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**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL**  
**NEWS FOR HEALTH PROFESSIONALS**

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### Amnesty International reports & statements:

See the following recent AI reports and press statements [dates given in day/month/year format].

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AFR 46/001/2007

### **Asylum seekers/refugees:**

**Australia:** 82 of 83 Sri Lankan Tamil men claiming asylum in Australia have arrived on Nauru after being held for almost a month on Christmas Island, where they were sent after the navy intercepted their disabled boat at sea. Another man, who is being treated in a Perth Hospital, will join them later. See the Australian (19 March)

<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,20867,21404724-2702,00.html>

**UK:** Nine people were taken to hospital after a disturbance broke out at a privately-run immigration detention centre in Oxfordshire. The removal of an asylum seeker detained in Campsfield Detention Centre, was said to have provoked a deliberately lit fire, leading to the hospitalisation of two detainees and seven staff. *The Guardian* (14 March):

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/immigration/story/0,,2033734,00.html>

### **Children:**

**Kazakhstan:** Twenty one former senior doctors and public health officials are currently on trial for negligence and corruption leading to the infection of 94 children and thirteen mothers with HIV during medical treatment in the southern province of Shymkent. Eight of the children have died. An investigation into the HIV outbreak among the children uncovered serious irregularities in the blood donor system. Prosecutors allege that medical staff traded in blood for profit. *IRIN Asia* (16 March):

<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=70532>

### **Death Penalty:**

**China:** A statement has been released by the Supreme People's Court, the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Justice and the country's chief prosecutor acknowledging that the country should reduce the number of death sentences it carries out but stating that it cannot abolish capital punishment altogether. The prosecutor also said that condemned prisoners should not be paraded through the streets and suspects should not be tortured. In 2005, China executed at least 1, 770 people, although the real figure is thought to be far higher. *AP* (12 March):

<http://apnews.myway.com/article/20070312/D8NQICPG0.html>

**Pakistan:** Two men and a woman were stoned by a 100-strong crowd, prior to being shot dead in north-west Pakistan on the orders of a tribal council that found them guilty of adultery. The Government said it had no power to interfere with "tribal traditions" in the semi-autonomous tribal belt. Pakistani authorities have only a limited grip on its tribal areas along the rugged, north-western frontier with Afghanistan, which is populated by conservative ethnic Pashtuns.

*The Guardian* (15 March): <http://www.guardian.co.uk/worldlatest/story/0,-6482377,00.html>

### **HIV/AIDS:**

**India:** The National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) has decided to increase by five-fold contraceptive vending outlets in the country to cover high risk groups. The supply of condoms is being targeted at both urban and rural areas, with priority being accorded to high HIV prevalent and high fertility districts. *IBN Live* (8 March):

<http://www.ibnlive.com/news/more-condom-vending-outlets-to-check-aids/35490-17.html>

See also the report that female sex workers in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu are to get 60,000 condoms as part of a government sponsored Aids prevention initiative, which, for

the first time, is providing the women with a personal choice over their reproductive rights. *BBC* (14 March):  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/6450721.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6450721.stm) .

**China:** An HIV positive mother is under house detention in connection with her protests against infections arising from contaminated blood. To date, courts have refused to consider these cases, and no officials have been prosecuted for the spread of AIDS through the tainted blood. See the Reuters report in *Khaleej Times* (14 March):  
[http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle.asp?xfile=data/todaysfeatures/2007/March/todaysfeatures\\_March26.xml&section=todaysfeatures](http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle.asp?xfile=data/todaysfeatures/2007/March/todaysfeatures_March26.xml&section=todaysfeatures)

**Chile:** La organización chilena Sidacción trabaja desde hace veinte años en prevención del VIH/SIDA. Pero ahora ha decidido «salir del closet», cambiar de nombre y sumarse al trabajo de defensa de los derechos de las personas gay. *AG Magazine* (19 marzo):  
<http://agmagazine.com.ar/index.php?IdNot=1006>

-[See also story under “children” above]

## Human rights:

**Czech Republic:** A group of Roma women speak out against their forced sterilisation, which often occurred without their knowledge, or understanding of consent forms. There are allegations that coercive sterilisation was used to curb the traditionally high fertility rate among the Roma, and similar cases have been reported in neighbouring Slovakia. Sterilisations took place as recently as 2001. *BBC* (12 March):  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/6409699.stm>

**Zimbabwe:** The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) say there has been an escalation in the violence faced by activists, after the police broke up a rally last week, and scores of protestors were arrested and beaten. Last week Morgan Tsvangirai required hospitalisation after losing consciousness in police custody. Four senior MDC officials, were prevented from leaving the country. Some were wishing to travel abroad to seek treatment for injuries they say were sustained in police custody. *BBC* (21 March):  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6469491.stm?s>

## Prisoners:

**Australia:** Australian David Hicks is among the first four Guantanamo Bay prisoners to be arraigned in preliminary hearings this week before their cases go to trial. The maximum sentence the four face is life in prison, but the military commissions will have the power to sentence others to death, and there is no independent appeal process. Amnesty International Australia is currently touring a full-scale replica of Hicks' cell, complete with glaring light, stainless steel toilet and bunk bed, for the public to experience for themselves. *The Herald Sun* (19 March):  
<http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21985,21409727-662,00.html>  
<http://www.bringhickshome.com/>

Professor Andrew Coyle of the International Centre of Prison studies was invited to address the Swedish UN Prison and Probation Officer Course in Stockholm. His lecture, entitled *Development of human rights standards in post conflict penal systems*, can be downloaded at <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/depsta/rel/icps/post-conflict-penal-systems.doc> . (2nd March 2007)

## Right to Health:

**China:** A new regulation on prescription management will take effect on May 1, to stem the practice of doctors receiving kickbacks from pharmaceutical companies by prescribing expensive and unnecessary drugs to patients. Under the new regulation, medical institutions will be restricted to offering patients the same type of drugs from no more than two pharmaceutical companies. *The China Daily* (14 March):  
[http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-03/14/content\\_826952.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-03/14/content_826952.htm)

**South Africa:** An independent civic group 'Coalition Against Water Privatisation' is to take Johannesburg Water and the Johannesburg City Council to court over denying the poor adequate right to water. President Thabo Mbeki has announced that South Africa has "already achieved the Millennium Development Goals in respect of basic water supply, with improvement of access from 59 percent in 1994 to 83 percent in 2006", but the group claims this is misleading as the "quantity provided does not meet the needs of the poor". *All Africa* (21 March):

<http://allafrica.com/stories/200703210161.html>

**Somalia:** Aid agencies warn that the nation is in the midst of a cholera outbreak following the worst flooding in decades. The WHO said in a report this week acute watery diarrhoea has killed 251 people and had infected 5,602 since January. Insecurity after a war between Islamists and government troops backed by Ethiopian armour has made humanitarian missions all but impossible. *Reuters AlertNet* (20 March):

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L20109936.htm>

### **Torture:**

**Nigeria:** Torture, ill-treatment and impunity for the perpetrators are widespread in police custody in Nigeria, though apparently not in the prison system, says the UN Human Rights' Council Special Rapporteur on Torture, after a visit to Nigeria. Torture was frequently cited to the Special Rapporteur as being used to extract confessions or to obtain further information in relation to alleged crimes. Corporal punishment remains lawful in Nigeria. *UN News page* (12 March):

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=21822&Cr=torture&Cr1>

### **Violence against women:**

**Japan:** The Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, has apologised in parliament for the country's use of women as sex slaves during World War II. The apology comes after Mr Abe was criticised by Asian neighbours for previous comments casting doubt on whether the women were coerced. See the BBC report (26 March): <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/6495115.stm>

**Pakistan:** 'In Pakistan a woman is said to be raped every two hours, and gang rapes happen every eight hours. What makes the crime so difficult to fight is the attitude towards women.' This article discusses the attitudes towards women in a society where rape is common, the lack of state support for victims, and the difficulties in obtaining any type of justice against the perpetrators. *BBC* (9 March):

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/6433357.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/6433357.stm)

**Guinée-Bissau:** Les représentants du 101 communautés pular et mandingue issues de la communauté rurale en Guinée-Bissau ont pris l'engagement solennel, en toute connaissance de cause, de préserver l'intégrité physique et morale de la femme par l'abandon des pratiques néfastes : l'excision et des mariages précoces des filles au sein des communautés. *Le Soleil*, Dakar (21 mars) :

<http://fr.allafrica.com/stories/200703210361.html>

**Jordan :** Jordanian law continues to be lenient on those who kill their female relatives in the name of protecting family honour. Last year, between 15 and 20 women were stabbed, beaten or strangled to death by family members, sometimes women themselves. *IRIN Middle East* (11 March):

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=70634>

### **Women's Health:**

**International Women's Day.** Many newspapers and journals published editorials and opinion pieces related to International Women's Day 2007 on March 8. See *Medical News Today* (13 March):

<http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/medicalnews.php?newsid=64897>

**Chile:** One year in office, Chile's first female president has legislated on the right to breast-feed in the workplace, offered greater protection against domestic violence, cracked down on alimony-dodgers and placed more women in positions of power. However discrimination remains, women are often asked to take a pregnancy test before being offered employment, and the average domestic violence case can take seven years to come to court. *The Union Tribune* (12 March):

<http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/world/20070312-0022-chile-womensgains.html>

**Haiti – République Dominicaine:** Un ensemble d'organisations sociales ont profité du 8 mars, journée mondiale de la femme, pour réclamer des soins de santé adéquats pour les femmes de la région frontalière. Voir *AlterPresse* (9 mars):

<http://www.alterpresse.org/spip.php?article5758>

Voir aussi la partie dédiée à la santé au milieu de l'article suivant:

<http://www.alterpresse.org/spip.php?article5743>

**The Philippines:** In the context of the growing economic crisis, Filipino women are increasingly marginalized and discriminated against, especially in terms of employment. There are reported cases of women losing their jobs when a pregnancy is discovered; "Even in the government offices, married women have less work opportunities". Pregnant women employed in government offices who are not married cannot avail of their reproductive health rights like maternity leave and prenatal check-ups. *Davao Today* (15 March):

<http://davaotoday.com/2007/03/15/gabriela-calls-for-full-protection-of-women-in-workplaces-as-high-court-favors-case-of-fired-pregnant-woman/>

**Poland:** The European Court of Human Rights found that a Polish woman's human rights were violated when she was denied access to a 'therapeutic' abortion, lawful in Poland. On grounds of suffering from severe myopia, Ms Tysiak obtained a referral for a termination which was then voided by a gynaecologist. Since giving birth in 2000, her eyesight has deteriorated significantly, and she is now classed as severely disabled. See *Human Rights Court judgement* in full (21 March):

<http://cmiskp.echr.coe.int/tkp197/view.asp?item=1&portal=hbkm&action=html&highlight=tysiac%20%7C%20v%20%7C%20poland%20%7C%20abortion&sessionid=11852914&skin=hudoc-en> . See also: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6470403.stm>

**Mexico:** Proposals to legalise abortion in the first three months of pregnancy have sparked debate in Mexico City, where officials from the Roman Catholic Church promise to oppose the bill. Under current Mexico City law, abortion is only permitted if the pregnancy endangers the woman's life or if the woman has been raped. *The Herald* (15 March):

<http://www.mexiconews.com.mx/miami/23792.html> article in English.

[http://www.cronica.com.mx/nota.php?id\\_notas=291488](http://www.cronica.com.mx/nota.php?id_notas=291488) *La Cronica* (20 Marzo) articuló en español.

## Meetings/Events:

Health, Development and Human Rights Intensive Course. The University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. 16-20 July 2007. Enrolment is limited to 60 participants. Further information is available at:

<http://www.ihhr.unsw.edu.au/initiative/courses.html>

## Publications:

Donaldson L, Banatvala, N. 'Health is global: proposals for a UK Government-wide strategy'. *The Lancet*. Vol. 369, Issue 9564. 10 March 2007. pp857 – 861. (free online registration required): <http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140673607603274/fulltext>

Editorial. Learning disability: a neglected concern. *Lancet* 24 March, <http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS014067360760467X/fulltext>

Naude J. *Making The Cut in South Africa: A Medico-political Journey*. Royal Society of Medicine Press Ltd, London, March 2007. (ISBN 978-1-85315-755-4). See: <http://www.rsmppress.co.uk/bknaude.htm>

Patel V. 'Closing the 10/90 Divide in Global Mental Health Research'. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*. Vol. 115, Issue 4. April 2007. Pp257 - 259. (subscription required): <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/toc/acp/115/4>

Rajalakshmi, T.K. 'Fragile Lives'. *Frontline* Vol. 24, Issue 5, 10-23 March 2007. <http://www.frontlineonnet.com/stories/20070323001708900.htm>

Riley, L.W., Ko, A.I, Unger, A. Reis, M.G. 'Slum health: Diseases of neglected populations'. *BMC International Health and Human Rights* 2007, Vol. 7:2, 7 March 2007. <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1472-698X/7/2>

Smith R. 'Reed-Elsevier's hypocrisy in selling arms and health: authors should take the lead in making the company divest its arms business'. *Journal of The Royal Society of Medicine*. Vol. 100, Issue 3, March 2007. pp 114-115. <http://www.jrsm.org/cgi/content/full/100/3/114>

Steinbrook R. 'HIV in India – A Complex Epidemic'. *The New England Journal of Medicine*. Vol. 356, Issue 11, 15 March 2007. pp1089-1093. <http://content.nejm.org/cgi/content/full/356/11/1089>

'Public Statement Concerning the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation'. European Committee For The Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT). 13 March 2007: <http://www.cpt.coe.int/documents/rus/2007-17-inf-eng.pdf>

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