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URGENT ACTION NEWSLETTER

As an Urgent Action (UA) Network participant, you may send many letters to different government authorities throughout the world over the course of a year, responding to a whole range of abuses committed against individuals in those countries. How can you tell what effect you have achieved? It is quite possible that even after writing UA appeals over several years, you will not receive a single reply to any of your letters; you will be unaware therefore that the avalanche of letters from around the world may have had an unprecedented effect. You may learn of the progress of a case through the further information which is circulated about that case in the form of UA follow-ups which are issued by the International Secretariat (IS), but you would be unlikely to hear what happened to a person once the case had been closed. Similarly, you might never know how grateful people are for the work you do on their behalf.

On UA sheets we ask people who do receive a reply from a government to send a copy on to the IS, and as a result we see many government replies over the course of a year. These replies can be very useful for the research team, to gauge the responsiveness (or otherwise) of a government. But that is not the only reason why it is useful for us to receive copies from you. We can also act as a news

grapevine, letting you all know when a response has been received. That way, even if you yourself did not get a letter from a government, you will know that some kind of response was indeed elicited. This knowledge, in itself, can be reward enough.

In addition to copies of government replies, the IS is also more likely to receive, directly or via a participant, letters thanking you for your efforts. One of the problems of having such a large network of participants all working on a single case, is finding ways to pass on these thanks to everybody. Of course, even at the IS we do not hear about every single thank-you letter, but what we do hear helps us to carry on our work from day to day, not to lose hope, but to be reassured that our work brings results. This newsletter passes onto Urgent Action network participants some heartwarming examples of those results, in the hope that, like us, it will help you to carry on the valuable work that you do.



DO GOVERNMENTS EVER RESPOND TO OUR APPEALS?

As we said above, here at the IS we receive many copies of government replies over the course of a year. Of course, the number of replies sent by a government is meaningless if the human rights situation in the country does not improve. However, replies do serve as an indication that a government is sufficiently concerned about the situation (or even its image!) to bother with a reply; it is possibly the first step towards taking action to improve its human rights record.

In some cases, it would be difficult to ignore the kind of pressure that UA appeals can place on governments, because of the sheer size of the network, and the vast numbers of appeals that can arrive within a very short space of time: the Presidential Adviser on Human Rights in Colombia recently reported that the President's Office received 20,000 letters within one week! And even though we estimate that those to whom we ask you to send copies of your appeals will get much fewer letters than the government (not everyone has the resources and the time to send copies of their appeals to all addressees), it was recently reported in the AI Newsletter that the office of Wolmer do Nascimento in Brazil received more than 1,000 copies of appeals from AI members, after a UA (UA 450/90) was issued protesting against death threats he and his children had been receiving.



In some cases there is evidence that governments are moved into action not because of the content of your appeals, but simply because they find the volume of mail so irksome. One West African head of State actually complained to an AI delegation that as soon as they detained someone for questioning, a deluge of letters started to arrive - the government had recently been on the receiving end of several Urgent Actions in response to illegal detentions and torture. Another West African head of State suggested that an AI Section would be most welcome in his country as it could lead to a vast increase in postal revenue. He had clearly noticed the volume of recent UA appeals!

Wolmer do Nascimento (pictured right)
with Amnesty International
delegate Bacre Waly Ndiaye
during a visit to Brazil

BUT WHAT SORT OF THING DO GOVERNMENTS ACTUALLY WRITE?

Having said that it may not necessarily be the content of your appeals which prompts a government to respond so much as the volume of letters they receive, on other occasions the authority concerned goes to some trouble to address the concerns voiced in your letters. Others respond by denying all charges, others by accusing AI of political bias, or pleading mitigating circumstances - some by being abusive. Below are some examples, to give you an indication of the kind of letters governments write.

The UA expressing concern about the killings in Lithuania in January 1991 (UA 11/91) prompted this response from the Embassy of the USSR in London:

"The situation in the Baltic republics is extremely tense, very difficult and complicated. There is a sharp confrontation between different sections of the population in Lithuania, as well as Latvia and Estonia, which caused dramatic developments in Vilnius and Riga. We deeply regret the tragic events and the loss of human lives, and we fully understand the humanitarian motives of your letter and your concern about the situation in the USSR."

To date, the IS has received from UA participants 53 copies of this reply from the Commissioner of National Police in Israel concerning allegations of torture against Riad Shehabi (UA 307/90):

"I have received your letter concerning Riad Shehabi, and since several letters regarding this subject have been received, I am therefore taking the liberty of replying to your letter in this manner. Mr Shehabi has

been released from detention and I should like to assure you a police file has been opened to investigate the allegations made by citizens from various parts of the world, and all efforts will be made to bring it to a satisfactory conclusion".

We do ask UA participants to send copies of their appeals to the local embassies of the country concerned, and often the Ambassador will reply personally to these letters; here is a letter to a Japanese participant from the Guatemalan Ambassador in Japan concerning death threats (UA 420/90):

"Thank you very much for your kind note regarding your humanitarian concern about the well-being of José Vicente Soto and his girl friend, Carmen Rubeña Cepeda, who supposedly have been continuously threatened in Guatemala.

You must rest assured that the Government of Guatemala observes and promotes the respect for Human Rights. Also, that all Guatemalans are equal under the law and therefore, are protected equally by the law. If Mr. Soto and Miss Cepeda have been threaten, not only do they have every right to their protection, but upon proving the source of the threats, to have those responsible brought to justice.

As in any other democracy, Guatemala has institutions to serve and protect all Guatemalan nationals; the popularly elected government of Guatemala will not tolerate any behavior that may hamper the Rights of any of the Guatemalan nationals".

It is heartwarming to see occasionally a more candid and open reply rather than the stock response which is so common.

Here is a letter from the President of the Human Rights Commission of the Chamber of Deputies in Bolivia, concerning death threats received by two men who were involved in investigations into allegations of torture at the Granja de Espejos prison (UA 467/89):

"First, the commission should like to thank you for your concerned letter regarding the problem we uncovered in the case of the Human Rights Commission at present congress, I can personally assure you that we will do everything possible to get indictments against the responsible parties in this horrible crime.

Drs. Colanzi and Mendivil are under special protection and are at the present time out of harms way. The commission shall propose to congress [to] modify the Police Organic Law to prevent that this will NEVER can happen again. Now that the Penal Instruction Judge handle the case, he has not issued his final judgment. We trust that the proof presented to us have only be judged one way.

Thanking you for your sincere interest at this unfortunate affair, so far away from your country".

Attached to this letter were several letters and press articles relating to the Granja de Espejos investigation begun by the Human Rights Commission itself.

It is evidently worth sticking to the recommendation to write polite letters - this is more likely to elicit a polite response (as in the example above). It is also worthwhile stating your profession, as it inclines the government authority to treat your letter with respect. Here is a good example of this, a letter from the Legal and Technical Secretary

to the President of Argentina, in response to an appeal concerning the reintroduction of the death penalty (UA 321/90):

"As I can gather, you are already advised that the Government withdrew the proposal to reintroduce the death penalty. I wish to confirm this is so and that there is no plan to resubmit this proposal to Congress. I can well understand your strong feelings on the subject arising from the humanitarian vision you have linked to the noble profession of nursing you exercise. Thank you for your kind letter."

Replies that we receive range from extremely short to extremely detailed. Sometimes, they can be as short as two or three sentences. This letter is from the Commander of the Sri Lankan army in relation to Father Eugene Hebert's "disappearance" (UA 348/90):

"This disappearance of Father Eugene Hebert a person personally known to me since 1957 and to the troops as a keen sportsman is causing us great concern. I assure you that the troops had nothing to do with this disappearance. Rest assured that we are doing our best to locate him."
(Signed) Lieutenant General, Commander of the Army.



This letter came from the Bangladeshi Ambassador in the USA, in response to a letter from a participant concerning UA 483/90 (the arrest of opposition leaders following the state of emergency imposed in November 1990):

"Thank you for your recent letter regarding prisoners of conscience in Bangladesh. I wish to inform you that the persons mentioned in your letter are now free. In this context, I wish to inform you that election to a sovereign parliament will take place in Bangladesh on 2 March 1991. All Political Parties and leaders including those mentioned in your letter, are fully active in working together with the Govt. for establishing democracy in the country. I appreciate your interest in Bangladesh".

But while some letters are short and to the point, others go into great detail. Several governments send press articles concerning the case (see **UA cases in the Press**, Page 20). Many AI groups around the world have received reams of paper from the Armed Forces Command in El Salvador. These replies would invariably include detailed allegations of abuses by the FMLN armed insurgents, but nothing relating to human rights abuses by the army.

The United Kingdom High Commission in Canberra, Australia, responded to an Australian lawyer who had written expressing concern at several shootings in Northern Ireland, with a long letter, accompanied by a press release from the RUC Headquarters, and a House of Commons report into the incidents. Here is an extract from the letter:

"The British Government is determined to take every practical step possible to protect its citizens and to bring this violence to an end; but it firmly believes that, in doing so, the security forces in Northern Ireland must always act within the law. For, if policemen or soldiers were to flout the law, they would

be doing the terrorists' work for them; destroying the fabric of a free society much more effectively than assassinations or bomb outrages..."

At least 32 UA participants received a personally signed letter from the Prime Minister of Belize, announcing that an investigation would be conducted into reports of torture of a Guatemalan national in Belize (UA 462/90). Each letter contained a copy of the 'Statutory Instrument appointing the Commission of Inquiry'. (See **UA cases in the Press** for an article which appeared in a British local newspaper about a member of an AI group who received one of these letters).

It can be seen by the above examples that some governments do make efforts to reply to at least a proportion of the appeals they receive (one government is reported to have received 20,000 appeals, and attempted to reply to every single letter, but had to give up after the 8,000th!). However, in some countries, it is extremely unusual for a government to reply at all. Every now and again the IS will receive a copy of one of these "rarities", of which here are a couple of examples.

The Kenyan authorities rarely respond to Urgent Action appeals; however, one member received a telexed response to a telex she had written on behalf of Koigi wa Wamwere (UA 408/90) to the Attorney General in Kenya; the response said:

"Your telex of 18/10/90 refers. I wish to inform you that Koigi wa Wamwere has not been detained but being held in connection with his activities against state security. He has already been brought before a court of law on a charge of treason with his accomplices. I would like to assure you that he will receive a fair trial by international standards."

Similarly, the Syrian authorities sent a message to a Swiss participant in response to

her telex she had sent in response to UA 425/90 concerning killings and arrests by Syrian forces. While containing a stock denial, the fact that any reply was received at all was regarded as significant. The reply says:

"Concerning the tlx that you sent on 23/10/90. We would like to inform you that the informations you received are wrong and they are fabricated by the French press. The Syrian Army is the one who transport General Aoun's wife and his daughters to the French Embassy in Beirut. It's not in our traditions and our custom to point a gun on the civilians who are not armed.

You can visit personally the arrested Lebanese who are loyal to General Aoun and you can see that they are under good care. We will hand them to the friendly Lebanese Army in the earliest opportunity".

There are very few examples of replies in which government authorities enter into substantive arguments, either on points of fact or on interpretation of events. With regard to the death penalty in particular, many governments simply say that "the contents of your letter have been noted". One reply, from the Jordanian Consul in Spain, refers to a participant's letter urging that the execution of two prisoners not proceed, saying:

"We understand that you do not agree with the given sentence, but that is our law".

"Comprendemos que Vd. no esté de acuerdo con la sentencia dictada, pero esa es la ley que tenemos".

In a reply to a participant in Hong Kong who urged the commutation of the sentence against Charles Walker (UA 334/90), the Assistant to the Governor of Illinois writes:

"The Governor remains convinced that the death penalty is an appropriate form of punishment for those convicted of the most heinous crimes, such as mass murders, the torture-murder of a child or the killing of an on-duty police officer".

Charles Walker was executed on 12 September 1990 whilst the constitutionality of the state's death penalty statute was under consideration. This was the first execution in Illinois for 28 years.

Other letters from governments, while not producing concrete evidence for their assertions, can make categorical statements concerning their human rights record. The Gabonese Ambassador in Spain wrote to a participant in Barcelona (in response to UA 338/90, concerning the detention of two members of an opposition party), saying:

"In our country, there are no political prisoners"

"Dans notre pays, il n'y a aucun prisonnier politique".

Similarly, the Congolese Chargé d'Affaires in the FRG says:

"There is no longer in Congo a single political prisoner. They have all been released and are free to speak to the national press".

("Il n'y a plus au Congo un seul détenu politique. Ils sont tous libérés et ont droit à la presse nationale".)

There are many other examples of the kind of response you elicit from governments. However, we hope that we have given you an idea of kind of feedback we get in the IS from the appeals you send. Occasionally, however, the feedback that we receive is through contacts, and not direct from the government itself. In May 1990 a member of CERJ (Consejo de Comunidades Etnicas "Runujel Junam", Council of Ethnic Communities "We are all Equal") in

Guatemala was the victim of an apparent extrajudicial execution in Sololá (UA 171/90). A source who went to Guatemala recently and travelled to Sololá, went to see the military commander there and asked him whether he was familiar with the case. He said he was "very familiar", and pulled out a bag, knee high, full of AI letters. Most of them were unopened, but he said: "We don't need to open them to know what they are. They come from Amnesty International".

LETTERS OF APPRECIATION

For UA participants, their concern for their fellow-human beings throughout the world is motivation enough to keep on writing appeal after appeal, year in, year out, seemingly forever. However, we are all fallible, and are bound to have times when we feel that all our efforts are wasted, or pointless. Therefore from time to time it is important to be reminded of the gratitude of those whom we have helped. Here follow several letters from prisoners who have been released.

René Sangolqui was arrested in Ecuador in May 1990, and was subjected to torture and held in prison for five months before being released in October. Before his trial many AI members received replies from the Interior Ministry, stating that René Sangolqui was guilty; at the trial the case was thrown out due to lack of evidence. A Belgian student received this letter from René, after his release:

"Warm greetings. Through these few words I wish to express my most sincere thanks, for your support and assistance. Thanks to God and to you I am free again..."

"De mis consideraciones le saludo con mucho aprecio, a través de estas cortas palabras quiero expresarle mis más sinceros agradecimientos, por su apoyo y colaboración ya que gracias a DIOS y a Usted hoy estoy nuevamente libre..."

Atondi Monmondjo Lecas had been in incommunicado detention without trial in Congo since August 1987, and in August 1989 went on hunger-strike in protest at his long-term detention without trial (UA 294/89); after the Urgent Action was issued he is reported to have been moved to a different place of detention, where conditions were less harsh, and where he was allowed to

receive visits. He was eventually released in August 1990.

In the same month we received the following letter:

"My dear friends,

Your humanitarian fight, to defend human rights and to lend a voice to those whom dictatorship reduces to silence, bears fruits. And I am living proof....

Thanks to your information, much has been made known about my deplorable conditions of imprisonment... I would like to thank you all without exception, all the people contacted by you who, through their interventions, compelled the Congolese authorities to release me from jail.

On behalf of my children, my family and relatives, I thank you with all my heart, not forgetting any of you, for all the initiatives you have taken. I will strive now to support your efforts to defend the rights and freedoms of the citizens of my country and of the world".

"Mes très chers amis,

Le combat humanitaire que vous menez pour défendre les Droits de l'Homme, pour donner également la parole à ceux que la dictature réduit au silence porte ses fruits. Et moi, j'en suis le témoin vivant....

Grâce à vos informations, l'opinion a appris beaucoup sur mes conditions déplorables d'incarcération... Je voudrais vous remercier tous, sans exception, tous les gens contactés par vous, et qui ont par leurs initiatives contraint le régime congolais à me sortir de la geole.

Au nom de mes enfants, de mes proches parents, et de ma famille, je vous remercie de tout mon coeur, de tous

les initiatives pris par tous, sans oublier un seul. Je m'engage désormais à appuyer vos efforts dans la défense des Droits et Libertés des Citoyens de mon pays et du monde".

Now that I, myself, have passed through this bitter experience, I pledge to redouble my efforts in the struggle for human rights, and to stand against any violation of human body and of the human dignity."

Just recently, AI learned of a psychiatrist in Egypt, Dr Mandour, who was arrested in February 1991 and tortured before being released 15 days later (UA 44/91). Following his release, AI received the following message of thanks from Dr Mandour:

"Dear Friends and Colleagues,

I would like to express my deep gratitude for your efforts which resulted in my release Saturday evening February 23 1991, by decision of the Minister of the Interior, annulling the administrative order against me.

I should like to inform you that I was released without having had any formal charges made against me, nor was I questioned, throughout my two weeks of detention, by prosecution officials.

I would also like to relate to you the effect your efforts had upon my morale when I learned of them upon my transfer to Abu Zaabal Prison and my meeting with Egyptian Organization for Human Rights lawyers. I felt that I was no longer alone, and the weight of insults, humiliation and physical abuse I had suffered, became much lighter.

It is difficult to find appropriate words to express my gratitude. Your efforts have strengthened my faith in our common movement for human rights, and have increased my confidence that our efforts are worthwhile.

In another recent case, Dr Sari Nusseibeh, professor of Philosophy and a leading Palestinian figure in the Occupied Territories, was arrested in Jerusalem and served with a six-month administrative detention order. We issued a UA (UA 36/91) on his behalf, calling for his immediate release as a prisoner of conscience; on 3 February the detention order was reduced from six to three months. On 25 February, Sari Nusseibeh wrote from jail:

"Dear Friends,

I cannot find the proper words to express my gratitude for the interest you have taken in my case and the solidarity which you have expressed. Inside a prison cell, such support is invaluable. Above all, it reinforces one's faith in what is human in a situation that seems shockingly inhuman...

I am sending you this letter simply to thank you, and also to keep you informed. Finally, I would like to say that this incident has not shaken my commitment to the need for negotiations and a political settlement that ensures freedom and independence for my people, nor has it shaken my faith that such a settlement is inevitable.

*With gratitude and affection,
Sari Nusseibeh"*

The "hidden victims" of human rights violations are often the relatives of those imprisoned, or under sentence of death. Feeling powerless, often afraid of making complaints themselves, the knowledge of your activities on behalf of their loved ones can be a tremendous support to them.

In our last newsletter we printed a photograph of Andrey Zapevalov in the USSR, convicted of the murder of two women and sentenced to death (UA 464/89) - his case is now with the clemency commission. Zapevalov's mother has written several letters to Amnesty International. One of these letters says:

"Above all I would like to thank you for the support and help you have given to me and to my son, Andrey, for the enormous amount of work you have done in the struggle to save my son, for the letters which have been coming in from various countries in support of Andrey, for your mercy and humanism.... I would like to thank from the bottom of my heart all those who have been fighting for my son's life, for their sincere generosity, selflessness and goodness. It is only thanks to such people that our Earth and life upon it is preserved. Please convey to them my profound respects [literally: my low bow] and wishes for their health, well-being and happiness".

In another letter she says: *"I thank you for your laborious and enormous amount of work, done by people who do not know either me or my son, but who nevertheless have given a particle of their soul and heart in order to save Andrey. There are no words to express the feeling of enormous gratitude to all those who have taken part in this act of mercy..."*

My son knows about your help, he asked me to convey to all people who have ... supported him in misfortune, his deepest gratitude."

In another death penalty case in the USSR, that of Vladimir Manzenko (UA 310/90), his sister-in-law wrote to AI with the news that his sentence had been commuted to a 20-year term of imprisonment. She says:

"We believe that this is to your and your organization's credit alone, as we only received formal replies to our protests, informing us that our appeals had no foundation whatsoever. (...) I would also like to express to you and your organization, Amnesty International, profound thanks from myself, from Yury and Vladimir [note: Yury is Vladimir's brother who was implicated in the same crime, but received a prison sentence] and from their parents for the fact that you did not remain indifferent to our misfortune and that you immediately reacted with your good deeds to our sorrow".

From Haiti, we received a letter from the daughter of Dr Sylvan Jolibois, who was arrested in January 1990 and ill-treated in detention (UA 47/90). The letter says:

"Just a few words to thank you for the help that your organization has provided to my father, Dr. Sylvan Jolibois. My family and myself are very grateful to Amnesty International... Knowing my father and his indomitable nature, I know he will continue to fight for a fairer government. Do not be surprised then, if in the near future we ask you for help again. Thank you once again".

"Juste quelques mots pour vivement vous remercier de l'aide que vous et votre organisation ont apporté à mon père, le docteur Sylvan Jolibois. Ma famille et moi se sentent reconnaissants envers Amnesty International... Connaissant mon père et sa nature indomptable, je sais qu'il va continuer à lutter pour un gouvernement plus juste. Ne soyez donc pas surpris si, d'ici quelque temps, je fais encore appel à vous. Avec tous mes remerciements".

Even if our efforts produce no concrete results, in terms of the release of a loved one, or evidence of their fate, the continued support of AI members can be a source of great strength for relatives forced to come to terms with their loss.

In 1983, we issued a UA on behalf of a "disappeared" person in Guatemala; there was no news, and eventually the case was taken up as an "investigation" case by two AI groups, in the Netherlands and the USA. Last year, the victim's mother wrote to the Dutch group saying:

"We are very grateful for your efforts, and we hope that the facts which we need so much, and for which you have been working for so long, will come to light.

Sadly, we also think that the Guatemalan authorities send formal, mechanical replies..., or rather, stereotypical formulas which can fill pages with pleasantries, but which really say nothing. Despite our scepticism and bitterness, we believe that the mere fact of keeping going, pressing for an investigation, is worth the effort your institution is making".

"Agradecemos en todo lo que vale sus gestiones y esperamos que lleguen a conocerse los datos que tanto nos interesan y por los que ustedes han trabajado por tanto tiempo.

Lamentablemente, también creemos que los oficiales de Guatemala envían respuestas en una manera mecánica y puramente formal..., o bien, son fórmulas protocolares estereotipadas, que puede llenar páginas enteras muy amables pero sin decir realmente nada.

A pesar de nuestro escepticismo y nuestra amargura, creemos que el solo hecho de mantener vivo el reclamo y la exigencia de una investigación, ya vale la pena el esfuerzo que ustedes como institución hacen".

We have also received letters of thanks from local human rights activists, people for whom the knowledge of our support is essential to keep up their morale, and to give them the courage to continue fighting for human rights.

Dalton Prejean was sentenced to death in Louisiana, USA in May 1978. He was 17 years old at the time of the offence for which he was convicted. Eleven years after being sentenced, his execution was scheduled, for 30 November 1989. He received a last-minute stay. Sister Helen Prejean, a tireless campaigner against the death penalty, wrote this letter to Amnesty International after the stay:

"Dear friends, The storm pitched against the life of Dalton Prejean has subsided now. Dalton is alive. And I write this letter to you because you played such a vital part in saving his life, those in leadership but also those who made phone calls and sent out letters and who spread the word to others.

Dalton was scheduled for execution shortly after midnight of November 30... Dalton called me at 12.30 from the death house. We talked awhile. He was sober but resilient, a strength I have noticed in others, and he was so appreciative of all the efforts made on his behalf... We finished talking and he said goodbye; his family was arriving for their last visit and with one last thank you he hung up. I wept. I thought it was the last time I would ever talk to him alive.

But you, Amnesty, you made a tremendous difference. Through you, calls, letters and telegrams flooded the Pardon Board and Governor's Office. Yvonne Campbell, Chair of the Pardon Board mentioned to Dalton's attorney that they were getting letters from all over the world. It helped give the Board courage and perspective to vote for life.

The stay of execution came at 4.00 in the afternoon from (of all places) the US Supreme Court. It was a miracle. A group of us gathered on Wednesday night in front of the

Governor's house - a large group, mostly students, mostly from Amnesty International. Keith Jennings from the AI Southern Regional Office came to Louisiana to help us organize the event. The media was there. We made our mark.

The road away from the death house in the middle of the night after an execution is the loneliest road in the world. Because of you that road was empty at midnight Nov 29/30.

I thank God for you. Sister Helen Prejean"

That was in December 1989. On 16 April 1990 the US Supreme Court vacated the stay of execution it had granted earlier, without giving written reasons. Dalton Prejean was executed on 18 May 1990.

People to whom you send copies of your appeals also find your support invaluable. We received the following from the organization COFADEH (Comité de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos en Honduras, Committee of Relatives of Disappeared Detainees in Honduras), after UA participants had sent them copies of their appeals in response to UA 517/90:

"Thank you for the solidarity you have shown with our work. We urge you to continue pressing the Honduran government to investigate the fate of these fellow-citizens and others who have disappeared in our country".

"Gracias por su solidaridad demostrada en nuestro trabajo; rogamus continuar presionando al gobierno de Honduras para esclarecer el paradero de estos conciudadanos y demás desaparecidos existentes en nuestro país".

To this letter they attached a copy of their own newsletter.

UA participants were also asked to send copies of their appeals to the organization Lafanmi Selavi in Haiti, in response to a UA expressing concern about the apparent extrajudicial execution of Mariano Delaunay, a teacher at a Roman Catholic school in Port-au-Prince (UA 282/90). The founder of Lafanmi Selavi, Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide, now President of Haiti, was also the subject of a UA (UA 494/90), after a bomb attack at a rally where he was speaking in early December 1990. In August 1990, Father Aristide wrote to the Haiti research team, saying that his organization had received 148 copies of appeals. He asked that the following letter be passed onto UA participants:

"I got your letter and indeed, you make me happy. Happy to realize we are trying to make life better in spite of the distance. Happy to have one more friend building solidarity to work for justice. Thank you very much, dear friend.

Here we still have a lot of problems to get justice. The authorities do not want to hear the voice of those who do not have a voice.. Once again, thanks a lot."

In July 1990 we issued UA 311/90 concerning of acts of violence committed against peasant families in Brazil. UA participants were asked to write calling for a full inquiry into the alleged ill-treatment of detainees, and seeking assurances that any evidence extracted as a result of ill-treatment should not be admitted in court proceedings.

On 29 January 1991, the International Secretariat received a letter from the Sociedade Paraense de Defesa dos Direitos Humanos (SDDH), Society for the Defence of Human Rights in the State of Pará. The following are extracts from that letter:

"We would like to thank Amnesty International for the marvellous dedication it gave to this problem and for disseminating it to the rest of the world. Here in Marabá we received more than 100 letters from countries from every continent..... all sending copies to the Brazilian authorities. This is a beautiful

and extremely useful example of international solidarity. Besides having helped us enormously with solving our problem, it fills us with happiness and emotion to know that we are not alone and that our concerns about justice, human rights and peace are echoed with resonance and human sensitivity in many places of the planet. This gives us great strength to continue. Thank you, A.I.

"Agradecemos a maravilhosa dedicação com que a AI tratou este problema e o difundiu para o resto do mundo. Aqui em Marabá recebemos mais de uma centena de cartas de países de todos os continentes ... trazendo cópias das manifestações às autoridades brasileiras. Este bonito e extremamente útil exemplo da Solidariedade Internacional, além de ter nos ajudado enormemente à solução do problema, nos enche o peito de alegria e emoção por sabermos que não estamos sozinhos; que nossas preocupações de justiça, direitos humanos e paz encontram eco, ressonância na sensibilidade humanista em muitos lugares do planeta. Isso' nos dá muita força para continuarmos. Obrigado AI.



NEWS OF UA CASES

Nermin Alkan, a 16-year-old schoolgirl, was detained in October 1990 for hanging an anti-war poster in her school, and it was feared that she would be tortured or ill-treated while in detention. After she had been transferred from police custody to prison, she said she had been slapped and punched during her detention by the police. She was later committed to prison and finally released from custody at a hearing on 25 December 1990 at Istanbul State Security Court where she was being tried for membership of an illegal organisation. She had been held for 75 days.

The research team on Turkey writes: All those who participate in UAs should be assured that we frequently receive confirmation that your efforts have been effective. Two journalists who were tortured while in detention in April 1990 say that they noticed that they were treated somewhat better after the UA had been initiated. Ahmet Timurtas, pictured right, who has a long history of being detained and tortured, was arrested in October 1990 (UA 429/90), but was released the following day after being treated very properly. Apparently as he was being released, the people at the police station said: *"Oh, you're a favourite of Amnesty's, aren't you?"*; Ahmet Timurtas wished us to pass on his thanks for our swift action. In other cases, though detainees may not be better treated, all those concerned without exception say that they are grateful for your efforts which demonstrate to those in authority that detainees are not forgotten by the outside world, and that this serves as a

protection against them becoming another number in the figures of deaths in custody.

Members of the UA network must also wonder about how cases are followed up after the action has been closed, particularly in cases where complaints or torture or ill-treatment have been made. Although the action is closed, the file is not. AI will continue to monitor the subsequent history of the case and the individuals involved. Where allegations of torture are made, AI encourages lawyers and other contacts to keep us informed of what action is taken by the courts and the prosecutor in response to such claims.

Unfortunately, in many cases no enquiry is opened, due to lack of medical evidence (which is difficult to obtain since the methods of torture preferred leave very few physical traces, and medical examinations are frequently perfunctory) or because the torturers cannot be identified (victims are almost invariably blindfold). However, in some cases claims are upheld and those responsible are brought to justice.

AI may also take action at a later stage through for example, a RAN action, if it is considered that those arrested do not receive a fair trial - particularly where they are prosecuted on the basis of evidence extracted under torture.

GOOD NEWS STORIES

We also hear from time to time of real successes, often several years after the original UA was initiated.

In July 1989, we issued a UA (UA 215/89) on behalf of six prisoners in the then Yemen Arab Republic, who faced imminent execution. For a year there was no further news that we could pass on to the UA network; however, following a visit of the Secretary General to the (now) Republic of Yemen in November 1990, the Chairman of the Presidential Council, General 'Ali 'Abdullah Saleh, agreed to commute the death sentences passed on five of the six people mentioned in the UA, along with the sentences of three others who had been tried in absentia. He also agreed to pardon them and to release the five who were reportedly being held in Ta'iz Central Prison.

Pictured right are two former Somali POCs - Suleiman Nuh Ali (top) and Abdi Ismail Yunis - who with their families finally made it to the US, with help from AI, following their release in early 1989. Both had been arrested in 1982, were tortured and eventually charged and tried in February 1988 and sentenced to death, commuted to 24 years' imprisonment; both were released in the general amnesty of early 1989. Between them they had been the subject of three UAs: UA 351/85, UA 37/88, and UA 252/88. In June 1989 they met an AI delegation who were on a visit to Somalia, and who asked that they be allowed to leave the country to take up fellowships at their former colleges in the US. In October 1990 they were finally allowed to leave, and are now settled in the US, where they are in touch with AIUSA. They have expressed their thanks for all AI's efforts on their behalf.

We hope these examples give you encouragement to continue your invaluable work on behalf of victims of human rights abuse throughout the world.

UA CASES IN THE PRESS

Another way of working for those in need of our help is to mobilize public opinion; it is for this reason that we often ask you to send copies of your appeals to newspapers in the countries concerned. Below are some examples where the newspapers have printed participants' letters on their Letters Page.

This letter appeared in the Bangkok Post on 25 September 1990, concerning six members of the National League for Democracy in Myanmar (UA 361/90):

The following two letters appeared on consecutive days in the National Concord in Nigeria; participants had been asked to send appeals on behalf of 12 young men who had been sentenced to death (UA 320/90). In January 1991, we learned that one of the men had died in prison, apparently as a result of medical neglect. We issued a follow-up asking for further appeals.

Several UA networks publicize UA cases by persuading newspapers in their own country to publish the text of UAs; below is a cutting of two Urgent Actions reproduced in the German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung; the newspaper reprints two UAs every fortnight. On the right is a cutting of a UA reprinted in a Czech newspaper Respekt, published in Prague.



As we mentioned earlier in the newsletter (under government responses), some governments reply to participants' letters by sending them press cuttings relating to the particular case. These two articles (below, and right) were sent to a UA participant in Denmark from the Sri Lankan embassy in Sweden, in response to their appeal concerning the "disappearance" of Father Eugene Hebert.

Another way of publicising a case in your own country is by interesting a local newspaper in a story about a UA case. Printed right is a cutting about an English schoolgirl who received a personally signed letter from the Prime Minister of Belize, announcing that an investigation would be conducted into reports of torture of a Guatemalan national in Belize (UA 462/90).

Several newspapers are prompted to write their own articles about a case in response to the deluge of letters that UA participants have sent them. For example, thousands of appeals were sent to Chile in response to a UA issued on 7 September 1990 concerning the closure of 35 "disappearance" cases on the basis of the 1978 Amnesty Law. On 27 September the article below appeared in the daily newspaper El Mercurio. Here are extracts of what the article says:

The caption reads: *"Amnesty International members sent letters..., deploring the application of the Amnesty Law. In the photograph, several of the letters have also been received at "El Mercurio".*

"Amnesty International: Expresses Disagreement with Amnesty [Law]".

Members of Amnesty International have sent letters,... in which they express their disagreement over the application of the Amnesty Law in the case of "disappeared" prisoners between 1973 and 1978. (...) These letters, which have also been sent to "El Mercurio" ... were sent by voluntary members of the worldwide human rights organization from France, Germany, Canada and the United States. They also ask that the resolution carried on 20 December 1978 at the 90th Plenary Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly be respected".

A UA participant in Finland received a letter from the Editorial Page Editor of a Wyoming newspaper to whom she had sent a copy of her appeal on behalf of Mark Hopkinson; accompanying his letter is an article he wrote for the Editorial Page (below). He says that he publishes almost all of the letters he receives - he gives letters he receives in other languages to language teachers in the local high school

and then publishes the translated version. In his letter he says: *"The Star-Tribune believes that the letters to the editor section has created a genuine public forum for our vast and sparsely populated state. I think that Amnesty, through its membership, provided a great service to the state of Wyoming - it caused our citizens to seriously debate the issue of the death penalty. We owe all of you our gratitude."*