

AI NEWSLETTER December 1994

World-wide Appeals

Cuba

State Security Police arrested 30-year-old Marta María Vega Cabrera in June, after searching her home in Nueva Gerona on the Isle of Youth (**Isla de la Juventud**), damaging furniture and assaulting her and her parents.

They took Marta, her sister and her sister's seventeen-month-old son to the headquarters of the Department of State Security (**Departamento de Seguridad del Estado**) in Nueva Gerona.

Her sister and her child were held for several hours before being released but Marta Vega Cabrera was kept in custody under investigation on a charge of distributing "enemy propaganda". At the time of writing, no trial had taken place.

In July Marta was transferred to the Western Women's Prison (**Prisión de Mujeres de Occidente**) in Havana. There, she was reportedly attacked by prisoners and prison guards and sent to a punishment cell after she had spoken out in defence of another prisoner who had been beaten for writing anti-government slogans on a wall.

A member of the unofficial **Partido Cívico Democrático**, Civic Democratic Party, Marta Vega Cabrera had previously been arrested on a similar charge and held for an unknown period in 1993 before being released, apparently without trial. Since then she and her family have suffered frequent harassment from the authorities because of their political beliefs.

AI believes Marta Cabrera Vega to be a prisoner of conscience. Please send appeals calling for her immediate and unconditional release to: Dr Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Councils of State and Ministers, Havana, Cuba.

Georgia

Victor Domukhovsky, a 46-year-old physicist, is one of a group of 19 prisoners allegedly beaten and ill-treated during their arrest and interrogation.

Allegations of ill-treatment include being hung upside down, scalded with burning water and systematically beaten. Some of the prisoners have fractured bones and teeth.

Several have also suffered serious ill health as a result of the overcrowded and insanitary conditions of their detention. They are being held in a pre-trial detention centre in Tbilisi where conditions are said to be appalling. Some have undertaken hunger strikes to protest against their treatment. In some cases it has been alleged that adequate medical treatment has been withheld on the instructions of the judge.

None of the statements of confession signed by the defendants has been excluded from the trial, despite allegations that they were obtained under duress. Some defendants also report denial of access to case material and difficulties in obtaining access to a defence lawyer of their own choice. The defendants, many of them supporters of the late former president Zviad Gamsakhurdia, were arrested in 1992 on charges ranging from illegal arms possession to murder and terrorism. The trial opened in October 1993.

Please send appeals, calling on the Georgian authorities to take immediate steps to provide adequate medical treatment, to investigate all reports of ill-treatment, and to ensure that the defendants receive a fair trial in line with international standards, to: Dzhomlet Babilashvili, Procurator General, ul. Gorgosali 24, 380033 Tbilisi, Georgia.

China

The simple communal life of a small Christian community in China was literally shattered when bulldozers tore down their village in June 1992. Possessions -- including food and clothing -- were confiscated and about 60 people were arrested. Eighteen women were reportedly subjected to degrading treatment while in police custody.

Today, around half of the 30 members of the community who received prison terms are still detained. AI considers them to be prisoners of conscience, held solely for the peaceful expression of their religious beliefs.

The Jesus Family at Duoyigou village community in Weishan county, Shandong province, was founded in 1929, but is not recognized by the government-sanctioned church organization.

On the afternoon of 18 June 1992 while a monthly communion service was being held armed police and local officials arrived in 40 trucks and cars and with two bulldozers. The community was raided and buildings destroyed. Harassment and the beating of community members by the police continued in the weeks following the raid. According to reports as many as 60 people were arrested, but half were released soon after.

The leader of the community, Pastor Zheng Yunsu is serving 12 years' imprisonment after being accused of "swindling" and "disruption of public order". Two of his four sons were later sentenced to nine years and two to five years' imprisonment. All are believed to be held under forced labour in coal mines. Others from the community who were arrested were assigned to two or three years' "re-education through labour".

Please send appeals calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Pastor Zheng Yunsu, his four sons and all those from the Jesus Community still detained, and asking for confirmation of the release of others whose sentences have expired, to: Governor of Shandong Provincial People's Government, ZHAO Zhihao, Shengzhang, Shandongsheng Renmin Zhengfu, 193 Jinger Lu, Jinashi, Shandongsheng, People's Republic of China.

News

Algeria

Government forces and armed Islamist groups have brutally killed thousands of civilians since the government declared a state of emergency in 1992. At least 10,000 are known to have died - although unofficial estimates put the figure at more than double this number.

Many more Algerians continue to live in a terrifying atmosphere of insecurity and confusion.

Hundreds of unarmed civilians are reported to have been extrajudicially executed by the security forces, often in retaliation for attacks by armed Islamist groups or as an alternative to arrest.

For their part, armed Islamist groups have killed hundreds of civilians, including individuals opposed to their political, relatives of members of the security forces, journalists and writers, women, civil servants, magistrates and others. Others have been threatened with death or taken hostage.

Tens of thousands have been detained by the authorities, and torture of detainees held incommunicado for illegally prolonged periods has become increasingly widespread. Confessions extracted under torture have been routinely accepted as evidence by judges in special courts.

AI has again called on the Algerian authorities to stop the practice of extrajudicial executions and torture by their security forces and has urged the political leaders of the armed Islamist groups to condemn the killings of civilians and other abuses perpetrated by those who act in their name.

*See Algeria: Repression and Violence Must End, AI Index MDE 28/08/94

Pakistan

Shaukat Ali Kashmiri, the Secretary General of Jammu and Kashmir People's National Party (JKPNP) was released from an army detention centre at Attok Fort on 26 September 1994, exactly one month after his "disappearance".

AI welcomed news of his release but has called on the Government of Pakistan to establishment of an impartial inquiry into the incident. It has also urged the government to bring to justice those responsible for Shaukat Ali Kashmiri's "disappearance", and to take measures to prevent future "disappearances" by the security personnel in Pakistan.

Haiti/Cuba

At the end of September a five-person AI delegation visited the US naval base at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, where the US authorities were holding in separate camps Haitian and Cuban asylum-seekers intercepted at sea. Following the visit, AI recommended that asylum-seekers in these camps who are considering voluntary return must have free access to relevant information about the situation in their country. The delegation called for proper procedures to be established to ensure those who wish to apply for asylum can do so and that no asylum-seekers at risk from human rights violations are returned against their will.

Haiti

Many Haitian asylum-seekers at Guantánamo had fled Haiti in terror, as the de facto military authorities who overthrew President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1991 carried out their campaign of intimidation, arbitrary arrests and killings. The AI visit took place a few days after United States (US) troops were sent to Haiti. The situation in the country was particularly tense and volatile.

Yet the Haitians were denied access to information that would allow them to make informed decisions about whether they wished to return. At the camps there was effectively a ban on the dissemination of independently-written material, including newspapers. The only sources of information were a Créole-language paper containing selected press reports from mainly US newspapers, and a Créole-language radio station. Both were run by the US authorities.

Due to poor external communications (no telephone links and a limited mail service), many Haitians felt further cut off from the outside world, adding to their sense of isolation and ignorance of what was happening in their home country.

The AI delegates were particularly concerned that in this climate of restricted information, Haitians were effectively being encouraged to repatriate. US officials regularly announced the possibility of immediate voluntary repatriation. Some of those held in a segregation unit for having committed offences in the camps were told they would be released from the unit if they agreed to repatriation.

Cuba

By August 1994, the number of people fleeing Cuba for the United States had reached its highest level for 14 years. US Government authorities intercepted Cubans at sea to take them to the base at Guantánamo. Arrangements were made to transfer some of the Cubans to other US military bases in Panama. AI has longstanding concerns in Cuba, where there are at least 500 prisoners of conscience. Arbitrary detention, unfair trials, intimidation and harassment of political opponents by the security forces are common.

The AI delegation concluded from its interviews that a substantial number of the approximately 32,000 Cubans held in the camps at Guantánamo Bay and in Panama could be at risk of human rights violations if required to return home -- yet there was no provision for them to request asylum. In practice, their only choice was to return to Cuba or to remain at the bases, where it was not clear what would happen to them in the long term.

The Cuban authorities have reportedly said that no action will be taken against those who choose to return. But in the past those who have tried to leave the country illegally have frequently been imprisoned for months or even years. Some of the people interviewed by the delegation reported that they had been encouraged or even forced by the Cuban authorities to leave Cuba, under threat of renewed imprisonment if they refused. Some were already facing charges related to their peaceful political or human rights activities. None of the Cubans AI spoke to at Guantánamo wished to return.

India

Three prisoners of conscience featured in the October newsletter have been released.

Shabir Shah, now 40, has been detained repeatedly since 1968 and has spent a total of more than 18 years in detention without charge or trial. He was released on 14 October.

As leader of the Jammu and Kashmir Peoples League he has been actively involved in campaigning for the right of the state to self-determination. At the time of his last arrest, AI believes he was imprisoned for the peaceful expression of his political views and has welcomed his release. But the organization has asked the Indian Government to clarify the reasons for his prolonged imprisonment.

Shabir Shah's release follows that of Abdul Gani Lone, leader of Jammu and Kashmir Peoples Conference, and Sayeed Ali Shah Geelani, leader of Jamaat-i-Islami on 30 September. They were arrested in October 1993 after leading largely peaceful demonstrations.

All three men were featured as Worldwide Appeals in the October newsletter, which went to press before their release had been announced.

Bulgaria

A 49-year-old man who was taken into police custody, supposedly on suspicion of stealing a few cows which were later found, never left the police station alive.

Slavcho Lyubenov Tsonchev, a member of the Roma community from the village of Bukovlyak, was arrested on 24 September 1994 and taken to Pleven police. He was not released and the following day his wife was informed that her husband had died.

According to the death certificate, there were bruises all over his body. Injuries recorded and videotaped by a team of human rights activists in Pleven indicate that Slavcho Lyubenov Tsonchev may have been tortured.

This is the third such death in custody of a member of the Roma community in Bulgaria since June 1993. In many other cases it is alleged that law enforcement officers have beaten and ill-treated Roma.* In most instances this treatment appears to have been racially motivated.

AI has repeatedly raised such cases with the Bulgarian authorities. In September the organization made a series of recommendations to the Bulgarian Government and called on it to establish an independent commission of inquiry into all allegations of ill-treatment of Roma.

*See *Turning a blind eye to racism* (AI Index EUR 15/04/94)

Indonesia

AI's major international campaign to end human rights violations in Indonesia and East Timor was launched by the Secretary General, Pierre Sané, on 28 September in Bangkok, Thailand. He later met government leaders in Thailand, Japan, New Zealand and Australia, and urged the international community to seriously address the human rights situation in Indonesia and East Timor.

AI's campaign comes as the Indonesian Government marks 29 years in power. During this period it has been responsible for persistent and systematic human rights violations.*

Human rights defenders, trade unionists and farmers protesting against government development projects are among those subjected to arbitrary imprisonment, political killing, torture and ill-treatment.

The harsh measures taken to repress peaceful dissent are in sharp contrast to the impunity with which members of the security forces commit human rights violations.

During the run-up to the Asia and Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meetings in Jakarta in November, there was a marked escalation in official intimidation and harassment of alleged government opponents, including short-term arbitrary detention and torture. In Jakarta, official measures to tackle crime and ensure a "clean and stable" environment for the APEC meetings have resulted in scores of alleged criminals being shot dead in suspicious circumstances since April this year.

AI has called on the Indonesian Government to take concrete steps to investigate human rights violations and to effectively implement international standards for the protection of human rights. Equally important however, is the need for the international community to ensure identifiable improvements in the protection of human rights in Indonesia and East Timor.

* See Power and Impunity: Human rights under the New Order

Turkey

More than 500 people -- politicians, artists, actors, poets, lawyers, trade unionists, human rights activists, the novelist Ya_ar Kemal, and other writers -- walked through the streets of Istanbul to demand the right to free speech.

The "Walk for Freedom of Thought" on 29 September was organized by the Turkish Human Rights Association and the Association of Progressive Lawyers. Thirty thousand signatures were collected for a petition calling for the free expression of non-violent opinion. The petition was presented to Hüsamettin Cindoruk, President of the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM).

Initially, large numbers of police had gathered to prevent the walk on the grounds that it would be in breach of Law 2911 which prohibits all unauthorized demonstrations. The marchers insisted that they were entitled to travel as a group to Ankara to petition their parliament.

After intervention by the parliamentary deputy Ercan Karaka_, who has tabled an amendment to Article 8 of the Anti-Terror Law under which most prisoners of conscience are held, the "expedition" was permitted to begin its journey. AI has repeatedly called for the release of prisoners of conscience in Turkey, and for the repeal or amendment of Article 8 of the Anti-Terror Law, which can carry a five-year prison sentence.

Some of the participants in the march also visited the Justice Minister Mehmet Mo_ultay. He said that he and other members of the Social Democrat Populist Party (SHP) -- junior partners in the ruling coalition -- wished to see an end to this "shame". With his permission, the group was able to visit imprisoned writers and academics as well as eight Kurdish members of parliament also being held in prison.

Rwanda

Hundreds and possibly thousands of unarmed civilians have been killed in revenge attacks by soldiers of the Rwandese Patriotic Army (RPA) in the period from April to August 1994.

According to eye-witnesses, as RPA soldiers gained control of successive regions of the country from the former government and found evidence of genocide committed against their families and supporters they took indiscriminate revenge on unarmed Hutu civilians. Most RPA soldiers belong to the Tutsi minority.

In June about 100 men, women and children were detained by RPA soldiers in the Mututu area of southern Rwanda. Dozens were killed by soldiers and their bodies dumped in an open pit.

A 56-year-old survivor of killings by RPA soldiers told AI of one incident on 13 April at Gishara, in northeastern Rwanda. RPA soldiers had promised the people food to emphasize their good intentions but instead threw a grenade into the meeting. Many were killed, including his wife, 10-year-old son and 20-year-old daughter.

The government has dismissed accounts such as these as "hearsay". AI recognizes its report* confirming deliberate and arbitrary killings by the RPA may be used as propaganda by supporters of the former government which carried out genocide in Rwanda. An estimated 500,000 people, mostly Tutsi, were massacred between April and July 1994 by Hutu soldiers and militia of the former government. Nonetheless, it is unacceptable that the international community dismisses without proper investigation reports of RPA abuses. In September officials working for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported that the RPA had carried out extrajudicial executions in southeastern Rwanda. Other UN agencies appeared to dismiss or disregard these reports. Several weeks later however, the UN announced that an investigation would be carried out.

December Focus

Introduction

(picture)

This was the scene that greeted two United Nations medical workers when they arrived at the palace of the former Somali President Siad Barre in the Somali capital, Mogadishu, in June 1993. In one of the palace rooms were thousands of appeals from AI members from around the world. Hundreds more opened letters were also found at the government's security headquarters.

President Siad Barre had been overthrown two years earlier, but during his 22-year rule AI had continued to campaign against gross human rights violations and had encouraged its members to write letters of protest. One of the cases which thousands of AI members took up was an appeal for the release of prisoner of conscience Yusuf Osman Samantar. A lawyer and leading politician, he had refused to support the new government of President Siad Barre which came to power in 1969. Under laws which gave the government almost unlimited powers of detention, Yusuf Osman Samantar was detained without charge or trial almost continuously for 20 years. He was one of the longest held prisoners of conscience known to AI, which continued to campaign for his release. AI representatives met him in Mogadishu soon after his release in 1989. He later fled from the political violence in Somalia and is now a refugee in the United States of American.

This Focus contains updates on many of the worldwide appeals cases AI has taken up over the past year or so. Thousands of AI members responded to those appeals by writing to the relevant authorities. Some of those featured have been released (see below). But many victims of human rights violations remain imprisoned for their beliefs or ethnicity, or have "disappeared". It is for them that AI continues to work.

Released

Abdallah Housby, a 35-year-old secondary school teacher in Morocco, was arrested in November 1985, apparently after distributing political leaflets. He was held in secret detention, tortured and forced to sign a confession. On the basis of this confession, he was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment.

Over the years, the Moroccan Government has imprisoned hundreds of political prisoners: AI has campaigned for their freedom. Abdullah Housby had spent over a quarter of his life in prison for his beliefs when he was featured by name in the May 1994 newsletter. In July this year, Abdullah Housby and more than 350 other political prisoners in Morocco walked free. The government had announced an amnesty.

AI members had been working too for the release of Jacinto Nculu, a soldier from Equatorial Guinea. Regarded as a political enemy of the government, he was one of scores of people arrested and brutally tortured in August 1993. Along with five other soldiers, he was tried in a grossly unfair trial and sentenced to 24 years' imprisonment (later reduced to eight years). He was also featured as a worldwide appeal in May 1994. In June, Jacinto Nculu and the five others jailed at the same time were released under a general amnesty. AI delegates met him in July. He still bears the scars of his torture.

Three long-term prisoners of conscience were released in Syria, shortly after two of them had been featured as worldwide appeals in February 1994. Hadithe Murad and Mustafa Rustum, both former government and Ba'ath party officials were arrested in 1970 and detained without charge or trial. Five others featured in the appeal are still held.

Ali Aref, a prisoner of conscience and former head of government in Djibouti, for whom AI made worldwide appeals in March 1993, was released in December that year. He and 14 others arrested and tried on fabricated charges were freed under a presidential pardon. On his release, Ali Aref thanked AI for its campaign on his behalf.

U Shwe Ohn, featured in the worldwide appeals in October 1993 was freed in November 1993. The 70-year-old lawyer was chairman of a political party banned by the military government in Myanmar. He had questioned the army's role in politics and had called for power to be handed over to the country's elected representatives.

General Sa'ad al-Din, former Ambassador and Commander of the Egyptian armed forces, also featured in the newsletter in October 1993, was released from prison aged 71 by a presidential

amnesty later that month. He had been sentenced to three years' imprisonment for allegedly disclosing military secrets. AI had serious concerns about the fairness of his trial. He thanked AI members for their work when he met two AI delegates who visited Egypt in April this year. In July 1994, AI appealed for the commutation of the death sentences passed on Andrei Arazov and Sultan Karibzhanov from Kyrgyzstan. They were convicted of murder allegedly on the sole basis of confessions they made after being beaten during interrogation. In September, the Clemency Commission of Kyrgyzstan announced that the death sentence against Andrei Arzov had been commuted to 20 years' imprisonment.
[news of Sultan Karibzhanov to be inserted]

Myanmar: Ma Thida (featured January 1994)

Ma Thida, a 27-year-old doctor and well-known short story writer is one of Myanmar's many prisoners of conscience. A prominent opposition figure, she is serving a 20-year sentence for her non-violent political activities. In February this year she was allowed to meet with a visiting United States Congressman at Insein Prison, Yangon, where she is being held in solitary confinement. She said she had no access to reading or writing materials and was concerned about her health. Although the Myanmar military government leaders recently met with opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, still under house arrest, there are no signs that political prisoners are to be released. Ma Thida continues to serve her 20 years in prison.

Iraq: Marsh Arabs (featured January 1994)

A year ago, AI called on the United Nations (UN) to implement the request by its own Commission on Human Rights for a human rights monitoring operation in Iraq. In its worldwide appeal, AI was particularly concerned about the plight of the people living in the marshlands of southern Iraq, an area which had come under increasing military attacks by the Iraqi Government. The exodus of people from the area, reported then at over 6,000, has now risen to over 10,000. Still no monitoring operation has been sanctioned by the UN.

China: Zhang Xianliang (featured February 1994)

Prisoner of conscience, Zhang Xianliang, is still in a labour camp on the outskirts of Shanghai. According to reports, he has been attacked and has had his food rations stolen by other inmates on orders of his team leader. He is constantly followed by at least two prisoners who shout obscenities at him and push him around. Zhang Xianliang is a veteran pro-democracy campaigner who had been jailed previously for five years. He was arrested again in June 1993 after raising the cases of dissidents detained in Shanghai. He was given three years "re-education through labour" -- a form of administrative detention imposed without charge or trial. His daughter was only granted a passport by the authorities after he had withdrawn an appeal for his case to be reviewed.

Turkey: Abdulvahap Timurtas (featured March 1994)

AI members in Norway who made appeals on behalf of Abdulvahap Timurtas were told by the Turkish Embassy in Oslo that "no incident as alleged took place". AI had reported that Abdulvahap Timurtas -- whose brother died in police custody in 1991 -- "disappeared" after being held by gendarmerie during a security raid on a village in the province of Sirnak, southeast Turkey on 14 August 1993. The authorities have denied holding him. The numbers of reported "disappearances" in Turkey is steadily increasing -- more than 40 in the first eight months of 1994. The police now almost routinely deny holding detainees. The victims are mainly Kurdish villagers in the southeast of the country, where gross human rights violations have been committed by both sides in the 10-year conflict between Turkish security forces and guerillas of the Kurdish Workers' Party.

Turkey: Baki Erdogan (featured December 1993)

Six policemen, including the Chief of the Anti-Terror Branch of Aydin Police Headquarters in Western Turkey, have been charged with "ill-treatment" of 29-year-old Baki Erdogan. He was arrested in August 1993 on suspicion of belonging to an armed political group, and died in police custody after being interrogated in Aydin Police Headquarters for 11 days. In its worldwide appeals in December 1993, AI asked members to write to the authorities, calling for an independent inquiry into the case. The trial of the six policemen is continuing and the prosecutor has asked for five-year prison sentences. At least 24 people died in police custody in Turkey in 1993 as a result of torture.

Uzbekistan: Pulat Akhunov (featured April 1994)

The clampdown on government opponents in Uzbekistan continues. When Pulat Akhunov's case was featured in April, he had been sentenced to four and a half years' imprisonment -- AI believes on fabricated charges designed to punish him for his political activities. He was deputy chairman of the now-outlawed opposition party, Birlík (Unity). AI has recently learned that he is now facing an additional three-year sentence on a charge of "wilfully disobeying" the prison administration. AI believes this is a further trumped up charge devised by the authorities to ensure his long-term imprisonment. For the past year Pulat Akhunov has been serving his sentence in the notorious Kyzyltepa labour camp, said to be one of the worst prisons in the country.

Brazil: Candelária Massacre (featured October 1993)

Nearly a year and a half after the Candelária massacre in which eight young people were gunned down in the streets of Rio de Janeiro, witnesses to the killings remain without any kind of state protection. In its worldwide appeal, AI had specifically urged that steps be taken to protect the child witnesses in the case, after the authorities announced that four men, including three policemen, had been charged in connection with the shootings. Around 40 children thought to have witnessed the massacre remain on the streets of Rio de Janeiro. Some have received death threats, allegedly by members of the military police. AI has now called on the government to set up a national witness protection programme.

Letters from AI members are not only sent to the relevant authorities calling on them to halt human rights violations -- thousands of members write directly to the victims of those human rights violations themselves. To many prisoners of conscience still in prison, these letters of support can act as a psychological lifeline.

An AI group in Hamburg in Germany recently received this letter of thanks from 186 prisoners of conscience held at Sindos Prison in Greece, where military courts continue to sentence all conscientious objectors to four years' imprisonment:

"We would like to thank you that you keep bringing on the world stage the issue of the conscientious objectors here in Greece. We know or better we try to imagine how much effort, time and money this costs.

"We thank you so much for the letters you have send us the recent years. All these letters are a part of our heritage here in prison...we urge you to continue this fine work you are doing for us. Please, keep sending us letters and cards."

Turkish prisoner of conscience, Mehdi Zana, was arrested in May 1994, and sentenced to four years' imprisonment for making a speech to the European Parliament Sub-Committee on Human Rights. A prominent figure in the Kurdish community, he had already spent 10 years as a prisoner of conscience after the coup in 1980. His wife is one of six Kurdish deputies now on trial on charges of separatism. He is now in Ankara Closed Central Prison, from where he sent this message to AI members:

"On 25 June 1994 a raid was organized on the political wing of the prison... The raid was carried out by the special forces from outside the prison. All the furniture and anything printed they tore up and threw out, and they took away all written texts. As you will understand, everyone was in a state. At any hour, every night, anything can happen.

"I have been meaning to write to you for a long time, but events have not given me an opportunity. I am receiving letters from all over the world from Amnesty members...I can see that you have been working very hard, so many, many thanks to you individually and to all the other friends."

Communication with prisoners varies greatly from country to country. One of the most difficult to communicate with is Cuba, where hundreds of prisoners of conscience are held. But even from here, AI members have received, directly or indirectly, messages of thanks from Cuban prisoners. One of the four scientists featured in a worldwide appeal in December 1993, and still believed to be imprisoned for their peaceful opposition to the Cuban Government, wrote to a relative in the United States of America, telling her he had received "a very beautiful and appreciated letter" from an AI member in Finland.

In a letter to a Canadian group another Cuban prisoner wrote: "I received your letter of 9 September which brought me great joy. Today I can say that you are maybe the only ones in the world listening to and being concerned about the suffering of others...I was pleased to know that I have been recognized as a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International. I still do not know how you learned of my existence in this prison..."

And in Morocco, in July this year, more than 350 political prisoners -- some of who had spent more than 10 years in prison -- were freed after an amnesty. Mohammed El Boukili sent this letter to a British AI group who had been campaigning for his release:

"I am free again, outside my cell and prison after about nine years of torture, pain and hope. In the darkest hours of my imprisonment, your words and cards came as the most welcome drops of rain in an endless desert, your letters and reports as the voice of wisdom and the conscience of the world ... My freedom now is the fruit of your everyday pressure, work and courage."

Zar Gana, a dental school graduate in his late 20s, is a popular humourist who satirized the government and military authorities. After reportedly impersonating General Saw Maung, former head of the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council, in front of thousands of spectators at the Yankin Teachers' Training College Stadium in May 1990, he was arrested and imprisoned. It was reported that he had been sentenced to at least five years, and was being held in a small cell in Yangon's Insein Prison.

AI adopted Zar Gana as a prisoner of conscience, arrested for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression. These rights are proclaimed in Articles 19 and 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. AI members around the world began campaigning for his release. He was freed in March 1994.

Prisoner of conscience Segundo Torres Centurión was released in March this year after having spent over two years in prison in Peru awaiting trial by a higher court. The court decided there was no evidence against him.

A prominent peasant leader, he was detained by the police in the city of Cutervo in January 1992. He said he was forced under torture to admit to being a member of the armed opposition group *Partido Comunista del Perú (Sendero Luminoso)*, Communist Party of Peru (Shining Path). AI adopted him as a prisoner of conscience because there was no evidence to link him to the armed opposition group and the charges he faced appeared to be based on his political activities.

AI has identified and adopted 63 prisoners of conscience detained under Peru's current anti-terrorism laws. By the end of September 1994, 33 had been released after at least 12 months in jail. Most claimed to have been tortured and ill-treated by the security forces.

The organization has also documented the cases of at least a further 250 possible prisoners of conscience in Peru, and AI believes there may be hundreds more "nameless" prisoners falsely accused of terrorism offences.