

The Wire

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[Page 1]

Denying the undeniable: enforced disappearances in Pakistan

“This is the worst thing to happen to anyone. If someone dies you cry and people console you and after some time you come to terms with it but if someone disappears, you cannot breathe, it is the bitterest of agonies.”

Amina Masood Janjua, wife of “disappeared” Masood Ahmed Janjua

Masood Ahmed Janjua, a businessman from Rawalpindi, “disappeared” on 30 July 2005 while travelling on a bus to Peshawar with Faisal Faraz, a 25-year-old engineer from Lahore.

Since late 2001, the Pakistan government has taken advantage of counter-terrorism measures adopted in the context of the international “war on terror” to subject hundreds of people including political opponents and foreign nationals to enforced disappearance. Relatives fear for the lives of the “disappeared”, aware that torture and other ill-treatment are routine in Pakistan’s places of detention.

In October 2006, the relatives of the “disappeared” dared to hope when the Supreme Court of Pakistan began hearing petitions they had filed. However, these hopes were dashed in November 2007 when the then President Pervez Musharraf imposed a state of emergency and unlawfully deposed the majority of Pakistan’s higher court judges, many of whom had been taking a tough stand on cases of enforced disappearance. This crackdown was shrouded in rhetoric about the judiciary’s interference in the government’s fight against terrorism. Since then, none of the enforced disappearance cases pending before the Supreme Court have been heard and the fate of Pakistan’s “disappeared” have become inextricably linked with the reinstatement of the deposed judges.

In a new report, *Denying the undeniable: enforced disappearances in Pakistan*, Amnesty International shows that despite overwhelming evidence, including official court records and affidavits from victims and witnesses, the Pakistan authorities have consistently denied subjecting anyone to enforced disappearance and obstructed attempts by the Supreme Court to trace the “disappeared”.

Following a general election in February 2008, a new coalition government was sworn in. Amnesty International calls on the new government of Pakistan – which has pledged to improve Pakistan’s human rights record – to end the policy of denial, investigate all cases of enforced disappearance and hold those responsible to account. It is also crucial that the new government reinstate the deposed judges and provide redress for the victims of enforced disappearance.

For further information, see: *Denying the undeniable: enforced disappearances in Pakistan* (ASA 33/018/2008). For further information on Masood Ahmed Janjua: www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA33/020/2008/en

[Photo caption: Protesters demonstrating against enforced disappearances in front of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, September 2006. © Private]

Escaping prisoners killed in cold blood in Cameroon

At least 17 prisoners were killed by prison guards on 29 and 30 June while trying to escape from New Bell prison in Douala, Cameroon. Another prisoner of Malian origin was shot dead, apparently as he tried to escape, on 5 August. These are the latest incidents in a history of excessive and unwarranted lethal force, particularly in cases of prison breakouts where the authorities operate a shoot-to-kill policy.

According to human rights defenders and the media in Cameroon, tension had been building in New Bell prison for several weeks before the June shootings. Plots to escape had reportedly been known to the prison authorities, but they had failed to take preventive measures. On the afternoon of 29 June, dozens of prisoners forced their way out of the prison and 15 were reportedly shot dead by prison guards and other security force personnel in the ensuing manhunt. Two others were killed on 30 June.

At least one civilian who had not been in custody was unlawfully killed. On 30 June, René Mireille Bouyam, a 21-year-old man who lived near New Bell prison, was shot and fatally wounded when members of the security forces found a prisoner hiding in his house. He and the prisoner were reportedly pinned to the ground and shot, killing the latter instantly. René Mireille Bouyam died the following day in hospital. Despite this incident and the high number of prisoner deaths, during a visit to the prison on 1 July 2008 the Secretary of State for Justice in charge of penitentiary administration is reported to have thanked the prison authorities for their action against the prisoners who tried to escape.

There has been a long-standing pattern of excessive use of lethal force by the authorities in Cameroon. In June 2007, at least 17 prisoners from Yoko prison in Adamaoua province were shot dead in similar circumstances to those at New Bell prison. No action is known to have been taken by the government to investigate the killings, bring those responsible to justice and compensate the families of those killed or wounded.

Such lethal force is not confined to prison breakouts: as many as 100 civilians were killed in February 2008 in various towns around the country following civil unrest. Riots had erupted in response to the rising cost of living, low wages and plans by the government to amend the Constitution. Photographs obtained by Amnesty International suggest that some of the victims were shot in the head at point-blank range and could therefore have been arrested instead of killed.

Inmates of prisons and detention centres in Cameroon are generally held in deplorable conditions. New Bell prison was built for 700 people but currently houses nearly 4,000. It consequently has woefully inadequate sanitation facilities, with a high rate of sickness and attendant deaths. On 20 August, nine prisoners died in a fire in the prison. Cases of violence and other abuses, including rape and prostitution among inmates, are reportedly common in prisons around the country. As a result, there are often riots and attempted escapes, which poorly-trained and inadequately paid prison guards often respond to with lethal force as a first resort.

[*Photo caption: Security forces clash with demonstrators in Douala, February 2008. As many as 100 people were killed as riots erupted in many parts of the country in response to the rising cost of living and low wages. © Ligue Camerounaise des Droits Humains*]

[*Pages 2 & 3*]

Fears of forced returns to Eritrea

Detained asylum-seekers in Egypt and Libya fear being forced back to Eritrea and to an uncertain fate which could include torture and other serious human rights violations.

Hundreds of Eritrean asylum-seekers in Egypt now fear forcible return to Eritrea after Egypt carried out a mass expulsion of 1,200 Eritrean nationals in June 2008.

Thousands of Eritrean nationals, among them asylum-seekers, are being detained in Libya and are at risk of being forcibly returned to their country. There is real concern that once they are returned they could be detained on arrival, tortured as punishment for “betraying” their country or for fleeing military service, and held incommunicado indefinitely without charge or trial.

Between 12 and 19 June 2008, Egypt forcibly returned up to 1,200 Eritrean asylum-seekers to Eritrea after they had been detained for weeks or months in different locations around Egypt. With no access to representatives of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Egypt and with absolute disregard for Egypt's international obligations, the Egyptian authorities forcibly flew the asylum-seekers back on specially chartered EgyptAir flights to Eritrea. Reports from Eritrea indicate that most of the men who were returned and some of the single women have been detained in military training camps in the remote area of Wia. Pregnant women and those with children are believed to have been released after some weeks in detention.

Following appeals from Amnesty International and others to stop all forcible returns, Egypt announced on 15 June that the UNHCR in Egypt would be granted access to all asylum-seekers. However, the UNHCR was allowed only to visit 179 Eritreans and Ethiopians detained at the Shallal Central security forces camp in Aswan, south of Egypt. Their applications for refugee status are currently being considered by the Egyptian authorities.

To the west of the border, in Libya, some 700 Eritrean nationals who had fled Eritrea to seek asylum abroad are being held in a detention centre in Mistarah, about 200km east of Tripoli. Amnesty International has received reports suggesting that on 21 June Libyan authorities took preparatory steps to forcibly return to Eritrea some 230 of the Eritrean detainees.

Although it seems that no detainees have been deported from the Mistarah detention centre to date, some fear that it is only a matter of time. The UNHCR has no formal presence in Libya but the Libyan authorities do in fact permit the UNHCR office in Tripoli to visit Mistarah regularly and provide medical and food assistance. However,

some reports suggest that the detainees, which include approximately 30 children, are held in inhumane conditions.

For further information see *Egypt: Amnesty International calls for President to stop flights to possible torture in Eritrea* (MDE 12/014/2008) and *Libya: Amnesty International warns against deportation of Eritreans* (MDE 19/007/2008).

[*Photo caption: Eritrean asylum-seekers on trial for 'illegal' entry to Egypt before their forcible return to Eritrea, Daraw misdemeanours court, north of Aswan, 13 April 2008. © Rafat Samir*]

Arrest of Radovan Karadžić a major step towards justice

Amnesty International welcomed the arrest of former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadžić on 21 July, after more than 12 years on the run.

Accused of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, he faces trial by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague.

The charge of genocide against Radovan Karadžić includes the murder of approximately 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys in Srebrenica in 1995.

The indictment alleges that forces under his command killed non-Serbs throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina and that they detained thousands of non-Serbs and transferred them to detention camps, where they were killed, tortured and sexually assaulted. He was also charged over the shelling of Sarajevo, which led to thousands of civilian casualties, and with using UN peacekeepers as human shields.

Calling the arrest a major victory, Amnesty International urged the UN to give the Tribunal the resources and time it needs to secure justice for all the victims of crimes committed in the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. In particular, the current deadline of 2010 might cut short the cases of two indicted war criminals still at large - Ratko Mladić and Goran Hadžić

. [*Photo caption: The International Criminal Court (ICC) at The Hague, Netherlands. © Amnesty International*]

Ending family violence in Venezuela

“What we experienced was not a game, our lives were in danger all the time and justice has to be done because we deserve it, we deserve to move on from this.”

Woman interviewed by Amnesty International, Venezuela, July 2007.

Violence in the family remains a serious problem in Venezuela, despite the introduction of ground-breaking legislation to combat violence against women. The 2007 Organic law on the right of women to a life free of violence was an important step forward. It defines violence against women as a human rights violation and reaffirms the responsibility of the state to eradicate it. It also sets out measures to prevent violence against women, to protect women at risk and to punish those responsible.

In July 2008, Amnesty International published a report which looks at the gap between the promise held out by the law and the reality of violence against women in the family in Venezuela. At the heart of the report were the voices of women who had shared their experiences of violence in the family with Amnesty International.

A woman interviewed by Amnesty International in Venezuela, July 2007, said: "I am not ashamed to say I was raped because I was not to blame. And that is the first thing that a raped woman should know. That she is not to blame. Never, a raped woman should never feel guilty...I ask you that, when you report all this, you call for this to stop happening to women. I don't want the same thing to happen to my daughters and so I will not keep quiet."

The report, *'The law is there, let's use it' - Ending domestic violence in Venezuela*, was launched simultaneously in the capital Caracas and in several regions of the country. The level of debate in Venezuela about violence in the family was reflected in the widespread and sustained media coverage on television and radio and in newspapers from across the political spectrum.

The public response to street events and workshops was overwhelmingly positive and showed that Amnesty International's concerns had struck a chord. Among the key areas highlighted were the chronic shortage of shelters providing protection for women and their children fleeing violent situations and the authorities' failure to set up the promised specialized courts and implement training for the police and judiciary. These are measures that would make a real difference to the lives of women experiencing violence in the family. If the 2007 law is to be more than a paper promise, the authorities need to hear and react to the demand of survivors: 'the law is there, let's use it'.

For more information see, *'The law is there, let's use it' - Ending domestic violence in Venezuela* (Index: AMR 53/001/2008).

[*Photo caption: Amnesty International Venezuela activists launching their campaign against domestic violence, July 2008. © Amnesty International*]

IN BRIEF

Mexico: AIDS conference affirms human rights

Some 25,000 delegates gathered in Mexico City between 3 and 8 August at the XVII International AIDS Conference to discuss all aspects of HIV and AIDS, including legal, social and human rights issues. Throughout the week, a human rights networking zone, co-ordinated by the Open Society Institute and the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, hosted numerous speakers, activities and petitions, and coordinated a human rights rally towards the end of the conference. The rally was addressed by prominent speakers and Amnesty International joined the call for human rights to be central to the response to HIV.

Sudan: former prisoner of conscience says thank you

In December 1990 Amnesty International raised the case of the imprisoned Sudanese poet Mahjoub Sharif. He had not even been allowed to see his wife when the cards started arriving, brought in to him by sympathetic prison guards. He received some 2,000 cards, which he shared with the other prisoners and hung to decorate the drab

walls of the cell. The constant message for the prisoners on most cards was “You are not forgotten”.

After Mahjoub Sharif left the prison, he managed to hide the cards from the Sudanese security services throughout 11 house searches, and in August 2008 carried them back to London, writing letters to every address there was to invite the senders, after 17 years, to a thank you party.

Two of the original letter writers came with friends to the celebration organized by Mahjoub in a church hall in London. Many others wrote back to say how happy they were to hear from him.

. [*Photo caption: Mahjoub Sharif, Sudanese poet and former prisoner of conscience.*
© Amnesty International]

Worldwide Appeals

Algeria: Human rights lawyer sentenced

Algerian human rights lawyer Amine Sidhoum is well known for his work opposing torture and unfair trials of those accused of terrorism. He also works on behalf of families of the “disappeared” in Algeria. These activities have exposed him to harassment by the Algerian authorities.

In April 2008, Amine Sidhoum was handed down a six-month suspended prison sentence and fined 20,000 dinars (over US\$300) for “bringing the judiciary into disrepute”. The conviction relates to a 2004 newspaper article in which he is quoted as saying that the 30 months one of his clients spent in prison without trial amounted to “abusive judgement”.

Amine Sidhoum says that he actually described the case as one of “arbitrary detention”. His sentence comes a few months after the UN Human Rights Committee expressed concern at harassment of human rights activists in Algeria and recommended that defamation be decriminalized.

Both Amine Sidhoum and the prosecution have appealed against the sentence. The prosecution is seeking a stronger penalty, as criminal defamation can carry a prison sentence of up to two years and a fine of US\$3,745.

Amnesty International believes the case against Amine Sidhoum is politically motivated and intended to prevent him from continuing his professional activities as a lawyer concerned with the protection of human rights. It considers his case to be part of a wider pattern of official harassment of human rights defenders in Algeria.

>Please write, expressing concern at the sentence handed down to Amine Sidhoum. Call for all charges against him to be dropped. Ask what steps the President is taking to ensure that human rights defenders are able to carry out their work without hindrance, in accordance with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

Send appeals to:
Abdelaziz Bouteflika
Président de la République

Présidence de la République
El Mouradia, Alger, Algeria
Fax: +213 21 609618
Email: president@el-mouradia.dz
Salutation: Your Excellency

[Photo: © Amnesty International]

Guatemala: harassment of human rights defenders

Forensic anthropologist Fredy Peccerelli, his family and colleagues are suffering death threats and ongoing harassment for their work as human rights defenders (HRDs).

Fredy Peccerelli heads the organization Fundación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala (Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation, FAFG), which carries out forensic investigations and exhumations of mass graves dating from the internal armed conflict (1960-1996).

The work of the organization has contributed to legal action against members of Guatemala's former military government accused of serious human rights violations. It appears that this work has led to the threats and harassment.

In one incident, an email sent on 19 May 2008 threatened to kill Fredy Peccerelli, his sister and four leading members of FAFG. It warned: "Fredy your day will come soon and it will be the turn of the other members of the institution afterwards, you'll never get the chance to testify [...]". Police protection has been provided, but appears to be inadequate.

Amnesty International has adopted Freddy Peccerelli's case to highlight the work of HRDs prior to the 10th anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders on 9 December 2008, a day before the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), a key opportunity to raise the profile of HRDs.

> Please write, urging the authorities to take immediate steps to provide effective protection to FAFG members and the relatives of Fredy Peccerelli, as requested by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in 2002 and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in 2006. Call on them to order an immediate and thorough investigation into the threats, identifying those responsible and bringing them to justice. Remind the authorities of the right of HRDs to carry out their activities without any restrictions or fear of reprisals.

Send appeals to:

Sr Francisco Jose Jimenez Irungaray
Ministro de Gobernación
6a. Avenida 13-71, Zona 1 (Palacio PNC)
Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala
Fax: +502 2413 8658
Salutation: Dear Minister

[Photo: © Private]

Saudi Arabia: Domestic worker at risk of execution

Siti Zainab Binti Duhri Rupa has been detained in Medina Prison since 1999. An Indonesian migrant worker and mother of two, she is alleged to have "confessed" to the murder of her employer, a crime which carries the penalty of execution by beheading.

At the time of Siti Zainab's arrest, the police reportedly suspected her of suffering from mental illness. She was convicted and sentenced to death after trial hearings about which very little is known. She was denied legal assistance and representation throughout her pre-trial detention and is not known to have had a lawyer to represent her at her trial or adequate translation.

Amnesty International has been campaigning for the commutation of her sentence since 1999. The organisation has expressed concern about the reliability of her alleged confession and drawn the Saudi Arabian authorities' attention to UN Commission on Human Rights resolution 2004/67, which urges states "Not to impose the death penalty on a person suffering from any form of mental disorder or to execute any such person". In November 2001 the government informed the then UN Commission on Human Rights that Siti Zainab had been sentenced to death for the murder of her employer and that her fate was pending until her employer's child reached the age of majority. Under Shari'a rule of *qisas* (retribution), the heirs of murder victims have the right to pardon the offender either freely or in exchange for *diya* (compensation), or to ask for their execution. Amnesty International does not know the age of the child and is concerned that Siti Zainab may be at imminent risk of execution.

Please write, calling for the death sentence imposed on Siti Zainab to be commuted, along with those of all others on death row, as a step towards abolition of the death penalty. Urge that she is given full and immediate access to legal representation, consular assistance, adequate translation facilities, and medical assistance if necessary.

Send appeals to:

King Abdullah Bin 'Abdul 'Aziz Al-Saud
Office of His Majesty The King
Royal Court
Riyadh
Saudi Arabia
Tel: + 966 1 488 2222
Salutation: Your Majesty

Turkmenistan: human rights defenders imprisoned

Activists Ogulsapar Muradova, Annakurban Amanklychev and Sapardurdy Khadzhiyev were detained in Turkmenistan between 16 and 18 June 2006, apparently in connection with their links to the Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation (THF), a human rights organization.

On 19 June 2006 national television broadcast a report that the Minister of National Security of Turkmenistan had accused Annakurban Amanklychev of being engaged in "subversive activities" and planning a revolution in Turkmenistan. The accusations

mainly related to attendance at human rights courses in Poland and Ukraine, the gathering and passing on of human rights information to the director of the THF in Bulgaria, and cooperation with foreign journalists from the BBC and Galaxie Presse. The then President Saparmurad Niyazov was reported as saying: "Let people condemn the traitors. The entire population is proud of their motherland, whereas they are trying to harm it."

Annakurban Amanklychev, Ogulsapar Muradova and Sapardurdy Khadzhiiev were sentenced on 25 August 2006 to between six and seven years' imprisonment each for "illegal acquisition, possession or sale of ammunition or firearms." Their trial lasted less than two hours. There are strong indications that the charge was fabricated to punish them for their human rights activities.

On 14 September 2006, the family of Ogulsapar Muradova was informed of her death in custody. THF director Tadzhigul Begmedova told Amnesty International that relatives viewing her body "saw a huge wound on her forehead and marks on her neck." Amnesty International is concerned by allegations that all three detainees were subjected to torture and ill-treatment in detention.

Please write, expressing concern about the death in custody of Ogulsapar Muradova and calling for the authorities to conduct a thorough, prompt and independent investigation into her death. Call for Annakurban Amanklychev and Sapardurdy Khadzhiiev to be released immediately and unconditionally.

Send appeals to:

President Berdymukhammedov

Presidential Palace

744000 Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

Fax: + 993 1235 5112

Salutation: Dear President Berdymukhammedov

[Photo: © Private]

[Page 4]

INTERVIEW: Activists in Iran lead struggle for women's rights

"Flexibility and ingenuity is what makes us a true social movement"

Extract from an interview with Sussan Tahmasebi, founding member, Campaign for Equality. This Iranian women's movement seeks to change all gender-biased laws in Iran. Its 'One Million Signatures Campaign' will demonstrate that one million Iranians want women to have equal rights

Q: What has the Campaign achieved in the past two years?

The Campaign managed to make discussion of women's rights a national priority, at a time when the government seems determined to limit women to the private sphere and define them as second class citizens.

Women's equal rights in marriage, equal inheritance rights, end to polygamy, equal compensation to women for bodily injury or death (blood money) and an end to stoning, are examples of issues the campaign addresses. Other women's groups,

including reformist religious, conservative and secular groups, have taken up these issues more seriously.

Small victories can be claimed. For example the judiciary issued a directive ordering insurance companies to use the same rates for women they use in compensating men for bodily injury and death.

Q: What kind of activities do you carry out?

Besides raising awareness through direct dialogue and collecting signatures for the One Million Signatures petition, we lobby artists, academics, intellectuals, political parties, policymakers and community and religious leaders.

As the space is increasingly restricted, we develop new strategies. We now have a website, we organize training, seminars and conferences, we use arts to reach out to the public. We recently organized a series of street plays, addressing polygamy and women's unequal rights in marriage.

Q: What problems have you encountered?

Our meetings, seminars and conferences are banned. Nearly 50 of our members have been arrested, some while collecting signatures for the Campaign's petition and some when meetings in our homes have been broken up. They are usually subjected to vague security charges, such as endangering national security, or spreading propaganda against the state. Many have pending court cases, or have been given suspended or mandatory sentences, which they intend to appeal.

Yet activists are determined to continue their work.

Q: How can we support the work of the Campaign?

Amnesty International took action for imprisoned members, putting pressure on the government to release and drop charges against them. We hope that Amnesty International and its members will continue supporting the Campaign, pressing for the release of activists and calling on the Iranian government to reform discriminatory laws.

[*Photo caption: Sussan Tahmasebi, women's rights activist and human rights defender. © Private*]

Governments must act now for a global Arms Trade Treaty

In October 2008, governments around the world will have the chance to begin a negotiating process for an urgently needed global Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). The Landmark 2006 majority vote by the UN General Assembly in support of such a process showed that the political will now exists to tackle poor regulation in the arms trade.

The establishment of a global ATT is essential to help prevent human rights abuses including attacks on civilians, deprivation of basic needs, extrajudicial executions,

forced displacement, genocide, systematic rape, and torture. For this reason, human rights must be at the heart of an ATT.

The consequences of irresponsible transfers of arms and ammunition are horrific, contributing to serious violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

In Somalia, for example, small arms and large conventional weapons have been used to carry out attacks resulting in widespread civilian casualties. Iraq has one of the highest rates of small arms possession per head of population in the world. The large scale and poorly controlled importing of these weapons into the country is exacerbating the human rights violations and abuses suffered by the Iraqi people.

World leaders must grasp this opportunity to steer the arms trade towards binding principles on the responsible use and transfer of conventional arms, which comply with international standards and respect human rights.

For more information see Amnesty International's report *Blood at the crossroads: Making the case for an Arms Trade Treaty* (ACT 30/011/2008), available from mid-September.

ACT NOW: The World is Watching

Send a clear message to your government that the world is watching to ensure they support and Arms Trade Treaty.

- Join the World is Watching action outside your parliament organized by your section or structure during the ATT week of action (13-19 September 2008).
- Play the new Control Arms viral game at www.controlarms.org/en/games/catch-bombs and email your government asking them to support tough controls on the arms trade.

[Photo caption: A woman and child try to avoid the shelling on the opposite side of their building, Hamar Bile, Somalia, 20 February 2007. © Private]

IN BRIEF

Saudi Arabia: eight Bahraini nationals released

Eight Bahraini men were released without charge in Saudi Arabia on 12 July 2008, after over four months in detention.

The men had travelled from Bahrain to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and were arrested by security forces when they arrived on 28 February 2008. Their families had no contact with them and were not aware of their exact whereabouts for several weeks.

The eight men included seven teachers – Sayyid Ahmad ‘Alawi, Majeed al-Ghasra, Muhammad ‘Abdullah al-Mu’man, ‘Abbas Ahmad Ibrahim, ‘Isa ‘Abdul-Hassan Ahmad, Muhammad Hassan ‘Ali Marhoun and Ibrahim Marzam al-Haddad – and an engineer, Muhammad Mahdi Khalil. They were held in solitary confinement throughout their detention.

Amnesty International welcomes their release and their return home, but remains concerned about many other detainees who are being held incommunicado by the Saudi Arabian authorities. Such detainees, about whom the authorities disclose little information, are at risk of torture and other ill-treatment. In July 2007, Saudi Arabia's Ministry of the Interior announced that there were at least 3,000 alleged political opponents then being held without charge or trial. The Ministry reportedly disclosed that they had detained 9,000 people between 2003 and 2007 as part of the "war on terror".

[*Photo caption:* Eight Bahraini nationals returned home after their 134-day detention in solitary confinement in Saudi Arabia, July 2008. © Amnesty International]

Ukraine: rise in racism

Citizens and foreign residents in Ukraine, including asylum-seekers and refugees, are facing an alarming rise in levels of discrimination because of the colour of their skin. They are at risk of attacks by members of the public and are subjected to frequent document checks and racial profiling by the police. There have been more than 30 racist incidents in Ukraine this year, four of which were murders. The majority of the victims were Africans or Asians. "We fear for our children", one African Kyiv resident told Amnesty International, "they might be attacked or killed at any time." An Amnesty International report on the increase of racially motivated crimes in Ukraine was launched on 10 July. The failure to apply existing legislation and the failure of the police to acknowledge the gravity of the crimes, the report claims, has led to a situation of virtual impunity for the perpetrators. Local media, NGOs and international organizations attended the launch of the report at a press conference in Kyiv. The event was preceded by meetings with the Ukrainian authorities, who generally refused to acknowledge that racism was on the rise and that the situation required urgent attention.

From September, Amnesty International will be campaigning alongside local NGOs in Ukraine for the elimination of racial discrimination from state policies and practice and for the protection of individuals from racially motivated attacks. To get involved please contact ajung@amnesty.org.

For more information see Ukraine: Government must act to stop racial discrimination (EUR 50/005/2008).

***The Wire* is changing**

Amnesty International's newsletter *the Wire* will be taking a short break for the next two months while it undergoes a revamp. It will return in December, on the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, full of new articles, actions and campaigns you can get involved in.

The new print edition will be longer and less frequent, with regular electronic bulletins in between covering appeals, news and information updates. Worldwide appeals will continue normally during October and November.

Thanks to all our readers and contributors, including those who took part in the readers' panel, for their continuing support and help in shaping *the Wire*.

Best wishes,
the Wire team, Publications Programme
ENDS