

The Wire

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Bodies in the streets

“I saw girls get raped in my neighbourhood and on the streets. I saw people get slaughtered. I saw people killed in their houses, their bodies rotting for days. It happened to my neighbour’s two girls.”

Civilians in war-torn Somalia are under attack. Killings, rape and looting are a daily occurrence, and a food crisis looms.

Accounts of events in Mogadishu were offered by scores of traumatized survivors of the conflict interviewed by Amnesty International in November and December 2007.

News from Somalia is scarce – hardly surprising given the recent clampdown on journalists and media outlets. Death threats and violence against journalists and human rights defenders escalated in late 2007, and scores were forced to leave the country. A 19-year-old radio journalist who left Mogadishu in October 2007 after being threatened several times by unknown callers said, “I couldn’t tell who to beware of and be careful of – the Ethiopians, the Transitional Federal Government or local national resistance groups.”

A woman from Mogadishu told her story, “First they steal, then they take away the girls. Sometimes the girls come back, sometimes they don’t. It was a Thursday in mid-November. We were robbed by armed men. They were only two, and they were masked. They tried to take my sister, but my husband intervened, saying ‘this girl is too young and poor.’ This is when they shot him in the chest with rifles. Then the two masked men ran away with my sister.”

Witnesses described people being “slaughtered” or “killed like goats” by Ethiopian troops; the victims had their throats slit. Their bodies were often left lying in pools of blood in the streets until armed fighters, including snipers, moved out of the area and relatives could collect their bodies.

Somali civilians have been routinely targeted in the conflict areas of southern and central Somalia, on the roads as they fled, and in camps and temporary settlements where they sought safety.

One woman described the dangers of road travel: “On the road from Mogadishu, there are robbers who come and take your money or just fire directly at the buses. Sometimes, there are roadblocks where they stop and ask you for money. If you don’t stop, they will kill you.”

Every day aid workers face checkpoints, roadblocks, extortion, ambushes and bureaucratic obstacles, making aid delivery in southern and central Somalia extremely

precarious. UNICEF announced on 14 February 2008 that some 90,000 children could die in Somalia in the next few months because of inadequate funding for food, water and sanitation programmes.

Government forces, Ethiopian troops backing the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), and armed groups opposing the TFG have all committed serious human rights abuses and have violated the laws of war.

Attacks on civilians by all parties must stop immediately. The international community must also bear responsibility for failing to put consistent pressure on the TFG and the Ethiopian government to respect human rights. Amnesty International continues to call for more determined international intervention, including the strengthening of the UN arms embargo on Somalia.

See *Somalia: Routinely targeted: attacks on civilians in Somalia* (AFR 52/006/2008).

[*Photo caption: A government soldier guarding food threatens civilians, Mogadishu, Somalia, May 2007.* © Private]

Iraq refugee crisis continues to deepen

“Save us from this hell. A person doesn’t live just to eat. I would like to have a good life anywhere else.”

Resident of al-Tanf refugee camp on the Iraq-Syria border,
interviewed by Amnesty International delegates, March 2008

The Iraq refugee crisis continues to deepen while the international response remains inadequate. Individuals and families forced to flee for their lives are now living in dangerous and increasingly impoverished conditions. For those most at risk, resettlement to a third country is the only durable solution to their plight yet, to date, the international community's response has been feeble.

While resettlement can form only a small part of the solution to this crisis, it is crucial for many refugees, in particular those who are especially vulnerable and in urgent need of support. Resettlement provides protection to the individuals involved and stands as a tangible expression of responsibility sharing by states in the international community.

The most vulnerable should be the first to benefit from this process. Those currently in dire need of resettlement include Palestinian refugees who have fled Iraq, many of whom have been languishing in dangerous and appalling conditions in border camps in the desert for more than three years. Iraqi members of targeted ethnic and religious minorities, female-headed households, urgent medical cases and victims of torture are also critically in need of resettlement and other assistance.

Despite the pressing need for action, the international community has not provided adequate and viable resettlement options. Where resettlement is taking place the numbers are limited and the process is often painfully slow. Some countries, including Germany and Belgium, have still not implemented resettlement programmes. Others,

such as the UK, provide for only very small numbers. In the USA, the law bars from resettlement anyone who has provided "material support" to "terrorist organizations". This has reportedly resulted in a number of people in need of protection being rejected because they paid ransom to armed groups for the release of kidnapped relatives.

Some countries have taken a positive lead in developing resettlement opportunities. Chile, for example, recently took 116 Palestinians from al-Tanf camp on the Iraq-Syria border. Sudan has signed an agreement in principle with UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to resettle some of the 2,000 Palestinian refugees currently in al-Waleed camp, just inside Iraq's border with Syria. Amnesty International believes much more can and must be done by other states to relieve the suffering of Iraq's refugees.

Amnesty International calls on the international community to work for a fast and effective solution to the refugee crisis in Iraq by providing protection through resettlement programmes, introducing new programmes where none existed previously, increasing annual intake quotas, and ensuring faster processing for those seeking asylum, among other measures.

See: *Suffering in silence: Iraqi refugees in Syria* (MDE 14/010/2008).

[*Photo caption: Tents in al-Tanf camp in the no-man's land at the Iraq/Syria border, March 2008. © Amnesty International*]

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20 June – World Refugee Day

Thai government must uphold the human rights of refugees

Amnesty International is calling on the Thai government to immediately release 154 Lao Hmong refugees, including 90 children, who have been held at the Nong Khai Immigration Detention Centre in northern Thailand since December 2006.

Despite being recognized as refugees by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), they are at risk of being returned to Laos, where they face torture, disappearance and arbitrary detention. Amnesty International is urging the Thai authorities to immediately issue exit visas so that the group can resettle in the four countries that have agreed to receive them.

Conditions at the detention centre are harsh but have reportedly improved recently. The refugees are confined to two overcrowded and windowless cells, but since late April they have been confined for only 12 hours a day, down from 22 hours. They are allowed out into a courtyard for two hours daily.

The Thai authorities attempted to return the refugees to Laos in January 2007, breaching international law. However, the plan was abandoned following

international outcry. In July, some members of the group went on hunger strike in protest at the deterioration of their detention conditions following the escape of seven men.

During the past year, several other Lao Hmong groups have been deported to Laos, including 11 individuals on 28 February 2008 and 67 on 10 April 2008. Some were forcibly returned.

Among the 11 people deported in February was a mother who was coerced to return without her five children who remained at the Phetchabun camp. The mother was then authorized by the Thai military to return to the camp and collect her children to take back with her to Laos. However, the children had gone into hiding, undermining claims by the Thai authorities that the family had volunteered to return.

The makeshift camp in northern Phetchabun province hosts some 8,000 Lao Hmong people, an unknown number of whom are asylum-seekers.

Over 370 Lao Hmong asylum-seekers have been forcibly returned from Thailand since December 2005. Upon return to Laos, some of these people have been held in arbitrary detention, and there have been credible reports of torture. The fate of most of those forcibly returned to Laos remains unknown.

An unknown number of ethnic Hmong people live in scattered groups in the Lao jungles. They are a remnant (some are descendants) of the “Secret Army” which fought alongside the USA against communist Pathet Lao forces during the Viet Nam war.

After Pathet Lao’s victory in 1975, some members of the “Secret Army” launched an armed resistance, basing themselves in the jungles where they and their families have lived ever since. The refugees in Nong Khai and some of those in Phetchabun camp are linked in various ways to those living in the Lao jungle.

The grave situation for the refugees in Nong Khai and the uncertainties surrounding those who have been forcibly returned highlight the insecurity facing the 8,000 Lao Hmong currently residing in the Phetchabun camp. Both the Lao and Thai governments have publicly stated that they will be returned to Laos before the end of 2008.

Thailand’s humanitarian role in providing temporary protection to hundreds of thousands of people who have fled persecution and conflict in neighbouring countries is widely recognized. Amnesty International is therefore calling on the Thai government to continue to uphold its obligations under international law. All plans for the return of any Lao Hmong asylum-seekers must stop until a fair and satisfactory procedure has been put in place to allow these individuals to exercise their human right to seek asylum.

[*Photo caption:* Lao Hmong refugees in overcrowded, windowless cells at the Immigration Detention Centre in the northern Thai town of Nong Khai. © Private]

Billy Moore: death row survivor tells his story

On 24 May 1984 Billy Moore was seven hours away from dying on the electric chair when he was given a stay of execution. He had spent the previous three days under “death watch”, housed in a single cell where his every word and movement were recorded by two guards. The execution date was the 13th he had received; he was to receive two more before his death sentence was finally commuted on 21 August 1990.

A few days before his scheduled execution, two officers showed him the electric chair. They took off the sheet and said: “Billy look at this. You need to see how beautiful this chair is... you’re not going to be able to appreciate none of this when we’re strapping you down in it.”

Billy Moore was sentenced to death on 17 July 1974 by a court in Georgia, USA, after pleading guilty to armed robbery and the murder of 77-year-old Fredger Stapleton. The judge had typed up his sentence even before the trial had started. Billy Moore spent the next 16 and a half years of his life on death row.

Since his release from prison in 1992, Billy Moore, a committed Christian, has devoted his time to campaigning against the death penalty. While on death row he wrote to Fredger Stapleton’s family, asking for forgiveness. Not only did they reply positively, but they have corresponded ever since. Speaking about the commutation of his death sentence in 1990, he said he believed his life was saved in part by the determination of Fredger Stapleton’s family not to see his execution take place.

The death penalty continues to be extensively used in the USA, with over 1,100 executions since its resumption in 1977.

[Photo caption: Billy Moore speaking to Amnesty International staff, London, UK, April 2008. © Amnesty International]

Dangers await returnees to Kosovo

Four months after unilaterally declaring its independence, Kosovo remains a dangerous place. People living there face the extreme threat of renewed violence between clashing parties, and the 235,000 refugees who fled the 1999 conflict to countries in Europe cannot be guaranteed a safe return.

During the month of June, a European Union (EU) mission will be established while the interim UN civilian administration UNMIK has not yet officially announced its withdrawal. The EU mission will assume, together with the Kosovo authorities, responsibility for creating secure conditions of return for refugees.

As the administrations go through transitions, other pressing issues, such as impunity for war crimes, organized crime, inter-ethnic violence, and marginalization of minority groups remain unresolved.

This adds yet more fuel to a dangerously volatile situation. Although a large majority of the Kosovo Albanians who fled in 1999 have since returned, a large number of

those refugees belonging to minority groups (mainly Serbs, Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians) remain displaced. Efforts to facilitate the safe return have been slow and inappropriate. Many countries have started to forcibly return refugees to Kosovo, leaving them faced with renewed violence and other human rights abuses.

Amnesty International is calling on all EU and Council of Europe member states, including the neighbouring countries of Macedonia and Montenegro, to stop forcibly returning vulnerable groups to Kosovo. Those who enjoy international protection must not be sent back until their safety can be guaranteed. And those who seek further protection or asylum must be offered a fair and transparent process to determine their status and offer them the right to appeal.

Kosovo effectively operates across a giant chasm – into which its minorities might fall. The authorities in Pristina adopted a constitution due to come into force on 15 June, the same day that the EU mission announced its establishment.

Adding to existing tensions, predominantly Serb municipalities in Kosovo have just held local and Serbian parliamentary elections, not recognized by the authorities in Pristina or by UNMIK.

[*Photo caption: Burned Ashkali houses in Vucitrn/Vusshtri, Kosovo. Amnesty International is calling for an end to the forced return of refugees. © Amnesty International*]

Human rights hope for Pakistan

Amnesty International welcomes the move by Pakistan's newly elected coalition government to ratify a key human rights treaty and sign two others.

On 17 April 2008, the government ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, while signing both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

This positive development is an encouragement for human rights activists in Pakistan following a crackdown on rights and freedoms after the imposition of a temporary state of emergency by President Pervez Musharraf in November 2007.

“Becoming a state party to UN human rights conventions is a key step to ensuring human rights are respected, protected and realized for all in Pakistan, in line with international standards,” said Sohail Warraich, Pakistan researcher at Amnesty International.

Amnesty International calls upon the Pakistan government to now ratify the ICCPR and the UN Convention against Torture and ensure that Pakistan's domestic legislation is brought into conformity with its latest international legal obligations.

Tunisia – harassed for wearing the hijab

Amal Ben Rhouma, a 24-year-old engineering student, is regularly stopped in the street by the police. They ask for her ID card and interrogate her about why she wears a hijab (Islamic headscarf). In May 2004, she was arrested in the street, taken to a police station and told to sign a document declaring that she would stop wearing a hijab. She said that when she refused, she was slapped in the face, knocked to the ground and kicked. In December 2006, state security officers visited her family home and told her father to stop her wearing her hijab.

When Sonia Srasra, a 25-year-old law student, went to the police station to apply for a national ID card, she was told that her application would only be accepted if she removed her hijab and signed a commitment to never wear it again. She refused to do so.

Article 5 of the Tunisian Constitution states: “The Tunisian Republic guarantees the inviolability of the individual, freedom of conscience and freedom of religious worship, provided that it does not disturb public order.” However, despite this guarantee, many women who choose to wear the hijab in accordance with their religious beliefs and freedom of expression are subject to restrictions, harassment and even violence.

Several ministerial decrees prohibit women from wearing the hijab in public. Decree 108, issued in 1981, bans the wearing of the hijab in government offices. Decree 102, issued in 1986, extended the prohibition to educational institutions. In October 2006 President Ben Ali denounced the hijab as a “garment of foreign origin having a sectarian connotation”.

In April 2002, the Ministry of Education suspended a teacher, Saida Adali, for three months for wearing the hijab. In October 2007 the administrative court ruled against the suspension, a decision the Ministry of Education is currently appealing against.

Amnesty International believes that prohibiting women from wearing the hijab, or compelling them to wear it, violates their rights to freedom of expression and belief. The secular or theocratic nature of a state should not be used to override the right of women and girls to express their conscientiously held beliefs or identity.

Cambodia – releases in forced eviction case

Eight villagers found guilty of crimes during the forced eviction of their village, Mittapheap 4, Sihanoukville, on 20 April 2007, were released from prison after the Court of Appeal denied the prosecution’s call for heavier sentences. They were released on 10 April 2008 after almost a year in prison and reunited with their families just before Khmer New Year celebrations.

The eight, plus another tried in absentia, had been tried in July 2007 for their role in the violence that took place during the forced eviction by 150 members of the security forces, which destroyed their houses and most of their belongings. Despite no evidence or witnesses against them, seven men were sentenced to 75 days’ and two men to eight months’ imprisonment. The prosecutor appealed against the sentences

and the men remained in prison pending the court hearing, although they had served the prison terms.

One year following the forced eviction, 90 families of fishermen and beach vendors are still living in squalid shelters on the roadside near their home village, lacking drinking water and basic sanitation, and struggling to make ends meet.

See *Cambodia: Making the poor homeless* (ASA 23/004/2008, March 2008); the *Wire*, *Cambodia burns the homes of its poor* (NWS 21/001/2008, February 2008), *Razed rights - Forced evictions in Cambodia* (ASA 23/003/2008, February 2008).

Worldwide Appeals

Zimbabwe – Abuses against opposition politicians

Nelson Chamisa and Paul Madzore, members of parliament for the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, were severely assaulted in March 2007 by men believed to be police officers or other state agents. Nobody has been brought to justice for these crimes more than one year after they occurred.

Nelson Chamisa was on his way to an international meeting when he was attacked by eight unidentified people outside Harare International airport on 18 March 2007. His assailants beat him on the head with iron bars, resulting in a fractured skull, damage to his eye and lacerations to his face. In spite of the high profile of the case Amnesty International is not aware of any investigations into the attack.

Paul Madzore was arrested at his home on 28 March 2007, along with his wife and children, and taken to Harare Central police station. After his arrest he was called into a room at the police station and confronted by eight men in plain clothes who he suspected were from the Law and Order section of the police. He was beaten on the feet with a metal rod and a rubber baton for around 30 to 40 minutes. Charges against him were later dropped because of insufficient evidence.

Following elections on 29 March 2008, there has been a sharp increase in state-sponsored violence against supporters of the political opposition. The police have failed to investigate these abuses and have also been implicit in abuses themselves.

* Please write to the authorities, calling for an immediate investigation into the reports of torture and other ill-treatment of Paul Madzore and the attack on Nelson Chamisa; call for those found responsible to be brought to justice.

Send appeals to: Commissioner-General of Police, Zimbabwe Republic Police, Police Headquarters, PO Box 8807, Causeway, Harare, Zimbabwe. Fax: +263 4 253 212.
Salutation: Dear Commissioner-General

[*Photo caption: Paul Madzore (left), and Nelson Chamisa (right) after being attacked, March 2007.*

© Amnesty International (Paul Madzore)

© Solidarity Peace Trust (Nelson Chamisa)]

Saudi Arabia - Detention of eight activists

Eight men – Al-Sharif Saif Al-Ghalib, Saud al-Hashimi, Abdel Rahman Khan, Abdelaziz al-Khariji, Musa al-Qirni, Fahd al-Qirshi, Sulieman al-Rushudi and Abdel Rahman al-Shumayri – are currently detained, reportedly without charge or trial, in the city of Jeddah. Amnesty International considers them to be prisoners of conscience, detained solely for the advocacy of human rights and peaceful political change. Two of the men – Saud al-Hashimi and Musa al-Qirni – are being held in solitary confinement.

The eight activists were arrested in Jeddah and Madinah on 3 February 2007 and are being held in Dhahban prison in Jeddah. Visits by relatives were not permitted until August, nearly six months after their arrest. Their lawyers have not been allowed to see them and are therefore unable to challenge the lawfulness of their detention.

Following the arrests, the Ministry of the Interior issued a statement claiming that the men had been arrested because they were collecting money to “help terrorism”. It appears that they were in fact targeted because of their advocacy of peaceful political change.

Article 114 of Saudi Arabia’s Law on Criminal Procedure (LCP), which states that detainees must be tried or released after six months, is widely ignored by the Saudi Arabian authorities. Article 4 of the LCP, under which detainees have the right to seek the assistance of a lawyer to represent them during the investigation and the trial, is also often ignored.

* Please write, calling on the authorities to release the eight men immediately and unconditionally if they are held solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to express their beliefs; ask the authorities to ensure that all the detainees are protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and given regular access to their families, their lawyers and any medical attention they may require.

Send appeals to: The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King ‘Abdullah Bin ‘Abdul ‘Aziz Al-Saud, Office of His Majesty The King, Royal Court, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Salutation: Your Majesty

Ukraine – tortured for a confession

Eduard Furman, who is married with one son, was arrested and allegedly tortured in police detention in April 2007 to force him to confess to a series of murders in Dnipropetrovsk and the capital Kyiv. He has spent over one year in detention awaiting trial.

He was arrested at a friend’s house in the city of Dnipropetrovsk on 11 April 2007 by troops from the Ministry of Interior. He was then taken to the offices of the Ukrainian State Security Service, where police investigators interrogated him about the murders. Eduard Furman reported that they beat him, pressed their fingers into his eye sockets

and gave him electric shocks on his testicles in an attempt to force him to confess. They put a gas mask over his head and cut off the air supply to suffocate him. He reported that he was then taken to a police station in the city of Brovary, where he was interrogated for a further four hours, beaten and put in a cell with a criminal suspect who tried to persuade him to confess. On 14 April 2007 his detention was extended; he alleged that after being beaten again he confessed to the murder of three people in the Kyiv region in March 2007. On 24 April 2007 he was charged with murder.

Despite his lawyer complaining to the Prosecutor General's office about his torture, no investigation has been opened into the allegations.

* Please write, calling for a prompt and impartial investigation into the allegations of torture or other ill-treatment of Eduard Furman and for those responsible to be brought to justice.

Send appeals to: Oleksander Medvedko, General Prosecutor of Ukraine, Riznitska Str. 13/15, 01601 Kyiv, Ukraine.

Fax: +380 44 280 26 03

Salutation: Dear General Prosecutor

[*Photo caption: © Private*]

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Getting a glimpse inside Guantánamo

Amnesty International is touring a life-size model of a maximum security cell at Guantánamo Bay through cities across the USA. The tour will enable people in the USA to gain a real sense of the harsh realities of illegal detention and prolonged isolation in Guantánamo.

Most of the detainees at Guantánamo are kept in isolation, sometimes for up to 24 hours a day. Many of them have virtually no access to natural light or contact with other human beings. Compounding their suffering is the fact that they are given no indication of when or if they will be freed.

Most are detained without charge. Those who have been charged face unfair trials by military commission. Some may face execution.

Guantánamo and the US programme of rendition and secret detention have become the best-known examples of unlawful detention practices adopted in the "war on terror". People detained in secret locations or in virtually incommunicado indefinite military detention have been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment. The lack of accountability for such human rights violations – including the international crimes of torture and enforced disappearance – and the absence of remedies for those who have suffered them, remains a cause for serious concern.

The USA's continuing refusal to apply international definitions of torture and other ill-treatment, its continuing use of indefinite detention without charge and denial of habeas corpus, and the CIA's programme of rendition and secret detention leaves much work to be done to ensure that detainees in US custody are free from torture and other ill-treatment, and other serious violations of their human rights.

The tour commenced on 8 May in Miami and continues through Philadelphia, Portland in Maine, and New York before arriving in Washington D.C. on 26 June to mark International Day in Support of Victims of Torture.

People are encouraged to enter the cell and experience for themselves the conditions of isolation and also share their experience in a video message. Before leaving, they can also take action to end illegal US detentions at Guantánamo and elsewhere by signing the global petition at www.tearitdown.org.

Readers can see inside the model cell also by visiting www.mediavr.com/hicks.htm.

[Photo caption: Life-size model of a maximum security Guantánamo cell on its journey across the USA. © Amnesty International]

A major step forward for economic, social and cultural rights

In a major step forward, the UN Working Group agreed by consensus to forward the text of an Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to the Human Rights Council. If the Optional Protocol is adopted by the Council at its next session in June, it would subsequently need to be adopted by the UN General Assembly and then opened for ratification by all UN member states.

The Optional Protocol would create a mechanism allowing individuals, groups and organizations to submit complaints about violations of economic, social and cultural rights to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Such mechanisms already exist for most of the other major international human rights treaties.

Amnesty International and other NGOs have been working for the creation and adoption of an Optional Protocol. The coming months are crucial in ensuring that the text of the Optional Protocol is not weakened and is adopted with the greatest support. All Amnesty International sections, structures and members are being encouraged to keep up the pressure on governments to support the adoption of the Optional Protocol and ensure that, by the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in December, all victims of all human rights violations have access to remedies at the international level.

Rural women living with HIV in South Africa struggle to access health care

In May 2007, K.E., a widow in her 40s living with HIV, needed to start her treatment urgently. She had no independent income, there was sometimes no food for her family, and she had no money to travel to the nearest hospital providing anti-retroviral

therapy. She told Amnesty International that her clinic had been informed about her situation. "I did explain and they said try and get the money. But I cannot get the money." Her health was deteriorating fast.

K.E.'s story is typical. Women living in rural South Africa face enormous barriers when they try to get access to comprehensive care and treatment for HIV and AIDS. Amnesty International's report published in March exposes the impact on their right to health of poverty and gender-based discrimination, as well as government delays in measures to respond to the HIV epidemic.

Amnesty International delegates visited rural communities in 2007 and spoke to women at risk of or living with HIV. The women spoke frequently of their experiences of oppression in their relationships with male partners and families, of the difficulties of finding employment, and the lack of adequate food. These circumstances, as well as persistent high levels of sexual violence and other gender-based violence, placed them at risk of HIV or created barriers to access to care and treatment for HIV and AIDS.

The international community is monitoring these issues. On 10-11 June, the 2008 UN General Assembly High-Level Meeting on HIV and AIDS will convene in New York to review progress towards the implementation of the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the 2006 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS. The UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) has received progress reports from 122 countries reporting on government performance and compliance with the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS. Amnesty International will join other NGOs and civil society in New York to help ensure that human rights commitments are not weakened.

Meanwhile Amnesty International members and supporters are targeting the South African authorities, as well as donor countries and institutions, as they campaign on behalf of rural women to ensure that they are able to realize their right to the highest attainable standard of health. See the report *I am at the lowest end of all – Rural women living with HIV face human rights abuses in South Africa* (AFR 53/001/2008).

[*Photo caption:* NGOs play a vital role in assisting women. They provide information on state services and help women cope with the consequences of violence and other forms of discrimination. © CSV & ALP]

The state of the world's human rights

Governments owe an apology for six decades of human rights failures, according to the *Amnesty International Report 2008*, launched on 28 May.

The 400-page report documents the state of human rights in 150 countries and analyzes human rights trends worldwide. It concludes that, in this 60th anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, human rights are still violated with impunity, in every region of the world.

The report reveals a world in which people continue to be killed and tortured for their beliefs; women still die for want of basic health care in childbirth; and whole communities are made intentionally homeless by governments seeking to exploit their land.

Amnesty International's Secretary General Irene Khan urged world leaders, both today's and tomorrow's, to show the same courage and leadership on human rights as their forebears did in 1948.

Without doubt, progress has been made in developing human rights standards, systems and institutions at national, regional and international levels. But the fact remains that injustice, inequality and impunity continue to be the hallmarks of our world.

This report shows that if we are to realize the Declaration's vision of "freedom from want" as well as "from fear" there is only one possible way forward: working to ensure that the indivisibility of the rights enshrined in the Declaration is a living reality for all.

The full report and other related materials in Arabic, English, French, German, Russian, Spanish and more, can be found at: <http://thereport.amnesty.org>.

For a printed copy (POL 10/001/2008), contact your local Amnesty International office or email: orderpub@amnesty.org.

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