

BAHRAIN

Mohammad Jamil 'Abd al-Amir al-Jamri, a 33 year-old civil engineer with the Ministry of Health, was arrested in 1988 and was reportedly tortured in custody to force him to confess. In 1990 the State Security Court sentenced him to 10 years' imprisonment after an unfair trial.

Mohammad al-Jamri, son of a leading religious figure in Bahrain's majority Shi'a community, was accused of spying for Iran, a charge he has vigorously denied. He was convicted by the State Security Court, which tries all cases concerning internal or external security. Procedures in this court fail to comply with international standards for fair trial. Proceedings are usually held *in camera*, and there is no provision for appeal against either the verdict or the sentence. Mohammad al-Jamri, like many other defendants tried by this court, was denied access to his lawyer until immediately before his trial.

Those tried before the security court can be convicted on the basis of uncorroborated confessions, which need only be recorded by the public prosecutor or the police, a practice which has encouraged the security forces to resort to torture to obtain confessions. Following his arrest, Mohammad al-Jamri was reportedly severely tortured in al-Qal'a Prison. Before he made his "confession", which he repudiated in court, he was severely beaten and made to stand still on one spot, blindfolded and with his hands bound behind his back, for four days. He is now reportedly held in al-'Adliya Prison.

Please send courteous letters appealing for a re-trial, according to international standards for fair trial, and for an investigation of the torture allegations, to: His Highness al-Sheikh 'Isa Bin Salman Al Khalifa/ Office of His Highness the Amir/The Amiri Court/Rifa'a Palace/Rifa'a/ Bahrain.

BRAZIL

Edméia da Silva Euzébio, one of a group of mothers who had campaigned for investigations into the "disappearances" of their children, was murdered in Rio de Janeiro on 15 January. Eight days before her death, Edméia da Silva Euzébio had testified in the judicial inquiry on the 1990 "disappearance" of her son and 10 other young people, and had denounced the involvement of military and civil police officers in the abduction.

Witnesses say that on the afternoon of 15 January, Edméia da Silva Euzébio and a woman friend, Sheila da Conceição, were walking in downtown Rio de Janeiro when two armed men jumped out of a car and began to chase them. The women tried to run away, but the men shot them dead before escaping in their car.

Edméia da Silva Euzébio, along with other mothers of the "disappeared", had received death threats. On the evening of 26 January 1992, for instance, three military police officers allegedly involved in the "disappearance" of her son are said to have sent the mothers a message threatening them with "a worse fate" than their sons had suffered. Following this incident, AI urged the state authorities to take measures to protect the women.

Edméia da Silva Euzébio was the mother of Luiz Henrique da Silva, one of 11 young people abducted on 26 July 1990 from a farm in Magé, Rio de Janeiro. Although a report by the Intelligence Section of the Military Police identified the perpetrators as military and civil police officers, no one has been charged with the abductions. According to the military police report, hooded policemen raided the farm in search of suspects in petty criminal cases. They took the victims away in two vehicles, one of which was later found burned and with bloodstained seat covers.

Please send appeals calling for a thorough investigation into the killing of Edméia da Silva Euzébio and Sheila da Conceição and urging that those responsible be brought to justice, to: State Governor of Rio de Janeiro, Sr Leonel Brizola, Palácio Guanabara, Rua Pinheiro Machado s/n, 22.231 Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

SOUTH AFRICA

Johannes Maisha "Stanza" Bopape, a community activist from Pretoria's Mamelodi township, "disappeared" in 1988, several days after being arrested by the security police. Despite his family's repeated public appeals for information, no trace of him has ever been found.

In January 1993 South African newspapers published the claims of a former police officer, John Botumile Mokale, who alleged that he had knowledge of secret graves where Stanza Bopape and other murdered detainees were buried. Although his claims have not been corroborated, John Mokale's allegations heightened public concern that no proper investigation had ever been conducted by the authorities into Stanza Bopape's "disappearance".

The police have consistently maintained that Stanza Bopape escaped from their custody on the night of 12 June 1988, while police officers were transporting him from Johannesburg to Vereeniging. They have not plausibly explained how Stanza Bopape managed to unshackle himself from handcuffs and leg irons or why they told Stanza Bopape's lawyer on 17 June that he was still in custody, only announcing two weeks later that he had "escaped". The "intensive investigation" promised by South Africa's Minister of Law and Order in June 1990 produced no results, and the government has refused to name the police officers responsible for interrogating and guarding Stanza Bopape.

In January 1993 Bheki Nkomo, who had been detained with Stanza Bopape, made public a statement he had sworn in 1989 in which he testified that his captors told him that they had shot and killed Stanza Bopape. Also in January an independent police reporting officer, authorized under the terms of the 1991 National Peace Accord to investigate complaints against the police, initiated a new inquiry into the case.

Please send appeals urging the government to conduct a full, judicial inquiry into the "disappearance" of Stanza Bopape and to bring to justice those responsible for his death: F.W. de Klerk/State President/State President's Office/Private Bag X83/Pretoria 0001/South Africa.

GUATEMALA**Former army sergeant convicted of a political killing**

Former Presidential Chief-of-Staff sergeant Noel de Jesús Beteta Álvarez, the first member of the Guatemalan military ever known to be convicted of a political killing by a Guatemalan court, was sentenced in February to 25 years in jail for the assassination of leading anthropologist Myrna Mack Chang.

Myrna Mack was stabbed to death by two men in September 1990 in what the authorities initially tried to explain as a criminal murder. The case was only brought to trial as a result of sustained efforts by Myrna Mack's sister Helen Mack and the Human Rights Office of the Archbishopric of Guatemala. There is, however, little chance that the other killer and those responsible for ordering the murder will ever be brought to justice.

Noel de Jesús Beteta had been named as one of the killers after an investigation led by José Mérida Escobar of the Department of Criminal Investigation of the National Police. In August 1991 José Mérida Escobar was himself extrajudicially executed on the street outside the National Police headquarters.

Since proceedings began, the Myrna Mack case has been handled by 13 different judges. Judicial officials, witnesses, relatives of the victim, and virtually anyone associated directly or indirectly with the case have been threatened and harassed. During the sentencing stage of the trial, shots were fired at the house of a principal witness, and he and the other main witness were threatened with death if they continued to testify. Surveillance was noticeably stepped up on the offices of the Association for the Advancement of Social Science in Guatemala (AVANCSO), of which Myrna Mack had been a founding member, and AVANCSO staff were threatened and harassed. After the trial ended, armed men in plain clothes came to the door of AVANCSO and told the night porter that they would set the building on fire with him inside. Helen Mack has been subjected to verbal abuse, and the mother of a main witness was threatened by an unknown man who had been seen watching the house in the previous days.

YUGOSLAVIA**Increased threat to ethnic Albanians in Kosovo**

Since the beginning of the year, there have been increasingly frequent reports of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo province being beaten by members of the largely Serbian police force during house-to-house searches for weapons.

Ethnic Albanians -- about 90 per cent of the province's population -- said that during searches the police have deliberately destroyed household goods and intimidated women and children. Police officers reportedly confiscated licenced guns, as well as illegally owned weapons. At the same time, Serbian military and police forces were said to be arming local Serbs and Montenegrins.

Selected villages were apparently targeted for mass raids. In the first week of February, for instance, about 40 people were reportedly arrested in villages near De_ane during arms searches and many were beaten in custody. The same week also saw reports of arms searches and ill-treatment in villages in the Pe_, Vitina and Klina areas. One man in the Pe_ area, Dervish Berisha, had apparently been arrested six times during arms searches; on one such occasion, on 1 February, he was taken to the police station in Pe_ and beaten. In Klina, 14-year-old Jeton Berisha was allegedly beaten by police who forced him to say that his father possessed arms. In Kli_ina village, police raided the Abdyli family home, took three of the men to a local police station and beat them so severely that they subsequently required medical treatment.

TURKEY

'Thought-crime' still grounds for imprisonment

Osman Aytar, General Publishing Director of the magazine *Medya Güneşi* (The Sun of the Medes), was arrested in January by the Istanbul State Security Court and charged with "spreading separatist propaganda" under Article 8 of the Anti-Terror Law. Earlier in the month, he had written an article about the activities of Kurdish opposition groups.

The Anti-Terror Law, passed in April 1991, removed those articles of the Turkish Penal Code under which prisoners of conscience had previously been sentenced to very long terms of imprisonment, but retained penalties of two to five years' imprisonment (invariably applied in violation of the right to freedom of expression guaranteed by Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights) for "written or spoken propaganda, assemblies, demonstrations and marches with the aim of damaging the indivisible unity of the state". Writers or activists accused of advocating a separate state for Turkey's Kurdish minority have repeatedly been targeted under the Anti-Terror Law.

AI is concerned that journalists are once again being prosecuted for the expression of their non-violent opinion. This concern is plainly shared by Turkish politicians -- in January the President of the Grand National Assembly Hüsamettin Cindoruk told the magazine *Kibiri's Do ru* (Towards 2000): "Unfortunately, the concept of thought-crime continues. This should be corrected. In order to change it the Anti-Terror Law must be revised."

AI has written to the Turkish authorities asking for Osman Aytar's immediate and unconditional release and recommending urgent reform of the law.

COLOMBIA

Local leaders in the Magdalena Medio region of central Colombia are being threatened with death by members of the Colombian armed forces and paramilitary groups working under their command.

On 28 January Humberto Geovo Almanza, human rights ombudsman for San Vicente, received an invitation to his own funeral, with the words "quit your post, you guerrilla son of a whore"¹ scrawled across the bottom. Saúl Pico Gómez, the mayor of San Vicente, has received numerous death threats over the past five months. On 13 November his office was raked with gunfire, although none of those present were injured. On the days leading up to the attack, known paramilitary leaders had been seen entering and leaving the local army battalion, *Batallón Luciano D'Elhuyar*. The two officials fled San Vicente briefly in February; they returned shortly afterwards, even though the armed forces refused to guarantee their safety.

Regional military commanders have publicly accused anyone who denounces abuses by the paramilitary forces of acting in the interests of guerrilla organizations. Those at risk of reprisal include peasant leaders, human rights workers, parish priests and local officials. Three peasant leaders -- Oliva Ballona, Avelino Domínguez and Octavio Sierra -- were threatened by the army in September 1992, apparently because they had ratified official complaints of harassment against regional peasant communities by the army. Oliva Ballona continued to be harassed in February 1993.

The Colombian armed forces have been carrying out joint counter-insurgency operations with paramilitary forces in the areas surrounding San Vicente and Carmen de Chucurí in the war-torn Magdalena Medio region since 1990. Peasant farmers are called to meetings by the armed forces and told they must co-operate with the paramilitary by paying "taxes" and participating in patrols and operations against guerrilla groups active in the region. Those who have refused have been tortured, "disappeared" or killed. Many others have been forced to flee the region.

ombudsman - personero
funeral invitation - sufragio
mayor - alcalde

¹renuncie de tu cargo, eleno hijo de puta

PAKISTAN**Death by stoning sentence suspended**

In February the Federal Shari'a Court (FSC) suspended a sentence of death by stoning imposed by a lower court on Nasreen, a 35-year-old woman, for adultery.

During the trial, Nasreen told the lower court that her first husband had divorced her verbally, telling her that his words were sufficient to make the divorce final under Islamic law. She subsequently married another man, and her first husband accused the couple of adultery and unlawful marriage. The couple were found guilty and Nasreen was sentenced to serve five years in prison before being stoned to death. Her second husband, Ghulam Jaffer, was sentenced to public flogging. They appealed to the FSC, which suspended the judgement pending a hearing by a full bench of the FSC and released the couple.

Nasreen and Ghulam Jaffer had been sentenced under the Hudood Ordinance, promulgated by General Zia-ul Haq during the martial law period (1977-1985) and later confirmed by an act of parliament. The Ordinance requires courts to invoke Shari'a law when hearing cases of alleged sexual offence. Hundreds of people have been sentenced under the Hudood Ordinance, several of them to death by stoning.

AI is unconditionally opposed to the death penalty, and to stoning and flogging -- which are cruel, inhuman and degrading punishments strictly prohibited under international human rights standards. Although the FSC has thus far overturned virtually all sentences of death by stoning, AI continues to urge the Pakistani Government to remove stoning and flogging from the statute books.

TUNISIA

Human rights activists targeted

On 4 February, just two days after 18 Tunisian human rights activists formed a national committee to defend prisoners of conscience, they were themselves hauled in for questioning by the police. The committee's coordinator, sociologist Salah Hamzaoui, who suffers from asthma and eczema, was kept in custody for two weeks; the others were released. All 18 were charged with forming an unauthorized organization, distributing leaflets and spreading false information.

The committee's communique, which formed the basis for some of the charges, condemned illegally prolonged incommunicado detention, torture and the detention of prisoners of conscience. In response, the Prime Minister's Office said that there were no prisoners of conscience or abuses of any sort in Tunisian prisons.

The abuses cited by the committee have been detailed in a number of AI reports over the last two years. Committee members said they would use truth as a defence if their case came to trial and pointed out that although they had not received authorization, a unregistered committee recently formed to campaign for the release of prisoners in Kuwait had been allowed to operate in Tunisia for months without harassment.

In 1992 the Tunisian Government dissolved the Tunisian Human Rights League, one of the oldest human rights organizations in the Arab world, after it refused to change its statutes to conform to amendments introduced to the Law on Associations.

[for trans: il n'y a plus de prisonnier d'opinion ... tout comme il n'y a plus d'abus d'aucune sorte]

SAUDI ARABIA**Torture and death in custody**

On 2 February Muhammad Hassan Daoud al-Shabeeb was transferred from al-Mabahith al-'Amma (General Intelligence) Prison in al-Dammam to the intensive care unit of al-Dammam Central Hospital, allegedly suffering from torture-related injuries. He was still in hospital at the end of February. Muhammad al-Shabeeb, a 21-year-old student, had been arrested in October 1992 on suspicion of possessing Shi'a Muslim opposition literature and audio tapes. He was reportedly held for nearly two months in solitary confinement.

Detainees in both political and common law cases are routinely tortured in Saudi Arabia. The most commonly used methods are *falaga* (beating on the soles of the feet), beatings all over the body, sleep deprivation and electric shocks. Since April 1992 AI has documented the cases of four people who have died in custody, most recently in January. Three of them reportedly died as a result of torture, while the fourth was said to have been denied medical care until shortly before his death. AI has repeatedly urged the government to investigate these incidents but has received no response.

TOGO

At least 19 people were killed and 50 others wounded on 25 January when soldiers opened fire without warning on a peaceful demonstration in the streets of Lomé, the capital. As the shooting started, people in plain clothes in the crowd reportedly produced guns and also began firing on the demonstrators. The demonstration had been called by opposition groups to show support for attempts to renew the dialogue between President Eyadema and the interim government created to oversee the transition to multi-party democracy.

The breakdown in relations between the president and the transitional bodies has created a tense political situation. Army elements loyal to the president have repeatedly intervened to prevent reforms by holding hostage or otherwise threatening members of the interim government and parliament.

Since 25 January an escalation in violent confrontations between the security forces and civilian opponents of the government has resulted in loss of life on both sides. On 30 January, five people, including a child, were killed by soldiers firing indiscriminately at civilians. Thousands of Togolese have fled to neighbouring Ghana and Benin for safety.

The impunity currently enjoyed by the security forces invites them to commit further human rights violations, and fuels the cycle of violence. AI has urged the authorities to order a full and independent investigation into killings by the security forces and to bring those responsible for extrajudicial executions to justice.

NIGERIA

Fourteen people were sentenced to death between December and February after grossly unfair trials before a Civil Disturbances Special Tribunal. They had been convicted of murder in connection with May 1992 religious riots in northern Nigeria in which over 300 people died in clashes between Kataf Christians and Hausa Muslims. The accused had no right of appeal to a higher court.

Eleven of those sentenced to death by the predominantly Muslim Special Tribunal in Kaduna were Katafs. Some of them, including retired army officer Zamani Lekwot, had already been tried for unlawful assembly in connection with the riots and discharged in August. They were immediately rearrested and charged with culpable homicide on substantially the same evidence.

In December the Special Tribunal had convicted other Katafs of unlawful assembly and rioting, although insufficient or no evidence was produced against them; two of them were sentenced to 18-year prison terms. Following the sentencing, a senior lawyer resigned from the Tribunal in protest.

Shortly after they were charged, the defendants had claimed that the Special Tribunal was biased and that their constitutional right to a fair trial was being denied. In October the High Court in Kaduna accepted that their complaint should be heard, but in November the Court of Appeal reversed this decision, ruling that the 1987 Civil Disturbances Decree removed the High Court's jurisdiction over the Special Tribunal. A government decree issued in late 1992 confirmed that the proceedings of the Special Tribunal could not be challenged in the courts.

AI urged commutation of the death sentences and expressed concern that the defendants had been convicted after unfair trials and could not appeal to a higher court.

RWANDA

Gangs of Hutu extremists loyal to President Juvenal Habyarimana allegedly murdered as many as 400 people, most of them members of the Tutsi ethnic group, in January and February.

In mid-February, AI also received reports that the security forces had been detaining hundreds of people, mainly Tutsi but also including Hutu members of opposition political parties. They have been held in military custody and reportedly subjected to harsh and sometimes fatal beatings. No information has been issued by the authorities about the reasons for the arrests. Dozens of these detainees have reportedly been killed in custody.

Earlier in the year, in January, an international team of human rights investigators in Rwanda reported that it had uncovered "widespread evidence of genocide and war crimes" carried out by government agents -- most of them Hutu -- against the Tutsi. The commission of inquiry, which carried out its investigations with the permission of the government, also accused both the Rwandese army and the Tutsi-dominated armed opposition Rwandese Patriotic Front² of committing rapes and summary executions. Some of those who assisted the commission have subsequently received death threats from security and government officials. One man was reportedly targeted because his son had acted as an interpreter to the commission.

Ethnic violence has escalated dramatically since October 1990, when an armed force of Rwandese exiles, mainly Tutsi, invaded northeast Rwanda from neighbouring Uganda in an attempt to overthrow the government of President Habyarimana. Since then, more than 2,000 people, most of them Tutsi, have been killed by the security forces or gangs from the Hutu ethnic group. No one has been brought to justice for any of these killings. AI has urged the government to investigate the killings, rapes, death threats and other abuses, and to ensure protection for those who may be in danger.

² *Front patriotique rwandais*

IRAQ

Al fears that the Iraqi government is holding two citizens of the United Kingdom (UK) as hostages in order to compel the UK Government to comply with Iraqi demands.

Michael Wainwright and Paul Ride were separately accused of illegal entry to Iraq in 1992 and were sentenced in September to 10 and seven years' imprisonment respectively. An appeal against the sentences was turned down in October.

In January Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz offered to review the sentences in return for the release of Iraqi assets frozen in UK banks since the Gulf War. In a television interview Tariq Aziz said: "If the British Government shows sympathy towards the hardship of the Iraqi people, then it would be very natural that the Iraqi Government would show sympathy to the difficulties of two or three British citizens."

At least nine other foreign nationals from countries including Pakistan, the Philippines, Romania and Sweden, have been imprisoned in Baghdad on similar charges.

JAPAN

Inadequate protection for refugees and asylum-seekers

In a report released in March* AI examined refugee policy in Japan and concluded that the government is failing to give all asylum-seekers the opportunity to make an asylum claim and have it examined in a satisfactory refugee determination procedure.

Asylum-seekers who do manage to have their claim formally submitted are put through a secretive and arbitrary process without due regard for their procedural rights or for the vulnerable position they are in. Many have been detained for months, and others whose applications have been refused, even though they would clearly be at risk if returned home, are kept on monthly visas, in constant fear of deportation.

AI's report analyses the procedures for deciding on asylum claims, and documents the cases of a number of asylum-seekers. Lin Guizhen from China was detained on arrival as an "illegal" entrant and initially not allowed to apply for asylum. She was eventually allowed to apply after lawyers intervened on her behalf, but was forcibly returned to China in August 1991 while her appeal against refusal of asylum was still before the courts. Upon her return to China she was arrested and sentenced to two years' "re-education through labour". She has since been released.

The report makes 15 recommendations to the government for measures which AI believes would help bring Japan's law and practice into line with its international obligations. AI recommends that the government ensure that all asylum-seekers are guaranteed access to the asylum procedure; establish a public and independent body responsible for making decisions on asylum claims; ensure that the procedure pays due regard to asylum-seekers' procedural rights, including an effective review of any refusal of asylum; and take measures to ensure that asylum-seekers are detained only for reasons which are legitimate under international standards and have an effective opportunity to challenge the legality of their detention.

* *JAPAN: Inadequate protection for refugees and asylum-seekers* (AI Index: ASA 22/01/93)

Late at night masked men burst into the home of a sleeping family. They took the husband from his bed, assuring his pregnant wife that they would let him go as soon as he answered a few questions. But she never saw him again; he is one of the "disappeared". Left alone, his wife struggled just to feed her three young children and keep a roof over their heads. But when her three-year-old daughter fell gravely ill with polio, there was no money left to pay for the expensive medical treatment. AI's relief program helped pay for hospital treatment and for the braces that enabled the little girl to walk.

A 21-year-old man arrested by the military was brutally tortured with electric shocks. Immediately after his release, he fled the country, despite the debilitating injuries he had sustained in custody. When he finally got to a doctor, one of his arms had to be amputated and he was in grave danger of losing his remaining arm because he could not afford the treatment necessary to save it. AI helped send the young man to a third country, where he spent several months in a specialist medical centre for torture victims. The doctors managed to save his remaining arm, give him treatment for the other severe injuries he had sustained under torture and fit him with an artificial arm.

Government agents gave drinks laced with deadly thallium poison to more than 40 political activists and government opponents. Two of the victims died a few hours later. Victims of acute thallium poisoning undergo agonizing abdominal pain and seizures before falling into a coma: those who survive for longer than a week can suffer nerve damage, sometimes leading to dementia and blindness. AI's relief program enabled three of the most seriously ill survivors to be airlifted to a country where they received life-saving medical treatment.

The cases described in this article are genuine; the names of individuals and countries have been withheld because the individuals or others in those countries could be put at risk if it becomes known that they have received money from abroad.

AI's main aim is to stop human rights violations by campaigning for the victims and for measures to prevent future violations from taking place. Although AI is not an aid organization, in some instances it is able to give financial assistance to current and former prisoners of conscience and their families, victims of torture, refugees and the dependants of the "disappeared" or victims of political killings.

AI relief payment is meant to help people deal with the devastating effects of the violations they or their family members have suffered. It is not intended to compensate them for the pain they have endured, for their lost income, or to provide long-term financial support. Requests for relief are considered on a case-by-case basis, according to a policy that aims to ensure that AI's limited resources are used as fairly and effectively as possible. AI's relief program does not fund human rights organizations or political groups.

PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE

AI works to get prisoners of conscience released, sometimes by helping them pay for lawyers to represent them in court. When prisoners of conscience are forced to serve jail terms, their families are often left destitute. Not only does the family lose whatever wages the prisoner had been earning, they also have to cope with a host of additional expenses. Many prisoners are detained far away from their homes, and their families cannot afford to travel to visit them. Prisoners often need medicine, soap, warm clothing, or food to supplement an inadequate prison diet, and the family may not be able to pay for their own food, rent or children's schooling. AI can contribute towards meeting these costs. Such relief is often provided by AI's local groups directly to the family of the prisoner they have adopted. The

group may send money, medical supplies or goods which the family cannot obtain. AI can either give relief directly to the individuals concerned, or work through projects that benefit groups of prisoners.

AI relief can be used to help prisoners develop their vocational skills or further their education while they are in jail. In Asia, AI contributed to a project which helps prisoners of conscience learn calligraphy, woodworking, and arts and crafts; this not only helps to alleviate the boredom and other demoralizing effects of long-term imprisonment -- some of these prisoners are serving sentences of up to 20 years -- but also provides them with some prospect of finding work when eventually released. AI relief funds have also been used to buy books for prisoners who want to study.

Former prisoners sometimes find that their release is as traumatic as their arrest. The life they once knew has been irrevocably altered: their jobs -- and often their homes -- are gone; they may not even know where their families are. Many are in poor health, often suffering from dental problems, stomach ulcers or skin diseases exacerbated by inadequate diet and poor prison conditions. Ill-treatment or torture may have left them with serious injuries or permanent disabilities. AI relief can help former prisoners and their families through the difficult transitional period.

In North Africa, for instance, 30 sickly and emaciated men were suddenly released from more than 18 years of secret detention. They had been held in complete isolation, deprived of light, warmth, adequate food, and contact with their families; a few were able to smuggle out letters letting their relatives know they were still alive. More than 30 of their fellow prisoners, weakened by starvation, neglect and ill-treatment, had died in custody. After the release it was clear that the health of the survivors had been ruined. Many had lost their teeth and were suffering from painful skin ailments; their eyesight had been damaged by years spent in total darkness. AI gave the newly-released men money to help them buy food and other necessities, and is trying to get them the medical treatment they still desperately need.

UNDER THREAT

In many countries, the peaceful political opponents of the government never become prisoners of conscience because they are summarily or arbitrarily executed, or simply "disappear" after arrest, never to be seen again. When individuals are in imminent danger of "disappearance" or arbitrary execution, AI may be able to help them flee to a safer area of their country, or to another country. In some cases, the relatives of those who have been killed or "disappeared" also become targets for political killing, and are forced to flee the area, often losing their livelihood as well as their loved ones.

In South America AI contributed to a project to assist families who fled their homes because of political violence -- most of them had received death threats and had at least one family member who had already been extrajudicially executed or "disappeared". The families, mainly rural peasants who had escaped to the shanty towns of the city, had no jobs and no way of earning a living. The project gave them money for their food and other basic needs while they sought work, and helped provide medical treatment for those who had themselves been detained and tortured by the security forces.

A basic principle of AI's relief program is that it should not encourage dependency. For this reason, AI relief tends to be in the form of single payments aimed at helping people to become self-sufficient. In some cases, AI also provides continuing assistance for short periods to former prisoners and their families, or to families who have lost a breadwinner to "disappearance" or extrajudicial execution. But even when such assistance continues for a few months, it is only a small contribution towards giving people the means to rebuild their own lives.

A "disappearance" or political murder can leave a single parent with the sole responsibility for supporting his or her children. In one South American country, the wife of a "disappeared" peasant farmer was herself detained while trying to find her husband. After her release she began to receive death threats from the local security forces, and was forced to take her two babies and flee to the city, where she had neither friends nor family. Although she was a skilled weaver, she could not practise her

trade until AI helped her to buy a loom. In Asia AI has provided assistance to projects to help bereaved families become self-sufficient. One such project offered training in basic technical and clerical skills; another helped the widows of men who had been extrajudicially executed to buy sewing machines so that they could do tailoring work to support their families.

MEDICAL RELIEF

Every day, in every region of the world, people are tortured in police stations, prisons or detention centres. AI tries to stop torture through its campaigning work, but also tries to get some of the victims the medical treatment they need to recover from their ordeal. Medical aid is invariably costly; some doctors will treat torture victims without charge, but the cost of medicine, supplies and travel to obtain the necessary treatment can still be staggering. And with so many cases of desperate need, the available resources are quickly exhausted.

Where possible, AI tries to help torture victims get medical treatment in their own country, which is often less disruptive for the patients. AI also helps some of the torture victims who need specialized treatment which is not available in their own country to obtain medical care abroad.

A 15-year-old African boy was detained and brutally tortured over a period of two years. His neck, face, chest and thighs were burned with an electric hotplate, and a cloth soaked in paraffin was tied round his arm and set alight. The resulting burns and other injuries made it impossible for him to move his head. After his release, AI helped to send him to Europe for a course of operations which were not available in his own country. In another instance, after a South American prisoner of conscience was subjected to forms of torture that nearly destroyed his hearing, AI helped him obtain specialist treatment and hearing aids.

Although AI does provide relief on an individual basis, it has often proven more effective to work through medical projects established specifically to treat torture victims. In one South American country, the restoration of democracy gave AI the chance to contribute substantially to the establishment of a project to provide systematic psychiatric and medical assistance to the hundreds of people who had been tortured under the previous military dictatorship.

Although such care may occasionally be available in the country where the torture occurred, medical aid projects are more commonly set up in the neighbouring countries to which torture victims have fled. AI works closely with such projects to identify which aspects of their work and which of their patients fall within AI's mandate, and to ensure that AI's contribution is spent for that purpose, rather than for any of the project's activities which do not fall within AI's own relief policy.

REACHING THE VICTIMS

There are many practical obstacles in the way of getting relief to the people who need it. Many of the victims of human rights violations don't have bank accounts, or even access to reliable postal services. In order to ensure that its relief funds reach those with the greatest needs, AI often works through local projects, which have more reliable means of distributing funds.

In one Central American country, AI contributed to a project run by Catholic nuns which provided food, lodging and schooling costs for children whose parents had been murdered by the army. In South America, AI contributed to the costs of establishing a centre for a group of displaced widows of the extrajudicially executed. The centre's advice and financial support enabled the women to set up their own small business selling baked goods and second-hand clothes. The centre also offered the women a forum for mutual support and advice, and assistance in getting affordable medicines and medical treatment for those in need.

Whenever AI provides aid through such projects, it stipulates the precise purpose of its

payments, which may only be used to help individuals falling within AI's own relief mandate, not for other people whom the project works for, or for its administrative costs.

AI WORLDWIDE PROGRAM

Over the past year AI has provided relief to victims of human rights violations in more than 40 countries in every region of the world. In recent years AI's International Secretariat has spent around £300,000 annually, but the overall total of the organization's relief program is considerably higher because AI's national sections and hundreds of its local groups also give relief to victims and their families.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s a large proportion of the organization's relief money went to Central and South America, where there were many victims of severe human rights violations and reliable channels for distributing assistance. In recent years proportionately more of the organization's relief assistance has been spent in Africa, where AI has been developing its relief work.

KEEPING THE ACCOUNTS

AI's relief work is not financed out of the organization's general operating budget, but through voluntary donations from AI members and other private individuals. AI also welcomes contributions to its relief funds from other organizations, but because the scope of its relief program is strictly defined according to its own mandate, it can spend such money only within the terms of its own relief policy -- not according to the policy of the donor organization.

Some donors ask that their contributions for relief be spent in particular countries, or for a particular area of work such as medical treatment for torture victims or assistance to children who are victims of human rights violations. AI takes account of such preferences where possible but the final decision on how the money is spent must be made by AI according to its own priorities and its own assessment of the needs, so in some cases AI may ask donors to agree to their contribution being spent for some purpose other than the one they have specified.

If you want to contribute to AI's relief work, contact the AI section in your country. In countries where there is no AI section, write directly to the International Secretariat: Relief Officer, 1 Easton Street, London WC1X 8DJ, United Kingdom.

For local AI groups, providing relief can be a particularly satisfying way of assisting victims and their families. Receiving a letter of thanks from prisoners of conscience or their families for money, clothing or food parcels more than compensates for the long hours spent on campaigning work.

□ "I received your letter with the enclosed cheque, and I also received the parcel you sent me for the children ... I apologize for replying so late, maybe something [that] might have disturbed me is that my husband was released; I was so excited when he came back home, that was a very pleasant day to us all as his family, seeing him as fresh as a fish in the water... My children are so excited about the clothes; they fit them very well, they say I must say thank you very much." [letter to an AI group from the wife of a prisoner of conscience]

"..I was very happy and honoured to receive a parcel ... I simply don't know how you can feel my happiness... you are an angel to me and my family. My children couldn't believe their eyes; to them is God's miracles ... we didn't know that there are still people who can help us like this, may God bless you and your family." [letter to an AI group]

BENIN: CHANGES FOR THE BETTER

An improvement in a country's human rights situation can give AI a unique opportunity to help people it couldn't reach before. In 1990, such an opportunity arose in Benin.

Throughout the 1980s, government opponents had been detained as prisoners of conscience, often without charge or trial, for as long as five years. Many of them were tortured, some of them to death. But in 1990, after months of strikes and demonstrations, delegates to a national conference demanded the dismantling of all torture centres and the release of all remaining political prisoners. A new constitution was subsequently adopted and a new government and president elected.

Although some human rights violations continued, the change of government enabled AI to establish a relief program which focused on providing training or assistance in starting small businesses to more than 30 former prisoners of conscience. Some of them resumed university careers interrupted by imprisonment; others chose short professional or correspondence courses to improve their chances of finding work. AI helped one former prisoner to buy a small milling machine and set up a maize grinding business. The widow of a torture victim was helped to establish a shoe shop, and a former mathematics teacher undertook a short course in computing studies to bring himself up to date with developments in the field since he was detained. Many of these people said the opportunity to start something new had raised their morale and self-esteem.

Many of the former prisoners had serious health problems, particularly recurring difficulties with their eyesight, caused or aggravated by their years in prison and the poor diet they had received. Most of them could not pay for specialist treatment, so, in cooperation with a local hospital, arrangements were made for them to receive treatment at AI's expense.

"Thanks for your letters ... [and] thanks very much for the cheque ..., you have solved a lot of my domestic problems and daily strains. I and the kids are quite fine, you have made things easier for me, I even managed to pay for [the prisoner's] brother at school ... I managed to see [the prisoner]. He was fine, he had gained weight and he was in good spirit ... I send him money every month for toiletries and things he's allowed to have, so I think he's fine there ... thanks to Amnesty International for helping so many people ... Please keep strong, you are a consolation to the world." [letter from the relative of a prisoner of conscience]

"To know how valuable such assistance is, you have to have been a released prisoner deprived of everything after a long period in detention.... This assistance helped me to find once again a reason for living -- once again, thank you." [letter from a former prisoner of conscience]

A former prisoner of conscience in Asia, who received AI relief during his imprisonment, later wrote: "I think I owe my release to your aid. I have no words to express my gratitude ... Though I was in poor health in prison, I am completely recovered now. Now I will return the money I received then. I hope you spend it on the activities of Amnesty International. Good luck."