

The Wire

December 2006 Vol. 36. No. 11
AI Index: NWS 21/011/2006

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No better life for Haitians in Dominican Republic

Every year, thousands flee Haiti's abject poverty for better opportunities in the Dominican Republic. The vast majority are undocumented and unable to enter the Dominican Republic legally. To cross the border, they rely on well-organized and extensive networks of traffickers and *buscones* – Haitian and Dominican smugglers – who lure them with empty job promises while charging them exorbitant fees. By paying off officials, the *buscones* secure passage through military checkpoints set up to intercept undocumented migrant workers.

Once they have crossed the border, many migrant workers are transported to *bateyes* – workers' settlements in the sugar cane plantations. There they are subsumed into the 30,000-strong labour force employed annually as seasonal workers by the sugar cane industry. Those who fail to find agricultural work will seek opportunities elsewhere – for instance, in the construction sector.

Even after finding work, incorrect enforcement of migration laws means many Haitian migrants will be deported. Scores of Haitians are routinely rounded up by the police, migration officials or the military and deported collectively to Haiti without any revision of their papers or consideration for their migratory status.

Discrimination based on nationality and race exacerbates the "process". Officials use racial profiling to intercept undocumented migrants. Young black men are the main victims of such speedy operations in which even those holding a valid visa, or proof of permanent residence or Dominican nationality are deported to Haiti because the authorities automatically deem their documents to be forged.

"If you are black, with identification card or without it, with birth certificate or without, it is the same, it has no value," says Téolé, a Dominican of Haitian origin who works to defend Haitian migrants' rights. "In the streets, with migration officials, you don't have any rights." Téolé was himself deported to Haiti even though he is a Dominican citizen.

Deportees are not allowed to contact family members to inform them about their situation, or to collect their personal belongings or outstanding wages. On occasions, their belongings and legal documents are confiscated by migration authorities.

Eight-year-old Francisca José was rounded up in the street along with five other children in Santo Domingo on 4 January. She was hit in the face by a migration officer and sent to a detention centre for migrants without her parents' knowledge. Francisca was released the following day when migration officials were shown proof of her Dominican nationality.

Haitian migrants are often wrongly blamed for increasing crime and unemployment in the Dominican Republic. Acts of xenophobia are frequent and are sometimes extremely violent. On 7 March, in retaliation for the murder of the local mayor, two Haitians, Edison Odio and Jako Medina, were set alight by a mob in the locality of Yabonico, province of San Juan. Hundreds of Haitians had to flee the area fearing for their lives.

An AI campaign on the rights of Haitian migrant workers in the Dominican Republic is launched this month, marking International Migrants Day (18 December). See appeal, page 3 and article, page 4.

[Picture caption: A sugar cane cutter in San Pedro de Macorís Province, Dominican Republic. Many Haitian migrants end up working on such plantations after entering the country. But they face the constant threat of deportation back to an impoverished life in Haiti. © Private]

New act threatens detainee rights

“I have been greatly saddened to hear that the Congress of the United States, a country I deeply admire, is considering new laws that would deny prisoners at Guantánamo Bay the right to challenge their detentions in federal court.” Former Guantánamo detainee Abu Bakker Qassim

On 17 October, President Bush signed into law the Military Commissions Act of 2006. The Act threatens to deprive “war on terror” detainees held by the USA in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, and elsewhere of fundamental safeguards against human rights violations. Among other things it denies foreign nationals labelled as “enemy combatants” the right to challenge the legality of their detention in habeas corpus petitions filed in US courts. It provides for such detainees to be tried by military commissions in what are likely to be unfair proceedings. It threatens to exacerbate an existing pattern of impunity for human rights violations committed by US personnel in the “war on terror”.

The Military Commissions Act is the response of the US government to a Supreme Court ruling in June 2006 which found that the military commissions established under a 2001 Military Order breached US and international law. President Bush sent a draft of the Act to Congress on the same day that he confirmed the existence of the CIA’s secret detention programme. In a bid to gain support for the proposed legislation, he simultaneously announced that 14 “high value” detainees had been transferred from secret detention to Guantánamo to “face justice” if the Act was passed.

More than 400 men remain detained at Guantánamo with no direct contact with their families. Some have been held for almost five years. Only a few have had any formal charges brought against them. None has been tried.

If the new legislation is upheld by the judiciary and applied retroactively, more than 200 habeas corpus petitions filed by Guantánamo detainees could be dismissed. Habeas corpus is a fundamental safeguard against arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance and torture or other ill-treatment.

16 December 2006 is AI’s day of protest against continued detentions at Guantánamo. AI members around the world will join with other activists to organize street events, film screenings and other activities. The global protests will include former detainees and families of those still held, and will kick-start a month of mass action demanding the closure of Guantánamo.

The timing of this action and your involvement is crucial. The day of action comes just a few weeks before 11 January 2007 – the fifth anniversary of the first transfers to Guantánamo. With this anniversary looming, the prospect of release or fair trial for many of those detained remains as distant as ever. The time has come to speak out on their behalf and to demand justice for all.

To take action see *Worldwide Appeals* page 3 and go to:
<http://web.amnesty.org/pages/guantanamobay-toolkit-eng>

[Picture caption: A detainee rests in his cell in Camp Delta, Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, June 2004. © EMPICS]

Domestic workers exploited and abused in Indonesia

Ratna started her life as a domestic worker when she was 13 years old. “I cleaned the house, cooked, swept the floor, and took care of the children,” she says, “every day from five in the morning until midnight.” No breaks were allowed. She could only go outside once a week – to hang the washing out.

Like many women domestic workers, Ratna did not have her own room. “[I slept] in the kitchen with no mattress, just on the floor. I felt cold... scared,” she says. “My employer locked me in the room [every evening], saying it was for my protection. I couldn’t go to the bathroom during the night.”

Many women domestic workers in Indonesia face human rights abuses at work. Often forced to work from as young as 12, they suffer economic exploitation and poor working conditions as well as gender-based discrimination. Many are subjected to physical, psychological and sexual violence. Some are even killed.

However, the harsh conditions they endure often remain hidden from view due to a lack of regulation of their work, their low social status, and the fact that they work in private homes. This “invisibility” means that their situation is often unknown, suppressed or ignored. By contrast, the plight of Indonesian domestic workers in south-east Asia and the Middle East often makes headlines in Indonesia.

AI is calling for domestic workers to be protected by current legislation safe-guarding workers’ rights in Indonesia, in particular by the 2003 Manpower Act which guarantees to other workers rights such as a minimum wage, a 40-hour working week, and standards providing for regular breaks and holidays.

Without legal protection domestic workers are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. Dewi, a domestic worker interviewed by AI, worked an average of 140 hours a week and was paid one tenth of the minimum wage.

Domestic workers also face an acute risk of sexual abuse, including rape.

A 22-year-old domestic worker was forced by her employer in Jakarta to have sex with his younger brother between June and October 2004. “He forced me to have sex with [him],” she recalled. “He started by trying to seduce me, flatter me, embrace and kiss me all over my body. He was getting excited and dropped my hand so I managed to run. But he caught me again, forced me to go to the room and shut the door.” When she fell pregnant, she was expelled from the household. She was paid her outstanding wages and given Rp 40,000 [US\$ 4] to cover transport costs.

Such cases of abuse and exploitation go under-reported to the police. Domestic workers are isolated from family and friends, their work is unregulated, and they are often scared of the police. They also risk losing their jobs if they speak out – a risk most of them cannot afford to take. These factors, coupled with the failure of government authorities to acknowledge and protect domestic workers, leaves much of the violence perpetrated against such women in the shadows.

AI’s report *Indonesia: Exploitation and abuse – the plight of women domestic workers* (ASA 21/001/2007) will be issued early next year.

[Picture caption: A domestic worker performs her daily tasks. Domestic workers in Indonesia lack vital protection of their rights, which leaves them highly vulnerable to economic exploitation, abuse and violence. © Rumpun Gema Perempuan]

School's out!

Romani children discriminated against and excluded from education in Balkan countries

For many Romani children in Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), education is a privilege rather than a right. Too often, extreme poverty places education beyond their scope. Coupled with this is the very serious discrimination that Romani communities face not only from society, but from the state itself.

Romani communities are among the poorest in Europe. Segregation and discrimination force many to live on the margins of society, in some cases in desolate settlements or slums lacking basic infrastructure and services. Roma are among the main victims of ill-treatment by the police and of racially motivated violence by members of the public. Too frequently, they are denied justice for the human rights violations committed against them.

Given these obstacles, access to education for Romani children is partial at best. Free meals, text books and transportation are sometimes provided. But just getting to school can be impossible when the school is too far to reach on foot and your clothes are not warm enough to cope with a bitter winter.

Children are often unable to study or do homework in cold, overcrowded homes. As members of the Romani community in Slovenia told AI, "Some of us live in huts. How can the children do well at school?" For children who do go to school, poor clothing marks them out as Roma and as targets for harassment.

Not only are they bullied by their classmates, but Romani children are often discriminated against by their own teachers. Sometimes, children are segregated into "Roma only" groups or classes and are offered a reduced curriculum. Negative stereotypes about the Roma's "way of life" or attitude towards education are often used to explain poor school attendance and grades. "Romani children, they are not interested in physics or mathematics," one elementary schoolteacher in Slovenia told AI. "They may learn Spanish, because they watch a lot of telenovelas."

Romani culture itself is often frowned upon. One Romani child in Croatia told AI: "The teacher tells me off when I speak my language."

Tackling these barriers to education is the responsibility of governments. The authorities in Croatia, Slovenia and BiH, have failed to respect and protect the right to education, including in some cases by not addressing racism and discrimination directed at members of Romani communities inside and outside schools.

AI calls on the authorities in these countries to prohibit and eliminate discrimination against Roma in education, in line with their international human rights commitments. To promote a more inclusive learning environment for Romani children, the authorities need to ensure that Romani language and culture are introduced into school curricula.

Without such efforts, the future for the Roma in these countries cannot change. Deprived of an education, Romani children are denied the possibility of improving their life chances. They

are condemned to a cycle of deprivation and marginalization that has blighted their communities for generations.

See AI's document *False starts: The exclusion of Romani children from primary education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia* (EUR 05/002/2006).

[Pull quote: 'When something is wrong in the school it is always the Roma's fault.' Romani children at an elementary school in Croatia, March 2006]

[Picture captions: A Romani child does his homework, Šentjernej, Slovenia. © AI, A drawing by a Romani child from Kuršanec, Croatia. © Private]

Central African Republic denies prisoners' rights

A filthy cell, fetid with the odour of human waste, greets inmates at the Port Police Station, in the capital, Bangui. The only source of light is the doorway and there are no sleeping facilities for the six detainees. Mohammed Diakité, a Malian, had been detained there for two months. About 16 years old, he was mentally ill and unable to communicate. He was so ill that he urinated in his clothes. Held for his allegedly illegal entry into the Central African Republic (CAR), he had not appeared before a judge. He should have been receiving psychiatric and other medical care.

Most prisoners in the CAR are held in appalling conditions. They are frequently denied access to legal counsel and visits by their relatives. Some detainees told AI that they were refused medical care, even when they or their relatives were prepared to pay for it.

A judicial backlog, caused by a wave of arrests since March, has exacerbated prison conditions. Following an attack on security posts in the northern town of Paoua, government forces launched a "counter-insurgency" assault. But the armed attackers had already fled the area and many unarmed civilians were reportedly killed. Dozens of people suspected of supporting armed groups opposed to the government of President François Bozizé were arrested. At least 7,000 people fled from Ouham-Pende province to neighbouring Chad.

By May, most of the detainees were still held without charge or trial at the National Gendarmerie's Research and Investigation Department (SRI) in Bangui, and other detention centres.

AI delegates, visiting the CAR in May, found many of those arrested incarcerated in appalling and life-threatening conditions. At Ngaragba prison in Bangui blocked drains and a lack of water left the communal toilets unusable. Inmates urinated in bottles and defecated in plastic bags. After use, the plastic bags were thrown into open drainage channels at the back of the cells, creating the potential for a cholera outbreak. Many detainees slept on the bare concrete floor and most had no blankets. As in other detention centres, with no mosquito nets inmates face the constant torment of mosquito bites and the risk of catching malaria.

Abdoulaye Manou, who was suffering from tuberculosis, was being held together with apparently healthy detainees at the SRI. In many prisons, detainees suffering from infectious illnesses share cells, increasing the risk of contagion.

In all detention centres in the CAR minors are held with adults. In some prisons male and female detainees are held in the same cells, increasing the risk of rape and other sexual abuse. At Bimbo women's prison, some women have children aged from a few months to five years old with them. The prison does not provide sleeping facilities and most of the women,

including those with babies, sleep on thin mats. The mats are inadequate protection from the cold cement floor, especially at night, and there are no mosquito nets.

These conditions clearly violate a detainee's right to humane treatment, as guaranteed by international law. In extreme cases, such detention conditions may amount to torture and inhuman and degrading treatment. AI is calling on the CAR government to ensure that prison conditions are humane and sanitary, and that detainees are promptly charged and brought to trial or released.

For further information see AI's report *Central African Republic: Government tramples on basic rights of detainees* (AFR 19/007/2006).

[translators: National Gendarmerie's Research and Investigation Department (SRI) Section de recherche et d'investigation]

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Worldwide Appeals

United Kingdom

Call for full public scrutiny

On 22 July 2005, the day after a series of serious security incidents on the transport system in the capital, Jean Charles de Menezes, a 27-year-old Brazilian man, was killed by officers of the Metropolitan Police Service on board an underground train in London. He was reportedly pinned down, and shot seven times in the head, after being mistakenly identified as a suicide bomber.

AI is concerned that, as yet, there has been no full and public scrutiny of all the events leading up to, and the circumstances surrounding, the fatal shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes; and that no criminal charges have been brought against any individuals in connection with his death.

The organization is also concerned about the failure, to date, to disclose the investigative report of the Independent Police Complaints Commission into the killing to his family and its lawyers.

In September 2006, the inquest into his death was adjourned indefinitely, pending completion of ongoing criminal proceedings against the Office of the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police for failing to provide for the health, safety and welfare of Jean Charles de Menezes. Such a prosecution under health and safety legislation could result in a financial penalty only, and could not result in someone being found individually criminally responsible for his death.

Given what has emerged so far, justice would be better served by bringing criminal charges against those reasonably suspected of involvement in the killing. AI considers that this failure compounds the family's distress, and undermines public confidence in the rule of law and the conduct of law enforcement officials.

Please write, calling for prompt, full and public scrutiny of the allegations that the killing of Jean Charles de Menezes resulted from unlawful use of force; an immediate resumption of the inquest; and criminal charges to be brought against those individuals responsible for the killing of Jean Charles de Menezes.

Send appeals to: John Reid MP, Secretary of State for the Home Department, Home Office, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF, United Kingdom. Fax: +44 (0) 20 7035 4745.

[Picture caption: Jean Charles de Menezes © The Jean Charles de Menezes family campaign]

Viet Nam

Internet crackdown

Prisoner of conscience Truong Quoc Huy, aged 25, was arrested on 18 August in an Internet café in Ho Chi Minh City where he had logged on to a chatroom website.

After his arrest, Truong Quoc Huy's family home was searched and several items were confiscated. At the time of writing, his family have no further news about him and his whereabouts are unknown. He has reportedly been charged with "conducting propaganda against the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam."

Truong Quoc Huy was first arrested in October 2005 with three other young people after chatting on a democracy and human rights website. He was held incommunicado for nine months without being formally charged or tried. After his release in July, Truong Quoc Huy said that he supported Bloc 8406, an emerging on-line democracy movement calling for peaceful political change and respect for human rights.

In recent years, the Vietnamese authorities have tightened their control of the Internet. Internet Service Providers are now required to inform on web users; Internet café owners are required to monitor and inform on customers; and web users themselves are required to inform on sites that oppose the state. Laws ban web users from spreading information that causes "harm to national security or social order." The authorities claim that websites are filtered to protect users from pornography. However, sites which are blocked are Vietnamese language ones referring to known dissidents or those mentioning democracy and human rights.

For more information see *Viet Nam: A tightening net – web-based repression and censorship* (ASA 41/008/2006).

Please write, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Truong Quoc Huy and others held merely for having exercised their right to free speech on-line. Call on the authorities to repeal or amend Internet decrees and relevant articles of law to bring them into line with Viet Nam's international human rights obligations.

Send appeals to: Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, Office of the Prime Minister, Hoang Hoa Tham, Ha Noi, Viet Nam. Fax (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs): +844 823 1872. Email (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs): banbientap@mofa.gov.vn

[Picture caption: Truong Quoc Huy © Private]

USA

Kuwaiti detained in Guantánamo

"The nurse shoved a tube up my nose so quickly that I began choking, bleeding from the nose and spitting blood. They used no anaesthetic."

Fawzi al-Odah has been held without trial in the US detention facility at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, since May 2002. He was working in Afghanistan until the US invasion when he and four other Kuwaiti nationals fled to Pakistan to escape the bombing in January 2002.

On arrival in Pakistan the five men are said to have taken refuge with a tribal leader who then sold them to the Pakistani authorities. They were later handed over to US forces in Kandahar, Afghanistan, where Fawzi al-Odah says that he was tortured. He was then transferred to Guantánamo.

Fawzi al-Odah joined others in a hunger strike at Guantánamo on 8 August 2005. He says that for the first two weeks of his protest he was given no medical care and no one discussed his reasons for refusing food. He was force-fed through a nasal tube while shackled. He told his lawyer that some of the hunger strikers were forced to urinate and defecate on themselves because they were strapped to restraint chairs for prolonged periods. Some are also said to have vomited blood.

He ended his protest on 11 January 2006 after reportedly being threatened with force-feeding using a thicker tube. He says that the previous day he had heard the screams of a detainee being force-fed in an adjacent room. That detainee is said to have advised Fawzi al-Odah that he should eat voluntarily so as not to experience the same pain.

Please write, calling for Fawzi al-Odah and all other detainees to be released from Guantánamo unless charged and tried in accordance with international standards of fairness in a court that will not impose the death penalty. Call for the immediate closure of the detention facility at Guantánamo Bay.

Send appeals to: Major General Glenn F Spears, Deputy Commander United States Southern Command, 3511 NW 91st Ave., Miami, FL, 33172-1217, USA. Fax: +1 305 437 1077. Email via: <http://www.southcom.mil/home/> To take further action see article page 1.

Spain

Excessive use of force at Spanish/Moroccan border

Pepe Ngandu was shot in the right foot while trying to cross the border into Spain near the frontier post of Tarajal. He lost one toe and later spent three weeks in hospital where he underwent surgery to amputate another of his toes.

Originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Pepe Ngandu was one of a group of approximately 500 people who attempted to cross the border between Morocco and the Spanish town of Ceuta, on 29 September 2005. As the group began to climb over the fence, members of the Spanish Civil Guard on the other side reportedly fired tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition to push them back off the fence.

Pepe Ngandu was advised by local non-governmental organizations not to file a complaint in order to avoid reprisals. Although he stated in hospital and in his asylum interview that he was wounded by a firearm, as far as AI is aware, no action has been taken by any authority to investigate the incident.

For further information see also Spain and Morocco: Failure to protect the rights of migrants – Ceuta and Melilla one year on (EUR 41/009/2006) and a video interview feature at www.amnesty.org/campaign/

Please write, calling for an immediate, independent and impartial investigation into the allegations of excessive use of force by the Spanish Civil Guard against Pepe Ngandu and others who have been killed or injured while attempting to enter Spain, and for the results of all such investigations to be made public.

Send appeals to: Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba, Ministro del Interior, Ministerio del Interior, Paseo de la Castellana 5, 28046 Madrid, Spain. Fax: +34 91 53 71 003.

Updates

Myanmar

Prisoner of conscience Ko Thet Win Aung, aged 34, has died in prison. He had been imprisoned since 1998 for organizing peaceful small-scale student demonstrations calling for the release of political prisoners and improvements to education.

He was tortured during his imprisonment and suffered from malaria. Ko Thet Win Aung protested against the poor diet and medical treatment of prisoners by going on hunger strike in 2002. By 2005 he was reported to have been unable to walk unassisted.

AI calls on the authorities to ensure that prisoners have access to an adequate diet and all necessary and appropriate medical treatment.

See *Worldwide Appeal* January 2000.

[Picture caption: Ko Thet Win Aung © Private]

China

AI welcomes the news that an appeal court refused to uphold the verdict against Chen Guangcheng as a step in the right direction. His lawyers and family welcomed this surprising move, but are concerned that his retrial will not be fair, particularly if he continues to be denied his choice of lawyer.

Chen Guangcheng was tried for “damaging public property and gathering people to block traffic.” AI considers his case to be a politically motivated attempt to prevent him from pursuing his peaceful human rights activities, and is concerned that the appeals court did not acquit him but ordered a retrial. AI considers him to be a prisoner of conscience and urges that he be released from detention irrespective of any further court proceedings.

Chen Guangcheng brought a legal case against the authorities in Shandong province in 2005, for carrying out a campaign of forced abortions and sterilizations which reportedly affected thousands of local women.

See *Worldwide Appeal* October 2006.

[Picture caption: Chen Guangcheng © Private]

Turkmenistan

Two prisoners of conscience were released this year following consistent international pressure.

Gurbandurdy Durdykuliev, aged 63, was released in April. He had been forcibly confined to a psychiatric hospital since February 2004, for sending letters to the authorities urging them to authorize a peaceful demonstration.

The campaign for his release, carried out by AI members worldwide, culminated in March when lobbying by AIUSA grassroots activists led to the US Congress sending an appeal to the Turkmenistani President. Gurbandurdy Durdykuliev was released shortly afterwards. See *Worldwide Appeal* January 2005.

AI also campaigned on behalf of Kakabay Tedzhenov, aged 70, who was also recently released from psychiatric hospital. He had been forcibly confined to medical institutions since January 2006 as punishment for protesting against government policies.

His daughter told AI: “I would like to thank everybody for their help in getting my father released. On my own I would have been powerless, but it is good to see that many people have not been indifferent to my father’s fate.”

[Picture caption: Gurbandurdy Durdykuliev © Private and Kakabay Tedzhenov © Private]

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Control Arms reap huge gains at UN

In a massive victory for the Control Arms campaign, the UN General Assembly’s First Committee passed a resolution to start work on an Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) in October. An overwhelming 139 voted in favour of the proposal, with the USA casting the only dissenting vote.

The Control Arms campaign was launched three years ago by AI, OXFAM and IANSA. The main objectives were to collect a “Million Faces” in support of the campaign and to lobby the UN to take the first steps to create an ATT in 2006. Thanks to the support of 15 Nobel Peace Prize Laureates, celebrities and over a million supporters worldwide this dream has become a reality.

Work on the ATT will begin in early 2007 when the new UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, will canvass the views of all UN member states to establish its foundations. This victory must now be converted into a strong and effective treaty to establish common international standards for the export, import and transfer of conventional arms.

[Picture caption: In a last push to gain support for an Arms Trade Treaty in the upcoming UN vote, Control Arms campaigners visited all ‘192 UN Missions in 192 Minutes’ during a mass lobbying marathon in New York, USA, October 2006. © AI]

‘No easy task’

Mohammad Ramizpoor tells AI about challenges facing human rights defenders in Afghanistan

Following months of threats, Mohammad Ramizpoor and his family left Afghanistan on 30 September for the safety of a nearby country. He had been working with human rights groups in Afghanistan, especially the National Progressives Council of Afghanistan (NPCA), a body that he established in 2001, after the fall of the Taleban regime.

The NPCA is dedicated to raising awareness about human rights issues, such as those relating to the rule of law and freedom of speech. It has helped to translate international human rights documents into Afghanistan’s national languages, making many of these texts available for the first time to Afghans in languages they understand.

Mohammad Ramizpoor was a lecturer in the Islamic Law (Shari’a) Faculty Kabul University where, controversially, he voiced interpretations of Islamic law that promote women’s rights. It may have led to more threats against him and his family.

Mohammad Ramizpoor has had to pay a heavy price for his activism. “Carrying out all these activities in a post-war and traditional society such as Afghanistan was not an easy task,” he says.

In 2002, police opened fire on student demonstrators at Kabul University. “I immediately protested to the government [but] the intelligence services arrested me...” He was released following interventions by international bodies and human rights groups, including AI.

The problems didn’t end there, he continues: “During the parliamentary election in 2005, I received threatening phone calls from the Taleban in an attempt to stop my activities on democracy and human rights.”

This did not stop him from taking part in public events, including media round tables, or from leading training sessions on the rule of law, the relationship between Islamic law and human rights, and democracy. As a result, he says, “I received another threatening message on 3 July 2006 from the Taleban leader, who threatened to kill me and my children and to blow up my house.”

When he informed the police and intelligence services of the death threats, “the intelligence services told me that I had to take care of my own protection myself because they were unable to help me” – due to lack of capacity.

With support from AI, Mohammad Ramizpoor and his family left Afghanistan, eventually finding safe haven in a nearby country, where he continues his human rights work with the help of local organizations. Although his work became untenable in his homeland, he is determined to carry on promoting human rights in Afghanistan – even if that means doing so from abroad.

The views expressed in this article are those of Mohammad Ramizpoor and do not necessarily reflect AI policy. Mohammad Ramizpoor is preparing to launch a blog with AI’s help. For more stories like this one, see <http://web.amnesty.org/pages/afg-241006-feature-eng>

[Picture caption: Mohammad Ramizpoor © AI]

Success for community activists in Zimbabwe

Community activists in Zimbabwe registered their first success in July following a human rights monitoring and documentation training workshop organized by AI. The training helped the activists to mobilize within the community and identify partners, both national and international, to confront the government and halt the eviction.

When Zimbabwe police threatened to forcibly evict at least 15 families at Hatcliffe New Stands settlement just outside Harare in April and May 2006, community activists asked AI and the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR) for help to stop the pending eviction. In June 2006, AI wrote letters to the Zimbabwean authorities expressing concern over attempts by the police to forcibly acquire 200 plots at Hatcliffe New Stands settlement for an extension to a nearby police boarding school. ZLHR were able to provide legal assistance to some of the affected families.

In July a delegation of officials from the Ministry of Local Government, National Housing and Urban Development, Harare Commission and police convened a meeting at the settlement and informed the community that they would not now be evicted.

This was a relief to the families who were trying to repair their lives – so brutally shattered during Operation Murambatsvina (the government’s programme of mass forced evictions) that left them without shelter or livelihood in mid 2005. The UN estimates that over 700,000 people lost their homes, their livelihoods or both.

However, many communities have not been this fortunate as the Zimbabwean government continues to implement low-scale evictions despite international condemnation.

The training in April, offered by AI Netherlands' Special Programme for Africa, followed a request for capacity building by activists who were victims of the 2005 mass forced evictions.

The success of this story demonstrates how AI, working with community activists and national human rights organizations, can strengthen effective activism in Africa. While this success is but a drop in the ocean given the mass scale of human rights violations in Zimbabwe, it is a big step towards building confidence among community activists to stand up for their rights.

See *Zimbabwe: No justice for the victims of forced evictions* (AFR 46/005/2006).

New AI primer highlights migrants' rights

Every year, thousands of people die while attempting to gain access to other countries – escaping whatever conditions have compelled them to flee their homelands. Many of those who survive the journey into a new country face further abuse and exploitation at the hands of traffickers, unscrupulous employers and state officials.

To mark International Migrants Day (18 December) AI has produced *Living in the shadows: a primer on the human rights of migrants* (POL 33/007/2006) to highlight the human rights violations faced by many migrants and to set out a campaigning agenda for migrants' rights. In particular, AI calls for greater accountability of state and non-state actors at all levels, and migration policies that protect human rights. Migrants and their communities must be central to debates on migration so that they can take a positive role in shaping strategies designed to protect their rights.

For more information see article, page 1. To take action, see *Worldwide Appeals*, page 3 and visit www.amnesty.org/refugees

When a shelter is the only option you have left

A counsellor at a Belgian shelter for women fleeing violence in the home explains how it helps its users. The shelter, which cannot be identified for safety reasons, can accommodate nine women and their children for up to three months at a time. This counsellor, speaking to AI, also cannot be named.

Domestic violence is something that changes your whole life. To leave a violent relationship is the hardest step a woman can take. The perpetrator should be forced to leave the house with safety guarantees for the victim. But it is the woman who becomes a victim again, for she must go into hiding, give up her home, sometimes her work or her friends – even her family.

Sometimes, victims are judged too weak because they have tolerated violence, or because they decide to return to their partner. In almost every case, it is the victim who must give up everything, and she often hesitates to do that.

People often view shelters as a service for the poor or poorly educated. The general public should know that violence occurs in all social classes. Sometimes people are stuck in a situation they could have got out of, if only they had realized there were options available to them.

The most important thing the women need is psychosocial support. If we cannot offer enough (for we are not therapists) we refer them to a mental health service, so that they can work on improving their sense of self worth. The main thing while they are with us is to rest, to think, to talk and to be believed.

Most women come to us in a crisis, but they are proud of themselves for making this decision. It is a profound moment, and they are pleased with themselves for the progress they make.

This is an edited extract from an interview with the author. The opinions expressed in it are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect AI policy or research. In November AI launched its 16 days of activism campaign in support of women's shelters across the globe. See www.amnesty.org/16days2006

[Picture caption: Violence against women in the family is a fundamental violation of human rights. It is a pervasive, daily reality for women in every country across the globe. Urge your government to sign up to AI's *14-Point Programme for the prevention of domestic violence* (ACT 77/012/2006). Visit www.amnesty.org/actforwomen to find out how. © AI]]