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## Women human rights defenders at risk

Human rights defenders around the world face serious dangers and difficulties on account of their work to promote and defend the human rights of others. This report, which highlights cases involving women human rights defenders, is one in a series of Amnesty International documents illustrating the different obstacles and forms of harassment faced by defenders worldwide.<sup>1</sup>

Despite many hurdles, women human rights defenders are working actively for the protection of human rights – including but not limited to women's rights. In so doing women human rights defenders enrich and advance protection of human rights in a totally unique way both in the field of economic, social and cultural rights and civil and political rights.

The appeal cases featured in this document highlight the special contribution of women human rights defenders to developing respect for human rights, enhancing women's access to human rights and empowering women to be more visible and active in public affairs and public life. However, this small sample of cases also illustrates how women activists while experiencing the same forms of intimidation sometimes experienced by their male colleagues, can also face discrimination, sexual abuse, derogatory accusations or baiting related specifically to their status as women.

These appeal cases also highlight how arbitrary detention, sometimes followed by the misuse of the law to prosecute and imprison human rights defenders is becoming one of the most frequently reported violations instigated against defenders as a form of punishment to deter them from carrying out legitimate human rights work. This trend whereby the law or legal procedures become instruments to harass activists rather than to protect them was also recently highlighted by the UN Special Representative on Human Rights Defenders, Ms. Hina Jilani, in her report of October 2004 to the UN General Assembly.<sup>2</sup>

Women defend human rights in the face of widespread social discrimination against them. The past decades have seen some breakthroughs in governments' and general public understanding of women's rights as human rights. Despite this, there remain many obstacles to women's empowerment and the achievement of equal rights between men and women. In many societies, there has been little progress in ensuring women's full participation in decision-making processes in government, in political organizations, in the workplace, in the home, in their access to education or to economic opportunities.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example: Human rights defenders at risk (AI Index: ACT 30/020/2004); which highlights the way in which the judicial system is frequently misused around the world to prevent HRDs from carrying out their very important work. For a full listing of Amnesty International's reports on human rights defenders: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/eng-346/reports>

<sup>2</sup> UN doc. A/59/401 Report by the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Human Rights Defenders, 1 October 2004.

Nonetheless, women are playing a pivotal role in activism ranging from challenging weak or corrupt judicial systems, environmental degradation, campaigning against the death penalty and highlighting human rights violations in ongoing conflicts, to running programs on the rights to education, to land titles, and freedom from hunger and poverty. Women are forming organizations to raise awareness of gender-based rights abuses, including traditional practices such as female genital mutilation prevalent in many societies. Women are prominent as peace activists and counsellors of victims of sexual violence including rape and domestic violence. Many are advocates of the rights of vulnerable groups including women and girls living with HIV / AIDS and inspire campaigns against racism, slavery, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance.

In conflict situations the work of human rights defenders, including human rights observers and monitors, is critical in exposing serious atrocities. Amidst escalating violence and difficulties regarding access to regions in conflict, abuses committed against women frequently go unnoticed and unreported. Rape and sexual violence against women and girls can become a weapon in and of itself to humiliate and demoralise parties to the conflict. Because of the stigma attached to survivors of sexual violence, and women's disadvantaged position in society, women face sometimes insurmountable obstacles to obtain justice. Whether as civilians, combatants, refugees or displaced people, the impact of conflict weighs particularly heavily on women. In such situations, the role of women's human rights defenders is all the more crucial but may carry even greater risks.

During the course of its research on the difficulties faced by human rights defenders Amnesty International has found that both women and men defenders are frequently persecuted or victims of retaliation because they criticise government human rights policies or the conduct of powerful economic or religious groups in regard of human rights standards. These findings are consistent with those published by various UN experts as well as many other human rights organizations. In recognition of the need to support and protect the important work of human rights defenders, the UN General Assembly adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in December 1998, commonly known as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

In particular, Amnesty International has found that women activists face specific risks during the course of their human rights work because they sometimes defy cultural, religious or social norms about the role of women. In many countries, they are targetted because by speaking out they challenge traditional patterns of power and status. By far the greatest difficulty faced by many women activists is that their work and proposals are all too often discredited or dismissed in importance.

Difficulties faced by women activists are underreported by both states and non-governmental organizations. Women human rights defenders are often "silenced" by dangers posed on their security and those of their loved ones and people working closely with them. For fear of further attacks against them, their colleagues or their families, women human rights defenders can be reluctant to report threats and harassment they receive.

Women who dare to challenge social conventions can be subject to verbal abuse and derogatory or sinister public accusations aimed at discrediting their character. Amnesty International has received reports of women human rights defenders who have been threatened with rape or sexual abuse, called man haters, prostitutes, un-marriageable types, provocateurs or troublemakers all because they tried to defend universally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Women defenders working on issues of sexuality, particularly sexual orientation and reproductive rights are especially vulnerable to marginalization, prejudice and violence. Governments and other social movements do not prioritize the rights they fight for and this impacts on their credibility and legitimacy, increasing their isolation and risk of public repudiation, stigmatisation and discrimination.

The **UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders** adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1998 is, as yet, a little known Declaration which affirms **the right to defend human rights** and requests of states protection of human rights work and those who carry it out. Amnesty International is calling on all governments to produce, publish and implement a policy to implement the principles contained in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. Such plans need to pay special attention to ensuring recognition and protection of women human rights defenders and ensuring women are equally entitled to exercise the right to defend human rights and all the other rights afforded them in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

## China

### Defenders of the right to redress: the Tiananmen Mothers



Tiananmen Mothers. Ding Zilin is the second from the left in the front line. © HRIC

The Tiananmen Mothers, founded by Ding Zilin, a retired university professor, is a group of 130 human rights defenders – mainly women – whose children and other close relatives were killed in and around Tiananmen Square on the night of 3-4 June 1989. The Tiananmen Mothers have been at the forefront of the campaign for accountability, redress and the defence of the rights of the relatives of people who were killed and people who were injured by the military over 15 years ago.

Heavily armed troops and armoured military vehicles stormed into Tiananmen Square on the night of 3-4 June 1989 to clear peaceful, unarmed demonstrators who were calling for an end to corruption and for political reforms in China. Hundreds of civilians were killed, and tens of thousands of demonstrators were arrested in the aftermath.

The Tiananmen Mothers have compiled a list of names of over 182 people who were killed and over 70 who were injured by the Chinese army. They have distributed humanitarian aid to victims' families and helped to set up a fund for the education of children and orphans of those killed or injured in Tiananmen Square.

The group regularly submits appeals and petitions calling on the authorities to allow victims' families the right to mourn in public, to allow them to accept humanitarian aid from organizations and individuals, to end the persecution of victims and their families, to release all those still imprisoned since 1989, and to implement a full and open public inquiry into the events surrounding 4 June 1989.

Ding Zilin, was reportedly placed under a form of house arrest in Beijing on 27 January 2005 after she had requested to pay her respects to the former party leader and Premier Zhao Ziyang, who died on 17 January 2005. Hundreds of petitioners gathered to mourn the death of Zhao Ziyang. Hundreds more had petitioned the authorities to attend his funeral but in an apparent effort to prevent high-profile activists from attending, mourning restrictions were placed on several human rights defenders including Ding Zilin.

Ding Zilin's house arrest may also have been prompted by a public letter that she and her husband wrote to the Chinese President and Premier appealing for the release of two well-known activists, Liu Xiaobo and Yu Jie, who were detained on 13 December 2004. The two were released the next day, but reportedly continue to remain under tight police surveillance in their homes.

This is not the first time that Ding Zilin has been detained. In March 2004, Ding Zilin, Zhang Xianling and Huang Jinping were arbitrarily detained in an apparent attempt to stop them from participating in the *Qingming* festival, when people tend the graves of their relatives. The Chinese authorities stated their detentions were the result of recording their testimonies to camera, and sending the footage to supporters abroad. In addition, 'T'-shirts bearing the words "Tiananmen Mothers" were confiscated by the authorities.

Each year around the anniversary of 4 June 1989, several of the Tiananmen Mothers are detained, harassed or physically restricted in some way. Their treatment is indicative of the government's continuing refusal to respect calls for redress.

Through their mutual support, the Tiananmen Mothers have brought comfort to numerous bereaved families empowering others, particularly women, to take part in public life, and the group's public profile has been a source of hope and inspiration for similar groups outside China.

#### **Take action on behalf of the Tiananmen Mothers:**

- Calling on the authorities to stop the arbitrary detention, intimidation and harassment of Ding Zilin and the other "Tiananmen Mothers";
- Urging the authorities to ensure that the Tiananmen Mothers can carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals;
- Remind the authorities of their obligations to fulfil the principles contained in the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility Of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote And Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 9 December 1998, commonly known as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders;

- Calling on the authorities to develop a national plan of action to implement the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders as an important first step to ensure that human rights defenders are able to safely carry out their legitimate work. The Plan of Action should include specific measures to address the particular obstacles faced by women HRDs.

**Send your appeals to:**

Minister of Justice of the People's Republic of China

ZHANG Fusen Buzhang

Sifabu

10 Chaoyangmen Nandajie,

Chaoyangqu, Beijingshi 100020

People's Republic of China

**Fax: +86 10 6472 9863**

**Email: [minister@legalinfo.gov.cn](mailto:minister@legalinfo.gov.cn)**

**Email: [pfmaster@legalinfo.gov.cn](mailto:pfmaster@legalinfo.gov.cn)**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Mayor of Beijing Municipal People's Government

WANG Qishan Shizhang

Beijingshi Renmin Zhengfu

2 Zhengyilu

Dongchengqu, Beijing 100744

People's Republic of China

**Salutation: Dear Mayor**

***Copies to:***

Secretary of Beijing Municipal Party Committee

LIU Qi Shuji

Zhonggong Beijingshi Weiyuanhui

3 Taijichang Dajie

Dongchengqu,

Beijing 100743, People's Republic of China

**Salutation: Dear Secretary**

## Iran

### In search of justice - the case of Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh

#### Introduction

Following the election of President Mohammad Khatami in 1997, numerous non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were formed, complementing the smaller number of NGOs formed in earlier years. The awarding, in 2003, of the Nobel Peace Prize to an Iranian human rights defender (HRD), Shirin Ebadi, marked the culmination of efforts made over years by many HRDs in Iran.

Yet from September 2004 tens of journalists and human rights defenders have faced arbitrary arrest, incommunicado detention, humiliating interrogations and threats to their security. These waves of politically motivated arrests constitute an attack on independent civil society and HRDs.

#### Flaws in the judiciary and attacks on civil society

Legal restrictions on freedom of expression and association; political influence on the judiciary and the uneven impact of the re-introduction of the role of prosecutor in 2002 constitute important structural impediments in Iran's justice system. Simultaneously, the judiciary maintains its grip over the independence of Iran's Bar Associations through discriminatory "gozinesh"<sup>3</sup> or selection provisions while the core functions of the Bar Associations have, in many cases, been usurped by the judiciary. Taken together these create fundamental flaws in the administration of justice in Iran.

#### The arbitrary arrest of Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh: "A small price to pay"

Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh, is the director of the Iranian NGO Training Center, or NGOTC<sup>4</sup>, an organisation formed to support the work of the growing NGO community in Iran. She is also the editor-in-chief of *Farzaneh*, which is "a journal of women's studies and research in Iran and Muslim societies"<sup>5</sup>. Both endeavours support the recognition of women's rights and the promotion of international human rights standards.

She was arrested on 1 November 2004. Her personal effects were reportedly summarily seized and the authorities sealed her office. Tehran's Chief Prosecutor, Said Mortazavi reportedly authorised the arrest but appears to have failed to give any reason for it. A month later she was released, on bail totalling around €30 000.

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<sup>3</sup> For a full assessment of these issues, please consult *Iran - A legal system that fails to protect freedom of expression and association* (AI Index: MDE 13/045/2001, 21 December 2001), which can be viewed at: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/print/ENGMDE130452001>; *International Labour Organization - Amnesty International's concerns relevant to the 91st session of the International Labour Conference, 3 to 19 June 2003* (AI Index: IOR 42/003/2003, 11 April 2003), which can be viewed at: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/print/ENGIOR420032003>

<sup>4</sup> The website of the organisation can be viewed at: [http://www.ngotc.org/english/en\\_about.asp](http://www.ngotc.org/english/en_about.asp)

<sup>5</sup> Please see: <http://www.farzanehjournal.com/about.htm>



Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh has said that she went through a very difficult period of interrogation while detained<sup>6</sup> and placed under extreme mental and emotional pressure throughout the time she was being interrogated.

In the last week of her detention, she was in a public or open block of Evin Prison, but otherwise Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh was held in solitary confinement for 23 days in a room measuring two by one and a quarter metres, in an unknown location in Tehran. It was constantly lit and totally silent. In the secret detention centre, all speaking was forbidden and it appears that listening devices in the cells themselves may have been used to ensure complete silence. She was taken to the toilet three times a day and deprived of any reading material save for a copy of the Qoran and a prayer book. She was permitted to call her family twice but otherwise forbidden to meet with them and denied access to a telephone.

Denying Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh access to her family, the immediate availability of legal counsel and the outside world is in contravention to provisions of the UN Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment<sup>7</sup>.

The interrogation was apparently designed to ‘break her’. She was questioned about her presentations at international meetings, including at the European Social Forum<sup>8</sup>, her address to the Asia-Pacific NGO Forum on Beijing+10 in July 2004 and her connections with international women’s rights activists. While blindfolded, discriminatory, intrusive and potentially incriminating statements relating to her private life – such as “tell us who you have slept with” - were repeatedly put to her, in an effort to humiliate and demean her. She was reportedly asked why she was working against the regime yet replied that what she was doing is for the benefit of the people of Iran. Judicial interrogators told her threateningly that her daughter would be brought in [to the prison] if she did not cooperate.<sup>9</sup>

Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh reportedly faces vaguely worded charges of ‘spreading lies’ and [spreading] ‘propaganda against the regime’ in connection with a speech given in Bangkok, to fellow NGO activists and other accusations relating to having ‘illicit relations’, and ‘relations with foreigners’; being improperly dressed – being without a headscarf - and possessing alcohol. The ‘file’ on Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh remains open and no date has reportedly been set for her trial. If imprisoned, amnesty International would consider her a prisoner of conscience.

Following her release on bail, Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh stated that she had “once again found the energy to return to my work”, and that since “civil society is still in its developing stages in Iran, this

<sup>6</sup> Information relating to her detention and subsequent release were posted on the website of the NGOTC for a period of time following her release. It was written to thank all those who intervened on her behalf during her ordeal.

<sup>7</sup> Principle 17 of the UN Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment, which states that: “A detained person shall be entitled to have the assistance of a legal counsel. He shall be informed of his right by the competent authority promptly after arrest and shall be provided with reasonable facilities for exercising it”. It can be viewed at <http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/bodyprinciples.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh took part in the seminar entitled *The Struggle for Democracy and against War in the Middle East & Afghanistan*, on 16 October, 2004, at the 2004 European Social Forum, which was held in London, UK. For more information, please see: <http://www.fse-esf.org/en/programme/list.shtml>

<sup>9</sup> For one case study of family harassment, please see *Five Years of injustice and ill treatment: Akbar Mohammadi - case sheet* (AI Index MDE 13/027/2004, 7 July 2004), which can be viewed at: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/print/ENGMDE130272004>

is a small price to pay.” She closed saying “I hope that my experience will be put to positive use [towards] promoting the women’s movement in Iran.” Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh has sought private psychological treatment for the ordeal she underwent during her incarceration.

### **WHRDs and others in search of justice**

On 25 December 2004, Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh along with at least four other journalists appeared before a presidential committee charged with listening to citizens’ complaints about failures to guarantee rights set out in Iran’s constitution. Although article 38 of Iran’s constitution forbids torture ‘for the purpose of extracting confession or acquiring information’, the group believed they faced precisely this treatment.

A few days after delivering their testimony, a member of the committee wrote on his website<sup>10</sup> that members openly wept on hearing the former detainees’ testimony of how they were kept in solitary confinement in a secret location, repeatedly subjected to beating and other physical and psychological torture and forced to write confessions admitting to their ‘crimes’<sup>11</sup>. In response, on 3 January 2005, Tehran’s Chief Prosecutor, Said Mortazavi held a press conference expressly to deny allegations of mistreatment and he once again threatened to prosecute those who made statements that they were abused to extract ‘confessions’ and ‘apologies’.

On or around 16 February 2005, however, the Head of the Judiciary, Ayatollah Mahmoud Shahroudi met with Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh and other former detainees. He ordered the case to be brought under the control of his office and promised to bring those responsible to justice. This search for justice continues to this day.

### **Creating a climate of fear and intimidation**

The actions against Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh fly in the face of Iran’s international commitments as a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Amnesty International fears that accusations against Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh are a pretext to silence other WHRDs. Her ill treatment and subsequent harassment is intended to create a climate of fear, to intimidate others who might be willing to discuss social problems including limits on the rights enjoyed by women, or who seek to expose human rights violations. The delay in setting the date for her trial acts as a Sword of Damocles over her future: a means used by the judiciary to force those accused to ‘cooperate’.

### **How you can act to support WHRDs in Iran**

Articles 1 and 5 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders envision a world in which individuals and associations which “promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights”, and provides and for the right “to complain about the policies and actions of individual officials and governmental bodies with regard to violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms...” It sets out measures that ensure activists can peacefully and legitimately campaign for the protection of their communities’ rights; are not threatened, harassed; imprisoned or subject to malicious prosecution, but rather are recognised and supported in their struggle. Yet the judicial

<sup>10</sup> Mohammad Ali Abtahi’s weblog can be viewed at: <http://www.webneveshteha.com>. He considers the question of human rights in Iran at: <http://www.webneveshteha.com/en/weblog/?id=-2141899119>

<sup>11</sup> For more information, please see the statement issued by Human Rights Watch, *Iran: Journalists Receive Death Threats After Testifying - Presidential Commission Heard Their Testimony of Torture During Detention*, New York, January 6, 2005, which can be viewed at: [http://hrw.org/english/docs/2005/01/06/iran9948\\_txt.htm](http://hrw.org/english/docs/2005/01/06/iran9948_txt.htm)

authorities in Iran have ignored international human rights standards and the provisions made for human rights defenders in moves set out to silence independent human rights defenders.

**Take action! Please send appeals to the Iranian government and judiciary:**

- Expressing concern that flaws in the administration of justice in Iran have resulted in human rights violations against women human rights defenders such as Maghboubeh Abbasgholizadeh that have gone uninvestigated and apparently unpunished.
- Expressing concern that failure to hold a prompt and open trial contravenes Iran's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).
- Urging the government to train the police and security forces on how to implement law in order to ensure that the freedom of association of human rights defenders is respected and protected.
- Remind the authorities of their obligations to fulfil the principles contained in the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility Of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote And Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 9 December 1998, commonly known as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders;
- Calling on the authorities to develop a national plan of action to implement the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders as an important first step to ensure that human rights defenders are able to safely carry out their legitimate work. The Plan of Action should include specific measures to address the particular obstacles faced by women HRDs.

**Please send appeals to:**

President of Iran

His Excellency Hojjatoleslam val Moslemin Sayed Mohammad Khatami  
The Presidency  
Palestine Avenue  
Azerbaijan Intersection  
Tehran  
Islamic Republic of Iran

**E-mail: [khatami@president.ir](mailto:khatami@president.ir) (please resend your message if it does not get through the first time)**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Head of the Judiciary, Iran

His Excellency Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi  
Head of the Judiciary  
Ministry of Justice  
Park-e Shahr  
Tehran  
Islamic Republic of Iran

**Email: [irjpr@iranjudiciary.org](mailto:irjpr@iranjudiciary.org) (mark 'Please forward to HE Ayatollah Shahroudi')**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

## Mexico

### Threats to indigenous rights activist

Amnesty International believes indigenous rights activist and human rights defender, Otilia Eugenio Manuel, may be in danger and is being harassed and threatened in order to prevent her from carrying out important human rights work. She has received anonymous death threats, and her house has been watched.

As a leading member of the indigenous organization *Organización del Pueblo Indígena Tlapaneco, AC (OPIT)*, Otilia has documented reports of human rights violations against members of the indigenous communities in the southern state of Guerrero. Among these reports were the cases of two women from the *Tlapaneca* indigenous group, Valentina Rosendo Cantú and Inés Fernández Ortega, who were reportedly raped by soldiers in 2002. At a conference on indigenous rights in Guerrero from 3-4 December 2004, Otilia made a presentation in which she publicly condemned the authorities' failure to fully and independently investigate the rapes in which members of the military have been implicated.

On 9 December 2004, a few days following the conference, a letter was reportedly delivered to Otilia's house, in the municipality of Ayutla de los Libres. It warned her that "soon you will rest in peace", and also threatened her family. It told her that "You keep on trying to attack us with your stupid lies about the rape of Valentina and Inés. We've had enough of the stupidities you accuse us of. We were already going to get you but now you are really in trouble".

On 26 December 2004, Otilia's sister saw two men circling Otilia's house on foot, taking notes and pointing towards the house. On 29 and 30 December 2004, unknown men were once again seen circling Otilia's house. On 4 and 5 January 2005, two men were seen taking photographs and watching the OPIT offices in Ayutla de los Libres, in Guerrero state.

Otilia has suffered intimidation and death threats before, in relation to her work on the case of rape of the two indigenous women, but she did not report the incidents to the authorities for fear of reprisals against her or her family, including her two young daughters.

On 14 January 2005, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States recommended that the Mexican authorities take "precautionary measures" to protect Otilia. At the time of writing Amnesty International understands that while some of the measures have been denied or are being studied by the authorities, others are in the process of being implemented.



**Otilia Eugenio Manuel ©AI**

Human rights defenders and community activists in Guerrero state have frequently been the target of threats, harassment and smear campaigns in order to prevent them from carrying out their legitimate work on behalf of others.

**Take Action! Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish or your own language:**

- expressing concern for the safety of human rights defender Otilia Eugenio Manuel and her family following the death threats and the intimidation she suffered in December 2004 and January 2005 in the municipality of Ayutla de los Libres, Guerrero state;
- Urge the Mexican authorities to adhere to their obligations to ensure the safety of Otilia Eugenio Manuel and her family in line with the request for precautionary measures made by the Inter-American Human Rights Commission;
- Remind the authorities of their obligations to fulfil the principles contained in the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility Of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote And Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 9 December 1998, commonly known as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders;
- Calling on the authorities to develop a national plan of action to implement the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders as an important first step to ensure that human rights defenders are able to safely carry out their legitimate work. The Plan of Action should include specific measures to address the particular obstacles faced by women HRDs.

**Please send your appeals to:**

Governor of Guerrero

Lic. Zeferino Torreblanca Galindo ,  
Gobernador del Estado de Guerrero  
Palacio de Gobierno, segundo piso, Plaza  
Central, Primer Congreso de Anahuac,  
Colonia Centro, Chilpancingo 39000, Guerrero,  
Mexico

**Fax: + 52 747 47 23125**

**Salutation: Dear Governor/Señor  
Gobernador**

Attorney General of Guerrero

Lic. Jesus Ramirez Guerrero, Procurador  
General de Justicia del Estado de Guerrero  
Carretera Nacional México-Acapulco Km.  
6+300, Tramo Chilpancingo- Petaquillos,  
Chilpancingo 39090, Guerrero, Mexico

**Fax: + 52 747 47 22328**

**Salutation: Dear Attorney  
General/Señor Procurador**

Minister of the Interior

Lic. Santiago Creel  
Secretario de Gobernación, Secretaría de  
Gobernación  
Bucareli 99, 1er. piso, Col. Juárez, Delegación  
Cauhtémoc, México D.F., C.P.06600, México

**Fax: +525 55 093 3414**

**Salutation: Señor Secretario / Dear  
Minister**

## Myanmar:

### Nuns sentenced for campaigning for rights improvements



**Ma Tin Tin Oo**



**Ma Than Htay**

Human rights defenders and Buddhist nuns, **Ma Than Htay**, also known by her Buddhist name as Mar Lar Yee and **Ma Tin Tin Oo**, also known as Thayzawaddy, are serving sentences of 13 years' imprisonment. They were arrested on 16 January 2003 for campaigning for the release of political prisoners and for improvements in living conditions. Amnesty International considers them to be prisoners of conscience and is calling for their immediate and unconditional release.

On 16 January 2003 the nuns, in their early 20s, demonstrated near Yangon City Hall. They called for the release of political prisoners and for basic commodity prices to be lowered. The following day authorities announced that they had been arrested for having distributed "*pamphlets to agitate the people to stage demonstrations*" and for shouting slogans outside City Hall at 9.45 am. Authorities accused them of "*trying to instigate the people under the guise of nuns.*" It is believed that the nuns were ill-treated by authorities in pre-trial detention.

Amnesty International has no information about their trial, but in most cases political prisoners have limited or no access to legal counsel, and often are sentenced in trials which do not meet international standards for fairness. They were reportedly sentenced under the Unlawful Associations Act, and the 1950 Emergency Provisions Act, a vaguely worded law that is frequently used to silence dissent in the country, and that effectively criminalizes peaceful protest.

Human rights defenders cannot operate in Myanmar without fear of harassment, arrest, incommunicado detention and long prison terms. The exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly are strongly restricted in Myanmar, where peaceful acts of dissent are routinely penalized. Attempts by members of political parties to engage in political activities have during the last 15 years led to harassment, arrests and incommunicado detention. Authorities have acted against human rights defenders engaging in peaceful campaigns for improvements to the human

rights situation, including the lifting of political restrictions, the release of political prisoners, and improvements to the education system and to living conditions. Many human rights defenders are among the at least 1,350 political prisoners serving prison terms in Myanmar.

**Take Action! Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible:**

- Expressing concern at the imprisonment of Ma Than Htay and Ma Tin Tin Oo for peacefully acting in protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- Urging authorities to immediately and unconditionally release them from detention, and pending their release to give them access to relatives and medical care, and to hold them in conditions which match international standards, including with access to reading and writing materials, and anything required to satisfy the needs of their religious life;
- Remind the authorities of their obligations to fulfil the principles contained in the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility Of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote And Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 9 December 1998, commonly known as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders;
- Calling on the authorities to develop a national plan of action to implement the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders as an important first step to ensure that human rights defenders are able to safely carry out their legitimate work. The Plan of Action should include specific measures to address the particular obstacles faced by women HRDs.

**Please send your appeals to:**

Senior General Than Shwe

Chairman

State Peace and Development Council

Ministry of Defence

Dagon Post Office

Yangon, Union of Myanmar

**Fax: + 95 1 652 624**

**Salutation: Dear General**

Lieutenant General Soe Win

Prime Minister

State Peace and Development Council

Ministry of Defence, Signal Pagoda road

Dagon Post Office

Yangon, Union of Myanmar

**Fax: + 95 1 652 624**

**Salutation: Dear Lieutenant General**

## Uzbekistan

### Harassment and intimidation of anti-death penalty activists



Dilobar Khudoberganova (left) and Tamara Chikunova (right) visit AI UK. © AI

Amnesty International is concerned that anti-death penalty activists Tamara Chikunova and Dilobar Khudoberganova and their relatives continued to be harassed by the Uzbek authorities in order to intimidate them because of their human rights activities.

Tamara Chikunova, director of the human rights group Mothers against the Death Penalty and Torture in Uzbekistan, and Dilobar Khudoberganova, a member of the group, have documented violations of fair trial standards in cases involving the death penalty, including torture in pre-trial detention of the suspects as well as in

some cases their relatives in order to extract incriminating “confessions”. There have been many attempts by the Uzbek authorities to intimidate the activists and their relatives.

The authorities have also on several occasions made it impossible for Mothers against the Death Penalty and Torture to carry out their human rights work. For example, in December 2003, this human rights group was the driving force behind the organization of an international conference to be held in Tashkent, aimed at initiating a public debate about the death penalty and a dialogue with the authorities. The conference was blocked by the authorities only hours before it was due to begin.

Men, who introduced themselves as “National Security Service officials”, called Tamara Chikunova and Dilobar Khudoberganova and threatened them with death after they addressed the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development at a meeting held in Tashkent in May 2003. They were told, for example, that their group was “*blacklisted*” and that the Security Services were awaiting orders to “*eliminate*” the organization.

In 2003 armed police came to the flat of Tamara Chikunova up to three times a week, to “*check her documents*”. At one point she was accused by police officers of running a brothel, and in August 2003 a senior officer of Khamzinsky regional police came to Tamara Chikunova’s flat and told her she was suspected of sympathizing with Islamist extremists.

Tamara Chikunova’s and Dilobar Khudoberganova’s participation in a lobbying tour on the death penalty, organized by several AI Sections between September and December 2004, apparently triggered new incidents of harassment.

At six o’clock on the morning of 29 September 2004 an investigator from Mirobad district procuracy in Tashkent came to the house of the mother of Tamara Chikunova. The investigator told the 78-year-old woman, who is confined to her bed, that he had an arrest warrant for her daughter on the basis that



she had carried out pickets which led to unrest in the Ferghana valley and in Tashkent. There were strong indications that the authorities targeted her mother to put pressure on Tamara Chikunova who was on an AI-sponsored tour in the Netherlands at the time.

On 21 December 2004 Erkin Khudoberganov, the father of Dilobar Khudoberganova, received a phone call by a man who introduced himself as a “National Security Service official”. He said that Dilobar Khudoberganova “talks too much” and warned that he should “think about the consequences her activities could have for his family”. The caller specifically criticized Dilobar Khudoberganova for giving interviews to the *BBC* and *Radio Liberty*, which, he said, the National Security Service had recorded, and for raising human rights issues on an AI-sponsored lobbying tour.

Despite regular threats and harassment from the authorities intent on stopping the work of Mothers against the Death Penalty and Torture, Tamara Chikunova and Dilobar Khudoberganova, as well as the other members of the organization remain committed to their work and have continued their campaigning and lobbying.

**Take Action! Please send appeals to the Uzbek authorities to arrive as quickly as possible, in Uzbek, Russian, English or your own language:**

- expressing concern that Tamara Chikunova and Dilobar Khudoberganova and their families have been intimidated by the authorities on several occasions;
- urging them to investigate the harassment of Tamara Chikunova and Dilobar Khudoberganova and their families;
- Remind the authorities of their obligations to fulfil the principles contained in the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility Of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote And Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 9 December 1998, commonly known as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders;
- Calling on the authorities to develop a national plan of action to implement the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders as an important first step to ensure that human rights defenders are able to safely carry out their legitimate work. The Plan of Action should include specific measures to address the particular obstacles faced by women HRDs.

**Please send your appeals to:**

President of Uzbekistan

Islam A. KARIMOV

Rezidentsia prezidenta;

ul. Uzbekistanskaia, 43;

Tashkent 700163

UZBEKISTAN

**Fax: +998 71 139 55 25**

**Email: [president\\_office@press-service.uz](mailto:president_office@press-service.uz)**

**Salutation: Dear President Karimov**

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Eler Ganiev

Ministerstvo inostrannykh del;

pl. Mustakillik, 5;

Tashkent 700029

UZBEKISTAN

**Fax: + 998 71 139 15 17**

**Salutation: Dear Minister Ganiev**

## **Zimbabwe**

### **WOMEN of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA!)**

Since February 2003, women belonging to the women's rights organisation Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA!) have repeatedly been arrested by the Zimbabwe police while taking part in peaceful demonstrations to protest the worsening social, economic and human rights situation in the country. They have been subjected to intimidation, harassment, and ill-treatment by police officers.

Many of those arrested have later been released without charge, but some have been charged under the repressive Public Order and Security Act (POSA). Others have been charged under the Miscellaneous Offences Act (MOA), usually with conduct likely to cause a breach of the peace or with an offence cited as "blocking the pavement". Lawyers have reported that MOA is often used by the police after they try and fail to bring charges under POSA.

In numerous cases where WOZA women have been arrested police have attempted to deny the detained activists access to legal advice. Human rights lawyers acting for WOZA have been subject to harassment by police officers.

\*On 7 March 2004 Bulawayo police arbitrarily arrested three women, all WOZA leaders, as they left a meeting. The women were kept in custody until 9 March, apparently in an attempt to prevent them organising a WOZA demonstration to mark International Women's Day on 8 March. They were charged under MOA with attempting to cause a breach of the peace. However, when they appeared in court on 23 March to answer the charge, the prosecutor refused to press charges.

\*On 16 June 2004, 43 women were arrested while attending a private meeting in Bulawayo. Of the women, seven had small babies or children who were also taken into custody with them. Several of the women reported that they were verbally abused and assaulted by the police. Winnie Muzhanje, Nancy Malabwe and Patricia Mahole were beaten with a sjambok (whip) on the soles of their feet. Thirty-nine of the women were released without charge on the same day. The four remaining women were charged under Section 24 of POSA, detained overnight and went to court the next day. The case was dropped when the prosecutor refused to press charges on the basis that Section 24 of POSA did not apply and no offence had been committed.

\*On Sunday 19 September 2004, more than 30 WOZA activists began a 440 km sponsored walk from Bulawayo to Harare to raise funds for women's rights activists, and in protest against repressive legislation. On 28 September, 48 women, together with 4 men who were assisting the WOZA walkers, were arrested some 60 km from Harare. Police said they would be charged under POSA – but initially they did not disclose which section of the Act the group was alleged to have contravened. The detainees were reportedly harassed, intimidated and threatened by police officers. Another woman activist, Siphwe Maseko, was also arbitrarily arrested when she attempted to deliver food to those in custody but was released the following day without charge. The group was held in custody for three days until 1 October when a magistrate ruled that they had no case to answer. All were released.

\*On 29 September 2004, WOZA activists who had not been arrested the previous day finished the walk, gathered at Africa Unity Square in Harare and held a brief prayer service for those in detention.

As they began to disperse, nine women were arrested by police, who reportedly claimed that they had contravened Section 19 of POSA by "praying in public". Section 19 of POSA refers to "gatherings conducing to riot, disorder or intolerance". The activists were detained at Harare Central Police Station where three of the women were allegedly assaulted by a plain-clothes officer during interrogation. Lawyers acting for the women were denied access to them, and were reportedly forced out of the police station. All of the women were released on bail on 1 October. When they appeared in court on 13 October no charge sheets were presented and all were released.

\*On 12 February 2005 some 50 women were arrested after a WOZA demonstration in Bulawayo to mark Valentine's Day. The women had marched with banners proclaiming "The Power of Love can conquer the Love of Power" and handed out roses to the public. Several of the women arrested were reported to be bystanders not involved in the WOZA action. Some of the women were released over the following two days – in many cases after family members paid 'admission of guilt' fines. However, at least two women remained in custody until 15 February. None of the women was taken to court to face any charges. While in custody women were reportedly threatened by police officers and denied food.

**Take action! Please write to the Zimbabwe Police authorities:**

- Expressing concern at the repeated arbitrary arrest, intimidation, harassment and ill-treatment of WOZA women activists giving brief details of the cases outlined;
- Urging the authorities to immediately ensure the arbitrary detention and intimidation of human rights defenders ceases and to open investigations into all reports of harassment of human rights defenders;
- Remind the authorities of their obligations to fulfil the principles contained in the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility Of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote And Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 9 December 1998, commonly known as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders;
- Calling on the authorities to develop a national plan of action to implement the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders as an important first step to ensure that human rights defenders are able to safely carry out their legitimate work. The Plan of Action should include specific measures to address the particular obstacles faced by women HRDs.

**Please send your appeals to:**

Police Commissioner  
Mr Augustine Chihuri  
Police Headquarters  
PO Box 8807, Causeway  
Harare, Zimbabwe  
**Fax: +263 4 726 084/ 253 212/ 728 768**  
**Salutation: Dear Commissioner Chihuri**

The Officer Commanding  
Provincial Headquarter  
Matabeleland North, Zimbabwe Republic Police  
P.O Box 701  
Bulawayo, Zimbabwe  
**Fax: +263 9 65763**  
**Salutation: Dear Sir**