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**AMNESTY AROUND THE WORLD**

1. **DEATH ROW PRISONER SAVED**

Malaysian death row inmate Shahrul Izani bin Suparman was pardoned in December 2016 after our two-year fight for his clemency application. His family was notified in February. Your 10,505 petitions and letters gained Shahrul’s case the global attention it deserved. He is now out of solitary confinement after seven years and his release is scheduled for 2030.


2. **FREE AFTER 17 YEARS**

Uzbekistani journalist Muhammad Bekzhanov was released on 22 February – he was one of the world’s longest imprisoned journalists. He served 17 years after being sentenced in an unfair trial in 1999 for his critical reporting and political opposition activities. He was tortured and otherwise ill-treated while in custody. Muhammad was a case in our 2015 Write for Rights and our Stop Torture campaign.


3. **POSSIBLE CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY**

In December, we released a report on the violence in northern Rakhine State, Myanmar, where security forces use violence against the Rohingya community which may amount to crimes against humanity. The report also highlighted the plight of Rohingya who fled to Bangladesh and are living in appalling conditions. Northern Rakhine State is difficult to get to and the government has blocked access to the area. We used satellite images, photos and video analysis to help expose what was happening there and to pressure Aung San Suu Kyi and the military to stop human rights violations and investigate.


4. **LEARN ABOUT REFUGEES’ RIGHTS**

Amnesty offers unlimited and free places for the online course Human Rights: The Rights of Refugees. Everyone with online access can sign up, whether you are in school, at university or want to follow it on your own in your free time. You will learn how to stand up for refugees’ rights and connect to a global community of campaigners. The three-week course runs until 19 November 2017 in English, French and Spanish.

SIGN UP HERE

1. **1 MILLION ACTIONS FOR SNOWDEN**

On 13 January 2017, our partners the Pardon Snowden campaign handed more than 1.1 million signatures to the US White House calling on then President Obama to use the presidential pardon for Edward Snowden. Amnesty supporters from 110 countries worldwide stood up for Snowden as part of our Write for Rights, tweeting, writing letters and signing our petition; thousands wrote solidarity messages as well. The fight isn’t over yet – we need to keep up the pressure.


2. **EXECUTION OF JUVENILE HALTED**

Good news! In February, the Iranian authorities informed the family of Hamid Ahmadi, who was at imminent risk of execution for a crime that took place when he was just 17 years old, that they have stopped all plans to execute him. This development is a direct result of the huge public campaigning and private advocacy efforts spearheaded by Amnesty International.


3. **PRESSURE ON PALM OIL TRADER**

Following our report on violations of workers’ rights on palm oil plantations in Indonesia, Wilmar – the palm oil trader involved – initially responded by publicly saying it would investigate our findings. However, we have learned that Wilmar is using intimidation tactics against workers to try to discredit our discoveries. None of the big consumer and food companies that buy from Wilmar have shown that they have taken any action to address the human rights violations in their supply chain. We will ramp up our campaigning with a week of action at the beginning of May targeting the consumer brands. Our campaign continues until Wilmar improves conditions for all workers employed in its palm oil production.


4. **ACTION TAKEN FOR ALEPPO**

Almost 300,000 people took action on amnesty.org to call for safe evacuation from eastern Aleppo in Syria in December. With an astonishing 284,439 page visits on just one day, the campaign and advocacy efforts put pressure on key governments and the UN Security Council, and we hope contributed to evacuations being completed safely and the UN Security Council voting to deploy UN monitors.


5. **35-YEAR SENTENCE COMMUTED**

Days before the end of his term, US President Obama commuted the sentence of army private Chelsea Manning on 17 January. Manning had been serving a 35-year sentence in a maximum security prison after releasing information via WikiLeaks in 2010 that pointed to potential crimes under international law and human rights violations by the US military.


6. **FOR ALEPPO**

Almost 300,000 people took action on amnesty.org to call for safe evacuation from eastern Aleppo in Syria in December. With an astonishing 284,439 page visits on just one day, the campaign and advocacy efforts put pressure on key governments and the UN Security Council, and we hope contributed to evacuations being completed safely and the UN Security Council voting to deploy UN monitors.


“Do you agree with Amnesty International’s analysis of the state of human rights as described in its annual report?” This question was put to several candidates in the French presidential election debates on major TV shows right after the launch. To me, this was one of the best indicators of Amnesty’s achievement, as far as media work is concerned. Not only was the message widely spread but it became the trending topic of the day and decision-makers were asked to react to it.

Launching the report in France – at a time when the country is at a crossroads with elections in May – was a strategic and emblematic choice. Human rights have been deeply embedded in French national values for hundreds of years, but today, hard-won freedoms are being traded away for security. France has been under a state of emergency, the new normal for its second year. This year’s Amnesty International Report focuses on the poisonous political rhetoric of “us versus them” which has surged across the world and is also mirrored in developments in France.

To achieve such great reactions to the report in France, we teamed up with colleagues from Amnesty’s International Secretariat in London and organized the biggest press conference I had ever seen in my almost 10 years with Amnesty. More than 70 journalists from all major French media and foreign correspondents attended. The event was a thrilling experience.

READ MORE
On 16 May, Amnesty launches its new global campaign promoting human rights defenders, and the protection of the ever-shrinking space they operate in. Now – more than ever – it’s crucial to stand up and defend the human rights of those being pushed aside, arrested, locked up, intimidated, forgotten or even killed. We must help people reject the rhetoric of division and the stigmatization of the other.

Human rights defenders can be on the frontline because – by shining a spotlight on injustice and taking action on behalf of others – they expose themselves to abuse. Today, this abuse is on the increase as a way to silence them.

But we can all take strength from their courage and we can all act as human rights defenders. This can mean signing a petition, contacting your elected representative on human rights issues or perhaps taking part in a demonstration. We all need to make more noise and take more action to protect and promote human rights which are the bedrock of free and just societies.

In this issue, we talk to an exiled human rights defender from Oman and hear from some courageous women who fight for women’s rights. We also report on what happened when refugees directly replied to social media messages from people around the globe who voiced their anger about the lack of response to the global refugee crisis. The refugees asked these people to take their outrage one step further and to take action on their behalf. We are also illustrating the journey of a prisoner through one of the notorious torture prisons in Syria in which thousands of inmates have been killed. Stories like these – about such horrific torture – show why the work of human rights defenders is so important.
People across the world joined the Women’s Strike on 8 March, demonstrating the consequences of “a day without a woman” working at home or in the office. Together, they voiced their frustration with the increasingly regressive trend for women’s rights worldwide.

The World Economic Forum predicts it will take another 169 years for the gender pay gap to close. This is just one of many shocking figures that show how long we might have to wait before women and girls can achieve equality.

Across the globe, some 225 million women are unable to choose whether or when to have children. Each year, about 47,000 women die, and another 5 million are disabled, as a result of unsafe abortions. An estimated 35% of women worldwide experience physical or sexual violence. More than 32 million girls around the world – compared with about 29 million boys – are not in primary school. And 700 million women alive today were married before they were 18 years old.

With so much left to be gained, women and girls around the world are saying enough is enough. Here are five women who are battling on the frontline to claim their rights, refusing to wait in the face of injustice. They won’t wait and neither will we.

“I hope that parents do not despair about searching for their missing children. We, civil society, should work together to help them reunite with their children. The government should also invest more in these efforts instead of hindering our work!”

Su Changlan
She won’t wait...to reunite another child bride with her parents
A medical doctor in South Africa, Tlaleng Mofokeng is a force to be reckoned with. Not only is she a committed medical professional, but she also fearlessly advocates for sexual health as a radio presenter, spreading her message far and wide.

“I won’t stop until the right of women to have an abortion is respected and provided for safely,” she says. “In South Africa, women die every year due to unsafe abortions, yet politicians think they can use women’s reproductive rights as a political ping-pong ball.”

Tlaleng is also challenging rape culture, and championing the drive to get health practitioners to treat patients with respect and without discrimination – she is a true human rights defender.

Connie Greyeyes is an “accidental” activist. An Indigenous Cree woman living in the province of British Columbia in Western Canada, she realized that a shocking number of Indigenous women in her community had gone missing or had been murdered. She began organizing to support the families of these women and took the demand for a national inquiry to the Canadian capital, Ottawa. According to official figures, more than 1,000 Indigenous women have gone missing or been murdered in Canada in the last three decades. The efforts of Connie and many other Indigenous women across Canada have borne fruit, with the Canadian government finally announcing an inquiry in 2016.

“When we’re together, there’s so much strength. Being able to smile even after finding out that your loved one was murdered. How can you not be inspired by women who have been to hell and back over their children? You know, fighting, trying to find justice.”

Connie Greyeyes
She won’t wait… for another sister to be stolen
Former school teacher Su Changlan’s story is not unique. One of her closest friends says that hers is the story of many women in China. She couldn’t stand by when she heard about girls trafficked as brides or parents whose children had gone missing. She did her best to help them and many others, her activism extending to land rights issues and support for pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong. She did all this knowing that she might have to sacrifice her freedom in the process. Sadly, this is just what happened. On 24 March, she was sentenced to three years in prison.

Until recently, Jeanette John Solstad Remø was John Jeanette, her name signifying the dual identity she was forced to accept every day in Norway. Although this former submarine commander felt her future could only be female, Norwegian law did not allow her to change her legal gender without undergoing a compulsory “real sex conversion”. This would have involved having her reproductive organs removed, as well as a psychiatric diagnosis. She refused to put herself through any of this. As a result, her driving license, passport, medical prescriptions, even her library card, still referred to her as male. She campaigned hard against Norway’s abusive law and her actions, alongside those of her supporters – including Amnesty – scored a huge victory. In 2016, Norway finally adopted a new law on legal gender recognition, which allows transgender people to choose their gender. On International Women’s Day, in acknowledgement of this milestone, she changed her name to Jeanette John.

“The whole world thinks they have a right to tell women what to do with our vaginas and our uteruses. Women’s health seems to be a free for all for everyone to have an opinion on.”

Dr Tlaleng Mofokeng

Fearless and formidable, Loujain al-Hathloul defied Saudi Arabia’s driving ban and faced the consequences. In November 2014, she was detained for 73 days for live-tweeting herself driving into Saudi Arabia from the United Arab Emirates. Released in February 2015, she went on to stand for election in November that year – the first time women were allowed to both vote and stand in elections in the state. However, despite finally being recognized as a candidate, her name was never added to the ballot. Today, she continues her fight to create a better future for her fellow Saudis – one where women enjoy their rights as full citizens of their nation.

READ MORE
http://bit.ly/InWoD17
‘IT’S A HUMAN SLAUGHTERHOUSE’

The Syrian government runs a calculated campaign of extrajudicial executions by mass hangings at Saydnaya Military Prison near Damascus. We exposed these harrowing findings in a report published in February 2017 and in response, more than 180,000 people from all over the world took action. They signed a petition calling on Russia and the USA to ensure independent monitors are allowed access to investigate conditions in Syria’s brutal prisons.

Saydnaya, Saydnaya…
This horrible name. I wish they had killed me rather than leave me to rot in this place.

This is not a prison it’s a slaughterhouse. All this for what? Because I was critical of Assad and his cohort.

All I did was to go to a couple of demonstrations... so many of us went... peacefully. I am so hungry. It's been at least three days since I ate something.

The guards are here. And they're calling out names... including mine.

I am being transferred to a civilian prison. Anything is better than Saydnaya.
Why aren’t we leaving?
Why are we being taken to the solitary cells?

It’s so cramped. It’s okay – soon we will be in a better place.

I can’t take these new beatings. It has never been so bad. Are we really being transferred? Or is this our last punishment?

We are on the move again.

We stopped. Why?
We are in another building.
In Saydnaya, every week – and often twice a week – groups of up to 50 people are taken from their cells to be hanged. These hangings take place in the middle of the night and in total secrecy. As many as 13,000 people were hanged at Saydnaya between 2011 and 2015.

We also found that the Syrian government holds Saydnaya prisoners in inhumane conditions which have led to huge numbers of deaths. Detainees are dying as a result of repeated torture and the systematic deprivation of food, water, medicine and medical care. These abhorrent conditions – which are replicated in detention centres across Syria – led to the death of at least 17,723 people in government custody in Syria between March 2011 and December 2015. As the Syrian crisis enters its seventh year with more than 250,000 civilians killed, victims and their families deserve truth, justice and reparation; perpetrators from all parties to the conflict must be held accountable.

These images from our video tell the story of a prisoner in Saydnaya.

**SUPPORT JUSTICE FOR SYRIA NOW**


All illustrations © Cesare Davolio/Amnesty International
In a unique new social media campaign, refugees tweeted real-time video messages urging people worldwide to put their outrage into action.
OUTRAGE IS NOT ENOUGH

When @SaraBashiri tweeted that the USA’s response to refugees lacks credibility, she probably didn’t expect an almost immediate and very personal video reply from a young man in a refugee camp. But that’s exactly what she got.

Just hours later, on 1 February 2017, Abu, aged 22 and originally from Burundi – featured on the front cover – tweeted her this message: “I really appreciate that you have not forgotten about us,” he said. “But tweeting is not enough. To have a future, I need an education,” Abu said. “But I might have to drop out of school because we don’t have enough to eat or money for the right medicine.

“That’s why I’m asking you to take action. Please go to amnesty.org and sign up to pressure world leaders to share the responsibility for refugees like me, instead of leaving countries like Kenya to cope alone.” Abu’s message to Sara concluded, “Please do it now. Thank you.”

Sara’s surprised response came quickly: “Thank you so much Amnesty! For all that you do!” she tweeted. “I will take proper steps to take action to help those like Abu!”

The actions taken during Amnesty’s Outrage is not Enough project contributed to a total of more than 800,000 signatures gathered worldwide during 2016/17 for Amnesty’s global I Welcome refugee campaign. These were presented to the new UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, by Amnesty’s Secretary General, Salil Shetty, on 6 February 2017.

FIND OUT MORE

All images © Michael Christopher Brown/Magnum Photos
The camp was set up in northwestern Kenya, near the borders with Uganda and South Sudan.

Roughly the number of people living in Kakuma

Minimum estimated number of different nationalities living in different sections in the camp, organized like a small city

Where most of the camp’s residents come from. Many of these people have lived in Kakuma for decades – or even all their lives

Refugees can only leave the camp with government permission, leaving many feeling stranded and isolated, and unable to study or find work

Minimum estimate number of refugees living in Kenya

FACT BOX: KAKUMA REFUGEE CAMP IN KENYA

1992

200,000

19

SOUTH SUDAN AND SOMALIA

TRAPPED

500,000
How did you become a human rights defender?
I had been blogging, but in 2011 I became engaged in human rights activism. I had ideas about freedom, human rights and liberty – but that year I was one of the organizers of a peaceful protest which called for more freedom of expression, the right to gather, peaceful protest and political reforms. Later – the same year, as a result of the arrests of some of my friends in the course of a peaceful gathering – I really became active.

It [activism] is not something you want to do. It is something that comes from inside you. You want to exercise your rights, but then you find a person or law bans you – and you ask yourself “why?” I want to not just have but also say my opinion. It is my right. You do not think about it [activism] until they act against you; until you face arrest. And then it takes hold of you.

You were arrested twice. How did you keep going?
Did I feel danger? Of course. But I endured jail. Look, the principles at stake here – of human rights – are more important to me than, say, a religion. And I believe in this. It is not just something I do, like a hobby, maybe to help some friends or those I don’t even know. No. When I stand up for them, I stand up for myself and my family. I stand up for my people. If you want to have a good country, with good policies, this is what you have to do.
How has human rights activism changed your life?

I’m free now and I find that through what I’m able to do, my life has become more valuable. What I’m doing gives meaning. It has taken four difficult years. I left Oman in December 2012. I was in a bad situation: no job, no future and I did not know anything about my tomorrow. I was in Lebanon for a year and I was followed and harassed. Maybe the easiest thing would have been to say, “I’m sorry. Can I please return to my country? I’m ready to do anything you want me to do”. That’s the only way you can live a safe and secure life.

But I couldn’t do that. I could not sell my soul to someone else. I resolved to find a safe place where the state respects you, where I could become engaged in rights work, to help others, to help improve difficult situations… Sure, there are obstacles. There is no work; no one really pays you for it [activism]. I know that. But even when I find paid jobs, can I forget this [activism]? No way. It’s what gives a meaning to your actions.

Where are you at now? What’s next?

I’m a refugee now in the UK and I’m active again. I’m in touch with other activists from Oman – now sadly most abroad – and others, from countries in the Gulf. We try to help each other as best as we can. I just want to see freedom for us all, in terms of expression, association and assembly. We can do more. But we need your [Amnesty International] support and international support. We need training but also funding. Our voice supplements yours and together we can make the Omani and all governments care more about their conduct, reputation and justice – not just at home but in the eyes of the world.

I have experienced frustrations. I feel terrible, guilty, when a journalist or activist is jailed… I want to do more but I don’t know how. But when they are released or when sentences are not implemented… I feel elated. It is at times like this that I feel proud to say that I am a human rights defender.

FACT BOX: OMAN

| POPULATION: | 4.7 million |
| HEAD OF STATE: | Sultan Qaboos (since 1970) |
| Criticism of the ruler is forbidden |
| Free speech and peaceful assembly restricted by use of broad provisions – including in the penal code and Cyber Crimes Law |
Sabrina Mahtani, Amnesty International West Africa Researcher based in Dakar, Senegal, talks about monitoring the human rights situation amidst the political turmoil in Banjul, capital of Gambia, at the beginning of the year.
On 16 January 2017, I waited in the border control queue at Banjul Airport wondering if I would be deported back to Dakar. Several journalists on my flight had been sent back that day. International media were scrambling to get back to Banjul as tensions were growing after President Yahya Jammeh reversed his initial acceptance of his election defeat in December and was refusing to step down. Independent radio stations had been shut down, the army had taken over the Independent Election Commission, the President-elect Adama Barrow had been taken to neighbouring Senegal for safety and thousands of Gambians were also fleeing, fearing violence. Luckily, I was not sent back and was able to monitor the human rights situation on the ground and support human rights defenders.

Just weeks before, in December 2016, I had left a different Gambia, when human rights change seemed to be just around the corner. Then, thousands of Gambians had come out to support the coalition of opposition parties that had formed...
to contest the election which took place on 1 December. They did this at great risk to themselves in a country where freedom of expression had been suppressed for 22 years. Human rights abuses such as torture and enforced disappearances were commonplace. The internet and international phone lines were blocked before polling day and we struggled to report back to our Dakar office and conducted media interviews via an erratic satellite phone.

Brave Gambian election monitors had counted results all through the night and a tense morning when, on 2 December, the results coming in indicated a shock defeat by Jammeh. We held our breath as the Chair of the Electoral Commission announced the results on national TV, despite facing intimidation. We witnessed tears of joy, calls to loved ones in exile to tell them to come home, shouts of “we are free”, “new Gambia” and celebrations in the streets of Banjul.

A few days later, we sat in a packed courtroom witnessing several courageous lawyers continuing their defence of political prisoners who were arrested during peaceful protests in April and May, such as Ousainou Darboe, head of the opposition UDP party. We had been documenting these cases and were one of the first organizations to bring them to the world’s attention. We witnessed the release of prisoners of conscience whom Amnesty International supporters had advocated for. These prisoners had spent months in detention and we celebrated their release with them and their families in their homes.

However, this jubilation soon turned sour when on 9 December, Jammeh went on television and said he was rejecting the results. The Christmas and New Year period was tense, the future of Gambia unclear. Having returned to Dakar, we spent our days monitoring human rights developments and engaging with human rights defenders on social media, a channel to share information relatively securely.
In January, we went back to Gambia on a joint mission with Human Rights Watch. Young people had started a social movement – Gambia Has Decided – urging Jammeh to step down in light of the election results. We documented several cases of people who had been arrested for selling T-shirts featuring this slogan and of soldiers – suspected of being loyal to the President-elect – who had been detained without access to family and lawyers. With the world focused on the political events, it was important to highlight human rights violations and to show solidarity with Gambian human rights activists. “At least we know that if anything happens to us, it will not be ignored”, one activist told me. “This is some form of protection.”

On 21 January, Jammeh agreed to step down and leave Gambia for Equatorial Guinea following extended negotiations facilitated by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and a growing civil society movement urging him to give up power. Human rights defenders over the years played an important role in bringing international attention to human rights abuses in Gambia and they emboldened citizens to continue to demand for their rights to be upheld.

The new government has already taken many positive steps: Gambia has rejoined the International Criminal Court, former officers from the National Intelligence Agency are on trial for the murder of a prominent opposition leader and political prisoners have been freed. The new Cabinet includes two political prisoners, Ousainou Darboe and Amadou Sanneh, who were former prisoners of conscience supported by Amnesty International.

READ MORE
TOUGH TIMES FOR DARFURI STUDENTS IN SUDAN

The situation of many students from the Darfur region, western Sudan, enrolled at Sudanese universities is a far cry from a student life of studying, free debate and preparing for a future career. Instead, they face violence, discrimination and violations of their human rights.

At least 13 Darfuri students were unlawfully killed between 2003 and 2016. The killings have gone uninvestigated and unpunished. More than 10,000 Darfuris have been arrested and tortured or otherwise ill-treated at universities across Sudan.

Salma – a 27-year-old Darfuri student activist and member of the Darfur Girls Students’ Association – was arrested four times between 2011 and 2014. In March 2014, officers of the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) arrested her for campaigning against the forced eviction of Darfuri female students from her residence hall in Khartoum. She was verbally insulted, and beaten with batons, the butt of a gun, water hose pipes and sticks during her arrest and interrogation. She was also electrocuted and her hip was dislocated in the beatings.

On 5 October 2014, Salma was rearrested. She was blindfolded and shackled and taken to the NISS offices in Khartoum North for interrogation. The security officers dragged her and pulled off her Toub [traditional Sudanese dress]. Salma was drugged and after waking up, the officers showed her a video of four officers raping her.
“I… woke up and I found myself lying on the bed naked. All the four security officers there were looking at me… One of them showed me a video of them raping me… the four officers took turns and raped me.”

After spending one month in detention, Salma was released in November 2014. She left Sudan and sought asylum in another country in 2015.

Torture, arrests and unlawful detentions of Darfuri students are happening amid the ongoing armed conflict in Darfur which started in 2013 and in which the Sudanese government continues its campaign to suppress and persecute the peoples of Darfur.

Darfuri students have been at the forefront of highlighting the situation in Darfur by protesting and disseminating information at universities about the conflict. To silence their voices, government security forces are carrying out a crackdown on the freedom of association, assembly and expression of students from Darfur. In several universities, public forums organized by Darfuri students have been violently dispersed and shut down. Some of the students have been suspended, expelled from universities or denied their graduation certificates on grounds of their political activism or failure to pay fees despite a fee waiver. Due to this persecution, some Darfuri students fled Sudan, contributing to the exodus of intellectual talent.

In January 2016, security forces and students affiliated to the ruling party – armed with knives, iron bars and machine guns – interrupted and violently dispersed a peaceful assembly of Darfuri students at the University of El Geneina. The students were beaten, and fourth-year economics student Salah Al Din Qamar died from injuries sustained from beatings by NISS officers. About 27 students were arrested. A police investigation into Salah’s death was closed, citing the cause or circumstances of his death as unknown.

**TAKE ACTION AND TWEET**

#Sudan government, promote human rights in universities. Allow #DarfuriStudents to freely discuss and protest on issues that affect them.

“We live in very tough times here. And in Darfur our families have been displaced and become homeless. When we try to explain such conditions to the students here in Khartoum, who have no idea about what is happening in Darfur, the government supporters attack us. They do not want the people to know what is going on in Darfur.”

Jalal, Darfuri student
More people are born intersex than you might think. Their sex characteristics fall outside typical male or female “norms”. Early – often medically unnecessary – interventions to “normalize” their gender continue to be unchallenged. We need to do more to protect their rights.

“Is it a boy or a girl?” It’s often the first question people ask parents about their baby. It’s a question based on the assumption that the world is divided into two groups of people, male and female, and that everyone’s biological and genetic characteristics – our sexual organs, chromosomes and hormones – neatly fit into one of the two categories.

But that is not always the case. So what happens to people who don’t conform to the standard norm of two biological sexes? Every year, an estimated 1.7% of children in the world are born with variations of sex characteristics. These variations are diverse – for instance, some children have genitalia outside the standard norms for boys or girls, and others have feminized bodies but have male XY chromosomes or masculine bodies and XX female chromosomes.

In Germany and Denmark – where Amnesty International recently did research – many of these children undergo surgery during infancy and early childhood. At this age, they are unable to consent to such medical interventions. The responsibility to decide whether or not these children will undergo surgeries then falls to parents, who are often not provided with adequate information to make an informed decision.

A recent study in Germany reveals that between 2005 and 2014, an average of 99 “feminizing” surgeries – where the vulva, vagina, clitoris or perineum is altered to look closer to what is perceived as “typical” female genitalia – were carried out per year. For the same time period, 1,630 “masculinizing” surgeries – where the appearance of the scrotum, testicles and penis is altered to look like what is accepted as “typical” male genitalia – were performed each year on children below the age of 10. During this nine-year period, the number of surgeries either increased or remained stable each year.

Most people interviewed by Amnesty International stated that the surgeries they had undergone as children were not medically necessary to safeguard their life or health. They were instead performed to make them conform to the standard norm of what a girl or a boy “should” look like. But the consequences of such operations should not be taken lightly. Many of the people Amnesty spoke with talked about lasting negative impacts on their health, sexual lives, psychological well-being and their gender identity.

When performed without informed consent or adequate information, these surgeries violate people’s right to physical bodily integrity and may have long-term consequences on their right to health and their sexual and reproductive rights, particularly since they can severely impede people’s fertility.

We now have a more detailed understanding of sex and gender and know that people don’t always fit within the binary of male and female. Medical practices which subject children to painful and often damaging surgeries for them to be either female or male cannot be allowed to continue.

FIND OUT MORE
“Around 1.7% of children in the world are born with variations of sex characteristics.”
Amnesty delegates Tracy Ulltveit-Moe and Nigel Rodley interview a woman about the disappearance of her husband. Guatemala, April 1985

Amnesty International pays tribute to former colleague Professor Sir Nigel Rodley who died in January. His vast legacy stretches across the human rights world in which he played a pivotal role over decades.

Nigel – as he was known to all staff – joined Amnesty as its first legal adviser in 1973. He then began to develop the long-range plan for the campaign against torture, one of Amnesty’s core campaigns to this date. His plan was submitted to a 1975 UN Congress in Geneva on the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders. That Congress put together a Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Being Subjected to Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration in December 1975.

Nine years later – on 10 December 1984, International Human Rights Day – the General Assembly adopted the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which gave legal force to the Declaration. It entered into force in June 1987. Over 160 states have now signed up to the Convention.

After leaving Amnesty as head of its Legal Office, Nigel was the UN Special Rapporteur on torture from 1993 to 2001, and from 2001 to 2016 he was a member of the Human Rights Committee. As one of the founders of the University of Essex Human Rights Centre, he taught and inspired students to become human rights defenders.

As well as for his great knowledge and humanity, Nigel is remembered by all who knew him as a kind, self-effacing and extremely warm colleague and friend who loved to dance and who regularly took a starring role in end-of-year staff pantomimes. He will be sorely missed on many levels.
“We believe connection is a basic need of every human being and no one should be denied their basic human rights to connect with their loved ones and to the outside world.”

Suki Chung, Regional Campaign Co-ordinator at Amnesty International East Asia

There are many ups and downs in the life of a human rights campaigner: progress is hard to achieve and setbacks are not infrequent. This is especially the case for North Korea where there is limited scope to influence the government in a way that translates into change on the ground. Yet even a North Korea campaigner can have a good day – as Suki Chung, Regional Campaign Co-ordinator at Amnesty International East Asia, found out in December.

In a blog post she wrote of her thrill on learning that the Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly had adopted a draft resolution on the human rights situation in North Korea that included some of the violations highlighted in a campaign she worked on.

“We knew it was not an easy campaign from the start,” she said. “North Korea is often... portrayed with a ‘hell-on-earth’ narrative sensationalized by media headlines along with the nuclear tests or risk of nuclear attacks.”

The campaign Connection Denied instead highlighted the right to freedom of expression in North Korea. “We believe connection is a basic need of every human being and no one should be denied their basic human rights to connect with their loved ones and to the outside world,” said Suki.

The additional few words of text in the formal UN document were a concrete step towards achieving some of the campaign outcomes Amnesty International wanted – to contribute to an effective international response and to compel the international community to hold North Korea to account for its human rights violations.

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A woman talks on a mobile phone in Pyongyang, North Korea
‘THE MOST COMMON WAY PEOPLE GIVE UP THEIR POWER IS BY THINKING THEY DON’T HAVE ANY’

Alice Walker
African-American writer and activist