

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## Urgent Actions: a post-bag no government can ignore

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*"The torturer aims to isolate you, to cut all your links with the outside world. But Amnesty International was able to break that isolation.....When I saw my wife, I knew that my case had become public. I knew they could no longer kill me."* Professor Luiz Rossi, Brazil.

Amnesty International will be marking 30 years of its Urgent Action technique on Wednesday 19 March this year. This very effective campaign technique mobilizes tens of thousands of Amnesty supporters world-wide to send urgent letters, faxes and e-mails on behalf of those in immediate danger of torture, execution, "disappearance" and other human rights violations.

The first appeal for Urgent Action was issued in 1973, the inspiration of Amnesty researcher Tracy Ulltveit-Moe, who still works for the human rights organisation in London. Brazilian prisoner, Professor Luiz Rossi, was under threat of torture from the military government. It was not until the letters started to pour in that Rossi's relatives were allowed to visit him. Although many people taken into police custody and were never seen again, Rossi was eventually freed in October 1973.

*"My case proves this activity has a meaning, has an effect,"* Václav Havel, Czechoslovakia 1989.

Václav Havel, one of the most famous subjects of an Urgent Action appeal, was arrested in January 1989. He was released four months later following a flood of letters and faxes from Amnesty supporters. However, most appeals are for men and women, sometimes even for children, who may not otherwise be known outside their families or communities. With nowhere else to turn, these victims of oppression depend on Amnesty members worldwide:

*"Thank you from my heart, I received your letters, a gesture of comfort and humanity, uniting strength to try and save our lives. The struggle has been difficult since I denounced the murderers of my son. We have suffered a lot of hardship and aggression, and have all been the target of much violence and threats. But thanks to the support of each one of you, I will carry on, in order that justice may be done, and that other children will not be killed and that such crimes will not go unpunished."* Dr Elma Novais, Brazil, January 2003, who, with her two children, faced threats and intimidation following her work to bring to justice those responsible for killing her son.

"Since the first one was issued in 1973 countless people from China to Chile, from Syria to

Morocco, have told us that an Urgent Action helped save them. In over one third of cases we hear of some improvement in the situation of the people concerned," Amnesty International said.

*"Guards at the labour colony were overwhelmed with the amount of cards from supporters I received. The few cards that reached me directly in the colony brightened the greyness of my existence."* Grigory Pasko, Russia 2003.

In January this year, a Russian prisoner of conscience Grigory Pasko was released two-thirds of the way through his four-year sentence for filming nuclear waste being dumped in the Sea of Japan. Thousands of Amnesty supporters world-wide wrote tirelessly on Pasko's behalf .

In 1973, Amnesty issued eleven Urgent Actions. Unfortunately Urgent Action is still needed and by 2002, the number had grown to 468 on behalf of people in 83 countries. Each case generating thousands of letters, e-mails & faxes to the authorities: a post-bag no government should ignore.

**For more information on Amnesty International's Urgent Actions please go to:**

[http://web.amnesty.org/web/web.nsf/pages/ua\\_30\\_years](http://web.amnesty.org/web/web.nsf/pages/ua_30_years)

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