ENOUGH

TIME FOR A BULLET-PROOF ARMS TRADE TREATY
ENOUGH!
A quick activists’ guide to securing a bullet-proof Arms Trade Treaty in March. Join our campaign! PAGE 4

NO MORE LOST GENERATIONS
Romani activists talk about their fight against discrimination in Europe, for the launch of our new global campaign. PAGE 8

LIGHTS, CAMERA... ACTIVISM!
Celebrating Art for Amnesty’s work with actors, artists and musicians to raise awareness about human rights worldwide. PAGE 10

FROM ‘DAYS OF RAGE’ TO RAGING CONFLICT
A look back at two years of turmoil in Syria since the uprising began, and its terrible human cost. PAGE 14

‘I CAN’T BELIEVE HE’S NOT HERE ANY MORE’
Lubou Kavalyoua’s son was executed and buried in secret in Belarus after an unfair trial. She talks to WIRE about his life, and her fight to end the death penalty. PAGE 18

A FORCE FOR GOOD
How writing letters became one of Amnesty’s most powerful ways to campaign for change. PAGE 21

WHEN A LETTER IS ALL THAT IS NEEDED
“’I have been covered with an avalanche of letters and postcards.” A big thank you from people featured in our record-breaking Write for Rights 2012 letter-writing event. PAGE 24

WORLDWIDE APPEALS
Write a letter, change a life – here’s all the information you need to take action for individuals at risk of human rights abuses. PAGE 22

ALSO IN WIRE
Get an insight into Amnesty’s work in the AGENDA and the UPFRONT column from South Sudan (PAGES 2-3), UNLOCKING THE TRUTH about secret renditions in Europe (PAGE 7), and IRAQ 10 years after the US invasion (PAGE 20).
WELCOME TO THE WIRE MARCH/APRIL

WIRE is Amnesty’s global campaigning magazine, focusing on the big issues that unite our global movement of over 3.2 million activists.

Right now, we are pushing for a strong global Arms Trade Treaty (p. 4), and to bring Romani children out of segregated classrooms and a life in poverty (p. 8). We celebrate Art for Amnesty’s amazing work with high-profile artists (p. 10), and the record-breaking achievement of 2012’s Write for Rights letter-writing marathon (p. 24). And we take a sombre look back at Syria’s conflict so far (p. 14).

Join us now to take action for human rights — you can start by sending a Worldwide Appeal (p. 22).

“Mursi, stop violence against protesters!” shouted Amnesty activists as the Egyptian president visited German chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin, 30 January 2013.

Find out more at amnesty.de/aegypten
FILM: UK screenings of No

Pablo Larraín’s new Oscar-nominated film, No, about an advertising executive hired to help the 1988 political campaign to defeat Chilean General Augusto Pinochet, was specially screened around the UK in February. Amnesty volunteers were on hand at the screenings to provide information and sign-up new members.

Gael García Bernal, who stars in the film, visited Amnesty UK in January and was interviewed for UK newspaper The Observer about the film and his support for Amnesty. Find out more at amnesty.org.uk/chile

Get a Hard Rock Café/U2 T-shirt to support human rights

Rock band U2 has teamed up with the Hard Rock Café and Edun Live to produce a T-shirt supporting human rights work. 15% of the proceeds from the “U2 Signature Series 30” limited edition T-shirt go to Amnesty International. To order yours visit bit.ly/U2-t-shirt

Roma in numbers

Between 10 and 12 million Romani people live in Europe

9 out of 10 Romani people in the EU live below the poverty line.*

Placement of Slovakia’s Romani children in ‘special schools’ has doubled in a generation, says the World Bank.

Roma action

Activists from Amnesty Austria visited Romania in December to support a two-day action with local NGOs against the forced eviction of a Roma community in Cluj-Napoca. Seventy-six mostly Roma families were evicted from their home in Coastei Street in the city centre in December 2010. Since then, 40 families have been living in inadequate housing provided by the municipality, 10km outside the city, next to a landfill site. The remaining families are living in improvised shelters on the same site. The community has limited access to services. Take action for the community at bit.ly/cluj-roma

“My son has gone, like all young men.” Samia Zouaoui’s son, Mehrez El Kilani, was 22 when the boat he was in sank on its way from Tunisia to Europe last year. His story reflects how European policies force migrants into taking dangerous routes to Europe. See more photos and take action at whenyoudontexist.eu

© Judith Quax
Art for Action campaign to end FGM
Amnesty's Art for Action campaign to end female genital mutilation (FGM) hosted the main event of its European tour in Brussels, Belgium on 27 February. The campaign, run by Amnesty Ireland, brought together artists and designers from around the world to raise awareness and influence EU decision-makers on FGM.

More than 42,000 activists signed paper rose petals for the campaign and 8,000 petals were made into art and design pieces exhibited in several European cities.

Visit endfgm.eu

Human Rights Education workshops
In December 2012, young activists from the Middle East and North Africa participated in a workshop in Morocco, organized by Amnesty's International Human Rights Education Centre (IHREC). Amnesty Morocco and the regional office in Beirut supported the event, which aimed to learn from the activists about their work in the region and build collaborative relationships.

For more information about IHREC and the workshop, visit amnesty.no/ihrec

Poor treatment of asylum-seekers continues
In the wake of the Australian government’s decision in 2012 to reintroduce offshore detention and processing of asylum-seekers, Amnesty Australia visited Nauru Island in November to assess conditions faced by asylum-seekers there.

Amnesty researchers found inappropriate and severely ill-equipped facilities, with men held in overcrowded, leaking tents and suffering physical and mental fatigue. Another visit is planned to Manus Island in March to review conditions for families and children detained there.

Find out more at bit.ly/asylum-nauru and sign Amnesty Australia’s petition at bit.ly/nauru-petition

‘My body, my rights’ campaign launches
Being able to make your own decisions about your body and your life is a basic human right. Despite commitments made nearly 20 years ago at the International Conference on Population and Development, many of the world’s 1.8 billion young people struggle to access the information, sexuality education and sexual and reproductive health services they need.

Amnesty’s new campaign calls on world leaders to protect sexual and reproductive rights now and for the next generation.

Find out more and take action at:
amnesty.org/mybodymyrights
Join the conversation at #mybodymyrights

Amnesty on tour with Coldplay
Staff and volunteers from Amnesty in Australia and New Zealand joined rock band Coldplay on their “Mylo Xyloto” tour dates during November. More than 7,940 fans took action on our Write for Rights cases in support of freedom of expression. The band actively supported the campaign via Twitter, where they have almost 9.5 million followers.

Keep updated on similar events at facebook.com/ArtforAmnesty

Letters
Want your views and comments to appear in The Agenda? Write to us at yourwire@amnesty.org

Read this and more at livewire.amnesty.org

Up front

Not forgotten: A return to South Sudan
By Alex Neve, Amnesty International Canada’s Secretary General and Khairunissa Dhala, South Sudan Researcher

It had been nine months since we visited Yida refugee camp in South Sudan (see WIRE, July/August 2012). The camp had tripled in size, from around 20,000 refugees in April 2012 to about 60,000 in January 2013. Arrivals were picking up again after the relentless rainy season, with around 1,000 people arriving every week.

The place had changed. The market bustled. Homes were being built everywhere: not just thatched grass huts, but sturdy brick structures. And the mood seemed much calmer. But much had not changed at all. Several refugees told us tales despairingly similar to those we heard last year.

People were still fleeing across the border to escape the continuing conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Sudan People’s Liberation Army-North (SPLA-N) in Southern Kordofan state.

Indiscriminate aerial bombardment by the SAF continues. People named relatives and neighbours – as young as a one-year-old baby – killed or badly injured by the bombing.

And everyone talked of the terrible toll of hunger. Bombing has destroyed food stores, ruined fields and made growing and planting crops impossible.

The UN refugee agency, UNHCR, worries that Yida is dangerously close to the border and a strategic road. Last year they put up tents for 9,000 people in Nyeel, a camp two hours further south. But because Nyeel was prone to flooding in the rainy season, and for other reasons, refugees at Yida stayed put.

Many once again insisted they would not move. They felt well settled at Yida, and were fearful that another proposed new camp was too close to the Sudanese military. “Why would refugees want to move closer to their enemy?” one woman said. Others told us they would rather go home than move.

That obviously is not the answer.

Taken from the blog post “Dangerous to stay, dangerous to move.”
Gravestones erected by Amnesty International in New York, USA, during the July 2012 UN arms trade conference, to raise awareness about the impact of the unregulated trade in weapons.

ENOUGH!

TIME FOR A STRONG ARMS TRADE TREATY

Activists worldwide are gearing up to make history in March, when the final UN conference on a global arms trade treaty takes place in New York, USA. We will be pushing for a bullet proof treaty to keep arms out of the wrong hands and stop people’s lives being shattered. Here’s a quick overview of our campaign and how you can help us make history this year.
A ONE MINUTE DUMMY’S GUIDE TO THE ARMS TRADE TREATY

WHAT IS IT?
It’s not been agreed yet – that’s what the UN conference in March is all about. We will be pushing for a strong, global treaty that will regulate all weapons, ammunition and other equipment used by the military and for law enforcement. It should cover the international arms trade and arms transfers between governments, as well as the brokering, transporting and financing of arms.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?
Because it will help protect people from human rights abuses. Every year, irresponsible arms transfers and abuse of arms contribute to millions of people being killed, raped, injured and forced to leave their homes. We want a “Golden Rule” included in the treaty, that will stop arms being transferred from one country to another if there is a danger that they could be used for serious human rights violations.

HOW DID IT COME ABOUT?
Through the power of activism! For 20 years, we have worked alongside our partners to make this happen. Thousands of people worldwide have invested their time, energy and creativity into fundamentally changing the rules for how arms – guns, jet fighters, ammunition – are traded worldwide. We have held talks and conferences, written thousands of pages of documents with key facts to convince states to back us up, held powerful stunts and shouted from the rooftops to show the world that a global Arms Trade Treaty really can help protect human beings.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MAKE IT HAPPEN?
Join us! Our global week of action takes place from 11-18 March. We’ll be writing letters to governments, US embassies and President Obama, doing stunts and using social media to push for the strongest possible treaty. To get involved, check your national Amnesty International website or visit bit.ly/control-arms

10 KILLER FACTS ABOUT THE GLOBAL ARMS TRADE

1. 131 armed conflicts continued or began worldwide between 1989 and 2010.

2. Between 794,000 and 1,115,000 people died as a direct result of battles fought in those 131 armed conflicts.

3. An estimated average of at least 200,000 people die every year as an indirect result of armed conflict.

4. The world’s deadliest conflicts were fought (in order of total direct deaths) in Afghanistan (21 years), Ethiopia (21 years), Eritrea (6 years), Iraq (16 years), Sri Lanka (19 years), Angola (21 years), and Sudan (22 years). Together, they account for 54% of the above estimate of 1,115,000 people.

5. Parties to armed conflict in at least 14 countries in 2011 used killed or maimed children, and/or committed rape and other forms of sexual violence against them.

6. Around 43,300,000 people worldwide were forcibly displaced by armed conflict and persecution at the end of 2010.

7. An estimated 42% of global murders are committed by individual people and criminal gangs using firearms.

8. South America has the world’s highest percentage of homicides committed by individuals or criminal gangs with firearms by region, followed by the caribbean, central America, north America, south-east Asia, southern Europe and Africa.

9. Only 35 countries publish their reports on international transfers of conventional arms and only 25 provide data on actual deliveries.

10. In 2010, the total value of global international conventional arms transfers worldwide, as recorded in national statistics, was approximately US$72 billion.

Sources: UN, TransArms, Uppsala Conflict Data Program, Geneva Declaration


Right: Refugee girls hold up drawings depicting Janjaweed attacks, eastern Chad, August 2007.
THE WORLD’S FIVE BIGGEST ARMS DEALERS

CHINA
Accounts for around 3% of the global conventional arms trade.

KEY CUSTOMERS
Often developing countries with poor human rights records, including Algeria, Angola, Bangladesh, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Libya, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Zimbabwe.

IRRESPONSIBLE ARMS TRANSFERS
Supplies ammunition for small arms to Sudan, used by security forces and militia in Darfur. Supplied rockets and anti-vehicle mines to Libya under Col. Mu’ammar al-Gaddafi, and ammunition, rocket-propelled grenades, mortar bombs and mortar launchers to Zimbabwe.

FRANCE
The value of France’s conventional arms exports ranks third globally behind the USA and Russia.

KEY CUSTOMERS
Singapore, the United Arab Emirates, Greece, other NATO partners, Middle Eastern, North African and other Francophone countries. France and Russia have recently started co-operating on defence and exchanging naval equipment.

IRRESPONSIBLE ARMS TRANSFERS
Has supplied arms to countries where serious human rights violations could be committed, including Libya under al-Gaddafi, Egypt and Chad, and Syria between 2005 and 2009.

RUSSIA
Russia is the world’s second largest arms trader by value of exports, and an influential ATT negotiator.

KEY CUSTOMERS
India, Syria, Algeria, Myanmar, Venezuela, Sudan and many African states. Having fallen behind in key technologies, Russia is now seeking sophisticated partners and new markets.

IRRESPONSIBLE ARMS TRANSFERS
10% of all Russian arms exports are believed to go to Syria, making it Syria’s largest arms supplier. Transfers include anti-tank missiles and MiG jet fighters. Russia supplies helicopter gunships to Sudan, used to attack civilians in Darfur and Southern Kordofan.

UK
The value of the UK’s conventional arms exports consistently ranks third, fourth or fifth globally.

KEY CUSTOMERS
The USA, India, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, other NATO partners, other countries in the Middle East, North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa.

IRRESPONSIBLE ARMS TRANSFERS
The UK generally supports strict criteria for arms transfers, but has supplied arms to countries with a high risk of serious human rights violations, including Sri Lanka. UK national legislation is being reviewed following evidence that it supplied small arms, ammunition, munitions and armoured vehicle equipment to Libya under al-Gaddafi, small arms to Bahrain and law enforcement equipment to Yemen.

USA
The USA is by far the world’s largest arms trader, accounting for around 30% of conventional arms transfers in terms of value. Its position on the ATT is therefore key.

KEY CUSTOMERS
The USA supplies arms to more than 170 countries. It has restricted arms transfers to Myanmar, China, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe and countries subject to UN arms embargoes. However, it has supplied arms to countries including Sri Lanka, Bahrain, Egypt and Yemen, where they could be used for serious human rights violations.

IRRESPONSIBLE ARMS TRANSFERS
The USA is Egypt’s main arms supplier, selling small arms, ammunition and chemical agents for riot control, despite the violent crackdown on protesters. It also supplied Yemen with small arms, chemical agents and armoured vehicles, and Bahrain with small arms. It provides Colombia’s security forces with arms, military aid and training, despite their persistent human rights violations.

Find out more in our new briefing, Major Powers Fuelling Atrocities, out on 12 March.
Visit bit.ly/control-arms
extraordinary renditions. Amnesty International has intervened on his behalf before the European Court of Human Rights alongside our partners, and targeted the US and European authorities.

A BREAKTHROUGH

An historic breakthrough came in December 2012. The Court found Macedonia responsible for unlawfully detaining, torturing and otherwise ill-treating Khaled El-Masri on Macedonian territory; for his enforced disappearance; and for his transfer to other locations where he suffered more abuse.

This is the first time the Court has ruled against a European country for its involvement in US renditions and secret detentions. “This ruling is a personal victory for Khaled El-Masri, who has faced a wall of silence in the United States and Europe about what happened to him for nine years,” said his lead lawyer, James A. Goldston, the Executive Director of the Open Society Justice Initiative.

In another triumph for Amnesty’s Unlock the Truth campaign, the European Parliament recently condemned many countries in Europe for not adequately investigating their role in CIA renditions and secret detentions. We had campaigned for years and throughout 2012, lobbying the Parliament to send a strong message to European governments. In September 2012, we delivered a petition with 8,000 signatures to the President of the European Parliament.

We also held a panel discussion with former Guantánamo detainee Murat Kurnaz, who described the torture he suffered there: “They hung me on chains for five days. Every couple of hours an interrogator came to ask me questions. They used electro shocks on me. They stuck my head in a bucket filled with water and hit my stomach at the same time so that I had to inhale all that water.”

IMPORTANT PRECEDENT

These recent developments represent important wins for activists worldwide. And they set an important precedent for bringing other countries to justice. As Julia Hall, Amnesty International’s counter-terrorism expert, said: “Macedonia is not alone. Many other European governments colluded with the USA to abduct, transfer, forcibly disappear, torture and ill-treat people in the course of rendition operations. Much more needs to be done to ensure accountability across Europe.”

Find out more about Amnesty’s work on secret renditions at unlockthetruth.org

Khaled El-Masri’s strange and painful story began in 2003. A German national, he was arrested during a trip to Macedonia in December, detained under armed guard for 23 days and interrogated repeatedly. He was denied any contact with his wife, family or a lawyer.

He was then handed over to the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and taken to a secret detention centre in Afghanistan. Before he was taken from Macedonia, he was beaten at Skopje Airport, had his clothes cut off and an object inserted into his anus, and made to wear incontinence pads.

Once in Afghanistan, he was tortured and held in inhumane conditions for more than four months, in complete isolation. He was finally flown to Albania and released without charge on 28 May 2004. His defence lawyer, Manfred Gnjidic, described him as “disturbed, disappointed, humiliated and bitter” afterwards.

THE SHOCKING TRUTH

Khaled El-Masri’s fate is not unusual. The USA captured hundreds of suspected terrorists between 2002 and 2006, flying them to third countries to interrogate them in detention. This practice has become known as “extraordinary rendition”.

The shocking truth about renditions has motivated activists worldwide to campaign tirelessly for justice for Khaled El-Masri and other victims of
On 4 April, Amnesty International is launching a new global campaign to stop discrimination against Romani people across Europe. We will set up a segregated classroom and a Roma settlement outside the European Parliament in Brussels, Belgium on 8 April, urging the EU and all its members to do their bit. Meanwhile, WIRE spoke to four Romani activists about how racism and segregation can ruin people’s lives, and also motivate them to fight for their human rights.
Fighting forced evictions
‘I can’t give up’

Claudia Creta (pictured) and her community were forcibly evicted from Cluj-Napoca, Romania, in December 2010 and resettled on the city outskirts, next to the municipal rubbish tip. Their story was featured in our 2012 Write for Rights letter-writing event. Claudia and other activists are now campaigning with Amnesty International to be moved back into the city and into adequate housing.

“The eviction day marked me for the rest of my life. Since then we have fought to show people that we should enjoy the same legal rights as everyone else. I want to show the whole world that we will not give up, even if we have a darker skin colour. It doesn’t matter – we are all human. I don’t want our children to spend their childhood in hell.

“I want people to see that we are normal people: we send our children to school, we go to work, our children go to kindergarten. We do normal things like any other ethnic group. We are human beings.

“Going to Warsaw with Amnesty International had a big impact on me. A 10-year-old boy showed me the letter he wrote for us. It touched me deeply. Now we send our children to school, we go to work, our children go to kindergarten. We do normal things like any other ethnic group. We are human beings.

“When Romania joined the European Union, that marked as Roma or Gypsy. I belong to society and so do my children. Their future is going to be better. They attend mixed classes – they have more opportunities, and they have a different approach to school. I hope change will come. Separate classes must be abolished. It’s good that people will read about it – if you don’t talk about it, nothing will change or be solved. So it was certainly good working with Amnesty, because in Levoča and elsewhere things have changed now."

PETER: “I feel Slovak, but I am Roma. I don’t like to be marked as Roma or Gypsy. I belong to society and so do my children. Their future is going to be better. They attend mixed classes – they have more opportunities, and they have a different approach to school. I hope change will come. Separate classes must be abolished. It’s good that people will read about it – if you don’t talk about it, nothing will change or be solved. So it was certainly good working with Amnesty, because in Levoča and elsewhere things have changed now.”

MARCELA: “I have fought, not only for my children, but for all children. I would be so happy if the Ministry of Education abolished all separate schools and classes. And I would like other parents to fight, as I have done with my husband. Working with Amnesty International gave me a lot of power and energy. If you weren’t with us I wouldn’t know where to start. It was a big experience for me. You gave us enough power to go on with our fight.”

Previous page: Children play in Pata Rat, a Roma ghetto in Cluj Napoca, Romania. People set up home there in December 2010 after they were forcibly evicted from another settlement downtown.

Fighting segregated education
‘You gave us enough power’

Peter and Marcela (pictured) live in Levoča, Slovakia. With support from Amnesty, they recently won a fight against their children being segregated in Roma-only school classes, although this practice still carries on.

PETER: “I feel Slovak, but I am Roma. I don’t like to be marked as Roma or Gypsy. I belong to society and so do my children. Their future is going to be better. They attend mixed classes – they have more opportunities, and they have a different approach to school. I hope change will come. Separate classes must be abolished. It’s good that people will read about it – if you don’t talk about it, nothing will change or be solved. So it was certainly good working with Amnesty, because in Levoča and elsewhere things have changed now.”

MARCELA: “I have fought, not only for my children, but for all children. I would be so happy if the Ministry of Education abolished all separate schools and classes. And I would like other parents to fight, as I have done with my husband. Working with Amnesty International gave me a lot of power and energy. If you weren’t with us I wouldn’t know where to start. It was a big experience for me. You gave us enough power to go on with our fight.”

Fighting discrimination
‘I got angry’

Rita Izsák (pictured) is a Romani woman from Hungary. She is now the UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues.

“My mother’s surname is Orsós, a traditional Roma name. Throughout my life, when I’ve had to give my mother’s name for official documents, it was always clear that I belong to the Roma group.

“When I was a student working part-time as an event organizer, I was suddenly fired for no reason. I heard my boss had found out that my mother was Roma, and he couldn’t have the company represented by a Roma woman. It didn’t matter that I was at law school, that I spoke two languages fluently, was a clean, polite girl; the only thing that mattered was that my mother was of Roma origin.

“I got angry, and joined the European Roma Rights Centre. I became a Roma rights activist. I was faced with this terrible truth, and it made me a fighter.

“I can see good signs – for example, my organization in Hungary just established a Roma women’s club, where I see dozens of very promising, highly educated, young, talented Roma women working for their communities.

“I think what’s missing really is clear language about what’s going on. There are not enough frank discussions, allowing people to digest what’s happening. Politicians are too often scared to use words such as ‘segregation’ or ‘violence’ or ‘killings of Roma’. There is silence.”

“Hate speech and hatred is rising, not only against Roma but also other groups, such as Jews and Muslims, in Western Europe. But Roma stand out because we are targets in almost all the countries where we live. The big difficulty is that we lack political, economic or media power. So it’s important to find platforms to show solidarity. There is always a way to reach out to these communities.

“We must act now to prevent another lost generation of Roma, whose only expectations are lives of poverty, discrimination and exclusion.”

Visit amnesty.org/roma in April

Join our campaign!
Most days, the Art for Amnesty office telephone is buzzing. One minute, you’re setting up a photo call with Mexican actor Gael García Bernal and negotiating Amnesty’s presence on a band tour; the next, you’re arranging a film-shoot with UK star Sophie Okonedo and agreeing a new partnership with London’s Old Vic Theatre.

There are calls to and from managers, producers, directors, photographers and the artists themselves – all with very full diaries. It’s a complicated process, but the artists who give their time to work with us want the same thing we all do: to make a positive impact for human rights and end abuses wherever they exist.

A POWERFUL FORCE
It’s no coincidence that artists should find common ground with Amnesty’s work – they are often persecuted for what their art reveals about their governments. And Amnesty has supported the causes of many imprisoned writers, filmmakers, poets, musicians and other artists over the years, including Burmese comedian Zarganar, Chinese contemporary artist Ai Weiwei and Russian punk band Pussy Riot.

Art can be a powerful force to stir peoples’ hearts and minds and mobilize them into action against an injustice; it reaches many thousands of people who might not come into contact with human rights causes otherwise.

Watch our death penalty film, made in collaboration with BAFTA-winning animation studio, Sherbet, and actor Paul Bettany speaking the words of Iranian lawyer Mohammad Mostafaei on his fight to save juvenile prisoners from execution. Look at the graffiti art on Mahomed Mahmood street in Cairo, Egypt. And let’s not forget the iconic image of a lighted candle wrapped in barbed wire.

GLOBAL REACH
Art for Amnesty (A4A) was founded by Amnesty supporter Bill Shipsey in 2002. Early projects included the Ambassador of Conscience Award, whose recipients have included Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi.

Since then, A4A’s work has grown, regularly touring the world with musicians including U2 and Coldplay, its campaigns endorsed by artists ranging from Paloma Faith to Anjelica Houston, Ben Okri to Vivienne Westwood, Kevin Spacey to Femi Kuti. In terms of raising the profile of human rights, its impact is clear. A4A reaches tens of thousands of potential activists and supporters through its work with artists.

“Nollywood” star Omotola Jalade Ekeinde’s 2011 video calling on Shell to clean up its oil pollution in the Niger Delta reached over a million
people online, including new audiences in Africa and the Caribbean. Artist support for Amnesty’s campaign to end the death penalty led to mass media coverage via social networking, reaching millions. And Shepard Fairey’s butterfly design commissioned by A4A for our sexual and reproductive rights campaign was featured on posters and merchandise worldwide, including the streets of Nicaragua, where thousands marched in September 2011 for women’s rights to abortion. Most recently, David Shrigley’s pink balaclava illustration for the campaign to free Pussy Riot became its motif and has been used by Amnesty and activists globally.

On U2’s “360°” tour, Amnesty accompanied the band through 22 countries for 66 concerts from August 2010 to June 2011, promoting our Demand Dignity campaign to a combined audience of five million people. Well over 200,000 of them took action for the campaign. At many shows, singer Bono asked the crowd to join Amnesty.

National Amnesty offices and groups worldwide use A4A projects to promote campaigns and actions locally, too. “Making the invisible visible” – a collaboration between German street art collective Mentalgassi and creative communications group Wieden + Kennedy London – was exhibited in 24 locations across six European cities. Special lenticular fence posters, visible only when approached at an angle, depicted the faces of six individuals at risk of human rights abuses. A plaque at each site directed passers-by to take action for them. The resulting film received over 70,000 views and international media coverage.

Our recent video with Scissor Sisters’ singer, Ana Matronic, was about homophobic discrimination and hate violence. It highlighted the case of Noxolo Nogwaza, a South African woman who was murdered apparently for being gay. It was featured widely online – watch it at bit.ly/Noxolo-justice. And take action for Noxolo through our Worldwide Appeals on p. 22-23.

ART LOVERS CHANGING THE WORLD

The success of all these creative collaborations depends on trust – the relationships we cultivate have to be based on a mutual sense of purpose. We have a responsibility to work with artists with a genuine interest and commitment to human rights, and an equal responsibility make sure the time artists give us is used effectively.

In 2013, A4A continues to develop new projects and build relationships with artists. In January, we met up again with Gael Garcia Bernal. He worked on Amnesty’s Invisibles documentary about Central American migrants travelling through Mexico in the hope of a better life in the USA. He was promoting his new film, No, about the 1988 referendum in Chile, which removed Augusto Pinochet from power. Amnesty volunteers were on the scene once more, at special preview screenings held nationwide in February, in search of more art lovers who want to change the world.

Follow Art for Amnesty at facebook.com/ArtforAmnesty and twitter.com/art4amnesty

Photos: Art and activism: two powerful forces combined. From bottom left, actor Gael García Bernal; Making the Invisible Visible in Berlin, Germany; Amnesty International Brazil campaigning for indigenous people’s rights during U2’s 360 concert in São Paulo; Actress Anjelica Huston; activists parading Shepard Fairey’s butterfly in Nicaragua; David Shrigley’s iconic Pussy Riot image; volunteers collecting signatures to protect slum dwellers in Kenya from U2 fans in Perth, Australia; Nigerian singer and actor Omotola Jalade Ekeinde.
THE ARMS TRADE IS OUT OF CONTROL.

Enough! Let's turn the tide and demand a strong Arms Trade Treaty.
Visit bit.ly/control-arms
NOWHERE HAS THE HUMAN COST OF THE ‘ARAB SPRING’ UPRISINGS BEEN HIGHER THAN IN SYRIA. WIRE SPOKE TO AMNESTY RESEARCHER CILINA NASSER AND SENIOR CRISIS ADVISOR DONATELLA ROVERA ABOUT THE CONFLICT SO FAR.

FROM ‘DAYS OF RAGE’ TO RAGING CONFLICT
TWO YEARS OF TURMOIL IN SYRIA
Emboldened by the fall of repressive governments in Tunisia and Egypt, Syria’s opposition activists started taking action in early 2011. Their uprisings grew wings – on social media and on the streets – and in March, Syria’s Local Coordination Committees (LCCs) were born. They organized local protests and shared information with other activists and the media, nationally and abroad.

BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS
Just months before, activities like these had been impossible in Syria. “Anyone who did something even small scale would be at risk of disappearing,” said Amnesty International’s Syria researcher, Cilina Nasser.

Nevertheless, the ranks of pro-reform activists continued to swell, and “Days of Rage” public protests began cropping up. Many protesters didn’t even know each other – they had met on social media and arranged to meet at mosques – the only viable places for group gatherings.

On 18 March 2011, a group of around 30 people gathered at a mosque in Homs, a city 150km north of the capital, Damascus. When Friday prayers finished and people began to leave, they erupted into chants of “Allah, Syria and freedom”.

Some onlookers were surprised or shocked. Many had never even seen a protest before – let alone taken part in one. Others pushed back against the security forces, allowing protesters to run away before getting caught.

THE WRITING ON THE WALL
On 17 April 2011 – Syrian Independence Day – another sit-in protest in Homs drew a far bigger crowd. The protesters were unarmed but more defiant, and began chanting for the “downfall of the regime” of President Bashar al-Assad.

That afternoon, the security forces opened fire on protesters in Homs, reportedly killing nine people.

It was part of an emerging pattern. One of the Homs protesters’ rallying cries was solidarity with people in Dera’a in the south. Its uprising began after the protesters’ rallying cries was solidarity with people in Dera’a in the south. Its uprising began after the protesters’ rallying cries was solidarity with people in Dera’a in the south. Its uprising began after the protesters’ rallying cries was solidarity with people in Dera’a in the south. Its uprising began after the protesters’ rallies were reportedly detained and tortured children for writing anti-government slogans on a wall.

GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT
Scenes like these were being replicated across Syria by mid-2011. The country was still virtually closed to foreign reporters and international human rights organizations.

“Not having access to the country made it very challenging, because we didn’t know the agendas of the activists we were talking to,” Cilina said.

Any tips or information Amnesty International received had to be verified – an increasingly difficult and time-consuming task.

“I went to northern Lebanon in May and June 2011 to work on a report. Most credible eyewitness accounts corroborated each other,” Cilina continued. “But there were also rumours and inaccurate information. We needed to carefully distinguish between what we had evidence for and what we didn’t.”

After the information had been rigorously checked, Amnesty concluded that crimes against humanity were being committed in Syria. We made strong calls for the international community to take action to end the abuses.

And we repeatedly called for the UN Security Council to refer the situation to the International Criminal Court, to ensure that all those responsible for crimes against humanity and, eventually, war crimes, would be investigated and prosecuted.

FULL-BLOWN CONFLICT
As Syrian security forces increasingly used excessive force against mainly non-violent protesters, an armed opposition emerged. From late 2011 onwards, some government opponents increasingly began revenge killings and armed attacks against government forces.

As opposition groups began to gain control of neighbourhoods in large cities and rural areas, they launched more brazen attacks. Government forces responded with a significantly wider and more violent crackdown, even using heavy weapons and artillery in full-scale assaults on opposition-controlled areas.

In April 2012, Senior Crisis Adviser, Donatella Rovera managed to enter Syria to investigate human rights violations in the north. She has returned several times since. “Government forces were still in control of the cities and highways, while armed opposition groups had de facto control of many villages and secondary roads,” she explained.

“Government forces had overwhelming superior striking power, but they couldn’t really go into several opposition areas at the same time. They launched repeated short, very intense and brutal attacks against some villages and then moved on to strike in other areas.”

Armed opposition groups very quickly learned to “dance around” government forces. These punitive raids carried on for months, with devastating consequences for civilians. When the soldiers couldn’t find their elusive armed opponents, they punished local residents. Extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detentions, torture, and disappearances were widespread. They also deliberately destroyed homes and properties.

“In every single village I found homes and shops burned down by the soldiers,” said Donatella.

While armed confrontations became more frequent in many areas, peaceful protests continued elsewhere. “At the end of May 2012 in Aleppo, Syria’s largest city, I saw government forces and paramilitary shabiha militias

Free Syrian Army fighters run for cover as a tank shell explodes during heavy fighting in the Ain Tarma neighbourhood, Damascus, 30 January 2013.
fire live rounds at peaceful demonstrators every day, killing and injuring protesters and bystanders alike. Activists in the city were also being arrested and tortured, sometimes to death, and disappeared,” she continued.

DEATH IN THE AIR
The Syrian army then started a relentless air bombardment campaign in August, which still continues. Even densely populated residential areas are not spared. Entire streets, even whole neighbourhoods, have been flattened.

This has dramatically increased the number of civilians killed, injured and displaced. “Towns and villages where displaced people had been sheltering suddenly emptied,” said Donatella. Hundreds of thousands fled to already-heaving refugee camps in neighbouring Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan. Many more are displaced within Syria.

Air strikes often targeted large groups of civilians – including people queuing for bread as food supplies dwindled, or those gathered near hospitals. “Aleppo’s Shifa hospital was bombed repeatedly until it was put out of use”, Donatella said.

Lack of access to medical care has been a serious issue throughout Syria’s conflict. Donatella described how security forces would detain and often torture anyone being treated for bullet wounds – accusing them of being “terrorists”. The regime uses that term interchangeably for both peaceful protesters and the armed opposition.

Fear of such retribution drove many people to seek treatment in makeshift field hospitals or mobile medical units set up by opposition activists. Doctors, nurses and medical students risked their lives to save others. Many were arrested and tortured, some were killed.

Donatella also documented the use of internationally banned cluster bombs in several areas. This dramatically increased in late 2012 and unexploded weapons are now littering large areas of Syria, a deadly legacy for many years to come.

ABUSES ON ALL SIDES
As the conflict rages on, Syria’s government forces and paramilitary (state-armed) militias does not have complete monopoly on human rights abuses.

Armed opposition groups too have committed serious abuses, including summary killing and torturing captured security forces, militia members and suspected informers. Amnesty International continues to document potential war crimes committed by all parties.

“Civilians are undoubtedly the ones paying the highest price. They are losing their lives, their relatives, their limbs, their homes, businesses and property,” Donatella said. “No end to the violence seems in sight, and sectarian, ethnic, ideological and religious tensions have become more entrenched. In this atmosphere, human rights abuses are increasingly frequent.”

People she has spoken to in Syria have been baffled by the international community’s lack of concerted action to curb the violations, especially compared to their rapid response to other, similar situations. The human rights situation in Libya was referred to the International Criminal Court (ICC) within two weeks of the first protest demonstrations in February 2011. But after two years of daily killings and countless other abuses in Syria, the international community has not yet agreed to refer the situation to the ICC.

Amnesty International continues to press for this, and for an immediate end to the pattern of human rights abuses being committed across the country. “That’s why we are putting pressure on the Syrian government and calling on all influential states to do the same to stop them committing terrible violations, as well as calling on those with influence over armed groups to stop their abuses,” said Cilina.

As Syria’s conflict rages on, the international community’s inaction has unfortunately conveyed a message that accountability for war crimes is not a priority. That is a dangerous presumption. Amnesty International will continue to press for concrete action at the international level stop violations on the ground and hold all those responsible to account.

Find out more about our work on Syria at amnesty.org
More than 60,000 people have been killed since the conflict began.

Over 700,000 refugees have fled to neighbouring Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq, and North African countries.

At least 2,000,000 people are displaced inside Syria.

Over half of all Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt are children. 1 in 5 of these refugee households is headed by a woman.

Approximately 23,500 Syrian nationals applied for asylum in the EU between April 2011 and October 2012. 15,000 of these applications were lodged in Germany and Sweden.

All figures are based on UN estimates from January 2013.
Lubou Kavalyoua’s son, Uladzslau Kavalyou – known as Ulad – was arrested in connection with a bomb attack in Belarus in April 2011. After an unfair trial, he was sentenced to death in November 2011. Ulad, aged 23, only saw his lawyer three times during the whole process and was forced into confessing. He later retracted his testimony and there was never any forensic evidence linking him to the explosion. His sentence passed by the Supreme Court of Belarus, leaving no possibility of appeal.

What was your son like?

Ulad was a cheerful, active boy, and he was shy. He loved music. He was always reading. He was fond of psychology, and that helped him a little in prison, because it was very difficult to endure. Ulad was very good to his friends, and his friendships lasted for years. And now his friends visit us, not very often, but they come and try to support me, and I feel better when they are with me.

Tell us what happened to him

I learned about his arrest when police officers arrived one night with a search warrant. They didn’t say why our apartment was being searched, or why Ulad had been arrested. When a neighbour asked the officers searching our flat what had happened, one of them replied that Ulad had found himself in the wrong place at the wrong time. They didn’t tell us anything else.

During the trial, people went to the courtroom every day and were not happy with what they observed.

They still oppose the sentence. I know I should have been ready for it, but I was still hopeful. When the verdict was read out in the courtroom, I don’t remember what happened. I don’t even remember what Ulad communicated to me, although people tell me he signalled: “Mum don’t cry”.

How did you find out that he had been executed?

On 13, 14 and 15 March, Ulad’s lawyer tried to see him but he wasn’t allowed. Of course, at that moment my heart didn’t give me a hint that Ulad was gone – I didn’t feel anything. But when I received the letter from the Supreme Court, I understood.

What have you done to find out where he is buried?

We have asked Lukashenka (Alyaksandr Lukashenka – the President of Belarus) to issue a decree to release the bodies of the executed to their relatives, or at least to provide information about their burial place. There is no reason not to release the bodies to their relatives, or to hide the burial site. Lukashenka can at least tell us where Ulad’s grave is.

What drove you to campaign against the death penalty?

At the beginning it was fear. I have seen how evidence is obtained, and that testimony is considered to be evidence, regardless of how it is obtained.

I don’t know if we will succeed, but I think it is still possible with the help of society, of the people. It is possible to change the legislation and eventually abolish the death penalty.

More than 400 people have been executed in Belarus in the past two decades: no one spoke about it, no one ever said anything, and the prisoners were shot. Everybody should know about it.
THE DEATH PENALTY IN BELARUS: THE FACTS

- Belarus is the only country in Europe and central Asia that still carries out executions.
- Prisoners risk being tortured into “confessing”.
- Condemned prisoners do not have access to an effective legal appeal.
- Executions are carried out by shooting the condemned person in the back of the head.
- Prisoners are only informed hours, or even minutes, before they are executed.
- Prisoners’ bodies are not returned to their families for burial, and families are not told where they are buried.

Amnesty International’s yearly report on the death penalty worldwide is published on 10 April. Visit amnesty.org/death-penalty

ACT NOW

Please write to President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, calling on him to abolish the death penalty and change the law so that families of executed prisoners can find out where they are buried.

Write to:
President Alyaksandr Lukashenka
Administratsia Prezidenta Respubliki
ul.Karla Marx 38, 220016 Minsk, Belarus

“...I’m looking at a picture of Ulad: he is so smiley there, so cheerful, I can’t believe he’s not here anymore. I wish the door would open, and he’d come in as if nothing had happened. I don’t want to leave the house, I’m always at home, waiting and waiting and waiting…”

Lubou Kavalyou

Family photographs of Lubou Kavalyou and her son Uladzslau Kavalyou, who was executed and buried in secret after an unfair trial.
March marks 10 years since US-led forces began the invasion of Iraq. Since then, tens of thousands of civilians have been killed by armed groups, militias and foreign and Iraqi forces. Hundreds of thousands have fled their homes to escape violence.

People in Iraq worry about their safety every day. Civilians and security forces are attacked daily, particularly in central areas. In this insecure climate, abuse of detainees continues to be reported frequently, and many have been sentenced in unfair trials, some to death.

A SNAPSHOOT OF ABUSE
Amnesty International recently visited Baghdad and the Kurdistan Region to investigate how detainees are being treated. Relatives, lawyers and activists came forward with powerful stories of detainees facing horrific abuses behind bars.

The story of four men arrested in Ramadi and Fallujah in 2012 gives a snapshot of the abuse that many detainees face. While being held in incommunicado detention at the Directorate of Counter-Crime in Ramadi, Nabhan ‘Adel Hamdi, Mu’ad Muhammad ‘Abed, ‘Amer Ahmad Kassar and Shakir Mahmoud ‘Anad were reportedly tortured to make them “confess” to assisting with murder (see our Worldwide Appeal for them on p. 24-25). Before their trial, video footage of their “confessions” were shown on local television.

At the trial, they told the court that they had been tortured into confessing. Photos of their bodies showed a crisscross of long bruises and evidence of burning; signs of torture that were confirmed by medical examination. Yet the men were sentenced to death on 3 December 2012, and it seems that no investigation has taken place into the alleged torture.

They are among more than 3,000 people sentenced to death since capital punishment was reinstated in 2004. Many of those on death row say they were tortured into making “confessions”; at least 447 have been executed.

DAILY DEMONSTRATIONS
Allegations of female detainees being abused were debated in Parliament in November 2012. In December, tens of thousands of Iraqis began holding largely peaceful protests condemning this and other abuse of prisoners. They held daily demonstrations over several weeks, calling for respect for due process and legislative measures, including an amnesty law and a review of anti-terrorism legislation. After several demonstrators were shot dead by the army in Fallujah at the end of January, officials announced an investigation.

Measures such as the amnesty law have so far been delayed due to the political stalemate since US troops withdrew at the end of 2011. Tensions between political parties, which partially reflect ethnic and sectarian divisions, have increased, slowing the pace of reform.

A new Amnesty International report urges the Iraqi authorities to end incommunicado detention, torture and coerced “confessions”, to ensure fair trial standards and to stop using the death penalty. Perpetrators of human rights violations, including those belonging to foreign armed forces in Iraq, must be brought to justice in fair trials that do not resort to the death penalty.

Read our new report, out in March, at bit.ly/iraq-10-years-on

ACT NOW
OVER 50 YEARS AFTER AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL’S FIRST NEWSLETTER APPEAL FOR AN INDIVIDUAL AT RISK, OUR CLASSIC LETTER WRITING TECHNIQUE IS AS POPULAR AND EFFECTIVE AS EVER.

Amnesty International is, at its heart, a movement of people who want to change other people’s lives for the better. Our first six cases of individuals at risk were published shortly after the organization started in 1961. In 1963, the first appeal for action went out in our membership newsletter.

The first “Prisoner of the Month” was Portuguese poet Mario Pedroso Goncalves, arrested by “the dreaded PIDE (secret police)” and charged with being a communist. Mario had already spent nearly five years in jail. He had married his fiancée in prison, and had no news of any future release. “Eventually his prison companions staged a hunger strike. They could bear his screaming no longer,” the article continued, ending with a call to join Amnesty in order to help people like Mario.

HELPING US TO NOT LOSE HEART

A 1964 article conceded that writing letters to the authorities was “a thankless task in the extreme,” because they hardly every reply. So providing good news and feedback was a crucial way to inspire activists: “Uplifting stories go a long way towards helping us not to lose heart,” said one member in Malta.

Yet, “the policy of patient and repeated pleading is the only one which in the end will succeed,” the article concluded. And indeed it has. Among our first good news stories was the release of Sister Maria Ruja in Romania, serving a 20 year sentence for “information allegedly passed through children”. An Amnesty group in Chester, UK, began working on her case in early 1963, and she was released in December that year.

Letter writing has proved to be a very effective campaigning method. A former prisoner of conscience, Dominican trade union leader Julio de Peña Valdez, was held, naked and underground in 1975: “When the first two hundred letters came, the guards gave me back my clothes,” he later said. “Then the next two hundred letters came, and the prison director came to see me. When the next pile of letters arrived, the director got in touch with his superior. The letters kept coming and coming; three thousand of them. The President was informed. The letters still kept arriving, and the President called the prison and told them to let me go.”

GOOD NEWS

The “Prisoner of the Month” appeals became the Worldwide Appeals in 1992. A good news summary from 1998 included an update on the case of Aurora Nazario Arrieta, a Mexican woman raped by three police officers in November 1995. "After receiving hundreds of appeals, the state Attorney General decided to pursue the case against the police officers involved," the update said. “The conviction of those responsible for raping Aurora has given other women in Mexico the courage to come forward and file complaints against the police.”

When WIRE was launched in May 2001, we began including stories of people affected by issues such as forced evictions and lack of health care. After being forced out of their homes by the city authorities, a Romani community from Romania’s Coastei Street were featured in WIRE’s Worldwide Appeals and also the 2012 Write for Rights letter-writing marathon. “With the support of so many people from around the world, we remain strong, we remain hopeful,” one person told us.

The WORLDWIDE APPEALS are still an important part of WIRE and our campaigning. You will find six appeals on the next two pages, along with good news and updates on page 26. Use them to take action for human rights: over 50 years of experience have shown that writing letters isn’t such a thankless task after all – they really do change lives.
Visitors

China: Gao Zhisheng Allowed Visits

Gao Zhisheng was allowed a family visit in Shaya county prison in January for the first time in nine months. The respected human rights lawyer, featured in our Write for Rights letter in December 2012, has long been persecuted for his human rights work.

The visit lasted only half an hour and was tightly controlled, but he appeared to be in reasonable health and clear-minded. Amnesty is still calling for him to be protected from torture and released immediately.

USA: Supermax Prison Closed

The super-maximum security prison in Tamms, Illinios has officially closed after 15 years. Amnesty International and others have called for it to be closed since 2009. The campaign, headed by advocacy organization Tamms Year Ten, highlighted the inhumane prison regime which kept inmates isolated in their cells for 23 to 24 hours every day. Laurie-Jo Reynolds of Tamms Year Ten said: “Amnesty International’s public statement defined Tamms supermax as a human rights catastrophe. Their findings became a fundamental part of our campaign message.”

Belarus: Prisoner of Conscience

Zmitser Dashkevich is a prominent activist and leader of a democratic youth organization, Young Front. He was sentenced to two years in a labour colony on 24 March 2011 for an alleged assault on the day before the December 2010 presidential election in Belarus. He was due to be released in December 2012, but was sentenced to another year in prison in August 2012 for allegedly violating prison rules.

Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience. We believe the charges against him were fabricated to stop him taking part in a demonstration against alleged election rigging.

Zmitser Dashkevich was detained with fellow Young Front activist Eduard Lobau. Both men maintain that security forces provoked the circumstances leading to their arrest. A third activist claimed that four men asked Zmitser and Eduard for directions and then punched them. Police arrived within minutes and detained the activists and two of the attackers. Zmitser and Eduard were convicted in a closed-door session. Zmitser claimed he was brutalized by police.

Since his conviction in March 2011, Zmitser Dashkevich has been transferred to a counselling facility in a labour colony near Zmitser. He has been told he will not be released until May 2013.

Zmitser Dashkevich is being held in Hrodna prison, where conditions are especially harsh. Hundreds of prisoners are kept in inhumane conditions and are not allowed to communicate with the outside world. Prisoners are allowed to spend only a few minutes of each day in the fresh air. They are allowed bedding even in winter, and are denied visitors and correspondence.

Please write to the authorities, calling for Zmitser Dashkevich and all those imprisoned in connection with the December 2010 election demonstration to be immediately and unconditionally released. Urge the authorities not to obstruct, harass and intimidate civil society activists who are directly or indirectly promoting and defending human rights in Belarus.

Send appeals to: President Alyaksandr Lukashenka
ul. Karla Marx 38
220016 Minsk, BELARUS
Fax: +375 172 26 06 10
Salutation: Dear President Lukashenka
MEXICO
PRIEST WORKING WITH MIGRANTS AT RISK

Catholic priest Fray Tomás González runs “La 72” migrants’ shelter in Tenosique, Mexico. He is also founder and president of the Usumacinta Human Rights Centre (Centro de Derechos Humanos del Usumacinta, CDHU). Both Fray Tomás González and staff at the shelter have faced harassment for their work defending migrants’ rights, including threats and intimidation.

Members of criminal gangs threatened staff and migrants at “La 72” most recently in December 2012, and already in 2013 there have been fresh reports of assaults against newly arrived Central American migrants, who pass through Tenosique on route to the USA.

No one has been held to account for these abuses and the shelter remains vulnerable to attack. The limited protection previously provided to them by the authorities was withdrawn in October 2012. The shelter is demanding that the authorities take action to improve safety and stop attacks on migrants.

Human rights defenders frequently face threats and intimidation in reprisal for their work. Migrants’ rights defenders have been particularly targeted due to their work highlighting abuses against migrants by public officials and criminal gangs.

Both “La 72” and the CDHU are in Tenosique, near the border with Guatemala. The shelter provides humanitarian assistance, including protection, food, water, clothing, advice and support to migrants making their way north.

Please write, calling on the authorities to publicly recognize and support the work of Fray Tomás and other human rights defenders at “La 72” shelter. Urge them to take all necessary measures to ensure that they can continue working safely, by providing protection and ending impunity for human rights abuses.

Send appeals to:
Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong
Minister of Interior
Secretario de Gobernación
Abraham González No.48, Col. Juárez
Del. Cuauhtémoc, México, D.F.
C. P. 06600 México
Fax: +52 55 50933414 (a voice will ask for the extension: dial 23256)
Email: secretario@segob.gob.mx
Salutation: Dear Minister/Sr. Secretario

USA
500TH TEXAS EXECUTION LOOMS

The state of Texas is approaching its 500th execution since resuming judicial killing in 1982. Texas accounts for more than a third of all executions carried out in the USA since the US Supreme Court approved new capital punishment laws in 1976.

The next seven most prolific states conducting executions – Virginia, Oklahoma, Florida, Missouri, Alabama, Georgia and Ohio – have put to death over 500 inmates between them.

Since 2007, four states – New Jersey, New Mexico, Illinois and Connecticut – have legislated to abolish the death penalty. In contrast, executions continue relentlessly in Texas. More than 250 have taken place under its current governor, Rick Perry – in office since December 2000. There were 152 executions in five years under his predecessor, George W. Bush.

During the past three decades, Texas has frequently contravened international safeguards in its pursuit of executions, including of people whose guilt remained in doubt, people with serious mental disabilities, defendants denied adequate legal representation and foreign nations denied their consular rights. Before the US Supreme Court banned executions of people under 18 years of age at the time of the crime in 2005, and offenders with “mental retardation” in 2002, Texas accounted for more such executions than any other state.

Studies have consistently shown that race, especially the race of the victim, plays a role in US capital sentencing. 70% of those put to death in Texas were convicted of murders involving white victims, while 13% were executed for crimes involving black victims. Three white people have been put to death for murders involving just black victims, while 100 black people have been executed for crimes involving just white victims.

Please write to Governor Rick Perry, urging him to work towards abolishing the death penalty, and to work with the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles to prevent executions in individual cases.

Send appeals to:
Governor Rick Perry
Office of the Governor, PO Box 12428
Austin, Texas 78711-2428, USA
Fax: + 1 512 463 1849
Salutation: Dear Governor

JAPAN
HAKAMADA IWAO AND OKUNISHI MASARU SENTENCED TO DEATH

Hakamada Iwao has been on death row since 1968. Following an unfair trial, he was convicted of the murder of his boss, his boss’s wife and their two children. Hakamada “confessed” after 20 days of interrogation by police. During his trial, he retracted his confession and told the court that police had beaten and threatened him during daily interrogations lasting more than 12 hours. Nonetheless he was found guilty and sentenced to death.

Okunishi Masaru has been on death row since 1969. He is facing execution for the murders of five women. He “confessed” to the crime after being interrogated by police for many hours over five days. During his first trial he retracted the confession, testifying that it had been forced, and was acquitted for lack of evidence. However, a higher court reversed the verdict and sentenced him to death.

Okunishi Masaru and Hakamada Iwao are among Japan’s longest-serving death row inmates. Both men were denied legal representation during their interrogations. Both men’s lawyers have made repeated appeals for retrials, nearly all of which have been denied. Okunishi Masaru was granted a retrial in 2005 but the trial was stopped following objections by the prosecution, despite new evidence concerning his innocence. New forensic testing is being used to challenge their convictions.

Executions in Japan are by hanging, and are typically carried out in secret. Death row inmates are only notified on the morning of their execution.

Please write, expressing concern that Hakamada Iwao and Okunishi Masaru were both convicted on the basis of confessions extracted under duress. Urge the authorities to grant stays of execution for both men and introduce a moratorium on executions in Japan. Call on them to ensure that their appeals for retrial are not blocked by the prosecution and for improvements in the treatment of death row prisoners, including an end to solitary confinement.

Send appeals to:
Justice Minister, Sadakazu Tanigaki,
Minister of Justice 1-1-1 Kasumigaseki,
Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-8977, Japan
Fax: +81 3 5511 7200
Salutation: Dear Minister

SOUTH AFRICA
JUSTICE FOR MURDERED LGBTI ACTIVIST

In the early hours of 24 April 2011, 24-year-old Noxolo Nogwaza was murdered on her way home from a night out with friends. Her attacker(s) raped, repeatedly beat and stabbed her – apparently for being a lesbian woman – before dumping her body in a ditch. Two years on, there has been no progress in the investigation into her murder and her killer(s) remain at large.

Noxolo lived and died in KwaThema township, east of Johannesburg. She was an active member of the locally-based Ekurhuleni Pride Organising Committee, working for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) rights.

As an LGBTI activist, Noxolo knew the risks of living openly as a lesbian woman. Homophobia and hate crimes against LGBTI people are common in South Africa, particularly in townships and rural areas. In the last six years, at least 11 cases of rape followed by murder of lesbian women have been reported in townships across the country.

The apparent indifference shown by South African police in such cases is also not unusual. Pervasive homophobic attitudes in wider society persist within the police. LGBTI people often experience further victimization by police officers or medical personnel when seeking help following attacks. In Noxolo’s murder investigation, the Tsakane police assigned to her case apparently motivated violence, including the Tsakane police investigating Noxolo Nogwaza’s death. Urge also that every police station has officers properly trained to investigate prejudice-motivated crimes in an efficient and unbiased way.

Send appeals to:
General MV Phiyega
National Commissioner
South African Police Service
Private Bag X94, Pretoria 0001
South Africa
Fax: +27 12 393 2616
Email: natcomm@saps.org.za
Salutation: Dear General Phiyega
Christmas is usually a difficult time for Rosa Franco. As it approaches, she relives what happened in 2001, when her daughter Mariá Isabel's body was dumped in a Guatemala City street.

Despite Rosa’s fight for a proper investigation – in the face of countless threats – the investigation never progressed. Shortcomings in how evidence was gathered means those who brutally raped and murdered Mariá Isabel are still at large.

Amnesty International is among many organizations working with Rosa to secure justice for Mariá Isabel. Hers was one of 12 cases featured in our 10th global Write for Rights letter-writing marathon in December 2012. Thousands of activists sent letters and SMS messages and signed appeals urging governments to take action, and expressing support for victims of human rights abuses and their relatives.

“I was at home, preparing the Christmas tree and food and I heard someone ringing the bell. It was the postman with a box full of letters. I received so much solidarity which has filled me with strength,” said Rosa.

And the letters kept coming.

“My family and I are surprised that so many people around the world care about Mariá Isabel, when no one here cares about killings of women,” said Rosa. She is now preparing to testify before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights about her daughter’s murder.

500 LETTERS A DAY
In December 2012, something extraordinary happened to Ales Bialiatski in his cell in a Belarus jail. He received up to 500 solidarity letters a day from people across the world.

“I have been covered with an avalanche of letters and postcards. I am very grateful to all the people who write to me. What they all have in common is sympathy,” he said in a statement.

Ales, the chairman of the Human Rights Centre Viasna, was imprisoned on 24 November 2011 for four and a half years for his human rights work in Belarus.

“These people do not just support me personally, but are expressing their protest against the systematic violations of human rights. It is a clear and simple message to all Belarusians,” he said.

A GLOBAL MARATHON
Write for Rights began in 2001 with a small group of activists in Poland and grew into the world’s largest human rights event. Over 80 countries participated last December.

In central Tokyo, Japan, people made over 1,000 lanterns shining “lights of hope”. In Paraguay, activists organized a bicycle race, collecting petition signatures as they went. And in Canada, the world’s 5th tallest free-standing structure, the CN Tower, was lit up on 10 December, Human Rights Day.

In countries like Pakistan and Nigeria, where human rights and the political environment are particularly unstable, activists gathered support from family, friends, colleagues and members of the public.

Waseem from Pakistan, for example, was unable to advertise his event in public. But he was touched by the support of the 20 people who had heard about the campaign through Facebook and turned up to his letter-writing event.

Rosa Franco said that all the cards and letters from Amnesty International’s activists gave her hope and energy to continue fighting for Mariá Isabel. “I wanted to make a mural so everyone who comes to my house sees them, on the walls beside my front door.”

On 9 January, Roxana Baldetti, Guatemala’s Vice President, thanked people worldwide for sending her more than 1,000 letters about Mariá Isabel. She also committed to “significantly improving” conditions for people in Guatemala – especially women and girls.

“Proof once again that writing letters really has the potential to change the world.”

Watch a video about our 10th Write for Rights letter writing marathon at bit.ly/write-for-rights2012
good news
'WHO SAID THAT KILLING THOUSANDS, IN A SINGLE INSTANT, IS WORSE THAN KILLING THOUSANDS, ONE BY ONE, EVERY DAY?'

OSCAR ARIAS, NOBEL PEACE LAUREATE AND FORMER COSTA RICAN PRESIDENT, WHO WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN GETTING THE FIRST ARMS TRADE TREATY TALKS STARTED. SEE PAGE 4.