



## US courts rule lethal injection inhumane

*"It really sounds like he was tortured to death."*

Jonathan Groner MD, Ohio State Medical School, on the execution of Angel Diaz

It took Angel Diaz 34 minutes to die by lethal injection at his execution in Florida USA, in December 2006. According to reports he was moving, grimacing and attempted to speak for over 20 minutes of that time. The needles had failed to deliver the deadly mix of chemicals into his bloodstream, penetrating further to surrounding soft tissue instead. A witness stated that he had chemical burns on his arms. A second injection had to be administered to complete the death sentence.

The botched execution prompted Florida to put a freeze on all lethal injections pending an investigation into current procedures. That same week a federal judge concluded that California's implementation of lethal injection was "broken" and marked by a "pervasive lack of professionalism". He recommended a review of the execution method by the executive. Other US states are similarly examining their lethal injection protocols, adding fuel to the argument that this ostensibly "humane" method of administering capital punishment is no less cruel or torturous than any other.

The USA introduced execution by lethal injection almost 30 years ago, applying it for the first time in 1982. Since then, nearly 900 prisoners have been killed by this method in the USA, and it has all but replaced the alternative methods - electric chair, hanging, gassing and shooting. Nearly 20 years after its introduction into US law, lethal injection was adopted by China, Guatemala, the Philippines, Taiwan and Thailand. Other countries - India, Papua New Guinea and Viet Nam - are currently discussing its introduction.

The injection consists of lethal doses of three chemicals: sodium pentothal to induce general anaesthesia; pancuronium bromide to cause muscle paralysis; and potassium chloride to stop the heart. If inadequate levels of sodium pentothal are administered, the anaesthetic effect can wear off rapidly and the prisoner will experience excruciating pain as he or she goes into cardiac arrest. Moreover, their paralysis means that they will be unable to communicate their distress to anyone.

The use of pancuronium bromide for pet euthanasia is not acceptable under American Veterinary Medical Association guidelines, and its use has been banned in several states. In September 2003, for example, a new law came into force in Texas banning its use in the euthanasia of cats and dogs. Texas is the state which uses lethal injection the most frequently for humans, having executed nearly 400 people by this method since 1982.

Most international and national medical bodies agree that any medical practitioner taking part in an execution - directly or indirectly - is in breach of their code of ethics. Yet there is little commitment to taking action when individuals disregard these principles. While there are many medical practitioners who have stood by these principles and refused to participate in executions, still others have stated a willingness to do just the opposite.

AI urges all members of the medical profession not to participate in executions and to support the campaign to abolish the death penalty.



Death chamber equipped for lethal injection, US Penitentiary, Terre Haute, Indiana, USA. Many US states are re-considering the use of lethal injection.



Former women detainees, who had been tortured while held at Khiam Detention Centre, Lebanon, speak to Irene Khan, 2006.

## AI witnesses turmoil and despair in Middle East

When AI Secretary General Irene Khan arrived in Lebanon at the beginning of December 2006, the capital, Beirut, was filled with demonstrators - some protesting against the latest political assassination and others against the current government. She was on the first stop of a broader visit to the region, taking in Lebanon, Israel and the Occupied Territories, including the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

This was the latest in a series of AI visits to the region undertaken since mid-2006. It gave the Secretary General an opportunity to see, at first hand, the extent of civilian damage and desolation caused by the recent war between Hizbullah and Israeli forces, which ended in August, and by the continuing conflict between Israelis and Palestinians in Israel and the Occupied Territories.

As they journeyed from place to place, AI delegates heard stories of confusion and despair. There were the Lebanese fishermen whose livelihoods were destroyed by an oil slick resulting from bombed oil tanks. There were the Red Cross workers in Lebanon whose efforts to save lives were frustrated by roads and bridges obliterated by Israeli bombardments. There were the victims of Palestinian rocket attacks in the Israeli town of Sderot and the Palestinian victims of Israeli bombardments.

And there was the Athamna family of Beit Hanoun, Gaza Strip, who lost 18 relatives - eight of them children - when their home was shelled by Israeli forces in November 2006. A total of 12 artillery shells fell on the house and the surrounding area. Several family members were killed in their sleep. Others were killed outside their home as they fled the shelling. Dozens of other civilians were injured.

Irene Khan later described the scenes of devastation which greeted AI as they entered Beit Hanoun. "Houses reduced to rubble, others with entire walls missing and roads so churned up that they look like

freshly ploughed fields. Was there an earthquake in Gaza? No, it was a one-week 'visit' of the Israeli army a month ago, during which more than 70 Palestinians, half of them civilians, were killed."

The Athamna family is just one of thousands of Palestinian families whose lives have been blighted by Israeli military strikes. In 2006 alone, some 650 Palestinians, many of them civilians, were killed by Israeli forces, more than three times the number killed in 2005.

In Qana, south Lebanon, AI met survivors of an Israeli air strike on a building last July which killed 29 people, 23 of them children. One woman recalled how she had lain, pinned to the ground by fallen debris, listening to the fading cries of her dying daughter. The Israeli authorities conducted their own inquiry into the incident in which they admitted that the attack had been a mistake. However, there has been no explanation as to precisely what mistakes were made, or whether those responsible have been held accountable. AI continues to call for an independent inquiry into all attacks against civilians and other violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed by both parties during the conflict between Israel and Hizbullah.

During her Middle East visit, Irene Khan met senior Israeli, Palestinian and Lebanese government officials as well as Hizbullah representatives - to urge them to fulfil their obligations under international law. She extended her appeal to government heads of the European Union, calling on them to "exercise leadership and take a bold initiative to address this long-standing crisis, and to do so by putting human rights concerns at its heart."

See *Israel and the Occupied Territories: Road to nowhere* (MDE 15/093/2006).



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## Worldwide Appeals

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## ERITREA



Gospel singer Helen Berhane was released from Mai Serwa army camp in October 2006. Held without charge or trial for two and a half years, she spent most of that period locked up in a metal shipping container. The authorities tortured and beat her in a failed attempt to force her to recant her faith. She was hospitalized in October 2006 after further severe beatings which have left her unable to walk and confined to a wheelchair.

Helen Berhane was among 2,000 detained members of the banned evangelical churches in Eritrea, including her own Rema church. She was arrested in 2004 after she refused to sign a statement pledging to end all Christian activities. She had released a new album of Christian music shortly before her arrest.

The Eritrean Information Minister has denied all knowledge of Helen Berhane's case. Speaking to Agence France Presse news agency about AI's comments on Helen Berhane's release, he said: "I am not saying it is a lie... what I am saying is that if these people like to make such statements then let them enjoy it, but we do not even give them recognition."

➔ Please write, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of the thousands who remain imprisoned in Eritrea solely for their religious beliefs.

Send appeals to: Issayas Afewerki, Office of the President, PO Box 257, Asmara, Eritrea. Fax: +291 1 125 123.

## SAUDI ARABIA



Majda Mostafa Mahir was released from prison in Saudi Arabia in November 2006 and returned to Morocco.

She was arrested in 1997 and sentenced to death on murder charges. The death sentence was annulled after the family of the man she was convicted of murdering waived its right to demand her death.

She expressed her sincere thanks to everyone who worked on her behalf and contributed towards her release.

See *Worldwide Appeals* March 2004 and November 2004.

## TUNISIA



In November 2006, prisoner of conscience Mohammed Abbou was treated in El-Kef Hospital after persistent requests to determine the cause of the pain in his back.

In December 2006, four people – his wife Samia Abbou; lawyer Samir Ben Amor; Moncef Marzouki, leader of the banned opposition party, Congress for the Republic; and journalist Slim Boukhdir – attempted to visit Mohammed Abbou in prison. They were stopped by police nine times while driving from Tunis to El-Kef, ostensibly to check their identities and the car's registration. Later when they left a restaurant in El-Kef, they were attacked by about 50 unidentified people who insulted and spat at them, and pushed and beat them. The four managed to escape to their car. They drove to El-Kef Prison, but were attacked by more people when they walked towards the prison entrance, preventing them from visiting Mohammed Abbou. Both attacks happened in front of police who failed to take action to protect them or apprehend the attackers.

Mohammed Abbou was sentenced to three and a half years in prison in April 2005, after an unfair trial, largely for publishing two Internet articles critical of the authorities and denouncing torture in Tunisia.

See *Worldwide Appeals* May 2006.

➔ Please continue to write, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of prisoner of conscience Mohammed Abbou and for the end of police harassment of his family.

Send appeals to: Béchir Tekkari, Ministère de la Justice et des Droits de l'Homme, 31 Boulevard Bab Benat, 1006 Tunis - La Kasbah, Tunisia. Fax: +216 71 568 106. Email: mju@ministeres.tn

## CUBA

Prisoner of conscience Pablo Pacheco Avila was one of 75 people arrested in March 2003 in one of the most severe crackdowns on the dissident movement in Cuba. AI is concerned for his health as he does not appear to be receiving necessary medical treatment in prison.

Working for an independent co-operative of journalists, he was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment under a law which provides for lengthy prison terms for those found guilty of supporting US policy on Cuba aimed at "disrupting internal order, destabilising the country and destroying the Socialist State and the independence of Cuba." AI believes that his detention is politically motivated, relating to his legitimate, journalistic activities.

See *Worldwide Appeal* April 2004.

➔ Please continue to write, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Pablo Pacheco Avila and all the other prisoners of conscience held in Cuba's jails. Pending their release, call for the authorities to provide prisoners with adequate medical care and treatment whenever necessary.

Send appeals to: Su Excelencia Dr Raul Castro Ruz, Presidente en funciones del Consejos de Estado y de Ministros, Havana, Cuba. Fax: +537 333 085.

## Individuals: survey

AI is making major improvements to the way it approaches its campaigning for individual people. We began 45 years ago by focusing on six individuals who had been imprisoned for their non-violent beliefs. Perhaps our greatest achievement since then has been to empower people to work for other people, bridging the gap between those whose human rights are violated, and those who are prepared to campaign on their behalf.

Since we began with those six cases in 1961, our methods have had to adapt to new realities and new human rights atrocities. As well as working to free prisoners of conscience, our work is now also focused on a variety of other human rights violations – from campaigning on those who have been forcibly evicted from their homes in Africa to those denied the right to health care in Peru.

This year we are launching a new approach to reinforce our commitment to individual people who need our help. Over the years, we have developed numerous campaigning methods to help people. These include the *Urgent Action* network, the *Worldwide Appeals* network.

## Courageous call for reform

"[President] Gayoom made sure nobody says anything against him. Very early on in his Presidency he started detaining people for expressing switching off the TV while he was speaking... People were just too scared to talk about him..."

Former prisoner of conscience Jennifer Latheef is not afraid to speak out. Released from house arrest in August 2006, the outspoken critic of President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, continues to campaign for greater freedom and democracy in the Maldives. A journalist and human rights defender, she is one among many hundreds of dissenting voices which the authorities have tried to silence.

Jennifer Latheef was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment in October 2005 on charges of "terrorism". Her alleged crime was joining a protest in September 2003 against the killings of four prisoners by riot police. Four hundred protesters were arrested alongside her.

"That was the one time people came out against the brutality," says. "Gayoom had never seen that kind of opposition."

### Beaten and arrested

Jennifer Latheef was badly beaten by the arresting police officers during another mass protest in 2004: "We were blindfolded and handcuffed... [security personnel] hit me on my lower back with their sticks twice, and that was enough to give me a permanent injury." One has been brought to justice for these abuses.

Her conviction appeared politically motivated as she is the daughter of Mohamed Latheef, a prominent leader of the democratic opposition in the Maldives, who currently lives in exile in Sri Lanka.

Once sentenced, Jennifer Latheef was moved to Maafushi Prison, an island south of the capital, Malé. Conditions there are notorious

## REPUBLIC OF CONGO

### Detention without trial

Former army colonel Serge André Mpassi, aged 62, was arrested at his home in Pointe-Noire on 18 February 2005. His wife told AI delegates that as many as 20 members of the security forces, reportedly wearing balaclavas, searched his home, including digging up parts of the compound. The soldiers did not say what they were looking for. After the search, they took Serge Mpassi's mobile phone, ordered him in to one of their vehicles and took him away.

Later, Serge Mpassi's wife learned that he was being held at the Directorate of Territory Surveillance regional headquarters where she was able to visit him regularly until he was transferred to the Military Academy in the capital, Brazzaville, in March 2005. She tried to visit him there but was stopped by the detaining authorities.

When AI delegates met her in early April 2005 she was extremely concerned about her husband's health since he required regular medication and a good diet following an earlier illness. Being unable to see or talk to him, she was not sure whether the detaining authorities had given him

the medication she had handed to officials at the Military Academy.

Serge Mpassi was transferred to the Brazzaville central civilian prison in mid-May 2005. He was still held there at the end of November 2006. It is thought that his arrest, along with several members of the security forces and more than 15 civilians, is connected to a government investigation into a theft of firearms from Bifouiti Gendarmerie, Brazzaville, and an alleged plot against the government in January 2005. Some of the detainees were given provisional release in late 2005 but Mpassi and 11 others had been held without trial for over 18 months.

For full details of his case and background information, see *Congo: Political detainees in limbo* (AFR 22/003/2006).

➔ Please write, calling for former army colonel Serge André Mpassi to be released immediately unless he is charged with a recognizably criminal offence and given a prompt and fair trial. Call for him to be given regular access to legal counsel, his family and necessary medical care.

Send appeals to: Monsieur Gabriel Entcha Ebia, Ministre de la Justice, Garde des Sceaux et des Droits Humains, Ministère de la Justice, BP 2497, Brazzaville, République de Congo.

Fax: +242 2 814167.

Salutation: Dear Minister/Monsieur le Ministre

## BANGLADESH

### Press freedom undermined

"What we are doing is too tough without the cooperation of Amnesty International." – Sumi Khan

Sumi Khan, a 34-year-old journalist working with local and national magazines and based in the city of Chittagong, has been attacked and received death threats as a result of her investigative journalism for the past two years. She was stabbed in an attack in 2004, and her attackers remain at large.

Sumi Khan has written investigative articles alleging the involvement of local politicians and religious groups in attacks on members of minority communities, and about kidnapping and land-grabbing by landlords.

On 12 March 2005 Sumi Khan received a written death threat telling her to retract articles she had written on Islamist groups. Fellow journalists in Chittagong received similar death threats allegedly from local Islamist groups.

In December 2005, Sumi Khan and a number of other journalists from Chittagong, as well as police, govern-

ment officials and magistrates from across the country, received death threats. They were reportedly threatened in a letter to the Chittagong Press Club, an organization for journalists. The letter, allegedly from the banned Islamist group Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), was believed to be part of a campaign by some Islamist groups to destabilize democratic society in Bangladesh.

The government ordered a police guard at the Chittagong Press Club and arrested suspected members of the JMB. However, the government's failure to investigate the death threats or protection needs of those named in the letter has put Sumi Khan and other journalists who write about the activities of Islamist groups, at risk of further attacks. Sumi Khan has received further threats from unidentified sources and attacks on journalists have continued nationwide.

➔ Please write, calling on the authorities to undertake a full, impartial and independent investigation into the threats and attack against Sumi Khan and to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Send appeals to: Mr Iajuddin Ahmed, President and Chief Adviser of the Caretaker Government, Office of the Chief Adviser, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Salutation: Dear Chief Adviser

## vors and activists

initiative, case sheets, action files, appeal cases and a host of other systems that feature specific individuals who need AI's help. This new approach will better co-ordinate our campaigning efforts and ensure that our work with and for individuals is increasingly interconnected.

From now, the various ways we work for people who need AI's campaigning help will come under a dedicated unit at the International Secretariat – the Individuals at Risk Campaigns Team – to progress this work.

This new approach is an exciting development for activists, as eventually we hope to enable you to see what other activists in different parts of the world have been doing on the same case.

The people highlighted in this issue – and every issue – of *the Wire* are just a small selection of those who need you to take action. Each represents a wider concern, and by helping these people we also help to change the policies and practices which allow such abuses to happen. We look forward to campaigning with you in the future.

## in the Maldives

harsh, with toilets constantly overflowing, unhygienic food and abuse from prison guards. Poor bedding and a failure to provide treatment exacerbated her back problems. Eventually she was admitted to hospital and later placed under house arrest.

On 16 August 2006, Jennifer Latheef was released when President Gayoom announced that he would pardon her. She thanked AI and others for their support, saying: "Amnesty and friends from Maldives and all over the world have put tremendous effort into securing my freedom."

### Reforms promised

While the government is now implementing a far-reaching process of political and judicial reforms, the authorities continue to carry out periodic crackdowns on democratic freedoms. The security forces have detained government critics or those attending anti-government rallies, with reports of protesters being beaten at the time of arrest. The opposition demands a faster pace of reform, while the government accuses the opposition of impeding the reform process through mass rallies that unnecessarily threaten public order.

"The government has consistently used the media, police and the courts to spread fear and intimidate the people," says Jennifer Latheef. "The mass arrests of November [2006] only show that [President] Gayoom is not going to allow the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, despite what he says to international bodies."



## CHINA

AI has learnt more details about the fate of Muhammed Tohti Metrozi following his forcible return to China from Pakistan in 2003. In a letter sent from prison, Muhammed Tohti asked a friend to sell his belongings in Pakistan and send him the money for medical treatment.



Muhammed Tohti, a recognized refugee awaiting resettlement in Sweden, was forcibly returned to China along with fellow Uighur, Abdulwahab Tohti. They had reportedly been engaged in pro-independence activities in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR), China, before fleeing to Pakistan.

Following a secret trial in July 2005, Muhammed Tohti's family were told that he had been sentenced to life imprisonment. The exact charges against him remain unconfirmed but according to earlier reports they were related to his application for asylum and his work helping Uighur refugees in Pakistan. After the verdict, he went on a hunger strike for 17 days until he became very ill. He has never properly recovered and is now unable to walk unaided as a result.

There is still no further information on the whereabouts of Abdulwahab Tohti.

See *Worldwide Appeal* September 2003.

➔ Please continue to write, calling for Muhammed Tohti Metrozi to be released and allowed to leave the country if he wishes. Call for information on the whereabouts of Abdulwahab Tohti. Send appeals to: Ismail Tiliwaldi Zhuxi, Chair of the XUAR People's Government, Xinjiang Wiewuer Zizhiqu Renmin Zhengfu, 2 Zhongshanlu, Wulumuqishi 830041, Xinjiang Weiwuer Zizhiqu, China. Email: webmaster@xinjiang.gov.cn

## CHINA

Chen Guangcheng's prison sentence was upheld in January following a retrial and subsequent second appeal behind closed doors. He was sentenced to a prison term of four years and three months for damaging property and blocking traffic after grossly unfair trials.



He brought a legal case against the local authorities in Linyi, Shandong province, for carrying out a campaign of forced abortions and sterilizations, which reportedly affected thousands of local women. AI believes his sentence is a politically motivated attempt to prevent him from pursuing his peaceful human rights activities and that he should be released immediately and unconditionally.

He was first convicted in August 2006 after a trial lasting less than two hours. The trial was the culmination of

months of beatings and arbitrary detention which began in September 2005. His lawyers were obstructed at every stage – from collecting evidence to representing him in court. His family, defence lawyers and other supporters have also been subjected to beatings, harassment and intimidation. He appealed his sentence, and in a surprise move the appeal court ordered a retrial. However, the retrial failed to consider new evidence from key witnesses and did not deliver justice.

See *Worldwide Appeals* October 2006.

➔ Please continue to write, calling for the immediate release of prisoner of conscience Chen Guangcheng. Send appeals to: Minister of Justice Aiyong Wu Buzhang, Sifabu, 10 Chaoyangmen Nandajie, Chaoyangqu, Beijingshi, 100020, China. Fax: +86 10 65292345 Email: webmaster@xinjiang.gov.cn

## EL SALVADOR

### Human rights defender receives death threats

The director of Asociación Entre Amigos, William Hernández, and other members of the organization have received death threats and are apparently under surveillance. It is feared that this intimidation is an attempt to stop the organization's work on behalf of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in El Salvador. The threats follow approval by the Legislative Assembly of an amendment to the Constitution that would make it illegal for same-sex couples to marry and adopt children. The Asociación Entre Amigos has been campaigning against this amendment.

On 1 June 2006 William Hernández was threatened at gunpoint outside the Asociación Entre Amigos office in the capital, San Salvador, soon after the police officer assigned to protect him had left him for the day. An unidentified man approached William Hernández from behind and put a gun to his neck threatening to kill him unless he stopped campaigning against the amendment.

The office had been raided two days earlier. Windows were broken, files searched and threatening notes left. A number of documents were taken, including plans for a demonstration in front of the Legislative

Assembly opposing the ratification of the constitutional reform banning the marriage of same-sex couples and the adoption of children by lesbians and gay people.

LGBT people in El Salvador regularly face attacks and intimidation. The Asociación Entre Amigos has reported seven raids on their offices during the last five years. Despite reporting the incidents to the authorities, investigations into them have proved superficial, and nobody has been brought to justice.



➔ Please write, calling for the authorities to promptly and fully investigate the threats against William Hernández and the raids on the offices of the Asociación Entre Amigos, and to ensure appropriate protection for the activists to enable them to continue their legitimate campaigns on behalf of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in El Salvador. Send appeals to: President Elías Antonio Saca González, President of the Republic of El Salvador, Casa Presidencial, Alameda Dr Manuel Enrique 5500, San Salvador, El Salvador. Fax: +503 2243 9947. Salutation: Dear President

## SYRIA

### Freedom of expression denied to journalist

Lawyer and human rights defender Anwar al-Bunni, journalist Michel Kilo, and Mahmoud 'Issa were arrested in May 2006 after signing the Beirut-Damascus Declaration. The Declaration called on the Syrian and Lebanese governments to normalize relations by exchanging ambassadors and defining their shared borders. The men are held in 'Adra prison near Damascus. AI believes all three are prisoners of conscience, held solely for their work in support of democratic rights.

They were among a group of at least 10 activists arrested by State Security service officers following the signing of the Declaration by hundreds of Syrian and Lebanese nationals. They are reportedly held on various charges including "weakening nationalist feeling and inciting racial or sectarian strife", "insulting official institutions and public officials" and with joining a political or international group without government permission. Two others, Khalil Hussein and Suleyman Shummar, who were released in September 2006, are believed to be in danger of re-arrest having been charged with the same or similar offences. The other five men were

released on bail after reportedly withdrawing their names from the Declaration. It is feared that they may have been coerced into withdrawing their names.

Mahmoud 'Issa was released on 25 September 2006 but re-arrested a month later. Anwar al-Bunni and Michel Kilo have been detained for almost nine months. Anwar al-Bunni is said to have been beaten during his initial interrogation while held in incommunicado detention. On 31 December, he was reportedly beaten by another prison inmate who pushed him down the stairs. The beating was reportedly witnessed by prison guards who failed to intervene and followed a statement he made to the press concerning the execution of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. All three men have been persistently harassed by the Syrian authorities over the years because of their support for democratic rights.

➔ Please write, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of prisoners of conscience Anwar al-Bunni, Michel Kilo and Mahmoud 'Issa detained solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression. Send appeals to: His Excellency Bashar al-Assad, Presidential Palace, al-Rashid Street, Damascus, Syria. Fax: +963 11 332 3410. Salutation: Your Excellency

ERITREA



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See Worldwide Appeals March 2004 and November 2004.

REPUBLIC OF CONGO

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See Worldwide Appeals May 2006.

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See Worldwide Appeal April 2004.

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Please write, calling on the authorities to undertake a full, impartial and independent investigation into the threats and attack against Sumi Khan and to bring the perpetrators to justice. Send appeals to: Mr Iajuddin Ahmed, President and Chief Adviser of the Caretaker Government, Office of the Chief Adviser, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Salutation: Dear Chief Adviser

Individuals: survivors and activists

AI is making major improvements to the way it approaches its campaigning for individual people. We began 45 years ago by focusing on six individuals who had been imprisoned for their non-violent beliefs. Perhaps our greatest achievement since then has been to empower people to work for other people, bridging the gap between those whose human rights are violated, and those who are prepared to campaign on their behalf.

Since we began with those six cases in 1961, our methods have had to adapt to new realities and new human rights atrocities. As well as working to free prisoners of conscience, our work is now also focused on a variety of other human rights violations – from campaigning for those who have been forcibly evicted from their homes in Africa to those denied the right to health care in Peru.

This year we are launching a new approach to reinforce our commitment to individual people who need our help. Over the years, we have developed numerous campaigning methods to help people. These include the Urgent Action network, the Worldwide Appeal

initiative, case sheets, action files, appeal cases and a host of other systems that feature specific individuals who need AI's help. This new approach will better co-ordinate our campaigning efforts and ensure that our work with and for individuals is increasingly interconnected.

From now, the various ways we work for people who need AI's campaigning help will come under a dedicated unit at the International Secretariat – the Individuals at Risk Campaigns Team – to progress this work.

This new approach is an exciting development for activists, as eventually we hope to enable you to see what other activists in different parts of the world have been doing on the same case.

The people highlighted in this issue – and every issue – of the Wire are just a small selection of those who need you to take action. Each represents a wider concern, and by helping these people we also help to change the policies and practices which allow such abuses to happen. We look forward to campaigning with you in the future.

Courageous call for reform in the Maldives

"[President] Gayoom made sure nobody says anything against him. Very early on in his Presidency he started detaining people for even switching off the TV while he was speaking... People were just too scared to talk about him..."

Former prisoner of conscience Jennifer Latheef is not afraid to speak out. Released from house arrest in August 2006, the outspoken critic of President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, continues to campaign for greater freedom and democracy in the Maldives. A journalist and human rights defender, she is one among many hundreds of dissenting voices which the authorities have tried to silence.

Jennifer Latheef was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment in October 2005 on charges of "terrorism". Her alleged crime was joining a protest in September 2003 against the killings of four prisoners by prison guards. Four hundred protesters were arrested alongside her.

"That was the one time people came out against the brutality," she says. "Gayoom had never seen that kind of opposition."

Beaten and arrested

Jennifer Latheef was badly beaten by the arresting police officers during another mass protest in 2004: "We were blindfolded and handcuffed... [security personnel] hit me on my lower back with their steel boots twice, and that was enough to give me a permanent injury." No one has been brought to justice for these abuses.

Her conviction appeared politically motivated as she is the daughter of Mohamed Latheef, a prominent leader of the democratic opposition in the Maldives, who currently lives in exile in Sri Lanka.

Once sentenced, Jennifer Latheef was moved to Mafushi Prison, on an island south of the capital, Malé. Conditions there are notoriously

harsh, with toilets constantly overflowing, unhygienic food and abuse from prison guards. Poor bedding and a failure to provide treatment exacerbated her back problems. Eventually she was admitted to hospital and later placed under house arrest.

On 16 August 2006, Jennifer Latheef was released when President Gayoom announced that he would pardon her. She thanked AI and others for their support, saying: "Amnesty and friends from Maldives and all over the world have put tremendous effort into securing my freedom."

Reforms promised

While the government is now implementing a far-reaching process of political and judicial reforms, the authorities continue to carry out periodic crackdowns on democratic freedoms. The security forces have detained government critics or those attending anti-government rallies, with reports of protesters being beaten at the time of arrest. The opposition demands a faster pace of reform, while the government accuses the opposition of impeding the reform process through mass rallies that unnecessarily threaten public order.

"The government has consistently used the media, police and the courts to spread fear and intimidate the people," says Jennifer Latheef. "The mass arrests of November [2006] only show that [President] Gayoom is not going to allow the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, despite what he says to international bodies."

CHINA



AI has learnt more details about the fate of Muhammed Tohti Metrozi following his forcible return to China from Pakistan in 2003. In a letter sent from prison, Muhammed Tohti asked a friend to sell his belongings in Pakistan and send him the money for medical treatment.

Muhammed Tohti, a recognized refugee awaiting resettlement in Sweden, was forcibly returned to China along with fellow Uighur, Abdulwahab Tohti. They had reportedly been engaged in pro-independence activities in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR), China, before fleeing to Pakistan.

Following a secret trial in July 2005, Muhammed Tohti's family were told that he had been sentenced to life imprisonment. The exact charges against him remain unconfirmed but according to earlier reports they were related to his application for asylum and his work helping Uighur refugees in Pakistan. After the verdict, he went on a hunger strike for 17 days until he became very ill. He has never properly recovered and is now unable to walk unaided as a result.

There is still no further information on the whereabouts of Abdulwahab Tohti. See Worldwide Appeal September 2003.

Please continue to write, calling for Muhammed Tohti Metrozi to be released and allowed to leave the country if he wishes. Call for information on the whereabouts of Abdulwahab Tohti. Send appeals to: Ismail Tiliwaldi Zhuxi, Chair of the XUAR People's Government, Xinjiang Wiewuer Zizhiqu Renmin Zhengfu, 2 Zhongshanlu, Wulumuqishi 830041, Xinjiang Weiwuer Zizhiqu, China. Email: webmaster@xinjiang.gov.cn

CHINA

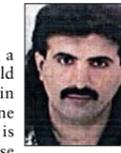
Chen Guangcheng's prison sentence was upheld in January following a retrial and subsequent second appeal behind closed doors. He was sentenced to a prison term of four years and three months for damaging property and blocking traffic after grossly unfair trials.

He brought a legal case against the local authorities in Linyi, Shandong province, for carrying out a campaign of forced abortions and sterilizations, which reportedly affected thousands of local women. AI believes his sentence is a politically motivated attempt to prevent him from pursuing his peaceful human rights activities and that he should be released immediately and unconditionally.

He was first convicted in August 2006 after a trial lasting less than two hours. The trial was the culmination of



USA



Ali Saleh Kahlah al-Marri, a Qatari national, has been held without charge or trial in military custody since June 2003. The US government is now seeking to have his case dismissed from the appeals court under the recently passed Military Commissions Act. If successful, this would take away his right, as a non-US citizen arrested in the USA, to contest his detention or treatment in the US courts.

Ali al-Marri was designated an "enemy combatant" under an executive order signed by President Bush. So far, lower courts have ruled that Ali al-Marri's detention is lawful provided he has the opportunity to challenge the basis of his case.

Held in conditions of extreme isolation in South Carolina, AI is calling for Ali al-Marri's release or that he be charged and brought to trial in accordance with international law. AI is also calling for an end to his isolation, and for him to be allowed visits from and communication with his family. See Worldwide Appeal August 2006.

Please send appeals on behalf of Ali Saleh Kahlah al-Marri to: President George W Bush, The White House, Office of the President, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington DC 20500, USA. Fax: +1 202 456 2461. Email: comments@white-house.gov

months of beatings and arbitrary detention which began in September 2005. His lawyers were obstructed at every stage – from collecting evidence to representing him in court. His family, defence lawyers and other supporters have also been subjected to beatings, harassment and intimidation. He appealed his sentence, and in a surprise move the appeal court ordered a retrial. However, the retrial failed to consider new evidence from key witnesses and did not deliver justice. See Worldwide Appeals October 2006.

Please continue to write, calling for the immediate release of prisoner of conscience Chen Guangcheng. Send appeals to: Minister of Justice Aiyng Wu Buzhang, Sifabu, 10 Chaoyangmen Nandajie, Chaoyangqu, Beijingshi, 100020, China. Fax: +86 10 65292345. Email: webmaster@xinjiang.gov.cn



ELSALVADOR

Human rights defender receives death threats

The director of Asociación Entre Amigos, William Hernández, and other members of the organization have received death threats and are apparently under surveillance. It is feared that this intimidation is an attempt to stop the organization's work on behalf of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in El Salvador. The threats follow approval by the Legislative Assembly of an amendment to the Constitution that would make it illegal for same-sex couples to marry and adopt children. The Asociación Entre Amigos has been campaigning against this amendment.

On 1 June 2006 William Hernández was threatened at gunpoint outside the Asociación Entre Amigos office in the capital, San Salvador, soon after the police officer assigned to protect him had left him for the day. An unidentified man approached William Hernández from behind and put a gun to his neck threatening to kill him unless he stopped campaigning against the amendment.

The office had been raided two days earlier. Windows were broken, files searched and threatening notes left. A number of documents were taken, including plans for a demonstration in front of the Legislative

Assembly opposing the ratification of the constitutional reform banning the marriage of same-sex couples and the adoption of children by lesbians and gay people. LGBT people in El Salvador regularly face attacks and intimidation. The Asociación Entre Amigos has reported seven raids on their offices during the last five years. Despite reporting the incidents to the authorities, investigations into them have proved superficial, and nobody has been brought to justice.

Please write, calling for the authorities to promptly and fully investigate the threats against William Hernández and the raids on the offices of the Asociación Entre Amigos, and to ensure appropriate protection for the activists to enable them to continue their legitimate campaigns on behalf of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in El Salvador. Send appeals to: President Elías Antonio Saca González, President of the Republic of El Salvador, Casa Presidencial, Alameda Dr Manuel Enrique 5500, San Salvador, El Salvador. Fax: +503 2243 9947. Salutation: Dear President

SYRIA

Freedom of expression denied to journalist

Lawyer and human rights defender Anwar al-Bunni, journalist Michel Kilo, and Mahmoud 'Issa were arrested in May 2006 after signing the Beirut-Damascus Declaration. The Declaration called on the Syrian and Lebanese governments to normalize relations by exchanging ambassadors and defining their shared borders. The men are held in 'Adra prison near Damascus. AI believes all three are prisoners of conscience, held solely for their work in support of democratic rights.

They were among a group of at least 10 activists arrested by State Security service officers following the signing of the Declaration by hundreds of Syrian and Lebanese nationals. They are reportedly held on various charges including "weakening nationalist feeling and inciting racial or sectarian strife", "insulting official institutions and public officials" and with joining a political or international group without government permission. Two others, Khalil Hussein and Suleyman Shummar, who were released in September 2006, are believed to be in danger of re-arrest having been charged with the same or similar offences. The other five men were

released on bail after reportedly withdrawing their names from the Declaration. It is feared that they may have been coerced into withdrawing their names.

Mahmoud 'Issa was released on 25 September 2006 but re-arrested a month later. Anwar al-Bunni and Michel Kilo have been detained for almost nine months. Anwar al-Bunni is said to have been beaten during his initial interrogation while held in incommunicado detention. On 31 December, he was reportedly beaten by another prison inmate who pushed him down the stairs. The beating was reportedly witnessed by prison guards who failed to intervene and followed a statement he made to the press concerning the execution of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. All three men have been persistently harassed by the Syrian authorities over the years because of their support for democratic rights.

Please write, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of prisoners of conscience Anwar al-Bunni, Michel Kilo and Mahmoud 'Issa detained solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression. Send appeals to: His Excellency Bashar al-Assad, Presidential Palace, al-Rashid Street, Damascus, Syria. Fax: +963 11 332 3410. Salutation: Your Excellency



Dozens of cardboard silhouettes shaped from the Million Faces Petition stand in front of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in The Hague, Netherlands, 2006. The largest photo petition in the world, the Million Faces Petition is a lasting symbol of the Control Arms campaign. Control Arms is a coalition of AI, Oxfam and the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA).

# control arms Arms Trade Treaty imminent

**control arms**

An international Arms Trade Treaty is closer to becoming a reality thanks to a historic vote in the UN General Assembly on 6 December 2006. An overwhelming 153 governments supported a resolution proposing a Treaty to prevent international arms transfers that fuel conflict, poverty and serious human rights violations. Only the USA voted against the proposal, and 24 governments abstained.

The UN General Assembly vote came just three years after the launch of the Control Arms campaign, which has seen over a million people in 170 countries adding their face to support the campaign.

There was strong support from the governments of Europe as well as Africa, the Pacific and Latin America.

"It is vital that governments recognize the urgent need to turn this vote into meaningful action and ensure that a legally binding treaty on conventional arms becomes a reality," said AI Secretary General Irene Khan.

One of the first tasks for the incoming UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, will be to begin canvassing the views of all UN Member States on the proposed Arms Trade Treaty in order to report back to the General Assembly in late 2007. A group of governmental experts from around the world will then be established to examine the issue in detail and report back to the UN General Assembly in 2008.

To find out what you can do to help make arms control a reality, go to [www.controlarms.org](http://www.controlarms.org)



Clockwise: Boy in Iraq, one of the million faces; show of support in the Netherlands; Control Arms camel caravan, Timbuktu, Mali; Control Arms tree of life, Mozambique; Control Arms boat at Cambodian water festival; demonstration, São Paulo, Brazil.

## Poland represses lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights

*"We'll do to you what Hitler did with Jews."*

Members of All Polish Youth counter-demonstration to Equality march, Poznan, 2005

Poland's political leadership has continued to undermine the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. Homophobic sentiment saw a dramatic upsurge since the Law and Justice Party (PiS) took power in 2005. In May 2006 the PiS secured a parliamentary majority by forming a coalition with two other parties. Leading politicians in two of the parties in the coalition have openly criticized LGBT rights campaigners.

One of the first decisions of the new government was to abolish the Plenipotentiary for Equal Gender Status, making Poland the only European Union (EU) country without a statutory equality watchdog.

Equality marches in support of LGBT rights have been banned or disrupted in cities across Poland in recent years. Demonstrators have been attacked by counter-demonstrators and allegations have been made of police failure to protect LGBT demonstrators' right to peaceful assembly.

The Equality march in the city of Poznan in November 2005 was banned. However, when a few hundred people began to demonstrate they were harassed and intimidated by members of the right-wing group, All Polish Youth, allegedly shouting homophobic chants such as "Gas the fags." Equality parades in Warsaw, in June 2004 and again May 2005, were banned.

When Lech Kaczynski of the PiS – who was then the mayor of Warsaw and later elected President of Poland – refused to authorize the Equality parade in Warsaw in 2005, he said that such an

event would be "sexually obscene" and offensive to other people's religious feelings.

However, the improvised parade took place attracting more than 2,500 participants. Less than a week later, he authorized the so-called "normality" parade, during which members of the All Polish Youth reportedly demonstrated on the streets of Warsaw and shouted intolerant and homophobic slogans.

In May 2006 Wojciech Wierzejski, Deputy of the Polish National Assembly, encouraged the use of force should LGBT rights activists organize their annual Equality march in Warsaw, in June. He said, "If deviants begin to demonstrate, they should be hit with batons." On the possible attendance of politicians from western Europe at the march, he said, "They are not serious politicians but just gays, and a couple of baton strikes will deter them from coming again. Gays are cowards by definition."

However, following a Supreme Court decision, the march was authorized. Owing to threats of counter-demonstrations, the organizers agreed a different itinerary with the Warsaw City Council. The demonstration (of between 2,500 to 10,000 people) passed with only minor incidents reported.

Poland has been warned by the EU that it could lose its voting rights if the President continues to oppose LGBT rights.

AI calls on the Polish authorities to respect recent court decisions to ensure that all individuals are allowed to exercise their right to freedom of assembly without discrimination, and to ensure that no public statements are made which could encourage homophobic sentiment.

See *Poland and Latvia: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights in Poland and Latvia* (EUR 01/019/2006).

## UN Special Procedures under threat

Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan described them as the "crown jewel of the system", but the UN Human Rights Council's independent human rights experts are under threat. Known collectively as the "Special Procedures" they include special rapporteurs, representatives, independent experts and working groups.

The UN Commission on Human Rights (now replaced by the Human Rights Council) created its first Special Procedure, the ad hoc Working Group on southern Africa, 40 years ago. Similar mechanisms were established in response to grave violations taking place in Cambodia, Chile, former Yugoslavia, Haiti and Rwanda and elsewhere, and on themes as diverse as torture, violence against women, health and housing. Through their urgent interventions, general appeals, country visits, and studies, the Special Procedures have remained a critical tool in preventing human rights violations.

The Human Rights Council has been mandated to review the Special Procedures. It has set up a working group open to all UN members and other stakeholders, including AI, to perform this task. Yet, rather than seizing the opportunity to strengthen the Special Procedures system, several states have made proposals which dilute the essence of what makes these procedures "special" – their independence, expertise and ability to adjust their methods of work to particular circumstances. Unless the Council builds a strong and effective system of Special Procedures, its ability to fulfil its mandate will be severely weakened.

The Council is to conclude its review of the Special Procedures by June 2007. AI urges states to build on, rather than squander, this precious legacy.

### ACT NOW!

To find out how you can encourage your government to support a strong system of Special Procedures, go to the UN section on AI's website at [www.amnesty.org/campaign/](http://www.amnesty.org/campaign/)



## Close Guantánamo now!

AI members and supporters around the world marked the fifth anniversary of the Guantánamo Bay detention centre, 11 January, by organizing demonstrations calling on the US authorities to close the prison camp once and for all. From Tokyo to London, Tel Aviv to Washington DC, hundreds of thousands took to the streets in protest. AI calls for all detainees to be given a fair trial without further delay or to be released. *Clockwise, from left:* AI Greece leads a protest outside the US Consulate, Thessaloniki; members of AI Israel record messages from passers-by in Tel Aviv to President Bush about the situation in Guantánamo Bay; some 300 people join AI France's demonstration, Paris; AI UK stages a demonstration in front of the US embassy, London. See also *Close Guantánamo: Symbol of injustice* (AMR 51/001/2007). Join AI's 'Close Guantánamo' flotilla and invite your friends to travel with you to confront injustice! [www.amnesty.org/guantanamoflotilla](http://www.amnesty.org/guantanamoflotilla)



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