had access to a defence lawyer and supported the team of lawyers who agreed to work free of charge.

The first court which heard Amina Lawal’s case read the decision in Arabic – a language which Amina does not understand. The man who had allegedly had sexual relations with her was freed after swearing on oath that he was innocent, whereas in her case the pregnancy itself was taken as proof that she was guilty. She was required to provide four witnesses to prove her innocence. This highlights the discrimination against women within the *Sharia* penal law.

Since northern Nigerian states started to introduce new *Sharia* penal codes in 1999 the crime of *Zina* (described in the lawbooks as “adultery”) is now punishable by stoning to death. *Zina* is also the offence of premarital consensual sexual relations, which is punishable by 100 lashes. International human rights standards recommend that the death penalty is only used for the most serious crimes. AI considers the criminalization of consensual sexual relations above the age of consent to be a human rights violation. It also opposes the use of the death penalty.

Although Amina Lawal’s case is now successfully closed, AI continues to campaign on behalf of other people sentenced to death. AI is also concerned about cases where cruel, inhuman and degrading sentences, such as amputations and flogging, are being passed under the new *Sharia* penal legislation in Nigeria.

For more information, see AI’s website on [www.amnesty.org/actnow](http://www.amnesty.org/actnow)

[Page 2]

### **Children with mental disabilities in Russian Federation – new attitudes, old practices**

Dima waltzes energetically around the bare classroom while Masha waves her fan about in a very elegant fashion. When they miss their lines Andrei jumps in and reminds them about what comes next. He seems to know all the roles by heart.

Dima, Masha and Andrei are members of a Moscow theatre group called “Theatre of the simple souls”. All three have been diagnosed with Down’s syndrome or another mental disability. Their parents have come to see them rehearse a play by the Russian novelist Nikolai Gogol.

In Russia, keeping children with mental disabilities at home is a daunting prospect for parents. Moscow has only one school where such children are taught in a mainstream educational setting. Institutions that provide psychological and pedagogical support to parents with children with mental disabilities are few and far between. In a society which routinely denies such children their right to a full and decent life, Dima, Masha and Andrei are the lucky ones.

In early 2003, AI delegates visited a state orphanage or internat for children with mental disabilities. The internat has locked doors and a high wall preventing the children having any contact with the outside world. About 30 children among the 270 in this institution are permanently confined to their beds. The director of the internat described these children as “uneducable” and said that their condition is so severe that they will never learn to walk or how to hold a spoon, but that they would not need this as they would probably never leave state care. In one room three boys were sitting on the floor, wearing a kind of strait-jacket which prohibited the movement of their arms.

A lively 15-year-old boy told AI that one of the boys in a strait-jacket was his brother. He said that they were orphans and that he hoped to leave the internat one day and become a mechanic. He said that he did not know if that would ever be possible as they did not have family outside. He did not know what would happen to his brother, who was described as a “really aggressive” child and was only released from his strait-jacket at night.

Around 29,000 children live in 155 state orphanages in the Russian Federation. A further 19,400 children under the age of four are living in children’s homes. Many of these children were born with mental disabilities and given away by their parents. The care for such children in state institutions is inadequate and the mortality rate is high. There is no law protecting the interests of children who are diagnosed as having mental disabilities. Their confinement is for life and there is no system for reviewing it.

Because the future for children with mental disabilities is regarded as hopeless in the Russian Federation, many human rights are automatically taken away from them. AI is concerned that the procedures used for institutionalizing these children breach many international standards. The decision to institutionalize them is taken without reference to any law. Nobody represents the children’s best interests. Children caught up in this situation have no legal means of reversing it.

For further information, see *Rough justice: The law and human rights in the Russian Federation* (EUR 46/054/2003).

### **Children sentenced to death in Philippines**

“Sometimes you reach a point where you lose all hope. It has been almost seven years that I have been in prison.” Saturani Panggayong, sentenced to death for a crime committed when he was only 15 years old

Saturani Panggayong was sentenced to death in May 2001 for murder with robbery, a crime allegedly committed when he was only 15 years old. He says that when he was first interrogated there was no lawyer present and he did not understand much of the proceedings. He says that during his trial, he was not asked to testify. He says: “When I was meted the death sentence, it was as if I could not see... All my hopes were dashed... I had thought that the death sentence meant that I was finished...”

At least seven child offenders are currently under sentence of death in the Philippines. The six men and one woman, now in their twenties, have had their death sentences hanging over them for years.

According to Philippine law, these seven young offenders should not have been sentenced to death. However, there is no requirement in the law to establish whether or not a suspect is a child – below the age of 18. This means that children are sometimes detained as adults.

All the seven child offenders have been detained with adults since they were first arrested. Some of them have reported being beaten or subjected to torture or ill-treatment on arrest, sometimes to force them to confess. The six young men were, until recently, locked in their cells for more than 23 hours a day.

Most had extremely limited access to lawyers. Many of them now receive few, if any, visits from relatives who are too poor to travel long distances from their homes.

A bill on abolition of the death penalty is currently before the Philippine Congress.

For further information, see *Philippines: Something hanging over me – child offenders under sentence of death* (ASA 35/014/2003).

#### TAKE ACTION

Please write, expressing sympathy for the victims of the crimes of which the seven have been convicted; stating that AI takes no position on the guilt or innocence of the seven young people and calling for the death sentences to be removed without further delay, in accordance with Philippine and international law. Send letters or faxes to the Secretary of Justice, Simeon Datumanong, Department of Justice, Padre Faura, Ermita, Manila, Philippines. Fax: +63 2 521 1614.

[Picture caption]

Larina Perpnan (*far right*) was sentenced to death in 1998, along with 10 others, for the kidnap for ransom of an elderly woman, who was later released unharmed. Larina Perpnan is reported to have been 17 years old when she was arrested. She says she barely saw her lawyer before the trial and lied to the judge about her name, age and address for fear of getting into trouble at home. When she finally proved that she was 17 at the time of the crime, the judge had already passed the death sentence and reportedly refused to reverse the decision. Larina, who was pregnant at the time of her arrest, later gave birth to a baby boy in prison.

#### **Honduras: killing with impunity continues**

More than 400 children and young people under 23 years of age were murdered or extrajudicially executed in Honduras during the first eight months of 2003. Despite several well-publicized investigations initiated by the government, only a few of those responsible for the killings have been brought to justice.

In many cases prosecutions are hampered because the authorities fail to carry out the

investigations as they should. In addition, witnesses are often afraid to come forward for fear of retaliation by the gangs or police involved in the killings

In one incident, on 5 April, 69 people were murdered inside El Porvenir prison in La Ceiba, Department of Atlantida. Among those killed were 29 young men and boys and three visitors to the prison. Many others were injured. Initially, the authorities said the incident was the result of a riot and a fight between gang members and other inmates. However, 61 of the 69 dead were from the same gang. Some of the dead had been decapitated and a large number were found burned to death in a locked cell. Despite a flurry of promises and investigations by official bodies there have been no convictions or sentences for these deaths so far.

In a positive development, initial steps have been taken in the last few months to create a National Witness Protection Program. AI hopes that, if the scheme succeeds, witnesses will be more willing to come forward and give evidence. The creation of such a program was one of the recommendations in AI's report, *Honduras: Zero tolerance... for impunity* (AMR 37/001/2003), published in February.

"The young pay a price here, just because they are young." Those were the despairing words of Sofía Cortez, Oscar's mother, talking to the Secretary General of AI Canada (English-speaking) in August, when he visited Honduras.

Oscar Daniel Medina Cortez, aged 16, was killed in 1998 along with José Luis Hernández, aged 14, after being detained by police officers. The two children were cycling home at the time. In June 2003, more than five years after they were murdered, initial steps were taken to investigate their deaths and some witnesses were interviewed. The two policemen suspected of the crime are still at large.

[Pages 2&3]

### **Riad al-Turk talks to *the Wire***

Riad al-Turk, the 73-year-old former First Secretary of the Communist Party-Political Bureau (CP-PB) in Syria, has been a prisoner of conscience for much of his adult life and was held in solitary confinement for nearly 18 years. His imprisonment, torture and ill-health led to numerous AI actions over the years. In September he visited AI's offices in London and spoke to *the Wire*.

Riad al-Turk's experience of Syrian jails and torture methods spans half a century. He was just 22 when he was first arrested in 1952 for belonging to the Communist Party. He was held for several months and tortured.

"The torture," he says, "was mild compared to what was used later... Then, there were only two rooms in the palace used by the security forces... Now there are castles with dungeons that can accommodate unlimited numbers of prisoners."

In 1960 he was again arrested, tortured and imprisoned, this time for opposing the unity of Syria and Egypt at the height of the Arab nationalist movement led by Egyptian President Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser.

"The Egyptian security forces brought with them harsher torture methods", he says. "*Falaqa* (beating on the soles of the feet) was introduced... and people died in custody as a result."

His longest period of imprisonment began in October 1980, when he was arrested for his membership of the CP-PB and his outspoken opposition to Syria's presence in Lebanon. Again he was tortured, and again the torture was more severe.

For the next 18 years he was held almost constantly in solitary confinement and suffered serious health problems, including diabetes and heart and kidney ailments.

So how did he survive?

“You have to forget about the outside world,” he says, “and find ways to kill time otherwise time will kill you.”

Without books, pens or paper, he relied on the tiny stones he found in the lentil soup served daily. He collected them to make ever-more intricate and artistic shapes on the floor. He also devised physical exercises to do in his two-square-metre cell.

His wife, Asmah al-Feisal, a medical doctor who was imprisoned for 20 months between 1980 and 1982, told *the Wire*: “We didn’t see him for 13 years, or even know for sure where he was.”

After Riad al-Turk was released in an amnesty in 1998 at the age of 68, he might have been expected to take it easy. But two years later, the new Syrian President, Bashar al-Asad, appeared to lift the lid on the repression. He encouraged political debate, released political prisoners, and spoke of reforms.

During what became known as the “Damascus Spring”, thousands of people, including Riad al-Turk, took part in lively political forums around the country. Then the political arrests resumed. Riad al-Turk was detained in September 2001 and subsequently sentenced to two years’ imprisonment, of which he served 15 months.

Despite his harrowing experiences, Riad al-Turk remains active and defiant – determined, as he says, “to fight for freedom, justice and democracy”.

“I come from a country where basic human rights are violated, where political prisoners die under torture, where arbitrary detention takes place, where hundreds of political prisoners are detained without trial...”

“Humanity is in need of AI more than at any point in the past because human rights violations are not just limited to authoritarian regimes.”

He spoke with gratitude of the solidarity shown by AI members towards him and other prisoners in Syria’s jails. “AI’s support was like a candle that lit the darkness of the cell and left the spark alive and vivid in our souls.”

[Page 3]

## Worldwide Appeals

### **Grenada**

#### **Imprisoned after torture and unfair trial**

A group of 14 former members of the Grenadian army and government were sentenced to death and three others were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment after an unfair trial in 1986. The death sentences have been commuted. Sixteen of the men remain in jail; one of them has been released on medical grounds but has not been pardoned and could be returned to prison.

The “Grenada 17”, as they have become known, includes the former Deputy Prime Minister, Bernard Coard, former members of the cabinet, trade union leaders and soldiers. They were convicted of the murder of the Prime Minister, Maurice Bishop, and others during political violence that erupted on the Caribbean island in 1983.

Following the violence, US and other Caribbean troops invaded Grenada ostensibly to

protect US citizens and restore order. They detained many members of the government and army including the Grenada 17. The trial of the Grenada 17 was marred by numerous irregularities including the use of confessions which may have been obtained under torture. Gross irregularities in the selection of the jury included choosing a registrar who, until the day before her appointment, was a member of the prosecution team. The defendants were denied access to material that related to the events leading up to the killings. They were denied their right to appeal to a higher court – a right enjoyed by all other citizens of Grenada.

AI believes that the Grenada 17 should not continue to be imprisoned following convictions obtained via a process that was in gross violation of international standards governing the fairness of trials. AI is calling for an independent judicial review of the trial to be conducted in line with international human rights standards.

For more information, see *The Grenada 17: Last of the Cold War Prisoners?* (AMR 32/001/2003).

Please write, calling for a judicial review of the trial of the Grenada 17 which conforms to international standards.

Send appeals to: The Rt. Hon. Dr Keith Mitchell, Prime Minister, Prime Minister's Office, Financial Complex, St George's, Grenada. Fax: +1 473 440 4116

## **Egypt**

### **Anti-war activist imprisoned**

Ashraf Ibrahim Muhammad was arrested on 19 April in connection with his activities campaigning against the war in Iraq.

For nearly four months he was held without charge or trial. On 30 July he went on hunger strike in protest. He ended his hunger strike on 9 August after being informed that he had been officially charged with leadership of an illegal organization, named in the indictment as the Revolutionary Socialists. He was reportedly offered the chance of release in exchange for naming 20 other activists.

In the first half of 2003, hundreds of people associated with the anti-war movement, including lawyers, journalists, parliamentarians, academics and students, were detained. Many alleged that they were tortured or ill-treated, particularly during the initial period of detention when held incommunicado at the premises of the State Security Investigations. All except Ashraf Ibrahim have since been released.

Four other men, Nasser Faruq al-Buhairi, Yahya Fikri Amin, Mustapha Muhammad al-Basyuni and Rimun Edward Guindi have been referred to court in the same case and are currently being sought by the police. The trial of the five men is scheduled to open on 16 December before the (Emergency) Supreme State Security Court; they will have no right to appeal to a higher court.

All five men are charged for their alleged activities in connection with the Revolutionary Socialists. They could face prison sentences of between five and 15 years if found guilty.

Ashraf Ibrahim is also charged with possessing printed materials for distribution relating to the Revolutionary Socialists and with harming Egypt's reputation, specifically by providing information to international human rights organizations. He is currently held in Mahkum Tora Prison, near Cairo.

Please write, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of prisoner of

conscience Ashraf Ibrahim who is detained solely for expressing his beliefs.  
Send appeals to: His Excellency Mohammad Hosni Mubarak, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, 'Abedine Palace, Cairo, Egypt. Fax: + 202 390 1998.  
E-mail: [webmaster@presidency.gov.eg](mailto:webmaster@presidency.gov.eg) (e-mails sent to this address may bounce back so please keep trying).

## **Austria**

### **Death in police custody**

Cheibani Wague, from Mauritania, died in police custody in Vienna on 16 July. Police were called to a dispute between him and a colleague at his workplace, in the Afrika-Kulturdorf cultural centre, at around 12.40am on 16 July. Cheibani Wague may also have been suffering from mental health difficulties at the time.

Cheibani Wague was said to have initially reacted calmly and stepped voluntarily into an ambulance, where he was handcuffed. However, when he reportedly suddenly stood up and ran out of the ambulance, knocking over a police officer, he was violently restrained.

An eyewitness alleged that police officers forcefully pinned Cheibani Wague's face against the ground, causing his nose and mouth to bleed. The witness alleged that they began to hit him when he struggled against them on the ground. One police officer allegedly punched him at least twice on the back of the head, while another hit him on his back five times.

The disturbing manner in which Cheibani Wague was subsequently restrained by police and medical personnel is cause for great concern. Video footage taken by a local resident shows six police and medical officials surrounding him as he lay handcuffed, face down on the ground, apparently unconscious. One police officer could be seen standing on the detainee's leg with one foot, while a medical attendant stood on him with both feet.

Cheibani Wague was reportedly restrained in this way for several minutes until medical personnel placed him in an ambulance. Video footage also shows a doctor watching him being treated like this and only apparently attempting to revive him once he had been put in the ambulance. Cheibani Wague was subsequently taken to Vienna's General Hospital, where he died at around 6am on 16 July. No official statement has been issued, to date, on the precise cause of his death.

Please write, expressing concern about Cheibani Wague's death and about allegations that he may have been ill-treated by police and medical officials. Ask to be informed of the findings of the investigation into the incident.

Send appeals to: Dr Ernst Strasser, Bundesminister für Inneres, Bundesministerium für Inneres, Postfach 100, A-1014 Vienna, Austria. Fax: +43 1 531 26 39 10

Email: [infomaster@bmi.gv.at](mailto:infomaster@bmi.gv.at)

## **Israel/Occupied Territories**

### **Administrative detention of a minor**

Secondary-school student Muhammad Hassan Mustafa al-Najjar was 15 years old when he was arrested by the Israeli army. He was taken by soldiers from his home in

Deheishe refugee camp near Bethlehem at 2am on 22 November 2002 and has been detained for nearly a year. He has not seen his parents since the day of his arrest and there is no mail service in the detention centres where he has been held.

On 27 November 2002 Muhammad al-Najjar was issued with a six-month administrative detention order, which was renewed on 29 May for another six months. The order is due to expire on 28 November but may be renewed. The reason given for his detention is that he was “a danger to the security of the region”. This general, vague formula is routinely used for those held in administrative detention. Muhammad al-Najjar denies the allegation, and the army have not brought any evidence to substantiate it. Administrative detainees can be held indefinitely without charge or trial, on the basis of “secret” evidence, which makes it virtually impossible to challenge the detention order or present a defence.

Muhammad al-Najjar was first held in solitary confinement in harsh prison conditions for 45 days which was a very traumatic experience for him. The Israeli authorities said that since Muhammad al-Najjar was a minor, they were “legally obliged” to keep him segregated from adults. After his 16th birthday, he was transferred to ‘Ofer military detention centre (near Ramallah, West Bank). Sixteen is the age of adulthood according to the Israeli military law governing the Occupied Territories. Children in Israel become adults at 18. He has no access to education in the detention centre, as he is now con-sidered to be an adult.

Please write, calling for the release of Muhammad Hassan Mustafa al-Najjar, unless he is to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and promptly brought to trial in line with international standards. Also, remind the authorities that his arrest contravenes Article 37(b) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Send appeals to: Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Office of the Prime Minister, 3 Kaplan Street, PO Box 187, Kiryat Ben Gurion, Jerusalem 91919, Israel. Fax: +972 2 651 2631. E-mail: [pm\\_eng@pmo.gov.il](mailto:pm_eng@pmo.gov.il)

[Page 4]

### **Control arms**

Every day, millions of men, women, and children face the threat of armed violence. Every minute, one of them is killed. From the gangs of Rio de Janeiro and Los Angeles, to the civil wars of Liberia and Indonesia, arms are out of control.

The impact of the widespread proliferation and misuse of arms is now critical. The “war on terror” should have focused political will to prevent arms falling into the wrong hands. Instead, since the attacks in the USA on 11 September 2001, some suppliers have relaxed their controls in order to arm new-found “allies against terrorism”, ignoring their dis-regard for human rights and humanitarian law. Despite the damage that they cause, there is still no binding, comprehensive, international law to control the export of conventional arms.

At the same time, we are seeing a long-term change. In more and more communities guns are becoming an integral part of life and therefore an increasingly common instrument of death.

It is a global human rights problem which needs a global solution. On 9 October, AI joined forces with Oxfam and the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) to launch a major new global campaign, Control arms.

The campaign was launched simultaneously in over 70 countries. In London, Trafalgar Square was transformed overnight into a graveyard to represent the enormous number of people who die every day from armed violence. This was followed by the launch of the Million Faces petition. People are being invited to “sign” the petition by having photos taken or drawing a self-portrait. These will be posted in the Million Faces Gallery on the [www.controlarms.org](http://www.controlarms.org) website. Our aim is to collect one million “faces” by 2006 as a powerful visual message of support for the Control arms campaign.

In Mali there was a live TV program about the campaign, a reception with the President of Mali and schoolchildren wrote poems on peace. A copy of the report\* was presented to the Minister of Development and Cooperation in the Netherlands. In the Philippines popular musicians and artists performed at a music concert to mark the launch. In Senegal the Prime Minister took part in the launch and hundreds of children marched to the President’s residence to present a request for him to join the campaign.

The aim of the campaign is to reduce the horrific human cost caused by the abuse of arms by:

- stopping the supply of conventional weapons to those who would use them to commit human rights abuses,
- controlling the use of weapons by soldiers, armed law enforcement officials, armed groups and criminal gangs.

The campaign is calling for action from the international to the community level. For example we are calling for an international Arms Trade Treaty to stop arms being exported to destinations where they are likely to be used to commit abuses. We are also calling for community safety initiatives – such as police reform and weapons collection – to be adequately resourced and supported.

\*See *Shattered Lives: The case for tough international arms control* on the [www.controlarms.org](http://www.controlarms.org) website.

### **Yemen ignores law in name of security**

“We the signatories of this letter, testify that ‘Abdullah ‘Abdu ‘Abdullah al-Khatib... had returned from Saudi Arabia in September 2001... We were surprised to learn that strangers came and took him from his home... we had no idea where or why they took him... ‘Abdullah is the only breadwinner for his family, which consists of his elderly father and eight other people. We... urge you to look into his case and release him for the sake of justice and compassion for his parents and young brothers. God is witness to our testimony.” Letter to the Director of Hudayda Political Security from the residents of al-Shahariya village, Hudayda, where ‘Abdullah ‘Abdu ‘Abdullah al-Khatib lives

As many as 200 people are detained indefinitely without trial or access to lawyers in Yemen. The government says they are detained because they hold “extreme” religious views and that they will be released only when they have changed their ideas.

In the wake of the 11 September 2001 attacks in the USA, security forces in Yemen embarked on mass arrests, detention and deportations of foreign nationals with total disregard for the rule of law and Yemen's international human rights obligations. Those detained, including women and children as young as 12, were often held incommunicado and interrogated for long periods. Some allege that they were tortured or ill-treated.

Foreign nationals were deported after weeks or months of detention and interrogation and were denied access to asylum procedures. They were unable to challenge the legality of their detention and no consideration was given to fears that they could face serious human rights violations in the countries to which they were sent. Some were deported to countries such as Saudi Arabia where they risked torture and execution.

The government argues that it has to take these measures to "fight terrorism" and avert the risk of a US military attack against Yemen in the wake of 11 September 2001. Such a policy risks seriously undermining the many human rights achievements made by Yemen over the past decade.

AI is concerned about the fate and whereabouts of those deported because of the secrecy surrounding their deportation and the human rights records of many of the countries to which they have been sent. It urges the Yemeni government to stop deporting foreign nationals to countries where they risk torture or execution, and to ensure that the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers are protected.

AI understands the new security realities facing Yemen. However, sacrificing human rights and the rule of law are no solutions to such realities. AI also recognizes that US policy towards Yemen, including military and security cooperation, has been a contributory factor in the deterioration of the human rights situation in Yemen. At times of security crises human rights need more, not less, protection.

In a recent report AI called on the Yemeni government to take immediate steps to ensure that international human rights standards are strictly observed. It also calls on the US government to ensure that its military and security cooperation with Yemen does not compromise respect for and protection of human rights.

For further information, see AI's report *Yemen: The rule of law sidelined in the name of security* (MDE 31/006/2003).

### **World Day against Death Penalty**

Activists around the world took part in the World Day against the Death Penalty on 10 October. Organized by the World Coalition against the Death Penalty, of which AI is a member, the World Day comprised seminars, plays, exhibitions and other local actions aimed at encouraging public discussion. An appeal was launched urging the authorities of countries that still retain the death penalty to end the practice.

For more information see AI's website or the World Coalition's website at [www.worldcoalition.org](http://www.worldcoalition.org)

### **Algerian activist acquitted**

Algerian doctor and human rights activist Salaheddine Sidhoum was acquitted of

charges against him in a retrial on 16 October. His 20-year prison sentence was quashed after he emerged in September from nine years of living in hiding. He thanked AI for campaigning on his behalf. He said it had given him a lot of strength. He is determined to continue his work for human rights in Algeria. See *Worldwide Appeal* August 2003.