

Trading in terror

Military, police and security transfers

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Amnesty International is a worldwide movement of people working to promote internationally recognized human rights. It is independent of any government, political persuasion or religious creed. Its mission is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination. In this context:

- It seeks the release of all prisoners of conscience. These are people detained for their political, religious or other conscientiously held beliefs or because of their ethnic origin, sex, colour, language, national or social origin, economic status, birth or other status – who have not used or advocated violence.
- It works for fair and prompt trials for all political prisoners.
- It opposes the death penalty, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment without reservation.
- It campaigns for an end to political killings and “disappearances”.

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Amnesty International calls on armed political groups to respect human rights and to halt abuses such as the detention of prisoners of conscience, hostage-taking, torture and unlawful killings.

It also seeks to support the protection of human rights by other activities, including its work with the United Nations (UN) and regional intergovernmental organizations, and its work for refugees, on international military, security and police relations, and on economic and cultural relations.

[cover photo caption]

COVER PHOTO:

A child looks on as a member of Colombian special security forces (known as “Robocops”) aims his gun during a raid of a working class neighbourhood of the town of Barrancabermeja, March 2001. Although this force had captured a number of paramilitaries in the town in recent months, it was clear that these efforts were insufficient to curtail paramilitary activity in the town. Army-backed paramilitaries continued to carry out military operations in Barrancabermeja unhindered.

In 1994 direct US military aid to the Colombian army was suspended because of the army’s appalling human rights record and its collusion with illegal paramilitary groups responsible for widespread human rights abuses – the “dirty war” tactics of the armed force’s counter-insurgency strategy. In 2000, however, despite overwhelming evidence of the Colombian army’s continued links with paramilitary groups, the US government approved a massive program of military aid to Colombia, most of it destined for the army. US congressional human rights conditions were waived by the then US President, Bill Clinton, and there are no controls to guarantee that it will not be used – either directly or indirectly via paramilitary groups – in the commission of serious human rights violations.

Military aid approved under Plan Colombia began to reach Colombia in 2000. After the aid was approved, the conflict intensified and violations of international humanitarian law – including arbitrary and deliberate killings by guerrilla forces of those they accuse of collaborating with their enemies – and human rights violations by the security forces and their paramilitary allies increased dramatically.

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[end caption]

Amnesty International's campaigning focuses on some of the gravest human rights abuses such as torture, "disappearance" and political killings. There is clear evidence that some transfers of military, security and police (MSP) goods or services to countries where human rights are abused can aid or exacerbate such abuses. This is why strict controls and vigilant monitoring are needed to ensure that such transfers do not occur.

[photo caption]

"If they press that button, your whole body will be in shock... They used it all the time on my body. They tortured me because I was speaking out for independence and I will continue to speak out."

Palden Gyatso, a Tibetan monk who had spent 33 years in Chinese prisons and labour camps, displays the type of electro-shock weapons used to torture him.

High-voltage, electro-shock stun technology was initially developed by mainly US companies. However, in recent years, other countries where there have been persistent reports of torture and ill-treatment have begun to produce this equipment.

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[end caption]

Highlighting such MSP transfers is an important part of exposing the involvement of governments in facilitating human rights abuses abroad and encouraging them to use their influence to enhance human rights protection. Action on such MSP transfers also allows campaigns to address directly those whose actions may constitute human rights violations – in particular members of military, security or police forces.

Amnesty International recognizes that there can be legitimate arms sales or other military or security assistance. It calls on governments to abide by their international human rights obligations and humanitarian law. These include ensuring that they do not authorize any transfer of arms or equipment to a state where there is a clear risk that they will fall into the hands of those likely to commit serious human rights abuses.

The global trade in weapons, equipment and know-how can involve a complex chain of clandestine and circuitous routes by which money and equipment flow across borders, sometimes involving false companies, offshore accounts and evasions of those export restrictions that do exist.

[photo credit]

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Arms brokers negotiate the transfer of military and security equipment from one country to another. Some brokers have been linked to supplies of equipment to repressive regimes and forces involved in armed conflicts characterized by massive human rights violations. Amnesty International calls on all governments to introduce comprehensive measures to control arms brokering and trafficking to ensure that the MSP transfers in which they participate do not assist in the violation of human rights abroad.

[photo credit]

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Tools of torture

“They worked on me... with the electric baton on the nape of the neck and in the genitals. It hurt so much that even now when I speak it is difficult to keep my head still as the back of my neck hurts very much... those people who make it for torture, they don't test it on their own bodies and they don't know the pain it causes. They do it to make other people suffer quite simply to make money.”

Roberto (not his real name), arrested and tortured in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) in 1991.

Lax export controls make it easy to procure security equipment and services which facilitate ill-treatment and torture. Some of the equipment used to torture and ill-treat – such as leg irons and shackles – has changed little over the years. However, devices using modern technology, such as electro-shock weapons, make up an increasing part of the torturer's armoury. Official controls on the manufacture and sale of these kinds of devices and weapons are woefully inadequate.

[photo caption]

In July 1997 Kenyan paramilitary police stormed the All Saints Anglican Cathedral in Nairobi. Pro-reform activists had taken refuge there after police violently dispersed their peaceful protest. Police threw tear-gas canisters into the building and then moved in wielding truncheons. Many people were injured, some seriously. Amnesty International obtained some of the tear-gas canisters and plastic bullets used and traced them back to manufacturers in the United Kingdom (UK). This triggered a campaign by Amnesty International members to put pressure on the UK government and the companies concerned to stop their trade in equipment used in repression. Subsequently the UK government declared that it had rejected £1.5 million of licence applications for riot control equipment “including batons and tear gas” to Kenyan police because of human rights concerns.

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[end caption]

Companies that market high-voltage electro-shock weapons, including stun belts, stun shields, stun guns and tasers, claim that they are safe and non-lethal if used properly. Amnesty International is concerned, however, that such weapons, which can inflict severe pain at the touch of a button without necessarily leaving marks on the human body, are open to abuse and that they can be harmful or even lethal if used on people suffering from conditions such as heart disease. Stun weapons have been banned for law enforcement purposes in a number of countries.

Despite their growing use in an ever greater number of countries, and despite increasing evidence of the misuse of such devices, there has been no thorough, independent evaluation of the effects of electro-shock stun equipment. Amnesty International has called for the use of electro-shock equipment by police or prison officials to be suspended immediately unless and until it can be proved safe.

‘Non-lethal’ weapons

Recent years have also seen developments in the field of so-called “non-lethal” weapons, such as tear gas and chemical irritants. The companies involved in manufacturing and trading these devices promote them on the grounds that they provide effective control without the risk of loss of life.

However, there is increasing evidence of the misuse of riot control equipment such as water-cannon, plastic and rubber bullets, and chemical agents such as pepper spray and tear gas, resulting in serious injury, even death. Many of these weapons have not been independently assessed and some remain inherently open to misuse.

Amnesty International calls on governments to introduce strict guidelines on the design and use of such equipment and to set up adequate monitoring mechanisms to ensure that the guidelines are kept under review and adhered to.

Amnesty International also calls on governments to implement stringent national and international controls on the flow of such equipment to ensure that it does not end up in the hands of those responsible for human rights violations.

[photo credit]

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Training

Providing training to military, security or police forces is often part of international donor assistance by governments as well as an international business. Some of this training may have the potential to benefit recipient communities by providing better skilled forces. However, much of this training occurs in secret, far from the scrutiny of elected officials or the public and there is a risk that it may be used to facilitate human rights violations. Amnesty International continues to press for stringent controls and monitoring of MSP training and know-how.

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Small arms

Irresponsible transfers of small arms and light weapons fuel many violent conflicts, undermining sustainable development and contributing to countless human rights abuses throughout the world. The UN estimates that in the 1990s conventional weapons were used to kill more than five million people, mostly civilians. Many of these weapons and much of the ammunition used were obtained through international arms transfers.

So-called “small arms” – such as handguns, assault rifles, machine-guns, grenades and landmines – are made easily available in large part because regulations on their supply are inadequate and they are more easily concealed. The result is a proliferation of smaller weaponry which contributes to gross violations of human rights, crimes against humanity, war crimes or genocide.

Amnesty International urges governments to adopt and implement laws and regulations to prohibit arms exports unless it can be reasonably demonstrated that such arms will not contribute to serious human rights violations, crimes against humanity or war crimes. It also calls for suitable mechanisms at the international level to provide effective control of the trade in small arms. Amnesty International supports the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and is a founding member of the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), a global network of non-governmental organizations working to combat the grave threat posed by the proliferation and misuse of small arms.

[photo caption]

Victims of mine blasts at the International Committee of the Red Cross’ orthopaedic centre in Kabul, Afghanistan, April 2001. One legacy of super-power involvement in Afghan politics and the ongoing warfare is around 10 million landmines which continue to threaten the lives of children, men and women.

For more than 20 years Afghanistan has been ravaged by conflict. More than a million people have been killed. The devastation has contributed to the deaths of an estimated four million children from hunger and disease. Powerful and neighbouring countries and international arms trafficking syndicates have poured weapons into the hands of their favoured warring factions, effectively helping to set the stage for a human rights catastrophe.

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“The torturers had just left but the horror remained. There was the whipping pole and the window grilles where prisoners were tied naked for days, freezing water thrown over them at night. Then there were the electric leads for the little dynamo – the machine mercifully taken off to Israel by the interrogators – which had the inmates shrieking with pain when the electrodes touched their fingers or penises. And there were the handcuffs which an ex-prisoner handed to me yesterday afternoon.

“Engraved into the steel were the words: ‘The Peerless Handcuff Co. Springfield, Mass. Made in USA.’ And I wondered, in Israel's most shameful prison, if the executives over in Springfield knew what they were doing when they sold these manacles.”

Journalist Robert Fisk writing for the UK newspaper The Independent describes the Khiam detention centre in the wake of the Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon in May 2000.

Until May 2000, the Khiam detention centre in south Lebanon was run by the South Lebanese Army (SLA), a Lebanese militia armed and sponsored by Israel. Torture was routine and systematic in Khiam. Hundreds of detainees passed through Khiam. Eleven died there, some after torture, others because of lack of medical treatment.

For years former prisoners and human rights organizations claimed that Israeli security forces controlled Khiam and were implicated in these abuses. The Israeli authorities consistently denied all responsibility. Although Israeli security forces may not have been involved in the day-to-day running of Khiam, it is clear that they paid and trained the guards and interrogators and used the information extracted under torture. Their position as paymasters and advisers meant they were well placed to secure a halt to Khiam's terrible regime of neglect, cruelty and torture. Instead they supported it.
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What you can do

1. Join Amnesty International and become part of a worldwide movement campaigning for an end to human rights violations. Help us to make a difference.
 2. Ask your Amnesty International section if you can support any campaign actions on international transfers of military, security and police equipment or training to help protect human rights.
- Make a donation to support Amnesty International's work.
 - Tell your friends, family, neighbours and co-workers about your commitment to human rights.

For further details, please write to the address in the box below, if there is one:

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