

AI NEWSLETTER MARCH 1995

WORLDWIDE APPEALS

PERU

Pelagia Salcedo Pizarro and her husband Juan Carlos Chuchón Zea, were detained on 11 December 1992 by the anti-terrorism branch of the police in San Juan de Lurigancho district, in Lima, the capital. They were forced, under torture, to sign a police report stating that they were in possession of illegal explosives and leaflets issued by the clandestine armed opposition group *Partido Comunista del Perú (Sendero Luminoso)*, Communist Party of Peru (PCP) (Shining Path).

In February 1993 the *Consejo de Guerra Especial de la Marina*, Navy War Council, sentenced both to 30 years' imprisonment. The sentence was upheld by the *Consejo Supremo de Justicia Militar*, Supreme Council of Military Justice, in April 1993.

The police based their suspicion on the couple's friendship with Celso Chavelón Najarro who, unknown to them, was an alleged member of the PCP and under police surveillance. There is no evidence that Pelagia Salcedo and Juan Carlos have any links to the PCP and they are not known to have used or advocated violence -- the charges they faced appear to have been politically motivated. AI believes they are prisoners of conscience and is calling for their immediate and unconditional release.

Ironically, the PCP attempted to kill Pelagia Salcedo and her husband in 1982 as a result of his active opposition to the PCP. Fearing for their lives they decided that it was best to move to Lima from their home in the Andean highlands. In the capital Pelagia Salcedo ran a market stall in her neighbourhood and Juan Carlos Chuchón worked as a builder.

Please send appeals calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Pelagia Salcedo Pizarro and Juan Carlos Chuchón Zea to: Presidente Alberto Fujimori, Presidente de la República del Perú, Palacio de Gobierno, Plaza de Armas, Lima 1, Perú.

KENYA

Josephine Nyawira Ngengi, a member of a non-violent campaigning group called the Released Political Prisoners (RPP), was arrested on 8 May 1994 in Nakuru, 150kms northwest of Nairobi. She was held illegally and incommunicado by police for 22 days. On 10 June 1994 she and 18 others were charged with robbery with violence, which carries a mandatory death sentence on conviction.

Police in Kenya appear to be abusing the law on armed robbery to detain, on non-bailable charges, critics of the government (See Page 2). AI is concerned that the charges against Josephine Nyawira Ngengi may have been fabricated and that she and some of those charged with her, have reportedly been tortured.

She and some of her co-defendants have been tried on two separate occasions - in Nakuru in August 1994 and in Nyeri, 100km east of Nakuru, in December. On both occasions the case was withdrawn by the prosecution. However, she was immediately rearrested and charged with the same offence. She is currently awaiting trial in Nyahururu, 60km northeast of Nakuru, with 14 others. All 15 have denied the charges.

In 1992 Josephine Nyawira Ngengi participated in a hunger-strike by female relatives and friends campaigning for the release of political prisoners in Kenya. At the time of her arrest she had been regularly attending the trial of her brother, G.G. Njuguna Ngengi, who has been charged with three others with robbery with violence. AI believes that the charges against them are false and that all four men are prisoners of conscience.

Please send appeals calling for a review of the charges against Josephine Nyawira Ngengi and her co-defendants, and for their immediate release if, as it appears, they have been imprisoned for their peaceful political and human rights

activities, to President Daniel arap Moi, Office of the President, P O Box 30510, Nairobi, Kenya.

IRAN

Azizollah Amir Rahimi, a 73-year-old retired General and former Commander of the Military Police, was arrested in Tehran on 31 October 1994, interrogated and released the next day. He was re-arrested on 3 November and reportedly beaten by members of the secret police. His son, Mehrdad Amir Rahimi, was arrested on 8 November 1994. He had protested at the arrest of his father and given interviews to foreign journalists. Both men are prisoners of conscience.

Azizollah Amir Rahimi, has openly criticised the Iranian Government. Recently he publicly called for President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani to step down or introduce democratic reforms and end immediately the "regime of censorship, denunciation and the rule of the mullahs". Many people have been imprisoned in Iran on trumped up charges after publicly criticising the government.

On 7 November the Iranian News Agency quoted the Public Relations Department of the Military Justice as saying that the General, who is being detained at the Air Force Hospital in Tehran, had "confessed during his interrogation that he uses opium because of neurological problems". AI fears that such a "confession" may have been made as a result of torture.

Azizollah Amir Rahimi was visited by his family at the Air Force Hospital in November, but the whereabouts of his son remain unknown.

Please send appeals calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Retired General Azizollah Amir Rahimi and his son, Mehrdad Amir Rahimi, to: His Excellency Hojjatoleslam Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, The Presidency, Palestine Avenue, Azerbaijan Intersection, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran.

INDIA: JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Hundreds, possibly thousands, of Kashmiris have died in custody in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir since armed conflict between the Indian army and secessionist groups erupted in 1989. Most of those killed are young men suspected of involvement with the armed opposition.

AI has specific information about 715 detainees allegedly tortured to death or shot outright over the last five years, but the true number is probably higher.* In March 1993 the Times of India referred to custodial killings in Jammu and Kashmir as an "almost daily phenomenon".

Detentions usually occur in areas where government forces are engaged in counter-insurgency operations. During periodic crackdowns aimed at flushing out the opposition, government soldiers enter a town or village, round up hundreds of men and women, then take away anyone they suspect of having links with the militants.

The families of those detained are seldom told why they have been arrested or where they are being held. Virtually all of those arrested are reportedly tortured, and many have been left mutilated and disabled for life. Ghulam Mohammad Bhat, an elderly man from Sopore, had to have both his feet amputated after being hung upside down for six days while in army custody.

The body of Abdul Jabbar Mir, a 50-year-old school teacher from Baramulla, was handed over to local police by an army officer in July 1993. He had been arrested by the army the day before. A police report noted that his "whole body from top to below had signs of torture"; the doctor who conducted the post-mortem concluded that the "deceased has been put to a lot of torture".

Addul Jabbar Mir's case is typical of hundreds of deaths of Kashmiris in custody. The army claims he was "shot trying to escape," and no one appears to have been arrested or charged in connection with the killing. The case is exceptional only in that the police themselves recorded that torture was the cause of death, and that this was later confirmed by a post-mortem.

In the early years of the conflict, the security forces made little attempt to disguise deaths in custody. The disfigured bodies of the victims were dumped on roads or in rivers, or were returned without comment to the police or family.

More recently, the government has tried to cover up such killings by attributing them to armed "encounters" between militants and the security forces. But evidence to support the official version of events is seldom offered, and in many cases the police confirm that the victims died in the custody of the security forces.

The Indian Government consistently denies allegations that torture in custody is rife, although the Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, Krishna Rao, freely acknowledges that torture is commonplace. "I feel genuinely bad," he told India Today in 1993, "if torture leads to death... I've told the forces to be careful."

Some doctors in Jammu and Kashmir have treated so many patients admittted from interrogation and torture centers with acute renal failure that they have taken to calling the condition "Physical Torture Nephropathy".

The Indian Government has promised that allegations of torture and deaths in custody would be investigated. Yet investigations continue to be rare, and not a single member of the security forces is known to have been prosecuted for killing a detainee. In some cases, special laws have made the security forces immune from prosecution.

Armed militant groups have also committed numerous human rights abuses. They have kidnapped many civilians and have deliberately tortured and killed some of them. AI condemns these human rights abuses unreservedly and has called repeatedly on armed opposition groups in Jammu and Kashmir to release hostages and reiterates its appeal to these groups to abide by basic humanitarian standards.

Although the Indian Government claims that it maintains an open policy on Jammu and Kashmir, it does not allow human rights monitoring groups, such as AI, access to the region, nor has it cooperated with United Nations experts on torture and extrajudicial killings, who have asked to be invited to Jammu and Kashmir to carry out investigations.

*see India: Torture and deaths in custody in Jammu and Kashmir, January 1995, AI Index: ASA 20/01/95

COLOMBIA: THE CRISIS CONTINUES

Colombia's President Ernesto Samper Pizano celebrated his inauguration last August with declarations that human rights would

be a priority for his new administration. However, recent measures have been at odds with his stated commitment to a human rights program, leading to doubts about whether the government has the political will required to end the crisis.

Colombia has suffered over a decade of torture, "disappearance" and extrajudicial executions. The perception of drug-trafficking as the principal cause of the political violence is largely a myth; the Colombian armed forces have responded to a long-running guerrilla insurgency with gross and systematic abuses committed with almost total impunity.

In 1994 alone the armed forces and their paramilitary allies extrajudicially executed more than 1,000 men and women. At least 150 "disappeared" after detention and many hundreds of prisoners were tortured.

In contrast to previous presidents, President Samper has acknowledged some degree of official responsibility for Colombia's human rights crisis. In September the president launched a human rights program, which included commitments to tackling impunity and eradicating paramilitary groups.

However, shortly afterwards the government rejected provisions of a draft law which would have criminalised "disappearances" and put investigations and trials under the jurisdiction of civilian courts, rather than the military justice system. The government's failure to remove human rights violations from military jurisdiction could serve to perpetuate the pattern of impunity. The government also announced in December the creation of civilian "rural surveillance organizations", which will assist the armed forces in intelligence gathering. AI is concerned that these civilian vigilante groups may be issued weapons by the army. These groups could also form the basis of a new paramilitary apparatus, which could be used to perpetuate illegal counter-insurgency practices, including extrajudicial executions and "disappearances".

KENYA, TANZANIA, UGANDA, ZAMBIA AND ZIMBABWE

A number of African countries are using criminal charges as a means of repressing peaceful political opposition without resorting to tactics more likely to attract international condemnation. AI has documented the use of such charges for political reasons in five east and central African states: Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.*

The charges, which include sedition, subversion, and holding meetings or demonstrations without an official permit, are often levelled against men and women seeking to build strong civil societies -- journalists, trade unionists, lawyers, human rights activists, academics and members of opposition parties.

In Kenya, for instance, opposition members of parliament, human rights activists, journalists and other government critics have been arrested in connection with peaceful demonstrations, speeches, or investigations into human rights abuses (See World Wide Appeals page). Whole editions of newspapers and publications critical of government policies have been impounded and printing presses have been put out of action. Since January 1994 over 20 journalists have been intimidated, harassed, arrested, fined or imprisoned.

Journalists in Zambia have likewise been targeted. Virtually the entire staff of the bi-weekly newspaper *The Post* have been arrested at various times over the last year, and charged with a number of offences, including defamation and "causing public alarm". The paper has been critical of domestic policy.

The criminalization of peaceful political activity is a serious violation of international human rights standards. Criminal charges can be used to intimidate, harass and restrict troublesome opponents. Charges can be held over the heads of the accused for prolonged periods, and are often dropped just before trial. But even if the case does not go to full trial, mounting a defence, or a series of defences for different charges, is expensive and time consuming. And some activists have been found guilty and imprisoned.

Repression by the Zanzibar government in Tanzania has focused on obstructing the activities of rank-and-file opposition supporters of the Civic United Front (CUF). At least 15 people have reportedly been charged with possession of seditious material after being found with audio or video-cassette recordings of CUF public meetings; one of the accused has received a three-month prison sentence.

*see Attacks on human rights through the misuse of criminal charges: AI Index: AFR 01/01/95

Pakistan: Scenes of a research mission

Two AI delegates recently spent three weeks in Pakistan, interviewing the victims of human rights violations, as well as lawyers, judges, human rights activists, trade unionists, community leaders, politicians and journalists. Field missions are one of the ways AI gathers information first hand. On their return, one of the researchers told us about some of her experiences.

On our fourth day in Karachi we were heading back from an intensive round of interviews, tired, sweaty and ready for a break. Driving through a suburb of Karachi, I caught a glimpse of a large empty field through gaps between little shops. Something was definitely wrong: in Karachi, with its 12 million inhabitants, no space is ever empty.

We soon saw why. All around the field there were soldiers, with guns ready. In the center of the field, three men in civilian clothes interrogated a fourth man. One of the interrogators was beating the man across the back and buttocks with a long wooden stick, while another hit the victim across the face with a foot-long rubber tube. They were joined by a man in uniform. He shouted questions at the man, while the beating continued.

Watching, we were frozen in place. We then stepped out from behind the silent crowd of onlookers, walking past the soldiers and their guns, hoping none would lose his nerve and pull the trigger.

The army officer turned on us impatiently: "What do you want?"

I opened my bag slowly, and handed him my card, saying as authoritatively as I could, "we are from Amnesty International.

We have come to investigate what is going on here."

Amnesty International didn't mean much to him, I could see, but a peremptory foreign woman demanding an answer seemed to fluster him.

"Who is this man?", I asked.

"He is a drug smuggler, he has to show us where he has hidden the drugs."

"That may be so, but it is forbidden to beat a suspect. You should take him to the police station and question him there properly, without using violence."

Our army man did not know how to respond so he walked away. The interrogation of a second man began, this time with the rubber hose only being waved menacingly in front of his face.

As we got back in the taxi, I felt suddenly weak. We hadn't been able to stop them, but at least we had seen it and recorded it on film. Next time Pakistani officials tell me that army and police brutality are an exaggeration, invented by the opposition, I would be able to set my own experience against it.

We scanned the local papers next day but found no reference to the raid and arrest. It may have been only one of dozens that evening, not worth mentioning. These incidents are detailed in a subsequent AI report; Pakistan - The Pattern Persists: Torture, Deaths in Custody, Extrajudicial Executions and "Disappearances under the PPP Government. AI index: ASA 33/01/95.

We reached Hyderabad six days later. It is the second largest city of Sindh, a provincial town where all the news from the rural interior comes together.

As we were about to sit down for lunch, a man came up and asked who we were. When my colleague said we were from Amnesty International, the man's face lit up.

"You helped me many years ago," he told us, "when I was in prison for six years during martial law. I got so many letters from France and Australia. The warden used to say, 'you must have many friends in foreign countries'."

"Of course I remember you," my colleague said. "I wrote your case sheet, I got in touch with your family."

The two men embraced, the former POC clearly at a loss for words: "So you worked for me ... That I should meet you ... I am so, so ... I don't know how to put it ...".

We spent the last week of our mission in Peshawar, where the hotel notice board said, "No guns in the hotel, armed bodyguards are required to leave their arms at the reception", In 1993 a tribal journalist, Sailab Masood, was sentenced to 16 years' imprisonment after a grotesquely unfair trial. He was guilty of nothing but doing his job as a reporter. AI had taken up his case, and he was suddenly released after serving a few weeks of his sentence. Life among the Pashtoon tribes is regulated by a very strict code of honour; having helped to get him out of prison, I was practically adopted by his family.

I visited tribal elders to hear their views about the judicial system in the tribal area. I interviewed Muslim activists in Malakand who normally would not talk to a woman. They are agitating

for the introduction of Islamic courts in their area, and have been subjected to torture and house destructions. When we were to leave Peshawar, Sailab embraced the men in our group. Me, a woman, he couldn't embrace, so he shook my hand for a long time, saying, "with your help I can face anything. I will work with more strength than before."

NEWS IN BRIEF

In December the Danish Minister of Justice, Bjørn Westh, announced that the use of the fixed leg-lock had been abandoned. In its June 1994 report on Denmark, AI stated that this method of restraint constituted cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. AI has asked the Minister of Justice to keep us informed of the results of a wide-ranging review of other restraint techniques, as well as measures undertaken to ensure that all detainees are granted access to a doctor, have ready access to toilets and are provided with food and water.

On 18 January, an AI Research Team arrived in the Rwandese capital, Kigali, to begin a three-month research project on Rwanda, Burundi and Eastern Zaire. The team includes Jo Wells, a Central Africa campaigner from the International Secretariat, Matthew Ganda, a former UN Development Program employee from Sierra Leone and Holo Makwaia, a Tanzanian attorney.

Human rights are women's right

For millions of women the 1990s have meant terror, deprivation and the imperative of fighting for justice. What unites women internationally -- transcending class, race, culture, religion, nationality and ethnic origin -- is their vulnerability to violations of their fundamental human rights, and their dedicated efforts to claim those rights.

The great failure of the international community is not just that it has been unable to guarantee women their social, economic and cultural rights -- women's right to equality, development and peace is the theme of the upcoming UN World Conference on Women. It is that governments have been unwilling to prevent and in some cases have sanctioned the violation of women's civil and political rights, including the rights not to be tortured, killed, "disappeared", arbitrarily detained or imprisoned.

Responsibility for abuses against women goes beyond governments. The growth of nationalist, secessionist and ethnic conflicts threatening all regions of the world has seen armed opposition groups adopt repression and terror in pursuit of their goals.

The UN Declaration prohibiting violence against women calls for "the universal application to women of the rights and principles with regard to equality, security, liberty, integrity and dignity of all human persons". Yet the universality of everyone's human rights is being undermined by governments who argue that such rights must be subordinated to national security, economic

strategy and local traditions. Governments tend to take an even more restrictive view of the human rights of women.

In many countries women who struggle to claim their basic and fundamental rights face torture, imprisonment or death. Even so, the past two decades have seen women's organizations spring up around the world. Some work for their "disappeared" relatives; some fight for basic rights such as freedom from want; some seek justice for the unrepresented; some campaign against torture or domestic violence; some struggle for equal treatment at work or for land rights and access to credit.

This wave of courage, creativity and commitment has all too often met a wall of government indifference and repression. Few governments recognize the work of women's human rights organizations as a legitimate exercise of fundamental civil and political rights. But such organizations must be our partners in the struggle to protect women's human rights worldwide.

Women and war

Half a century ago rape in war was outlawed by the Geneva Conventions, which state: "Women shall be especially protected ... against rape, enforced prostitution, or any form of indecent assault". Rape may be outlawed under international rules, but women are being raped -- terrorized, degraded and violated -- in every modern conflict on the planet.

Women are raped because their bodies are seen as the legitimate spoils of war. Rape by combatants is an act of torture, and clearly prohibited by the rules of war and by international human rights laws. Yet few governments or armed opposition groups have taken action to prevent rape during conflict.

The armed forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina have committed countless rapes. Women have been raped in their homes by soldiers from their own villages, and by troops passing through. Women prisoners have been raped by soldiers and guards in detention centres. Many rapes have been organized and systematic: women have been imprisoned in hotels and other buildings specifically to make them readily accessible to soldiers.

Although soldiers from all sides in the conflict have taken part in these violations, most of the victims have been Muslim women raped by Serbian soldiers and irregulars. The sexual abuse of women has been part of a wider pattern of warfare, characterized by the intimidation and abuse of Muslims and Croats, which has led thousands to flee or be expelled from their home areas. The UN Special Rapporteur on the conflict in the former Yugoslavia reported:

"...rape was being used as an instrument of ethnic cleansing... There are reliable reports of public rapes, for example, in front of a whole village, designed to terrorize the population and force ethnic groups to flee."

Rape is not an accident of war, or an incidental adjunct to armed conflict. Its widespread use reflects the special terror it holds for women, the special power it gives the rapist over his victim, the special contempt it displays for her. It reflects the inequalities women face every day in peacetime. Until governments live up to their obligations to ensure equality, and end discrimination against women, rape will continue to be a favourite weapon of the aggressor.

During conflict -- whether international war, civil war, or low-intensity insurgency -- the human rights of civilians become secondary to military advantage. Only five per cent of the casualties in the First World War were civilians. By the Second World War this figure had risen to 50 per cent. By the mid-1990s, about 80 per cent of the casualties in conflicts were civilians -- most of them women and children.

Government forces often face opposition from movements that draw their support from a particular ethnic group which has been excluded from power and denied access to resources. In country after country, troops engaged in counter-insurgency operations have targeted women just because they come from the "enemy" ethnic group.

In January 1994 an armed indigenous peasant movement took control of several towns in southern Mexico, demanding land rights and electoral reforms. After several days of heavy fighting, they retreated to the mountains. Since then, indigenous peoples have suffered repeated threats and attacks by the Mexican army.

Last June, in the southeastern state of Chiapas, three young indigenous women were returning to their village after selling their produce at a local market. They were stopped at a roadblock, raped by 10 soldiers, and warned that they would be killed if they told anyone.

Women in the southeastern provinces of Turkey have likewise been targeted. Since the Turkish Government announced in July 1993 that its armed forces would pursue a policy of "total conflict" against guerrillas of the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), human rights abuses against Kurdish villagers have been reported on a daily basis.

In villages suspected of supporting the PKK, government soldiers have beaten and publicly humiliated women, including pregnant women, young girls and the elderly. Women have been killed in reprisal attacks by the security forces on civilian areas of towns in the south east. In police custody women have allegedly been raped and several have "disappeared".

The growth of conflict in all parts of the world has forced millions of people to flee in search of safety. Between 1981 and 1993 the number of refugees worldwide doubled from eight million to more than 20 million; millions more are displaced within their own countries.

More than 80 per cent of refugees are women and children. Refugee women are particularly vulnerable during flight, when they may be attacked by pirates, bandits, members of the security forces, locals, smugglers, or other refugees. Border guards have detained women and girls for weeks to exploit them sexually. Smugglers sometimes assist female refugees across the border in exchange for sex or money. A refugee woman fleeing the Mengistu Government in Ethiopia described her journey to a neighbouring country.

"We were four people: my two children, four and two years old, our guide and myself. I was five months pregnant. On our way we were stopped by two men who asked us where we were going. When we explained, one pulled me aside and said: 'No safe passage before sex!'...he forced me down, kicked me in the stomach and raped me in front of my children. He knew I was pregnant, but that made no difference to him."

The vast majority of women who flee in search of safety never get as far as seeking asylum abroad. According to the UN, there are more than 100 million displaced people worldwide, some 80 per cent of whom are women and dependent children.

Millions of women are caught between the government and an armed opposition, both of which use violence in pursuit of their goals. Armed opposition groups all over the world have resorted to brutal tactics against innocent bystanders. Women have been murdered, raped, taken hostage and tormented by armed opposition groups, many of which claim to be fighting for the rights of those they abuse.

In Algeria killings of women by militant Islamic groups have coincided with drastic clampdowns by the government and a sharp deterioration in respect for human rights. Since a state of emergency was imposed in February 1992, more than 30,000 people have reportedly been killed by the security forces and armed Islamist groups.

Women have faced increasing pressure from armed Islamist groups to wear the Islamic veil. Katia Bengana, a 16-year-old student, in Mefta (Blida), Algeria, had been repeatedly threatened with death, yet she still refused to wear the veil. In February 1994 she was coming home from school with a friend who was wearing the veil. A gunman appeared before them, told the other girl to move out of the way, and shot Katia dead.

Fighting for justice

Dr Manorani Saravanamuttu was suddenly propelled into a world of death, grief and intimidation when her son, Richard de Zoysa, a journalist, was abducted and killed in Sri Lanka in February 1990. Tens of thousands of people have "disappeared" or have been murdered by government forces in Sri Lanka.

Three months after the murder, a letter warned her: "Mourn the death of your son. Any other steps will result in your death..."

Only silence will protect you. Heed this advice. Your son failed to heed advice and had to be killed..."

Manorani Saravanamuttu refused to be silent. She campaigned to expose the truth about her son's killing and for the murderers to be brought to justice. She said she could identify one of her son's abductors as a Senior Superintendent of Police in Colombo. Despite her determination, no independent inquiry into her son's abduction and killing was held, and the police inquiry produced no results.

She also defiantly ignored the repeated threats against her by taking on a leading role in the Mothers' Front, a mass movement of 25,000 mothers of Sri Lanka's "disappeared".

"They expect you to curl up in a corner and die of fear," she said in 1991. "The women are saying 'We were going mad with grief at home alone'. Now at least we are doing something."

Manorani Saravanamuttu is a symbol of countless other women around the world whose names are not widely known but who have stood up for their principles, regardless of the personal cost.

All over the world poverty forces women to work in miserable factories with miserable rates of pay. Women employees are regarded as cheaper and more docile than men. Sometimes women organize and fight back. But when they take up the struggle for their rights they are seen as a threat by those in power. They can lose their jobs, or even their lives.

In Indonesia the official minimum wage is below the level needed for survival, and factories seldom comply with minimum wage standards. Women workers take home about half the male wage. In 1993, the management of a watch factory in East Java decided it would not even pay the inadequate official rates. So the workers walked out. A woman called Marsinah was one of those elected to negotiate with the company.

Two days later she was abducted. Her bruised and bloodied body was later found by a group of children in a shack on the edge of a rice field more than 100 kilometres from her home.

A thorough investigation by an independent human rights organization concluded that high-ranking military authorities were responsible for Marsinah's murder. There is little chance, however, that they will be brought to justice in Indonesia, where the security forces appear free to kill with impunity.

Eren Keskin is a lawyer and a human rights activist in Turkey. Because she has defended members of the PKK, she has been repeatedly harassed and threatened. "We are measuring your coffin," she was told on the telephone. She has been shot at, assaulted by a police officer, and subjected to arbitrary detention and ill-treatment. Eren Keskin also faces a sentence of two years' imprisonment for "separatist propaganda" because she sent a message to the Belgian parliament about the situation of the Kurdish minority in Turkey.

Women political activists in many countries are behind bars. Dr Ma Thida, a surgeon and a writer, is serving a 20-year prison sentence because she distributed information on opposition activities and campaigned on behalf of the National League for Democracy, the party which won the elections in Myanmar (Burma) in 1990 but was denied power by the military.

Women make up nearly a third of the hundreds of political prisoners held in Tibet. Many have been tortured. Most are nuns serving sentences of "re-education through labour", who were imprisoned for organizing or joining protests for Tibet's independence from China.

Women everywhere are involved in the community. They organize support networks, set up health and education projects and run creches. In some places, governments view these contributions to community life as a threat.

In Peru the authorities have claimed that community activists sympathize with the armed opposition, and use this as a pretext for targeting them. One such woman, Santosa Layme Bejar, has been active in local health projects for the poor since 1983. She was detained in February 1994, accused of being a member of the armed opposition group Shining Path and charged with "terrorism". Ironically, Santosa Layme Bejar has received death threats from Shining Path because of her public and unqualified opposition to their activities.

Women at risk

Rape and other sexual torture and ill-treatment is experienced by women in custody all over the world. Rape, threats of rape and sexual abuse are often used to elicit information or a confession during interrogation, or to humiliate and intimidate women detainees.

Women are also raped and sexually abused to punish entire communities. When the military launched an anti-poaching operation in Zaire's Salonga National Park in 1992, more than a dozen school girls aged between 13 and 15 were raped by soldiers; a father was forced at gunpoint to rape his 18-year-old daughter. In some countries the law provides for particularly cruel, inhuman and degrading punishments for offences which are mainly committed by women.

Hundreds of women have been flogged for breaching the dress laws in Sudan since the military government introduced a new penal code in March 1991. The penal code defines a wide variety of offences which are punishable by flogging: wearing clothing contrary to public decency is punishable by up to 40 lashes. Women in Iran have also been flogged for breaking dress laws.

Bangladeshi women are particularly at risk in areas where local village councils controlled by Islamists have set themselves up

as enforcers of their interpretation of Islamic law. In the past three years, these councils, known as *salish*, which are not part of the judicial system and have no legal authority, have ordered the execution, torture or ill-treatment of women.

A *salish* sentenced a 13-year-old girl, Sapnaha, to a public whipping in May 1994. The girl had been raped about eight months earlier, and had become pregnant. The alleged rapist had been acquitted by the *salish*, because the crime was not witnessed by four adult male Muslim witnesses of good repute, as is required by Islamic law. On the evidence of her pregnancy, Sapnaha was declared guilty of illicit sexual intercourse, and sentenced to be publicly flogged 101 times. A group of women's activists, the Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, gave Sapnaha safe haven in a rehabilitation centre before the sentence could be carried out.

Women are often detained, tortured, held hostage and sometimes even killed because their relatives or people they are associated with are connected to political opposition groups, or are wanted by the authorities.

Eighteen-year-old María Teresa Akumu was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment by a court in Equatorial Guinea. She was charged with an attempt against the security of the state and convicted of giving shelter to plotters, apparently because of her boyfriend's alleged involvement in a raid against a military barracks.

After her arrest María Teresa Akumu was tortured and starved. Her trial was blatantly unfair. During her sentence she is being forced to do domestic labour at the house of a government official during the day and is taken back to prison every night.

In several countries women are persecuted because of their sexual orientation. Lesbian women are in double jeopardy; vulnerable because they are women, lesbians are further marginalized and stigmatized because of their sexual orientation.

Campaigning for women's rights

Discrimination is a deadly disease. More women and girls die each day from gender-based discrimination and violence than from any other type of human rights abuse. Every year, because of discrimination, millions of women are mutilated, battered to death, burned alive, stripped of their legal rights, and bought and sold in an unacknowledged but international trade in slaves for domestic or sexual purposes.

For many years now, African women have been in the forefront of the campaign to eradicate female genital mutilation. An estimated 110 million women suffer serious, even life threatening, injuries as a result of this traditional practice which many underwent as children or infants. The scale of the practice is enormous; around two million girls are mutilated every year.

Activists against the abuses encompassed by the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women have been threatened,

imprisoned, tortured, "disappeared" or murdered. The perpetrators of these violations are often agents of the same governments that claim to support this declaration. Governments must be held to their obligations if this international standard is not to become one more double standard.

AI acknowledges the important work by individuals and other organizations against domestic violence, genital mutilation, forced prostitution, and other violent acts committed by private individuals and organizations. However, AI's mandate for action on behalf of individual victims is directed at governments and armed political groups and does not include such abuses.

AI urges governments that are seriously committed to ending discrimination and violence against women to adopt and fund comprehensive policies for widespread education about all women's human rights issues.

The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, the final document of the 1993 UN World Conference on Human Rights, states: "The human rights of women and of the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights". The UN Commission on Human Rights appointed in March 1994 a Special Rapporteur on violence against women.

Yet the UN resolution to hold the World Conference on Human Rights had made no mention of women or gender-based abuses. What forced women's human rights onto the agenda in Vienna was the collective action of women in the years and months beforehand. As one activist put it: "The conference was part of a continuing process to improve women's rights, which is precisely why women targeted it as an important place to be present and to be heard. And we were".

Women's voices can be heard all over the world: demanding justice, protesting discrimination, claiming rights, mourning dead husbands and comforting raped daughters. The task of the international human rights movement is to make governments listen and ensure that they take action to protect and promote all the human rights due to women.