

The Wire

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South Korea exploits its migrant workers

“Migrant workers are also human beings. Why don't they pay for my work? I cannot go home because I don't have money. I have chosen to kill myself as there is no other way.”

These words were found on a note left by Jeong Yu-hong, a 34-year-old migrant worker from China who had a valid work permit. After enduring 13-hour nightshifts at an embroidery factory in South Korea for four years, she tried to find a job elsewhere. Both her employer and the government-run employment support centre refused to let her change her workplace. The employer claimed that withholding pay for less than three months was not a good enough reason to want to leave. Jeong Yu-Hong quit the job and after visiting the employment support centre once more, she threw herself under a train in April 2004.

According to 2005 figures, there are some 350,000 migrant workers in South Korea – about 1.5 per cent of the total workforce. They come from more than 90 countries, including China, the Philippines, Indonesia, Nepal, Mongolia, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nigeria. Most are employed in low-skilled jobs.

In 2004, the government passed the Act Concerning the Employment Permit for Migrant Workers (EPS). Under it, employers unable to find a South Korean worker to fill a vacancy can obtain a permit to hire a non-national on a three year (maximum) contract renewable annually. The law – the first of its kind in Asia – is designed to safeguard the welfare of migrant workers in the country.

But two years on, abuse and exploitation of migrant workers continue to be commonplace. AI has documented numerous cases of discrimination, sexual harassment, intimidation, beatings and other breaches of migrant workers' fundamental human rights by their employers which, combined with a lack of protection from government authorities, make migrant workers an especially vulnerable community in South Korea. Like Jeong Yu-hong, many migrant workers are denied payment for the hours of labour they put in, and if they dare to question their employers or request permission to change their workplace, they are often sacked and left without any identity documents. In fact, a 2005 survey revealed that more than 80 per cent of migrant workers interviewed found it hard to change workplaces under the EPS.

Many migrant workers continue to work despite low pay – often below the minimum wage – and poor, if not dangerous, conditions. If an accident does happen at work, they are usually denied proper health care and adequate compensation.

James Mensah, a migrant worker from Ghana, lost his fingers in a factory accident. Treated poorly at the hospital, his injury deteriorated so badly that his hand had to be amputated. “The company did not do anything about my expenses and my employer was nowhere to be found,” he says. “I had a one year visa before the accident, but my employer kept my passport because he did not want the insurance company to compensate me.” James Mensah was discharged before his hand had properly healed. He says: “I have been walking on the street for sometime now without treatment, living on charity in Korea, with a wife and two sons aged 13 and 10 in Ghana.”

Faced with dangerous working conditions, the near impossibility of changing workplaces and the constant threat of sacking and deportation, many migrant workers slip into the world of

the undocumented migrant worker (that is, they lack legal permission to stay in the country). Here there is no protection. Undocumented migrant workers live in cramped, “underground” dwellings which they only leave to go to work. If found on the street they can be stopped by plainclothes officers, detained and deported.

If arrested, they are at high risk of abuse by personnel in detention facilities. A January 2006 survey found that one in five detained migrant workers experienced beatings and two in five faced verbal abuse. More than a third had been stripped naked and searched.

YB, a Nepali migrant worker, once held a valid work permit. But after suffering a serious head and leg injury at work, he was refused a contract renewal by his employer. Threatened with deportation, YB ran away.

“I live at my friend’s place,” he says. “Because of my injured leg, I can’t work. So I can’t pay the debts that I have incurred back home. My daughters can’t study and my family members suffer in poverty... My passport is with immigration authorities and I am now an undocumented migrant worker.”

AI’s report, *Republic of Korea: “Migrant workers are also human beings”* (ASA 25/002/2006), will be published later this year.

See also www.amnesty.org/refugees to learn about AI’s work on the protection and promotion of the human rights of all migrant workers.

[Picture: Foreign migrant workers denounce moves by the South Korean government to deport foreign workers who have overstayed their visas, at a rally in Seoul, South Korea, February 2006. The slogan on their headbands says, “We demand work visas”. © EMPICS]

Activists under attack in the Philippines

The sight of two motorcyclists speeding down the road in some areas of the Philippines can ignite fear and suspicion in an activist. Irma “Kathy” Alacantara was the secretary general in her province for the Movement for National Democracy, a leftist national political organization. While attending a conference in early December 2005 on peasant and fishermen’s rights, Kathy was reportedly shot by two armed and unidentified motorcyclists as she waited outside the entrance of the conference centre. Her colleagues reported that she had received threats and was under surveillance by armed men prior to her killing. Scores of other leftist activists have been killed in an increasingly familiar pattern.

Since 2004, the number of political killings targeting members of legal leftist organizations publicly labelled by the government as being “front” organizations for communist armed groups has increased sharply. Community organizers, human rights activists, religious workers, members of the legal leftist political parties and others suspected of being linked or sympathetic to communist insurgents are particularly at risk.

Armed conflict between government forces and communist insurgents has continued for over 37 years. The ongoing political killings have contributed to the derailing of the peace process between the government and the communists and with it any chance of securing peace in the near future.

Rafael Markus Bangit was on a bus trip with his son in early June when he and a female passenger were gunned down by an unidentified man. Only days earlier, Markus Bangit had complained of being followed. He belonged to the Malbong people and throughout his life he vigorously defended indigenous peoples’ rights. Most recently he worked for the Cordillera

Peoples Alliance, an independent federation of left-oriented people's organizations, many based among indigenous communities in northern Philippines. He was also secretary general and vice chair in his home province for the leftist political party, Bayan Muna.

AI believes that these unabated killings share similar characteristics. These include the political affiliations of the victims, the methodology of attacks, and reports that the armed forces or other state agents have been directly involved in the attacks, or have consented to or been complicit in them. AI considers there is a persistent pattern of failure to conduct prompt and effective investigations which lead to the arrest, prosecution and conviction of those responsible.

In a report to be issued shortly, *Philippines: Political killings, justice and peace process* (ASA 35/006/2006), AI documents such killings and outlines the duty of the government to protect the right to life of every individual in the country – irrespective of their background or political affiliation. AI sections and members are encouraged to work with organizations such as unions, churches, indigenous people's networks and other groups at risk to pressure the Philippines government to stop political killings.

[Picture: More than 3,000 people stage a die-in near the Mendiola Bridge, to protest against the increase in political killings in the country. Manilla, 27 June 2006. © EMPICS]

[For translators: Kilusan para sa Pambansang Demokrasya : KPD : Movement of National Democracy]

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Prisoners of conscience released in Equatorial Guinea

Weja Chicampo was one of 42 prisoners “pardoned” in a presidential amnesty declared on 4 June. A leading member of the Movement for the Self-determination of Bioko Island, he was arbitrarily arrested at his home on 4 March 2004 by about 10 army officers wearing balaclavas. He was severely beaten during his arrest. For several months he was detained incommunicado at Black Beach prison in the capital, Malabo. In January 2006 he was brought before a judge for the first time but he still had not been charged or tried by the time of his “pardon”.

When a group of Presidential Guards and the prison administrator came to Weja Chicampo's cell, on the night of 5 June, and told him he was being released, he thought he was going home. Instead, he was put in a car with two Presidential Guards and taken to the airport. At the airport Weja Chicampo was handed over to the Director General of National Security who signed his exit visa and told him to get on the plane and not to create problems. On the plane, he was handed over to Spanish police officers who were expecting him, and was flown to Madrid, Spain.

His family in Malabo were not informed of the expulsion or whereabouts of Weja Chicampo. His expulsion from Equatorial Guinea violates the country's Constitution, which guarantees freedom of movement and the right to choose residence, as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Equatorial Guinea ratified in 1987. He is not allowed to return to Equatorial Guinea and his status in Spain is as yet unclear.

Speaking to AI after his release, he was tired and emotional but said that he was overwhelmed by all the letters he had received from AI members. Although he did not see them all himself, his cousin informed him of every letter that arrived. He thanks AI for all its support and especially all those members who sent letters on his behalf.

In the same amnesty, Marius Gerhardus Bonzaair “Bone” was pardoned on humanitarian grounds. A South African national, he was serving a 17-year prison term after being convicted, in an unfair trial, of an attempted coup in November 2004. He was tortured during his pre-trial detention and since his arrest in March 2004 was handcuffed and shackled 24 hours a day. He suffers from serious chronic ailments for which he rarely received medical treatment. According to reports, he was in hospital at the time of being pardoned but has now returned to South Africa.

Mariano Oyono Ndong also thanked AI on his release. He was among those members or sympathizers of the opposition party, Democratic Republican Force, convicted after an unfair trial of offences relating to an alleged attempt to overthrow the government in 2002.

AI welcomes the recent releases in the presidential amnesty but urges the government of Equatorial Guinea to release all the prisoners of conscience still held, as well as all those detained without charge or trial on account of their peaceful political activities.

[Pictures:

Weja Chicampo © Private

Defendants are convicted, after an unfair trial, of an attempted coup in 2004. Many claim they were tortured in pre-trial detention. Marius Gerhardus Bonzaair “Bone” front row, second from right © Estelle Shirbon (Reuters)]

[For translators: Movement for the Self-determination of Bioko Island : Movimiento para la autodeterminación de la isla de Bioko. Democratic Republican Force : Fuerza Demócrata Republicana]

Algerian intelligence agency routinely uses tortures to obtain ‘information’

“I was spat at by interrogating officers, insulted and kicked. They did this because I had denied information that they had presented to me.”

Former detainee who was tortured by the Department for Information and Security (DRS) in 2005

People who are thought to have information about terrorism continue to be tortured and ill-treated with impunity in Algeria.

The DRS – widely known as Military Security – an intelligence agency within the military that specializes in counter-terrorism, operates with great secrecy.

The DRS systematically detains suspects in secret, and their families receive no information about their whereabouts, sometimes for months. While held by the DRS, detainees have no contact with the outside world and there are persistent reports of torture and other ill-treatment.

Statements established by the DRS are regularly used in court to obtain convictions for terrorism-related offences, while allegations of torture or other ill-treatment in DRS custody are never investigated.

The DRS specializes in detaining and interrogating people who are believed to have information about terrorist activities, due to their alleged links either with armed groups in Algeria or with international terrorist networks abroad.

Methods of torture include beatings, electric shocks, the forced ingestion of dirty water, urine or chemicals, and the suspension of detainees from the ceiling. Most detainees do not have access to a lawyer when they are first brought before a judge.

No civilian institution oversees the practices of the DRS. Prosecutors do not enforce safeguards under Algerian law and are apparently not informed of arrests carried out by the DRS.

The Algerian authorities have been engaged in counter-terrorism measures for well over a decade, and have become a prime ally of the US and other governments in the “war on terror”. Today, the “war on terror” serves as a pretext in Algeria to continue abuses.

Foreign governments must do more to help end torture and ill-treatment in Algeria through their strengthened security ties. Governments should not forcibly return anyone to Algeria who could be at risk of torture or ill-treatment, regardless of any “diplomatic assurances” from the Algerian authorities that returnees will not be tortured or ill-treated.

The government must end arrests and detentions by the DRS and ensure that all detainees have prompt access to lawyers. Amnesty laws which grant impunity to members of the security forces and criminalize criticism of state agents with years of imprisonment should be repealed. All complaints against the security forces are now inadmissible, regardless of the crimes they may have committed.

ACT NOW!

Write to President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, demanding that he investigates the serious allegations of torture and other ill-treatment by the DRS. Call on him to ensure that the DRS no longer arrests or detains suspects.

Send appeals to: President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Présidence de la République, El Mouradia, Alger, Algeria.

Journalists attacked in Azerbaijan

Sakit Mirza Zakhidov, a well-known journalist and satirist for the opposition newspaper Azadlyq, was arrested on 23 June by anti-narcotics personnel from the Interior Ministry. They alleged that he was in possession of 10g of heroin. Sakit Zakhidov is now held in pre-trial detention at the Nasimi regional police station in the capital, Baku. If convicted of possession of narcotics with intent to sell or distribute, he could face between three and seven years in prison, where he would be at risk of torture or other ill-treatment.

Qanimat Zakhidov, editor-in-chief of Azadlyq, and other prominent opposition journalists believe that the heroin was planted on Sakit Zakhidov and that his arrest is a politically motivated attempt to silence him.

Violent attacks, intimidation and arbitrary arrests of opposition journalists have sharply increased in Azerbaijan over the last 18 months. Journalists have been attacked or harassed by law enforcement officials while covering opposition political rallies or following the publication of articles alleging corruption within government or military institutions. They have also been abducted, beaten and even killed by unidentified assailants.

Qanimat Zakhidov was abducted and beaten in February 2005 by assailants who allegedly told him to stop writing articles criticizing President Ilham Aliyev. In March 2005 Qanimat Zakhidov and Azer Akhmedov, a technical director of Azadlyq, were reportedly abducted, forced to strip and beaten by policemen in a private room in a Baku restaurant. Humiliating

photos were then shown on the Lider television channel (run by Adalat Aliyev, great nephew of the late President, Heydar Aliyev) the next day.

In the period leading up to the November 2005 parliamentary elections, international organizations such as Article 19 and the Committee to Protect Journalists noted the government's attempt to curtail freedom of expression. Editions of opposition newspapers such as Azadlyq were confiscated and staff arrested.

Prominent journalist Elmar Huseynov, editor-in-chief of the outspoken opposition weekly Monitor, was shot and killed outside his home in March 2005. In two separate incidents in March and May 2006, two opposition journalists – including another Azadlyq correspondent – were severely beaten and left for dead in the outskirts of Baku.

This escalation of attacks and intimidation against opposition journalists has had a significant negative impact on the freedom of expression in Azerbaijan, which has been made worse by the lack of thorough, effective and independent investigations of these incidents.

ACT NOW!

Call on President Ilham Aliyev to ensure a thorough and independent investigation into the allegations that incriminating evidence was planted on Sakit Zakhidov and to ensure that he will not be tortured or ill-treated in detention. Urge him to publicly condemn human rights abuses against journalists and to promote freedom of expression.

Send appeals to: President Ilham Aliyev, Office of the President of Azerbaijan, 19 Istiqlaliyyat Street, Baku AZ 1066, Azerbaijan.

[Pictures:

Sakit Mirza Zakhidov © Private

Elmar Huseynov © Newspaper Monitor]

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Worldwide Appeals

Papua New Guinea

Sorcery-related killings

“She was one hell of a woman, my friend and sister Anna Benny.”

Human rights defender Sarah Garap talking to AI, 2006

Human rights defender Anna Benny “disappeared” from Goroka, Eastern Highlands, in November 2005. Her family did not report her missing and the police did not look for her.

Anna Benny's family told a friend that she had gone to a dance and not returned. However, reliable sources report that she went to help her sister-in-law who was being held by villagers on suspicion of practising sorcery. Both Anna Benny and her sister-in-law were reportedly shot and killed.

Sorcery-related killings are common, particularly in the Highlands, in Papua New Guinea. Any kind of accidental death may be blamed on sorcery, and then, as Sarah Garap explained: “For every one death, one or more other people must die... 95% of the time it is women who get accused, tortured and killed... in most cases the family have to give their consent or approval.”

A conspiracy of community silence surrounds these killings, and those who speak out or seek justice are, according to Sarah Garap, “at risk of being attacked for ‘unburying’ what was ‘buried’.”

The police do little to penetrate this silence. Very few sorcery-related deaths are investigated and the perpetrators are rarely brought to justice. In Anna Benny’s case, the police in Goroka refused to investigate her death, claiming that they had received no complaint from the family. The police reportedly said to her friend: “Have you seen it happen? How do you know? We cannot act on hearsay reports.”

Anna Benny campaigned tirelessly to ensure that violence against women and girls was not ignored or condoned by the community. A local women’s organization is now conducting its own investigation into her death. Despite threats against their members, they are determined that by pursuing justice in this case they can set a precedent.

See AI’s forthcoming report *Papua New Guinea: Violence against women, Not inevitable; Never acceptable!* (ASA 34/002/2006).

Please write, calling on the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary to conduct a prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigation into the death of Anna Benny and her sister-in-law.

Send appeals to: Sam Inguba, Commissioner of Police, Police Headquarters, PO Box 85, Konedobu, Port Moresby, NCD, Papua New Guinea. Fax: +675 321 0101/322 6113/321 1929.

[Picture: Anna Benny (back row, second from left) at a Human Rights and Village Courts training session in Papua New Guinea, July 2005, where the issue of sorcery beliefs and human rights abuses was discussed.© Private]

USA

Held for three years without charge or trial

Ali al-Marri, a Qatari national, has been detained for over three years without charge or trial in a military prison in Charleston, South Carolina. He is held in solitary confinement, often shackled, in a cell measuring approximately 3m x 2m. He has reportedly been denied adequate bedding, clothing and toilet paper and to be allowed only brief periods out for exercise. AI is concerned about his deteriorating mental and physical health.

He was initially arrested in December 2001 and held as a material witness in the investigation into the 11 September attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Centre. He was subsequently charged with credit card fraud and making false statements to the FBI. He reportedly entered the USA legally with his wife and five children in September 2001 to pursue post-graduate studies. He was held incommunicado for over a year before his first visit from the International Committee of the Red Cross and was not granted access to a lawyer until October 2004.

Ali al-Marri was due to stand trial in a federal court in Illinois on 21 July 2003. However, on 23 June 2003 President George W. Bush ordered that he be detained in US military custody as an “enemy combatant”. He says that interrogators threatened to send him to Egypt or Saudi Arabia where, they told him, he would be tortured and sodomized, and his wife would be raped in front of him.

Ali al-Marri is the only person held as an “enemy combatant” on the US mainland. His conditions of detention are similar to those held at Guantánamo and he faces the prospect of many more years of indefinite detention without charge or trial.

Please write calling for Ali al-Marri’s immediate and unconditional release if he is not to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and brought to trial without further delay in full accordance with international law and standards. Call for him to receive appropriate and continuing medical and psychological care, and access to family members.

Send appeals to: President George W. Bush,
The White House, Office of the President, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington DC
20500, USA. Fax: +1 202 456 2461.
Email: president@whitehouse.gov

Burundi

Imprisoned for criticizing the government

Prisoner of conscience Térencia Nahimana was charged on 15 May with “threatening state security” after publicly questioning the Burundian government’s commitment to engage in peace talks with the rebel group, the National Liberation Forces (FNL).

Director of Cercle d’initiative pour une vision commune, a non-governmental organization working on peace and conflict resolution in Burundi, he has worked to facilitate talks between the opposing sides and has frequently met with FNL leaders to promote peace and conflict resolution. Discussions have been slow, although the FNL have indicated their willingness to talk.

On 5 May, Térencia Nahimana wrote to President Pierre Nkurunziza, accusing the government of intentionally delaying peace negotiations with the FNL. The letter and subsequent press conference stated that the Burundian authorities were planning to use the presence of FNL fighters currently operating in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo to justify moving troops there.

He accused the authorities of hindering talks with the UN aimed at establishing a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He said that the government was afraid that some of its members could be found responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity by such a Commission.

Térencia Nahimana’s detention is part of a continuing pattern of harassment, intimidation and the arbitrary arrest of human rights defenders and journalists in Burundi. The government’s actions expose a growing trend towards using the country’s law to restrict the liberty and activities of individuals expressing opinions critical of the state authorities.

On 12 June 2006, the Court of Appeal confirmed the legality of Térencia Nahimana’s arrest; however a date for his trial has not yet been confirmed. He is currently in custody in Mpimba central prison in the capital, Bujumbura.

Please write, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of prisoner of conscience Térencia Nahimana who is detained solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression.

Send appeals to: Madame Clotilde Niragira, Ministre de la Justice et Garde des Sceaux,
Chaussée Prince Rwagasore, BP 1880, Bujumbura, Burundi. Fax: +257 21 86 10.

[Picture: Térence Nahimana © Private]

Turkmenistan

Human rights defender arbitrarily detained

Ogulsapar Muradova, a founding member of the human rights group Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation (THF) and a correspondent for the US-funded Radio Liberty, was detained at her apartment on 18 June by two police officers without an arrest warrant. They told her family they were taking her “for a conversation”.

When her daughters Sana and Maral went to the Interior Ministry to enquire about her they were ordered to return with their mother’s computer and fax machine. They refused to cooperate. They spoke to their mother by phone but she reportedly had difficulty speaking and what she said was totally incoherent. It is thought she had been given psychotropic drugs. Her daughters still refused to cooperate and returned home. On 19 June they were detained along with their brother Berdy, but were released on 1 July.

Independent civil society groups are unable to operate openly in Turkmenistan and independent political parties do not exist. The THF, whose director operates from exile in Bulgaria, has publicized human rights abuses since 2003. In recent years many of its members and their relatives, independent journalists and others who criticize the government have been subjected to human rights violations such as arbitrary detention, torture or other ill-treatment or have been forced into exile.

AI fears that Ogulsapar Muradova as well as two other members of the THF detained around the same time – Annakurban Amanklychev and Sapardurdy Khadzhiev – are at risk of torture or other ill-treatment. A number of high level government statements accusing the three detainees of “treason” (which can carry a life sentence) have recently been publicized in the media. AI believes that they are prisoners of conscience, detained solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression and calls for their prompt and unconditional release.

Abuse of civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights is widespread in Turkmenistan which is a virtually closed country. The recent detentions appear to amount to a new clampdown on dissent, particularly targeting civil society activists.

Please write, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Ogulsapar Muradova, Annakurban Amanklychev and Sapardurdy Khadzhiev detained solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression.

Send appeals to: President Saparmurad Niyazov, Presidential Palace, 744000 Ashgabat, Turkmenistan. Fax: +993 12 35 51 12.

[Picture: Ogulsapar Muradova © Private]

News in brief

Liberia

Charles Taylor was transferred to The Hague, The Netherlands, on 20 June to face trial on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity – crimes he allegedly committed while President of Liberia from 1997 to 2003. This decision was taken after the UK agreed to jail Charles Taylor if convicted. The Dutch government had made this a condition for hosting his trial. The Special Court for Sierra Leone, sitting in The Hague, will still exercise authority

over Charles Taylor.

For justice to prevail, AI considers it imperative that witnesses and others involved in the trial be able to travel to The Hague to participate in the process. AI will continue to monitor the trial.

Moldova abolishes death penalty

On 29 June the Moldovan parliament unanimously agreed to abolish the remaining provisions in the Constitution for the death penalty. The changes remove article 24 from the Constitution which allowed for the death penalty in extraordinary circumstances. The Constitutional Court had already agreed the changes to the Constitution in September 2005, but a parliamentary decision was needed for Moldova to abolish the death penalty in law. Moldova has not yet ratified Protocol 13 to the European Convention on Human Rights concerning the abolition of the death penalty in all circumstances.

UN Human Rights Council

The UN Human Rights Council met for the first time on 19-30 June in Geneva. Its first session saw several achievements, including the adoption of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Council has put both forward for adoption by the General Assembly later this year. The Council replaces the UN Commission on Human Rights.

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Freedom at a price

Former prisoner of conscience Akbar Ganji talks to the Wire about the challenges facing journalists in Iran

“Without global support, I don’t know what my destiny might have been,” says Akbar Ganji. “Amnesty International has been very significant and effective in my case and I take this opportunity to express my thanks.”

After spending six years in prison – much of it in solitary confinement – Akbar Ganji was freed in March. Since then, he has been speaking out against human rights violations in Iran and has spent the last month touring Europe, meeting human rights groups and calling on them to continue to support others like him in Iran. He has been awarded the 2006 Martin Ennals Award for his human rights work.

Arrested in 2000 for attending a cultural conference in Berlin, Germany, he spent over a year in jail. He was tried again, in 2001, for a set of articles, later published as a book, in which he implicated some high-ranking officials in the 1998 “serial murders” of several prominent political activists.

Charged with “collecting confidential state documents to jeopardize state security” and “spreading propaganda”, he was jailed. In 2005, he went on hunger strike – a protest that endured for well over 70 days. “When you are prevented from all your rights, when they want to ruin your personality and take away your humanity, [sometimes] that’s the only way you have to resist,” he says.

Although released from prison, Akbar Ganji has been banned from ever writing for publication in Iran again. But, he adds, this is a “minor” point in the context of the wider clampdown on freedom of expression. “In the last eight years, a hundred newspapers and journals have been shut down. Tens of journalists have been sentenced and imprisoned.”

Those newspapers that continue to run only do so because they censor themselves. Not only is the news media censored, but books as well. Akbar Ganji laughs wryly as he points out the lengths to which censors will go to alter a text. He offers the example of novels and the prohibition on mentioning girlfriends and boyfriends. “They change the relationship to sister and brother, and at the end of the book, you see the sister and brother are going on honeymoon!”

Joking aside, such censorship means that he must find other ways of communicating his message. One of the only ways, he says, is through the Internet, but even here there are obstacles. Many activists and journalists publish their views on weblogs with dire consequences – some have been imprisoned and tortured for their efforts. “All sites are filtered and blocked by the Iranian regime,” he adds. “And this is [also] part of our challenge for human rights – the blocking and unblocking of filters.”

Akbar Ganji began a three-day international protest in London, UK, on 14 July, with activities in cities worldwide. His tour then continues to North America after which he returns to Iran, where he fears he could be arrested again and returned to solitary confinement.

“There are always costs involved in achieving any aim,” he says. “And those ideals are not obtained without challenges. Democracy and human rights do not come free.”

ACT NOW!

Possible prisoners of conscience Mansour Ossanlu, Ramin Jahanbegloo and Sayed Ali Akbar Mousavi-Kho’ini, remain in Evin prison, Tehran. Please write, calling for their immediate release, to: Leader of the Islamic Republic, His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed ‘Ali Khamenei, The Presidency, Palestine Avenue, Azerbaijan Intersection, Tehran, Iran.
Fax: + 98 21 649 5880

[Picture: Akbar Ganji talking to *the Wire* © AI]

Control Arms

Million Faces Petition at UN

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan pledged to pass on the call for an Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) to UN member states after receiving the Million Faces Petition from the heads of AI, OXFAM and IANSA, at the start of the UN conference on small arms.

Julius Arile, a survivor of armed violence from Kenya, handed the petition over to the UN Secretary-General. “I am the millionth person to have joined the Million Faces Petition,” he said. “I have done so because my country Kenya has suffered a great deal as a result of small arms.”

“The trade in small arms weapons continues unhindered to some of the world’s worst perpetrators of human rights abuses, thanks to the hypocrisy, greed and inaction of governments,” said AI Secretary General Irene Khan. “The Million Faces Petition is a powerful call to action from ordinary people who want tougher international arms controls.” The petition, featuring people from over 160 countries, is the largest photo petition in the world.

The UN General Assembly in October could initiate negotiations for an ATT; a resolution is being discussed and the campaign is pulling out all the stops to get a “yes” vote. To find out how you can make it a reality, visit: www.controlarms.org

[Picture: Julius Arile in front of the Control Arms poster, New York, USA © AI]

USA backtracks on rights

More than four years after President George W. Bush decided not to apply Geneva Convention protections to detainees picked up during the conflict in Afghanistan, the US Department of Defense has instructed all its personnel to adhere to Common Article 3 of the Conventions. This Article provides for fair trial rights and bans torture, cruel, humiliating or degrading treatment.

The new instruction, contained in a memorandum dated 7 July , was prompted by a recent US Supreme Court decision which ruled that the military commissions established by President Bush in November 2001 violated US and international law. The instruction applies only to Department of Defense personnel. Other government agencies such as the CIA are exempt. Commenting on the recent policy shift, White House spokesperson Tony Snow said: “It is not really a reversal of policy – humane treatment has always been the standard.”

See: www.amnesty.org/stoptorture

AI sections’ posters win awards at Cannes

AI sections won accolades at the 2006 Cannes, France, advertising awards in July. Sections worked with prominent advertising agencies to create innovative campaign images.

Left /right: winners of a Gold Lion, the “Stamps” campaign by AI Malaysia and Saatchi & Saatchi Malaysia.

Below, left: AI Denmark’s anti-torture ads, Tightrope and Awake, designed by BBDO Denmark with photo by Martin Sjøby, won a Bronze Lion.

Below, right: AI Poland’s Freedom of Speech ad which won a Bronze Lion. The poster was designed in collaboration with Saatchi & Saatchi.

AI France also snapped up a Bronze for Wall by TBWA (*not pictured*).

See: www.canneslions.com