

@WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Human rights under attack

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Preface

Women in the Middle East are speaking out for their rights. They are also joining human rights groups in growing numbers, determined to make the world a safer place for all humanity. In countries such as Algeria, Israel and Tunisia, women play a leading role in Amnesty International's groups. Their work is dedicated to campaigning against human rights violations in countries outside their own. They have participated in international campaigns to protect people they have never met, nor are ever likely to meet, in countries as far apart as the USA and China. They have joined thousands of other women and men in writing to governments of every political persuasion in all regions of the world on behalf of individual victims of human rights violations. They have sent appeals to armed opposition groups urging them to respect the basic principles of humanitarian law. They have also worked to raise awareness about human rights in general inside their own countries.

Amnesty International members and groups always operate openly and within the law, and keep the authorities informed of their peaceful activities. Despite this, in several Middle Eastern countries they have been refused permission to organize and in others they have been facing increasing harassment and restrictions on their activities.

Women in the region are organizing in many other ways to defend human and women's rights. Widad Hilwani is typical of the many women who have been propelled into activity by personal tragedy. After her husband 'Adnan "disappeared", she helped to establish an organization in Lebanon to search for the 17,000 women and men who went missing during the 1975 to 1990 civil war. She testifies:

*"When 'Adnan was kidnapped, I couldn't believe it... I told all the military authorities... I kept being told he'd be back at any moment... Two weeks passed and 'Adnan didn't return. While looking for 'Adnan, I'd ask if there were others in a similar situation... I don't know how, I became involved with all the families of the kidnapped. The kidnapped list kept getting longer and longer: two or three new cases a day. I thought of getting all the families together. Many came. We set up a committee and we lobbied on a large scale."*¹

In Israel and the Occupied Territories, Palestinian and Israeli women have organized to campaign for the release of political prisoners and administrative detainees and to protest against human rights violations. Many of the most active groups have been founded by women whose relatives -- female and male -- have suffered political imprisonment or have "disappeared". Maysun al-Wahaydi set up the Committee of Mothers in Solidarity with Political Prisoners after her daughter, 'Abir al-Wahaydi, was

¹ Quoted in "Suspended Dreams", a film directed by Jean Chamoun and Mai Masri, produced by MTC, BBC2 and TVE

held as a political prisoner (see Chapter 3). Another woman, **Suha al-Barghouti**, founded the Committee to End Administrative Detention after her husband, Ahmed Qatamesh, was administratively detained.

In Morocco, too, women relatives of political prisoners helped establish the Association of the Families of the "Disappeared", Political Prisoners, Martyrs and Exiles. The Association subsequently expanded its work to carry out activities on a range of human rights violations. [pic]

In Egypt, Dr Susan Fayad runs the El Nadim Centre for the Management and Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence. The Centre, which was founded in Cairo in 1993, helps women, men and children who are victims of torture, rape, domestic violence and child battering. Another woman, Dr 'Aida Saif al-Dawla, heads the New Woman Research Centre, which deals with violence against women, rape and other women's issues. Both organizations campaign for the banning of female genital mutilation in Egypt. In Tunisia, a group of women signed a petition in June 1994 calling on the authorities to respect freedom of expression; several were subsequently questioned by the police and asked to deny that they had signed the petition. In 1995 women human rights activists in the Democratic Women's Association wrote to the Minister of Justice asking him to ensure the fair application of the law: for this they later faced prosecution for defamation. The case is still pending.

In Sudan, women regularly stage protests, carrying placards and photographs of relatives who were executed in April 1990 within a day of being arrested on suspicion of attempting a coup. [pic] In Algeria, Bahrain and Iraqi-Kurdistan, women have taken to the streets to demonstrate for human rights.

Women are also resisting the discrimination and violence they suffer in their everyday lives. In early 1994 Palestinian women in Kfar village in Galilee set up a shelter for victims of domestic violence -- an abuse which devastates the lives of millions of women across every continent, culture and class. The Kfar village shelter was the first of its kind for Arab women in the Middle East. Sahar Dawud, the woman who runs the shelter, said:

"In the past Arab women were reluctant to take such drastic steps; today, they have started to understand that they don't have to put up with violence. It's a process of education about rights."

This report calls on governments and armed political groups in the Middle East to listen to the voices of women -- voices that are too often silenced by repression and discrimination. It urges them to ensure that women can continue their peaceful activities without fear of intimidation, attack or prosecution.

1. INTRODUCTION

Women's human rights are under attack across the Middle East, as they are in every other region of the world. In the violence of wars and conflicts, women are killed, taken hostage, raped and driven from their homes. In peace, they are imprisoned and tortured for opposing the government or simply for being related to political activists.

Several of the region's governments openly flout the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, which 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". Most violate the international human rights treaties under which they are obliged to protect the fundamental rights of all their citizens, and many have refused to ratify relevant international instruments². Despite their international obligations, the region's governments violate human rights with impunity on the grounds that they are protecting national security or have to combat "terrorist" threats -- yet these can never justify practices such as torture, extrajudicial executions and "disappearances". And when it comes to women's human rights, several governments take a particularly restrictive view, in contravention of the commitment made by governments at the 1993 UN World Conference on Human Rights that "...the human rights of women and of the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights".

For the women whose fundamental rights are being violated, the excuses governments make are nothing but an insult. The women in Syria who are on trial simply for belonging to a political party have had their basic human rights violated -- whether or not the Syrian Government has effectively outlawed that party. The unarmed Palestinian women and children shot dead by Israeli security forces have been denied their basic right to life -- whether or not the Israeli Government believed that national security was under threat. The Saudi Arabian women detained for driving cars have had their basic human rights violated -- whether or not the Saudi Arabian Government believes such punishments are necessary to maintain social order.

Women's human rights are not only applicable in all contexts and situations. They are also indivisible. The women in Tunisia who are arbitrarily detained without charge, the women in Iran who are tortured, the women in Algeria who are victims of deliberate and arbitrary killings, the women in Iraq who are made to "disappear", the Bahraini women who are forcibly exiled -- all these women have no chance of exercising their social, economic and cultural rights. Without respect for women's fundamental

2 see Appendix I

rights, women's rights to equality, development and peace -- the themes of the Fourth UN World Conference on Women to be held in China in September 1995 -- are also unattainable.

This report covers 17 countries in the Middle East and North Africa and is one of a series of reports on women in different parts of the world. Amnesty International takes no position on any of the conflicts mentioned, nor on the types of government or legal systems in place. Amnesty International's sole concern is with specific human rights, which its one million plus members in all regions of the world, including the Middle East, campaign to defend and promote. In particular, Amnesty International believes that no one should be imprisoned as a prisoner of conscience³ and that no political prisoner should be imprisoned without a prompt and fair trial. Amnesty International also takes action to oppose torture, the death penalty, extrajudicial executions and "disappearances". Alongside such work, the organization opposes human rights abuses committed by armed political groups, including deliberate and arbitrary killings of civilians, torture and hostage-taking. This report shows that whenever there is conflict, either across borders or within countries, women figure largely among the victims, although their suffering often remains hidden. They are killed in reprisal assaults and other deliberate attacks on non-combatants. They are raped and sexually abused by armed men intent on terrorizing civilian populations or in situations of lawlessness. They face hardship and deprivation as they struggle to support their families, their male relatives having been killed or made to "disappear". They are forced to make arduous journeys as refugees, often risking abuse on their way or in the refugee camps.

In recent years the Middle East has been beset by conflict, often accompanied by widespread human rights violations. Between 1980 and 1988 up to a million people are estimated to have died in the war between Iran and Iraq. In 1990 and 1991 there were tens of thousands of casualties in the Gulf following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. The region has also been riven by other prolonged conflicts: Israel and the Palestinians; Morocco and the Sahrawis; the 1975 to 1990 civil war in Lebanon; and fierce internal wars in Sudan. Elsewhere, in countries such as Algeria and Iraq, there are continuing conflicts between government forces and armed opposition groups.

This report also shows that women in the Middle East are not passive victims of violence and injustice. They are organizing to defend their rights, to protest against violations and to campaign for justice, equality and freedom. Often they are

3 Amnesty International considers anyone detained for their beliefs or because of their ethnic origin, sex, race or language to be a prisoner of conscience, provided they have not used or advocated violence.

persecuted by both government and armed political groups precisely because they are standing up for their rights. Women activists are subjected to violations such as rape and threats of sexual abuse to which they are particularly vulnerable, as well as other serious human rights violations. Moreover, in several countries they face detention as prisoners of conscience, torture and harassment simply for being related to male activists wanted by the authorities.

The human rights violations suffered by women in conflict and peace occur in the context of legalized discrimination against women, including criminal penalties for exercising the full range of their civil and political rights. In many parts of the Middle East, women's participation in public life is severely limited. Along with men, their rights to freedom of association and expression are curtailed, but the additional discrimination they face means that they are even less able than men to take an active part in determining how their societies are run. Even in the countries where they are allowed into the offices of power, they are grossly under-represented.

Some governments in the Middle East have said they will put women's rights on their agenda, but nowhere in the region have women been accorded the full rights and protection that they are entitled to under international law.

During the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, the exiled Kuwaiti royal family promised to grant full political rights to both women and men if they were returned to power. Women were praised for risking their lives by joining the Kuwaiti resistance and feeding and hiding male members of the resistance. But when the Iraqi forces were expelled, the Kuwaiti royal family proved reluctant to honour their promises, and even when it did introduce democratic reforms, only some men benefited.

The reaction of many Kuwaiti women was summed up by Professor Laila al-Qadhi, a women's rights activist and teacher:

"It's outrageous in today's world that we are denied our rights. When the Iraqis came they did not discriminate by occupying only male Kuwait, they took all of Kuwait; all of Kuwait suffered." ⁴

In Tunisia the government has repeatedly promoted itself in the international arena as a defender of women's and human rights. Yet, as this report shows, women activists and relatives of political opponents have had their human rights persistently violated. In March 1995 the government prevented a celebration of International Women's Day which had been jointly organized by the Tunisian Section of Amnesty International and the Tunisian Women's Democratic Association.

The following pages highlight the tragic consequences for women

when their fundamental human rights are devalued, ignored and violated.

2. WOMEN AND CONFLICT

The mutilated body of Asrar Qabandi was dumped outside her family's home in Kuwait by Iraqi soldiers. She had been interrogated for weeks about her work for the Kuwaiti resistance and tortured in front of her father. She was just one of many women who suffered almost every known human rights violation during the Gulf conflict of 1990 to 1991, a conflict which still dominates many women's lives as they struggle to cope without their husbands or search for missing relatives.

Hundreds of unarmed civilians, including women, were deliberately killed in Kuwait when Iraqi troops invaded the country. Children were shot in the head at close range by Iraqi soldiers and their bodies dumped outside their houses for their mothers to find. Many women were sexually abused; in particular, foreign domestic servants were raped by Iraqi soldiers. Hundreds of Kuwaitis and other nationals who were transferred to Iraq during the occupation remain unaccounted for. Some are believed to be still held, but there are fears that others died as a result of torture or were executed. Among those still missing are Wasmiyya Fahd Shuwairib al-'Ajmi [pic], now aged 33, and her mother, Bakhita Muhammad Slaih al-'Ajmi, both Kuwaiti nationals. They were last seen at their home by relatives on 2 August 1990.

Also missing is Samira 'Abd al-Ghaffar Mansur Ma'rafi, owner of a small business, who was seized at a check-point in Kuwait City by Iraqi soldiers in November 1990. She was 27 years old. Her mother, who has campaigned tirelessly for her release, has had to rely on scraps of information about her daughter's fate. First she was said to be in a Kuwaiti jail. Then she was reported to have been moved to Iraq. Then a Lebanese man said he had seen her on a prison bus in Baghdad in 1992. Since then her mother has heard nothing and the Iraqi authorities have refused to respond to appeals for information.

The end of the Iraqi occupation did not end the suffering for many women in Kuwait. The returning Kuwaiti authorities and armed Kuwaiti civilians exacted a terrible revenge on many civilians, particularly Palestinians, Iraqis and Sudanese living in Kuwait. Scores of people were slaughtered and women were among the 1,000 or so who were arbitrarily detained, some of whom subsequently faced manifestly unfair trials.

Among several defendants sentenced after an unfair trial that lasted just one day was Ibtisam Berto Sulaiman al-Dakhil, a 35-year-old journalist. She was sentenced to death, later commuted to life imprisonment, for alleged "collaboration" with the occupying Iraqi forces. She was charged with 23 other women and

men in connection with her work for the newspaper *al-Nida'*. All said they had been forced to work for the paper after being threatened by Iraqi soldiers: the newspaper they had previously worked for, *al-Qabas*, was closed down by the Iraqi authorities shortly after the invasion and replaced by *al-Nida'* -- the only newspaper allowed to publish during the occupation. Another woman tried in the same case, Wafa' Wasfi Ahmad, a 23-year-old Jordanian secretary, was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment. Both are prisoners of conscience.

Fatima Ramez Tafla [pic] remains behind bars in Kuwait Central Prison despite a government review of her case which should have led to her release. Her nightmare began in 1991 when she was charged with "collaboration" with Iraqi forces, including "deliberately assisting the Iraqi enemy by indicating that her husband was a member of the Kuwaiti resistance". Her husband had been executed by Iraqi forces in September 1990.

The case against her was brought by her father-in-law when Fatima Tafla was preparing to leave Kuwait with her young son shortly after the Iraqi withdrawal. She was interviewed by the Deputy Attorney General and initially released on the grounds that there was no evidence against her. Nevertheless, her case was referred to the Martial Law Court and on 13 June 1991 she was sentenced to death. When all death sentences were reviewed by three Counsellors appointed by the Martial Law Governor, they unanimously agreed that her sentence had no legal grounds owing to a lack of any substantial evidence against her. They recommended that her sentence be suspended. Despite this, her conviction was not overturned and her death sentence was reduced to 10 years in prison. In total, there are still 14 women political prisoners in Kuwaiti jails, including six prisoners of conscience, serving sentences ranging from 10 years to life imprisonment for "collaboration".

In Iraq, too, the aftermath of the war did not mean the end of widespread human rights violations. In March 1991 women suffered in huge numbers as government forces violently suppressed popular uprisings by Kurds in northern Iraq and by Shi'a Muslim Arabs in the south. Tens of thousands of families were forced to abandon their homes to escape the terror, many in the south fleeing to the marshlands. Since then, government forces have repeatedly attacked the marshes, assaulting and killing many women, men and children in the villages. [pic]

In one incident in May 1992 helicopter gunships attacked a wedding ceremony in the village of al-Agir in the al-'Amara marshes, killing the bridegroom as well as children. There was no military target in the area. An eye-witness recalled: "The aeroplanes came and hit at us... The celebration turned into mourning."

The repression has not stopped. In September 1993 scores of unarmed civilian women and men were reported to have been

deliberately and arbitrarily killed during a bombardment of the Abu Zargi and 'Elwi marshes northwest of Basra. Others "disappeared" after arrest, or were tortured and later executed. Even before the 1991 Gulf war, women in Iraq had suffered abuses on a massive scale during decades of ceaseless repression by the government. Several hundred thousand women, men and children "disappeared" during the 1980s as the authorities clamped down on any sign of resistance. The victims included people from a wide variety of groups -- Kurds, Arabs, Turcomans and Assyrians; Sunni and Shi'a Muslims, and Christians -- as well as members of prohibited political parties and their families, military personnel and disaffected members of the ruling elite. The most notorious example of mass extermination was the killing of an estimated 5,000 civilians by chemical weapons in the Kurdish town of Halabja in March 1988. [pic] There have been other Halabja-style massacres. In fact, in August and September that year, as a result of a particularly intense wave of attacks on Kurdish communities, including with chemical weapons, tens of thousands of Kurds fled to southern Turkey. Many women have described how rape and sexual abuse have been used as a weapon of terror by Iraqi security forces during operations against the Kurds. A Kurdish woman, a member of the Iraqi Communist Party *Pesh Merga*, explained what happened to her in the late 1980s:

"They snatched me off the street. I put up a fight against the security police, but they hit me on the head with a pistol butt and I passed out... One method used by Iraqi jails epitomizes their barbarity. And that is rape... No matter how much I'd heard about it, nothing prepared me for the actual experience. It lives on inside me. I still bleed a lot. It was done not by just one man, but by a group of them."

Around the world millions of women are the forgotten victims of armed conflicts inside their countries. As both government forces and armed opposition groups resort to campaigns of terror in pursuit of their aims, women are taken hostage, raped and murdered. Whatever the reasons for the conflict and whoever is responsible for the human rights abuses, the result is that the lives of women and their families are devastated.

In Sudan, thousands of women have been extrajudicially executed, made to "disappear", imprisoned, tortured and raped by government forces. Most of the violations have been committed in the context of the fierce fighting between government forces and the armed opposition movement, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), in the war zones in the south and in the Nuba mountains.

In the Nuba mountains government troops have abducted, murdered and raped thousands of women and children in attacks on villages

during military operations to forcibly resettle civilians in so-called peace villages. A former security official who witnessed assaults on Nuba villages in July and August 1992 described the government's tactics when clearing villages:

"...ground troops entered the villages, shooting indiscriminately and killing hundreds of civilians... Many women were raped by the soldiers... The people were loaded on to trucks each of which could transport about 80 persons. Many had to walk to Kadugli under army guard. The dead bodies were left behind as prey for the animals."

Because of the shame attached to rape, few of the victims have talked openly about their experiences. One who did, a woman from the Moro Hills who was raped by soldiers in Kadugli in October 1992, said:

"I was taken on the way home by soldiers and tied down. I was...taken to the barracks. I refused them... Once I was tied up they did a lot of things to me."

Women have met a similar fate in northern Bahr al-Ghazal, particularly when troops have been driving people away from the railway line linking north and south Sudan. Women and girls have been abducted by members of the Popular Defence Force (PDF), a government-created militia, during such operations; some have been taken as concubines or sold into domestic slavery. Among those still missing is Apiu Majok, aged 12, who was abducted in 1993.

Women have also suffered gross abuses as a result of fighting between armed opposition groups. For example, in October and November 1991 many women were killed, raped or abducted when SPLA-Nasir forces briefly took over land controlled by SPLA-Mainstream in Upper Nile. In March 1993 SPLA-Mainstream troops attacked the village of Pagau in retaliation; 32 women were lined up and shot in the head. Their only "crime" was to be of Nuer origin and therefore suspected of loyalty to the SPLA-Nasir faction.

In Algeria over 40,000 people are reported to have been killed since conflict erupted in early 1992. While many of them died in armed clashes, thousands of civilians are reported to have been extrajudicially executed by the security forces or deliberately killed by armed groups defining themselves as Islamic groups. The violence erupted following the cancellation of the second round of multi-party elections after the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) had made major gains in the first round, and since February 1992 a state of emergency has been imposed. The conflict between government forces and armed groups continues to claim an increasing number of civilian lives; during 1994 and

early 1995 the number of violent attacks on unarmed civilians by both sides escalated.

Up to 300 civilian women are reported to have been killed by armed groups since the beginning of 1992. Civilian women are also reported to have been killed and injured by the security forces during raids and at check-points. Tens of thousands of women have been widowed as a result of killings by the security forces and by armed groups; others continue to search for their relatives who "disappeared" after arrest.

The conflict in Algeria has again seen the use of rape as a weapon of terror. Because of trauma and the social stigma associated with this form of torture, women are often reluctant to report rapes. In Algeria, this reluctance, combined with the absence of independent human rights monitors, has made it difficult to assess the true scale of the problem. However, reports of abductions and rape by groups of armed men, particularly in rural areas, have been increasing. Some women are reported to have been held prisoner and used as forced domestic labour. The victims and their families are often threatened with further abuse if they speak of their experiences. Many have fled their homes fearing further attack; some have been ostracized by their families.

Algerian women have also been the victims of widespread campaigns of terror. Professional groups -- such as teachers, journalists, magistrates and civil servants -- have been targeted, as have students and relatives of the security forces. Death threats have been posted up in public places and sent to individuals' homes. The sources of the threats are not always clear; the effect, however, is. They have created a climate of fear in which many women are terrorized.

Groups defining themselves as Islamic groups have increasingly abused women in Algeria for not covering their hair, for going to beaches or for travelling on public transport because male and female passengers are not segregated. Katia Bengana, a 17-year-old student, was shot dead in Blida in February 1994, reportedly after receiving threats that she would be killed if she did not wear the *hijab* (Islamic veil). After her death an anti-Islamist group, the Organization of Young Free Algerians, issued a statement saying that for every woman not wearing the veil who was attacked, they would kill 20 veiled women. Soon after, on 29 March, two young women students wearing the veil were shot dead at a bus stop near their school.

Armed groups defining themselves as Islamic groups have also threatened women working in the public sector with death if they do not give up their jobs. Among those believed to have been killed by such groups were three women teachers, including Khadija Aïssa, who were killed in February 1995. Nabila Diahnine, an architect and leading feminist, was shot and killed on 15 February 1995 in the centre of Tizi-Ouzou. She was a

member of the Berber Cultural Movement and president of a feminist organization. She had been due to go to France to take part in events organized to celebrate International Women's Day on 8 March.

The political leadership of the FIS outside Algeria have stated that they respect women's rights, including the right of women not to wear the *hijab*. However, until recently they had failed to condemn threats made by armed groups defining themselves as Islamic groups against women for not wearing the veil or for behaving in ways they consider un-Islamic. The FIS has claimed that these threats are made by those who are seeking to discredit Islamist groups. However, armed Islamist groups have not themselves denied these attacks and threats against women. Several of the other conflicts which have dominated the region in recent years have had grim consequences for women. In the Israeli-Occupied Territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, scores of Palestinian women and children were killed by Israeli soldiers during the Palestinian *intifada* (uprising) which began in 1987. Many of these were shot dead in the numerous incidents in which soldiers have used excessive force in response to protests by Palestinians. Some died as a result of misuse of tear-gas. Many were killed when they were simply going about their everyday lives.

One such victim was Najah Abu Dalal. She was in her courtyard chatting to a relative on 21 April 1993 when she suddenly fell to the ground. She had been shot through the left eye, apparently by a soldier stationed on a nearby rooftop. Five days later she died. The Israeli authorities have yet to mount an adequate investigation into her death.

Among the Palestinian girls who have been killed was 11-year-old Rana Abu Tuyur [pic]. On 19 December 1994 she was sent out by her mother to buy milk as a long curfew had just been lifted. She came across soldiers who were trying to stop a group of stone-throwing youths who were some 500 metres away. She was on the other side of the road to the soldiers, between 50 and 100 metres away. Witnesses say the soldiers were firing at anyone who tried to cross the road and one of the soldiers fired and hit Rana Abu Tuyur in the chest. She died before reaching hospital. An official investigation found that two soldiers had deviated from the rules of engagement, but found no connection between the shots fired and Rana Abu Tuyur's death. However, details of the methods and results of this investigation have not been made public, contrary to international standards. Women have suffered other human rights violations at the hands of the Israeli authorities during the *intifada*. For example, many were made homeless after mid-1992 as a result of a policy of house destruction. Typically, houses in which the Israeli authorities believed suspects may have been hiding were surrounded and their inhabitants ordered out and held in nearby

houses. The houses were then attacked with heavy fire, including machine-gun fire, grenades and anti-tank missiles. Afterwards, soldiers entered the houses, firing at any place where survivors may have been hiding. In many cases, soldiers blew up the houses with explosives, suggesting that one of the aims, if not the main aim of these operations, was to impose a form of collective punishment on the occupants. In one such operation in Hebron in March 1994, a pregnant woman was killed in disputed circumstances.

The Israeli authorities denied that these operations were a form of collective punishment, claiming that they were designed to protect their forces from surprise attacks by people inside the houses. They also denied that houses were blown up after soldiers had entered them. However, the authorities have never clarified evidence provided by military experts that the houses were indeed blown up from the inside.

The Israeli authorities have also destroyed the houses of Palestinians who have participated in attacks against Israelis, rendering their families homeless. In November 1994 the house of the family of Salah 'Abd al-Rahim Nazzal, who was responsible for a bus bomb in Tel Aviv which killed 23 people (see below), was demolished after the family's appeal to the High Court of Justice against the demolition order had been rejected. Such collective punishment violates fundamental principles of international law.

Women have also suffered at the hands of Palestinian armed opposition groups. Unarmed civilian women have been deliberately and arbitrarily killed in attacks by such groups. Many attacks in recent years have been carried out by the Islamic Resistance Movement, *Hamas*, which continues to oppose the peace process. For example, in April 1994, four women, two girls and a man were killed by a suicide car bomber. *Hamas* described the attack as "legitimate retaliation" for the killing of Palestinians by an Israeli settler in Hebron two months earlier. In October 1994 women were among 23 people killed in a suicide bomb attack on a bus in the centre of Tel Aviv carried out by *Hamas*.

The wider Arab-Israeli conflict has also threatened the physical integrity of many other civilians, including women and children. In July 1993 a week-long confrontation in south Lebanon and northern Israel between Israeli forces and *Hizbullah*, a Lebanese armed group fighting against Israel's continuing occupation of a strip of south Lebanon, led to thousands of civilians in both countries having to flee their homes for safety. Israeli forces carried out a widespread bombardment of villages and Palestinian refugee camps in south Lebanon. Israeli officials stated that the bombardment was deliberately aimed at forcing the civilian population to flee the area and at putting pressure on the Lebanese Government to prevent *Hizbullah* from carrying out attacks against Israel. Radio broadcasts warned village

residents to leave or risk death. Over 200,000 people fled northwards, and over 130 people, including civilians, were killed.

During the same period, *Hizbullah* launched over 270 Katyusha rockets against northern Israel and the "security zone", killing two civilians and forcing tens of thousands of others to leave their homes to seek safety.

In Morocco, the government has used a system of secret detention to punish its political opponents, particularly supporters of the pro-independence movement in Western Sahara. Several hundred women, men and children from the south of Morocco and the Western Sahara have "disappeared" since 1975. They were reportedly arrested by Moroccan security forces and later imprisoned in secret jails. In several cases, whole families "disappeared". Almost all the victims were suspected of sympathizing with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el Hamra and Rio de Oro, more generally known as the Polisario Front.

For example, five women were arrested by Moroccan security forces on 3 March 1985 during a wave of arrests in Laayoune. Among them was 40-year-old Salka ment Najemould Omar Lahsen. Police came to her house in the morning, broke down the door and arrested her on suspicion of distributing leaflets in support of the Polisario Front. She has never been seen again. Her children were left to fend for themselves.

Magboula ment Bouchraya [pic] "disappeared" four years earlier. Security officers raided her house in Laayoune in the middle of the night in January 1981. They searched the premises but found nothing. Nevertheless, they took Magboula ment Bouchraya away in a police van. For two months her family was able to take food and clean clothes to her in Laayoune prison. Then they were suddenly forbidden from doing so, although no reason was given. They heard nothing of Magboula ment Bouchraya until her release 10 years later. In 1991, Magboula ment Bouchraya and more than 300 women and men who had "disappeared" for up to 16 years were released during a worldwide campaign against human rights violations in Morocco.

In 1991 more than 300 women and men who had "disappeared" for up to 16 years were released during a worldwide campaign against human rights violations in Morocco. Nevertheless, hundreds of people reported to have "disappeared" since the 1960s remain unaccounted for. The government denies any knowledge of them, just as it had for years denied knowledge of the 300-plus "disappeared" who were released in 1991.

3. WOMEN ACTIVISTS

In the Gulf state of Bahrain, women have increasingly been participating in pro-democracy demonstrations, calling on the

government to reconvene the National Assembly, which was dissolved by Amiri decree in 1975, and to respect the country's 1973 Constitution. They have also been protesting against the heavy-handed response of the authorities and demanding the release of political detainees. As a result, they are finding out what the inside of Bahrain's jails look like and some have reportedly been beaten or otherwise ill-treated by security officials.

One woman, who joined a protest by women outside the Ministry of Justice building in February 1995, described how the protesters were treated that day:

"We were about 20 women calling for our relatives to be released. The whole area was surrounded by police. They ordered us to leave the area but we refused. I was beaten and carried by six policemen and forced into a jeep, but I managed to jump out again. One woman had her clothes torn and her chest was exposed. Another woman was pregnant. They humiliated and insulted us."

Some Bahraini women have been singled out for arrest either because of their activities or because they are related to male activists. Zahra Salman Hilal and a 12-year-old girl, Ayat 'Abd al-Jabbar Salman, were rounded up in mass arrests in early April 1995 and taken to the Juveniles Prison in Madinat 'Issa. A few days later Zahra Salman Hilal went on hunger strike to demand the right to see her husband, who had been detained since January 1995. She remained in prison without charge or trial until 29 May. Ayat 'Abd al-Jabbar Salman was released in mid-April.

On 6 April Fatima 'Ashur Singais and her daughter Malika were arrested in a dawn raid on their home in al-Sanabes. Fatima 'Ashur Singais was released within a few days, but Malika remains held without charge, apparently in order to force her brother to give himself up.

On 9 April Nazi Karimi, a student of languages at the University of Bahrain, was summoned for interrogation with her husband in connection with the pro-democracy protests. He was released the same day, but she remained held without charge or trial until 10 May. For 18 days she was held in solitary confinement and denied access to her family, lawyers and medical treatment. She had reportedly been put under pressure to sign a "confession" saying that she had taken part in recent protests. She reportedly went on hunger-strike after her arrest, resulting in significant weight loss and illness. The authorities had also reportedly threatened to forcibly exile her and the rest of her family from Bahrain.

Whole families have been persecuted in this unprecedented upsurge of protest in Bahrain, during which at least 12 people have been shot dead by the security forces during demonstrations

and 1,300 detained. On 1 April 1995 security forces surrounded the home of Shaikh 'Abd al-Amir Mansur al-Jamri, a prominent Shi'a Muslim religious scholar and member of the former National Assembly, in the village of Bani Jamra. He and 18 members of his family were placed under house arrest without charge, including his wife, Zahra Yusuf, three daughters, three sons and other young children. All were denied access to the outside world and had their telephone lines disconnected.

On 15 April Shaikh 'Abd al-Amir al-Jamri was transferred to an undisclosed location. There was no information on his fate or whereabouts until 9 May, when he was taken to al-Qal'a Prison in al-Manama. There, one of his daughters, 'Afaf, was brought to see him, allegedly in order to tell him that he would be sentenced to a long term of imprisonment. While in the prison, 'Afaf al-Jamri was reportedly beaten by women police officers. She was taken into custody herself later that day, and remains held at a detention facility in Madinat 'Issa. She is 31 years old and has two young children. Her father, Sheikh al-Jamri, remains held without charge or trial.

In Tunisia political activists have learned the hard way not to trust the government's declared commitment to human rights. In the past few years, hundreds of women have been detained without charge or trial, harassed and ill-treated. Scores of them have been tortured, sexually abused and threatened with rape in the Ministry of the Interior and in police stations. Dozens have been detained as prisoners of conscience for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression, association and assembly, and many have been imprisoned after unfair trials. Some of the women cited in this report cannot be named for fear of further endangering their well-being and that of their families. Most have been targeted because of suspected links with *al-Nahda*, an unauthorized Islamist movement (see below). However, other political activists have also been subjected to human rights violations.

A woman who was five months pregnant was arrested at her home in Gabes on 6 November 1992 and accused of carrying out political activities on behalf of the Tunisian Workers' Communist Party (PCOT). During incommunicado detention in Gabes police station, she says she was partially undressed, beaten with sticks and threatened with rape and further violence if she did not talk about her political activities. One of the policemen reportedly told her: "We'll bring out what you have in your womb". She was forced to sign a police statement without knowing its contents. The following day she felt ill and seemed in danger of miscarrying, and was released. A few days later she was rearrested and interrogated while lying on the floor as she was too ill to stand up.

On 18 November 1992 she was tried and sentenced to four months' imprisonment for belonging to an unauthorized organization and

collecting money without permission. Her lawyer requested a medical examination and an investigation into her allegations of ill-treatment, but these were denied. Although she was granted bail pending appeal, she continued to be detained until 11 January 1993, when the appeal took place. Her sentence was upheld, but she was released the following day by presidential pardon. No investigation was carried out by the authorities into the allegations of ill-treatment and those who ill-treated her were not brought to justice.

Women activists in Iraqi-Kurdistan have continued to suffer gross violations of their rights since the area came under the control of Kurdish political parties in October 1991. Some have been detained without charge or trial and subjected to torture and ill-treatment.

During a demonstration in August 1992 against the Turkish military bombardment of a Kurdish area in southeastern Turkey, Kurdish security forces shot into the peaceful crowd to disperse the protesters. Among the dead was the six-year-old daughter of Laila 'Ali Musa, who was herself held as a political prisoner. In prison, she told Amnesty International:

"When the shooting started I was immediately hit. Then my daughter Kurdistan was killed as a bullet shot through her head... After the shooting they arrested a group of us and took us inside the Asayish [security forces] building. They tortured me for about one and a half hours in one of the offices. They beat me on the bullet wound and on my back with a hosepipe."

Another woman, Payman Sulaiman Hamid, who was also arrested after the demonstration, told Amnesty International:

"They tied my hands behind my back and then suspended me from a height against the wall. I was beaten with a hosepipe. The torture lasted for about one and a half hours. I fainted three times and each time they poured water on me to revive me. They burned me with cigarettes on my legs [scars on her legs were still visible at the time of the interview]. All the time I was blindfolded. Then they threatened to assault me sexually in front of my husband."

These two women, along with two other female and nine male detainees arrested at the same time, began a hunger-strike on 29 November 1992 demanding access to their families and a meeting with the investigating judge. This was granted on 1 December 1992 and on 11 January 1993 all were released without having been brought before a court. None of the security personnel involved in either the killing of the demonstrators or the torture of detainees has been brought to justice. None of the victims of torture or the families of those killed have been

compensated.

In Iran, women who have peacefully opposed the government since the 1979 revolution have faced severe penalties. Several have been held as possible prisoners of conscience for many years in connection with their alleged activities for organizations such as the Tudeh Party and People's Fedaiyan Organization of Iran. Those suspected of political opposition in Iran are routinely tortured and ill-treated during interrogation. In 1988 thousands of political prisoners, many of whom were already serving prison sentences, were summarily executed. The mother of one of the victims wrote to Amnesty International; her experience mirrors that of many others. Her daughter was arrested in 1982 for alleged possession of leaflets issued by the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI) and tried by an Islamic Revolutionary Court. For six years the mother was able to visit her daughter regularly in Evin Prison in Tehran. In August 1988 the visits were suddenly stopped. In November 1988 she was informed that her daughter had been executed. She has never been told where her daughter's body is buried. To this day the authorities have failed to account for the thousands killed in 1988. One former female prisoner told Amnesty International:

"We were aware of the massacre of the men prisoners [in 1988 and 1989] and assumed that the Mojahedin women prisoners had also been executed. We discussed this among ourselves ... We could not see the future clearly. We thought at that time that we were in a world of death. There was no contact with the world of the living."

Women political activists in Syria have also been jailed for their peaceful opposition to the government. Doha 'Ashur al-'Askari, for instance, has been in prison since mid-1993. Her trial was still in progress at the end of 1994, but there has been no news of her since. She was arrested for suspected membership of the Party for Communist Action; she had been living in hiding since 1986 when she found out she was wanted by the authorities. Her daughter Kamilya has known nothing but prison life; she was born in Duma Women's Prison in Damascus a few months after her mother was detained.

In Egypt, women have been detained without charge for peaceful protests. On 24 March 1995 Warda Mahmoud and Nawwara Nagm, students at Cairo University and 'Ain Shams University respectively, were among dozens of people arrested after they had peacefully protested against Israel's participation in the International Trade Fair being held in Cairo. The two women were held at al-Qanatir al-Khayria Prison until 3 April, when they were released without charge.

The Israeli authorities have jailed women suspected of opposing the Israeli occupation of West Bank and the Gaza Strip or of

being members of illegal organizations. Some of them have been ill-treated. 'Abir al-Wahaydi, a 23-year-old engineering student at Bir Zeit University on the occupied West Bank, was arrested in June 1992 on suspicion of being involved with activities organized by Fateh, the main faction in the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). She was taken for interrogation to the General Security Service wing in Ramallah, where there are reportedly no separate facilities for women. Three days later she was transferred to Moscobiyyah detention centre in Jerusalem. She testified in a written affidavit:

"...I was taken to Moscobiyyah for interrogation. They took me out to the courtyard on Friday after five days of no sleep with a sack on my head and my hands handcuffed. Above me there was a loudspeaker and it was very cold. I felt as if I would collapse from the sound coming out of the loudspeaker... The interrogation lasted for 14 days without letting me see a lawyer."

Her interrogators repeatedly threatened her. She testified that they told her she would go mad and that they would kill her, and that "the cell of Hazem 'Id and Mustafa 'Akkawi [detainees who had died in custody] still existed". She said they also threatened to rape her, detain her parents and young sister, and destroy her parent's home.

After 17 days she was brought before a judge, having being forced to sign a statement, which she alleged she had not read. For 52 days she was kept in solitary confinement and then transferred to Hasharmon Prison. In April 1994 she was sentenced to 17 years and four months' imprisonment for membership of Fateh and for planning to kill an Israeli settler, after a trial that was held entirely in Hebrew -- a language she does not understand.

Two days after she was sentenced the Israeli authorities demolished her house. Her mother recounted:

"They came in the morning...and said we should empty the house of all the people. They said someone who was wanted was in the house. We swore there was no one. They locked us into a room at our neighbour's...they started hitting the kids."

"At 12.30 they brought anti-tank rockets and started shooting the house with more than 16 rockets... The house was new. We'd saved for it for 26 years and only lived in it for 27 days. My daughter had never lived in it."

The Israeli authorities told Amnesty International that they had investigated 'Abir al-Wahaydi's allegations of ill-treatment and found them to be false. They also said that when questioned

about her treatment, she denied having any complaint. However, in the military court system in the Occupied Territories detainees are subjected to numerous improper pressures to plead guilty and enter a plea bargain. Defendants are reluctant to ask for an exclusion of their confessions if they were obtained under duress as their allegations of torture or ill-treatment are almost impossible to prove, and, if an application for such a ruling is unsuccessful, they are likely to receive substantially longer sentences.

Palestinian women have also reportedly suffered human rights violations in the areas under the jurisdiction of the newly established Palestinian Authority. Several have alleged that they were ill-treated in custody by Palestinian police officers. The new authorities have failed to conduct prompt, thorough and impartial investigations into their complaints.

In south Lebanon, at least seven women remain locked up in the Khiam detention centre, which was set up in 1985 by the South Lebanon Army (SLA) with Israel's assistance and supervision. They are detained outside any legal framework and for years they had no access to the outside world; family visits were resumed in January 1995 after a gap of eight years. All are believed to be Lebanese citizens; some are suspected of belonging to armed organizations hostile to Israel and the SLA, others may have been arrested to put pressure on their relatives.

Among those held in Khiam is Suha Fawwaz Beshara, accused of trying to assassinate the commander of the SLA in November 1988. She is reported to have been kept in solitary confinement almost continuously since her detention in late 1988. Like the other detainees in Khiam, she has never been charged or tried.

Many detainees in Khiam have been tortured or ill-treated. Methods commonly reported include beatings all over the body, sometimes with an electric cable; electric shocks, often applied to the nipple; and threats, including of rape and sexual abuse. In other parts of Lebanon, women activists have been gunned down while peacefully demonstrating and detained and ill-treated. In September 1993 women were among nine people shot dead when the security forces opened fire on a peaceful demonstration protesting against the peace agreement between Israel and the PLO. The authorities have never revealed the results of the investigation they said they had opened into these killings. In September 1994, three women -- Huda Yamin, Lina Ghurayeb and Muna Shkayban -- were detained and charged with security offences before a military court for distributing leaflets opposing the Syrian presence in Lebanon. All were allegedly tortured or ill-treated while held in the Ministry of Defence and may have been prisoners of conscience. Amnesty International is not aware of any investigation into the allegations of torture or ill-treatment. The three women were released on bail in October 1994.

Other women in the region have had their basic human rights violated for exercising their rights, as trade unionists, to peaceful association and expression.

In Morocco, for example, Khadija Benameur was sentenced to a year in prison in March 1995 for joining her fellow workers in a peaceful sit-in at her workplace in Sidi Slimane. They had been on strike since 21 February 1995 and the sit-in was staged to call for Moroccan labour laws and internationally recognized labour rights to be respected.

In the course of the protest, police arrested Khadija Benameur, the Secretary General of her factory's branch of the Moroccan Labour Union, and five others. Three of them, including Khadija Benameur, were charged under Article 288 of the Moroccan Penal Code, which allows for the imprisonment of people who organize or participate in a concerted withdrawal of labour. All three alleged they were ill-treated in police custody; they reportedly still bore marks of bruising on their faces and hands when they appeared in court. Khadija Benameur was also found guilty of offending the person of the King. She was reportedly accused of having said that her employer should be saluted rather than the King. She denied the charge. On 27 April Khadija Benameur was released on bail pending an appeal, which was due to be heard on 30 May 1995, but was postponed.

4. WOMEN AT RISK

"Guilty by association"

A 35-year-old Tunisian woman, the mother of three children, was repeatedly arrested, tortured and ill-treated in 1991 and 1992. She had committed no crime. She was not a political activist. But she was the wife of a prominent member of *al-Nahda*, an unauthorized Islamist movement, and that was enough for the security forces.

"After my husband left Tunisia, I had to report three times a week to the Ministry of the Interior, where I would be held for several hours at a time, often for a whole day. They asked me about my husband's whereabouts, but did not believe me when I said I did not know where he was, and threatened me.

"Once in August 1992 they kept me for a whole day; they undressed me in front of several male policemen, two policewomen and my brother. Another male al-Nahda member detained there was brought in the room and I was told that they would make him rape me. They stubbed cigarettes on my genitals whilst two policemen held my hands and a policewoman held my face. They suspended me by the hands, beat me all over, and broke my right arm."

Most of the hundreds of women related to Islamist opposition political activists who have been arrested in Tunisia since 1990 have never been charged; they were interrogated solely about their husbands' activities and whereabouts. The few who have been tried have mostly been charged with illegally collecting money for the families of imprisoned Islamist political activists.

The harassment of such women began after the government launched a crackdown against *al-Nahda* in late 1990. As the repression intensified in 1991, many activists went into hiding and later fled the country. As a result, the security forces focused on their female relatives in order to extract information about the activists' whereabouts and to put pressure on them to surrender. Wives of detained or exiled Islamist political activists have also been put under extreme pressure to give evidence against their husbands. Their homes have been regularly visited, especially at night, by the security forces, who sometimes enter by force. Many say they were threatened, pushed or hit. Some were subsequently repeatedly taken in for questioning at police stations, often having no time to make arrangements for the care of their children. Most of these women say they were verbally abused and threatened, but not physically ill-treated, although scores testified that they were beaten, undressed, sexually abused and threatened with rape in detention.

Aicha Dhaouadi, a secondary school teacher from Bizerte and mother of a four-year-old girl, was arrested in November 1993 and questioned for several days about the whereabouts and political activities of her husband, an exiled supporter of *al-Nahda*, and about her contacts with the families of imprisoned or exiled *al-Nahda* supporters. She was released on bail and at the beginning of 1994 she was tried and sentenced with four other women to two years and three months' imprisonment on charges of maintaining a political party and collecting donations, charges often used against women and men suspected of having helped the families of imprisoned or exiled *al-Nahda* supporters financially. She remained on bail and at the beginning of 1995 her sentence was reduced to nine months' imprisonment on appeal. On 19 May 1995 she was taken into custody and imprisoned in Bizerte. [pic]

Wives of Islamist activists sought by the authorities in Egypt face similar treatment. Many have been arrested and detained as substitute prisoners or hostages to force their husbands to give themselves up. Again, they are rarely charged with any offence. They are simply used as pawns, their human rights flouted with impunity.

One such case is that of Hana 'Ali Farrag, a 17-year-old student, who was arrested at her home in Minya in July 1990 and interrogated about the whereabouts of her brother, Sayyid, who

was wanted by the Egyptian authorities:

"They took me to the police station and put me in a room. Three of them asked me where my brother was hiding. It must have been around midnight and I kept telling them I didn't know where he was. The head of the State Security Intelligence told the others to suspend me and they obeyed. I was swinging upside down from a bar under my knees and they hit the soles of my feet with a thick wooden stick, and kept repeating the same questions 'Did you take him food? Did you go and see him? Where is he hiding?' Afterwards we submitted a formal complaint of my detention and treatment, but it has never been investigated. My brother, Sayyid, was not wanted in connection with any offence, it was just the usual detention."

The pattern is repeated in Syria. Wafa Fahmi 'Ali 'Abidat [photo] has been missing since November 1986. A fourth-year dentistry student at the University of Damascus, she was 28 when she "disappeared" after arrest. She was not apparently involved in any political organizations or activities; it appears that she was arrested solely because of her brother, Hani 'Abidat, who had been detained a month earlier for alleged membership of Abu Nidal's Fateh-Revolutionary Council, a Palestinian armed group. Wafa 'Abidat's family have spent years searching for her, making inquiries at every possible office. So far, they have received not a word of information.

Miyasser Jamil 'Abd al-'Isawi "disappeared" after leaving her home in Damascus to visit her husband in prison on 3 September 1985. Ten years later, her family have still received no information about her fate or whereabouts. Her mother told Amnesty International:

"I ask every human being who has blood and feelings, sight, taste, speech and has a country -- I ask them, I appeal to them -- I, Daniez 'Abd Jamil al-'Isawi, I demand my right to know where my daughter is..."

In Algeria female relatives of members of the security forces have been targeted by armed groups defining themselves as Islamist groups. For example, on 10 March 1995 the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) issued a statement in which it threatened to kill women members of the security forces or relatives of members of the security forces unless the authorities released all Islamist women prisoners. In the following week, nine women, including relatives of members of the security forces, were reported to have been murdered by the GIA. Among the victims was 15-year-old Fatima Ghodbane, who was abducted from her school in Oued Djer, near Blida, by a group of armed men who slit her throat outside the school.

Journalists in Algeria have also been the target of death threats by armed groups calling themselves "Islamic groups". Forty Algerian journalists have been killed since May 1993 in attacks reported to have been carried out by such groups. Rachida Hammadi, a 32-year-old journalist working for the national television station, and her 36-year-old sister, Hourria, were shot by gunmen on 21 March 1995 on their way to work in Algiers. Hourria was killed on the spot and Rachida died from the wounds some weeks later.

The mothers, wives and sisters of thousands of men arrested or killed by the security forces have been traumatized. Some have seen their male relatives killed before their eyes; others are still searching for their relatives.

Women relatives of suspected Bahraini dissidents have faced another form of human rights violation -- forcible exile from their country. In the early 1980s former political detainees -- primarily Shi'a Muslims suspected of having links with Iran -- and entire families were rounded up, stripped of their Bahraini passports or identity documents, and forced to board boats bound for Iran. Most had no knowledge of Iran or its language and no known relatives to stay with. In some cases the Bahraini authorities gave them false documents stating that they had been born in Iran.

In recent years Bahraini nationals attempting to return home from abroad have also been forcibly expelled. The victims include the wives and families of political prisoners who had fled Bahrain to avoid harassment. Some of these women and children have been detained for up to a week at Bahrain's international airport before being forcibly expelled from Bahrain. No reasons for the expulsions or details of the legal basis for such measures are given, and there is no appeal procedure. As a result of these policies, several women and their families have been forced to travel around the region in search of temporary sanctuary.

A few Bahraini women have been forcibly exiled because they themselves were suspected of opposition. Among them is Badi'a Hassan Yusuf, who is currently in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with her four children; she had been arrested in Bahrain in 1982 on suspicion of membership of a prohibited organization linked to Iran.

[Saudi Arabian pic]

Under attack by law

In several Middle Eastern countries women face imprisonment, cruel punishments and even death under laws which discriminate against women in many areas of life. They can be prosecuted for the clothes they wear or for the clothes they do not wear. They can be condemned to brutal physical retribution for their sexual

behaviour. They can even be locked up for driving a car. In Saudi Arabia, dozens of women staged a symbolic protest for women's rights when they defied a *de facto* ban on women drivers by driving a convoy of cars along one of Riyadh's main streets in November 1990. They were stopped by police who detained 49 of them without charge. They were not released until male members of their families had signed an undertaking that the women would not drive again. Many of the women lost their jobs as a result of the demonstration. A week after this protest, the Ministry of the Interior introduced legislation formally banning female drivers.

In Iran women and men face sentences of flogging and stoning to death for sexual offences. Stoning to death, which is prescribed by Iran's Islamic Penal Code for *hodoud* offences such as adultery, has been used to execute dozens of women since 1979. For example, Mina Kolvat, a married woman, was reportedly stoned to death in Evin Prison on 1 February 1994 for having an affair with her cousin and planning the murder of her husband. Her cousin was executed by hanging.

Iranian law states that a woman should be buried up to her chest and specifies the types of stone that should be used. Article 104 of the Penal Code, which refers to adultery, gives some indication of the cruel, inhuman and degrading nature of this form of punishment:

"In the punishment of stoning to death, the stones should not be too large so that the person dies on being hit by one or two of them; they should not be so small either that they could not be defined as stones."

Scores of women have reportedly been flogged annually in Iran in recent years for various offences, although details have been almost impossible to obtain. Amnesty International has been denied access to Iran to research human rights violations since 1979. Stringent restrictions on freedom of association inside the country have prevented the creation of local independent human rights organizations which could take up such cases and the authorities do not publish information about these issues. In the United Arab Emirates, too, the law provides for cruel, inhuman and degrading punishments for certain offences against the moral code. However, practice varies between the different emirates and sentences are sometimes commuted or overturned. In 1994, for instance, a pregnant foreign national, who was tried and convicted of adultery, was reportedly sentenced to death by stoning. The Court of Appeal overturned the sentence, imposing instead a nine-month prison term and 100 lashes to be administered 45 days after she gave birth. In another case, a woman and man were sentenced in February 1995 to flogging and imprisonment for adultery. It is not known if these sentences

were carried out.

In Yemen, women imprisoned for offences against the moral code are kept in jail indefinitely if they have no male relatives to go to or if their relatives disown them because of their offences. By contrast men imprisoned for the same offences are invariably released on completion of their sentence. The government policy of keeping women in prison indefinitely if they do not have male relatives to receive them is based on the perception that such women, if released, would commit further such offences. Scores of women imprisoned for offences against the moral code are believed to be currently held in Yemeni jails, most of them years after expiry of their prison terms. Some of them are held with their children.

In several Middle Eastern countries the clothes that women wear -- or do not wear -- can result in them being harassed, dismissed from their jobs, arrested and even flogged. In some cases women may have infringed the dress code for conscientious reasons -- a non-violent expression of their beliefs.

In Iran women risk arrest and flogging if they fail to obey the dress laws: the law provides for 74 lashes for such offences. In July 1993 the Human Rights Committee, the body of experts which monitors implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a state party, noted with concern the "punishment and harassment of women who do not conform with a strict dress code" and recommended that active measures be taken to "enhance the status of women...and guarantee their equal rights and freedoms".⁵

In Sudan women have been flogged for dressing in ways that infringe the military government's laws on public morality. A woman living in Omdurman was fined and sentenced to 35 lashes after being arrested in late 1991 because she was wearing trousers. She recalled:

"I grabbed the whip and twisted it. Then two or three policemen grabbed me and tied my hands to my back. After I received 40 lashes ... I gave him a venomous look. He noticed and gave me another five lashes."

Another woman, a student at Khartoum University, who was wearing a blouse and skirt, was stopped by a guard in December 1993 and told to change her clothes. She refused and was punished by 25 lashes.

In Tunisia, on the other hand, the authorities have increasingly put pressure on women, especially students and those working in the public sector, to stop wearing the *hijab* as this is considered an indication that they belong to or sympathize with

5 UN Doc. CCPR/C/79/Add. 25, paras 13, 21, adopted 29 July 1993.

the illegal Islamist opposition movement. Many have been threatened with dismissal if they do not comply. A university student who was arrested three times in 1991 and 1992 was threatened with imprisonment if she did not stop wearing the *hijab*. She complied and was forced to sign at the police station three times a week until the end of 1994, when she left the country. Women wearing the *hijab* are also systematically stopped at prison gates and prevented from visiting relatives or leaving food for them.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Human rights for women, as for men, are protected by international law. Yet in the countries of the Middle East, as elsewhere in the world, women are suffering a wide range of human rights violations and abuses. Women are also facing abuses solely or primarily because of their gender.

Amnesty International calls on all governments and armed opposition groups in the Middle East to respect human rights and to abide by international human rights standards. It also calls on all governments in the region to protect human rights groups in their countries and to let them carry out their activities without risk. The following recommendations, based on Amnesty International's 15-point program published in March 1995, include recommendations which address abuses primarily suffered by women as well as human rights violations that women have suffered along with men and children. The recommendations focus on the specific areas of Amnesty International's mandate and aim to complement and contribute to the efforts of others in the region who are working to defend and promote women's human rights.

Recognize that women's human rights are universal and indivisible.

Ratify and implement international treaties for the protection of human rights⁶.

- Governments should ratify international legal instruments which provide for the protection of the human rights of women and girl-children, such as:
 - the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its two Optional Protocols;
 - the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
 - the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;
 - the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;
 - the Convention on the Rights of the Child;

Eradicate discrimination which denies women human rights.

- Governments should recognize that discrimination against women both in law and in practice is a key contributory factor to human rights violations such as torture, including rape, and other forms of custodial violence. It is also a factor behind the application of the death penalty and cruel, inhuman or degrading punishments to women. Governments should initiate a

6 see Appendix I

plan of action against such discrimination.

Safeguard women's human rights during armed conflict.

- Governments and armed opposition groups should issue clear orders that extrajudicial executions, deliberate and arbitrary killings, rape and violent sexual abuse of women and girls will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

Stop rape, sexual abuse and other torture and ill-treatment by government agents.

- Conduct prompt, thorough and impartial investigations into all reports of torture or ill-treatment. Any law-enforcement agent responsible for such acts, or for encouraging or condoning them, should be brought to justice.
- All detainees should have access to family members and legal counsel promptly after arrest and regularly throughout their detention and/or imprisonment.
- Female guards should be present during the interrogation of female detainees and prisoners, and should be solely responsible for carrying out any body searches of female detainees and prisoners.
- Female detainees and prisoners should be held separately from male detainees and prisoners.

Prevent "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions by government agents and compensate the victims.

- Conduct prompt, thorough and impartial investigations into all reports of "disappearances", extrajudicial executions and deaths in custody and bring to justice those responsible.
- Ensure that the commission of a "disappearance" or extrajudicial execution is a criminal offence, punishable by sanctions commensurate with the gravity of the practice.
- Inform families immediately of any arrest and keep them informed of the whereabouts of the detainee or prisoner at all times.
- Make available judicial remedies such as *habeas corpus* to enable lawyers and relatives to locate prisoners and obtain the release of anyone who has been arbitrarily detained.
- Order forensic investigations into killings and deaths in custody to be carried out promptly and thoroughly by independent qualified personnel.
- Provide fair and adequate redress to relatives of victims of "disappearance", extrajudicial execution and death in custody, including financial compensation.

Stop persecution because of family connections.

- Any woman detained, imprisoned or held hostage solely because of her family connections should be immediately and unconditionally released.

- The practice of killing, abducting or torturing women in order to bring pressure on their relatives should not be tolerated. Anyone responsible for such acts should be brought to justice.

Safeguard the health rights of women in custody.

- Provide all women under any form of detention or imprisonment with adequate medical treatment, denial of which can constitute ill-treatment.
- Provide all necessary pre-natal and post-natal care and treatment for women in custody and their infants.
- Women in custody should be consulted over arrangements made for the care of their infants.

Release all prisoners of conscience immediately and unconditionally.

- Release all detainees and prisoners held because of their gender, peaceful political beliefs or activities, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, language or religion.

Ensure prompt and fair trials for all political prisoners.

- Ensure that all political prisoners are treated in accordance with internationally recognized safeguards for fair legal proceedings.

Abolish the death penalty and other forms of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishments.

- Governments should abolish the death penalty and stop judicial executions.
- All death sentences should be commuted.
- In countries which retain the death penalty, the law should provide that executions will not be carried out against pregnant women and new mothers, and that all legal procedures conform with international standards.
- End the use of flogging, amputation and other forms of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

Support the work of relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

- Governments should publicly state their commitment to ensuring that the intergovernmental bodies which monitor violations of human rights suffered by women, including the UN Commission on Human Rights and its Special Rapporteur on violence against women, the UN Commission on the Status of Women and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, have adequate resources to carry out their task effectively.
- Governments should allow women activists and non-governmental organizations working peacefully for the promotion and protection of women's human rights to carry out their work without risk.

Promote women's rights as human rights through official programs of education and training.

- Among other actions, governments and intergovernmental organizations should make available human rights education materials which promote women's rights as human rights. These materials should be designed to be understood by the illiterate.

Armed political groups should safeguard women's human rights.

- Armed political groups should also take steps to prevent abuses by their members such as hostage-taking, torture and ill-treatment, including rape, and arbitrary and deliberate killings, and should make clear to their members that these abuses will not be tolerated in any circumstances.

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Syria7, 32, 36, 40
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captions

A protest organized in 1993 by relatives of Moroccan prisoners of conscience. From left to right: the sister and mother of Mohcen al-Khatib; the mother of Omar Boudaoui; the mother of Abdelhaq Chbada (who died during a hunger-strike in August 1989); and the wife of Said Tabal. The sister and niece of Lieutenant Colonel 'Abd al-Moneim Hassan Ali Karrar, one of 28 officers summarily executed in Sudan on 24 April 1990. Despite persistent harassment, the families continue to protest against the executions.

An Israeli border policeman strikes a Palestinian woman taking part in a demonstration in East Jerusalem to mark International Women's Day in 1994 © Associated Press

Kuwaiti women demonstrating in 1992 for the political rights they were promised by the Kuwaiti royal family and then denied © *Popperfoto/Reuter*

Wasmiyya Fahd Shuwaireb al-'Ajmi, last seen at her home in Kuwait in August 1990
Fatima Ramez Tafla

Shi'a Muslim Arab women in the southern marshes of Iraq. Thousands of families fled to the vast marshland area after an uprising by Shi'a Muslim Arabs was brutally crushed by Iraqi government forces in 1991. Since then, government forces have repeatedly attacked villages in the marshes, killing hundreds of women, men and children. © *Associated Press*

Victims of the Halabja massacre, March 1988

Rana Abu Tuyur, shot dead on 19 December 1994

Magboula ment Bouchrayaould Mohamed Yahdih

Aicha Dhaouadi, imprisoned in Bizerte, Tunisia

Wafa Fahmi 'Ali 'Abidat, "disappeared" in 1986 in Syria

Rachida Hammadi (*above*) and Hourria Hammadi

Zahra' Habib Mansur al-Nasser, a 40-year-old housewife from the village of Awjam, Eastern Province, Saudi Arabia. She was arrested with her husband on 15 July 1989 at the checkpoint on the Saudi Arabian-Jordanian border. Police who searched them allegedly found a Shi'a prayer book and a photograph of the Ayatollah Khomeini. They were held in the Hudaitha check-point detention centre where Zahra' Habib Mansur al-Nasser reportedly died as a result of torture three days later.

Endnotes

¹ Quoted in "Suspended Dreams", a film directed by Jean Chamoun and Mai Masri, produced by MTC, BBC2 and TVE

² Amnesty International considers anyone detained for their beliefs or because of their ethnic origin, sex, colour or language to be a prisoner of conscience, provided they have not used or advocated violence.

³ *The Observer*, London, 4 October 1992

⁴ UN Doc. CCPR/C/79/Add. 25, paras 13, 21, adopted on 29 July 1993

⁵ see Appendix

quote

'To all who are concerned about Mansour, to all who know Mansour's fate, to all who wish for the freedom of Mansour, and to all those, like Mansour, whose fate is unknown:

From me, and from all mothers whose hearts are filled with pain...we say: season's greetings to you all... Eighteen months have passed since our loved one was taken away from us — 18 months of grief, of endurance, of hope, and of anger.

'Eid is coming, all of you who are concerned about Mansour's case. Where is Mansour — and the thousands like him?... Help us. Return our loved ones to us.'

Mrs Baha' Mansour al-Kikhiya, writing an appeal on behalf of her husband, Mansour, and others who have "disappeared", on the occasion of the Muslim festival 'Eid al-Adha. Mansour Kikhiya, a former Libyan Minister of Foreign Affairs and opposition activist, "disappeared" while attending a human rights conference in Cairo in December 1993. There are fears that he may have been abducted by Libyan government agents and returned to Libya.

KEYWORDS: WOMEN / EXTRAJUDICIAL EXECUTION / DISAPPEARANCES / TORTURE/ILL-TREATMENT / SEXUAL ASSAULT / IMPUNITY / TRIALS / ADVERSE DISCRIMINATION / PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE / POLITICAL ACTIVISTS / FAMILIES / MILITARY / NON-GOVERNMENTAL ENTITIES / ARMED CONFLICT / DEMONSTRATIONS / CORPORAL PUNISHMENT / DEATH PENALTY / INCOMMUNICADO DETENTION / SOLITARY CONFINEMENT / DETENTION WITHOUT TRIAL / UNLAWFUL DETENTION / HOUSE/TOWN ARREST / LONG-TERM IMPRISONMENT / RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE / CONFESSIONS / HOUSE DESTRUCTION / BOMB ATTACKS / EXILE / ETHNIC GROUPS / MINORITIES / HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS / WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTIVISTS / JOURNALISTS / TRADE UNIONISTS / BUSINESS PEOPLE / CLERICAL WORKERS / STUDENTS / TEACHERS / ARCHITECTS / POLITICAL PRISONERS / CHILDREN / JUVENILES / PREGNANCY / POLICE / OCCUPATION / SECOND GOVERNMENTS / EMERGENCY LEGISLATION / STRIKES / SUDAN / PRISONERS' TESTIMONIES / PHOTOGRAPHS /