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On the final day at the NGO Forum of the UN World Conference on Women, Amnesty International delivered petitions to several embassies in Beijing calling for action on women victims of human rights violations.

During the 10-day Forum, some 5,000 signatures were collected on the petitions appealing on individual cases from 11 countries, ranging from women raped in Bosnia-Herzegovina to those on death row in the USA.

"The people who signed our petitions have given a voice to the women who can't be here because they are imprisoned, "disappeared" or have died at the hands of the state," said Pierre Sané, Secretary General of Amnesty International.

"At the time of the World Conference on Women here in Beijing we want to pressure their governments to act now to end these persistent and preventable human rights violations."

The delivery of the petitions comes six months after Amnesty International launched a worldwide campaign on the human rights of women, during which time the organization's members internationally have campaigned, lobbied and written letters on behalf of these individual cases.

Visits were made to the embassies of Brazil, Myanmar, Rwanda, South Korea, Sudan and the USA to deliver the petitions. The petitions on cases from Algeria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, China, Kuwait, and Turkey could not be delivered today, but will be presented to the governments at a later date.

Appeal case details

Algeria

Sixteen-year-old Katia Bengana was killed as she walked home from school on 28 February 1994. She was shot because she was walking in the streets without wearing the hidjab, the Islamic veil. Amnesty International is calling on armed Islamist groups to stop killing and threatening women for not complying with the Islamic dress code or for what they may consider "un-Islamic behaviour".

Bosnia-Herzegovina

Mirjana (not her real name) is a Serbian women, who in June 1992 was one of four women gang rape repeatedly for five hours by seven different men. She is one of countless women raped since the war broke out in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1992. Amnesty International is calling on the Presidents of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia to investigate all reports of rape by soldiers and to bring those responsible to justice.

Brazil

Edmeia da Silva Euzebio, 47, was one of the Mothers of Acari who banded together after the "disappearance" of their children in Rio de Janeiro in 1990. She paid for her search for justice with her life in January 1993, when she was shot dead while walking down the street. Amnesty International is calling on the government to make sure that those responsible for Edmeia's death, and for the "disappearance" of her son and 10 other be brought to justice.

China

Phuntsog Nyidron, a Tibetan Buddhist nun, was tortured, tried and imprisoned following a independence demonstration in October 1989. She is now serving a total of 17 years in prison, the longest-known sentence for a female political prisoner in Tibet. Amnesty International considers Phuntsog to be a prisoner of conscience, and is calling for her immediate and unconditional release.

Gao Yu is a prominent freelance journalist held since October 1993, and was sentenced to six years in prison after a secret trial in November where she had no legal representation. She was charged with “disclosing state secrets” in articles she had written for Hong Kong publications. Amnesty International considers her a prisoner of conscience and is calling for her immediate and unconditional release.

Kuwait

Hamda As'ad Yunis, 69, is was sentenced to death in Kuwait in 1991 during the blatantly unfair Martial Law Court trials that followed the Iraqi withdrawal. Her sentence – imposed apparently because she continued to work as a teacher of Arabic during the occupation – has since been commuted to life. Amnesty International is asking for a full judicial review of the case.

Myanmar

Dr Ma Thida, 28, was sentenced to 20 years in prison following her arrest in 1993 for campaigning for Myanmar's main opposition party, the National League for Democracy. Ma Thida worked as a campaign assistant to recently released prisoners of conscience Aung San Suu Kyi. Amnesty International considers Ma Thida to be a prisoner of conscience and is calling for her immediate and unconditional release.

Rwanda

Agathe Uwilingiyimana was Rwanda's first woman prime minister, committed to power sharing between the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups. Agathe, 41, and her husband were among the first victims of the genocide that claimed over half a million people. They were killed by presidential guards just hours after the president's plane was shot down on 6 April 1995. Amnesty International is calling for the government to establish an independent and impartial judicial system able to prevent violations, promote human rights and end impunity.

South Korea

Park Yong-gil, 75, was arrested in 1955 unauthorized visits to North Korea. She has been in prison now for 40 years, and there are concerns about her health. Amnesty International considers her to be a prisoner of conscience and is calling for her immediate and unconditional release.

Sudan

Samira Hassan ali-Karrar has protested against the execution of her husband, who was one of 28 army officers executed in 1990 for an attempted coup. For her protests, she has received death threats and has been detained. Amnesty International is calling on the government to end the harassment of Samira.

Turkey

Eren Keskin, a lawyer and member of the Human Rights Association, has been repeatedly harassed with death threats, physical assault, and arbitrary detention. In September 1994, she was found guilty of “separatist propaganda” and sentenced to two years in prison. Her sentence is under appeal and she is free, but the threat of prison hangs over her. Amnesty International is calling on the Prime Minister to urge her to ensure that Eren does not go to prison.

USA

Faye Copeland, at 73 the oldest person awaiting execution in the USA, was sentenced to death in 1991 along with her husband for the murder of five men. She remains on death row despite her present attorney's claims that she was a battered wife, cowed into submission by her violent and abusive husband. Amnesty International is calling on the Governor of the State of Missouri to grant clemency to Faye Copeland.

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