

[Page 1]

Children at war in Africa

Rehabilitation of child soldiers in Democratic Republic of Congo in desperate need of resources from international community

Emmanuel was seven when he was forcibly recruited by one of the factions involved in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, formerly Zaire). He had become separated from his parents when they fled the fighting in Mambasa, Ituri, and joined a group who told him they were fighting to defend former President Mobutu. In fact the group were fighting forces loyal to President Mobutu. He was taken to the Nyaleke military training camp in North-Kivu province where he learned military discipline and how to strip down a gun. Emmanuel had not had a chance to start school before the fighting took away a large part of his childhood.

Five years later he told an AI delegate how the soldiers would shoot live rounds in the children's presence so that they would get used to it and overcome their fear. He described how he had served on the frontlines and seen one of his commanders beheaded and how he had carried a gun so heavy he had to kneel down to fire it. Eventually he was wounded in the arm. He says that once he has recovered he wants to go to school.

Tragically Emmanuel's story is far from unique. Many of the demobilized children interviewed by AI delegates in the DRC in 2003 also wanted to recapture some of their stolen childhoods and return to school. Unfortunately the majority of these children, many of whom have been orphaned or no longer even know if their families are dead or alive, can scarcely keep themselves sheltered and fed, let alone find the means to pay for their education.

Faced with homelessness and destitution, many of the children can see no other option but the army, despite the terrible hardships and trauma they endured as soldiers.

Since the latest conflict erupted in 1998, more than 3 million people are estimated to have been killed or to have died from the effects of war in eastern DRC. As many as 2 million people have been internally displaced, including some 400,000 children. Agriculture has been devastated, resulting in malnutrition and death. The breakdown of the political, social and economic infrastructures – including the break-up of families and communities and the closure of schools and health facilities – has weakened or destroyed those structures which should provide children with their immediate source of care and protection. As a result they have become an easy target for recruitment into the armed forces of the various warring factions.

In July 2003 a transitional government, led by President Joseph Kabila, was set up. However for many Congolese, peace remains a distant dream. In eastern DRC the fighting and grave human rights abuses continue.

Massacres, mutilations and rapes continue throughout the Ituri and Kivu regions in eastern DRC. In Bunia, capital of Ituri, some 20,000 people forced to flee their homes are living in makeshift camps under the protection of international troops. Tens of thousands more have fled the Ituri region altogether. The violence is the result of a

power struggle between rival armed groups who have remorselessly manipulated ethnic tensions to further their own interests. Eastern DRC is rich in natural resources including gold, diamonds, coltan and timber. AI believes that the exploitation of this natural wealth is the biggest factor underpinning the continuation of the conflict.

All parties to the DRC conflict have recruited child soldiers. The children, some as young as seven, are used as porters or cooks, but are also routinely sent to the frontlines. They are given weapons and trained to use them to kill. Many of the girl soldiers are sexually abused. Child soldiers suffer very high casualty rates on the frontline because of their inexperience, recklessness and lack of training. They also suffer disproportionately from the rigours of military life and are particularly vulnerable to disease and malnutrition. Some have reported that they were forced to commit gross abuses, including killing, torture and mutilation, against the enemy and even against their own families. Local non-governmental organizations have reported that children exposed in this way to conflict and forced to take part in atrocities suffer severe psychological consequences. Most have no possibility of completing their basic education.

AI believes that concerted action at the national and international level is needed to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers in the DRC and to ensure that the military and political leaders who are suspected of being responsible for their recruitment and use are brought to justice.

There is a desperate need for adequately resourced programs to rehabilitate child soldiers and offer them opportunities to develop their lives and potential so that they are not compelled to rejoin armed groups to survive or to live on the street where they are vulnerable to crime and exploitation.

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which entered into force in November 1999, prohibits the recruitment and use of children under 18 as combatants. AI calls on all those responsible for the destruction of the childhoods of tens of thousands of children in the DRC - government and opposition forces - to ensure that no child in Africa is subjected to these most blatant of abuses of their physical and mental integrity.

To take action on AI's concerns in the DRC, please sign our on-line petition at www.amnesty.org

USA: Unfair trials by military commissions

Six foreign nationals held by the US authorities are at risk of unfair trial by military commissions.

If the trials go ahead, they will be the first people to be tried under a Military Order signed in 2001 which also provides for the indefinite detention without charge or trial of foreign nationals accused of involvement in “international terrorism”.

The six were named in July by US President George W. Bush and included two UK nationals, Moazzam Begg and Feroz Abbas, and David Hicks, an Australian national. The US government responded to concern in those countries by stating that it will not pursue the death penalty in the cases of these three individuals, who are all being held at the US Naval Base in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. However, it has made no such promises for the other three, who were not immediately identified by the US.

AI has repeatedly called for the Military Order to be rescinded and for the US government to withdraw the threat of trial by military commission.

- The military commissions are not independent. The US President has given himself or the Secretary of Defense the power to pick the members of the commissions and the people who will be tried before them, as well as to make the final decision in any case.
- The commissions would allow a lower standard of evidence than is admissible in the ordinary courts, including hearsay evidence. There are concerns that this could even include statements extracted under torture or ill-treatment.
- There is no right of appeal to an independent and impartial court, only a review by a three-member panel appointed by the Secretary of Defense or his designee.
- Defendants will have only a limited right to an effective defence. They do not have the right to see all the evidence against them. Their right to counsel of choice is restricted. They will be forced to accept US military lawyers, even if they want to represent themselves, or can retain civilian counsel. Restrictions on any such civilian counsel will be substantial.
- The Military Order is discriminatory. Only foreign nationals will be tried by military commission and subject to this second-class justice.

More than 650 people are currently held without charge or trial in Guantánamo Bay. Many of these detainees have been held for well over a year in conditions which may amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

Rooms to conduct military commissions are reported to have been prepared in Guantánamo Bay and the possibility of constructing an execution chamber at the Naval Base has recently been discussed.

For further information on AI's concerns or to get involved in AI's work on behalf of detainees held in Guantánamo Bay, please contact your local AI section or visit AI's website www.amnesty.org

[Page 2]

Pakistan's children let down by justice system

Around 4,500 juveniles are currently in detention in Pakistan. More than 3,000 of them have not been convicted of any offence; their trials have either yet to start or have not yet been completed. Juveniles can sometimes spend several months or even years in detention simply because their families cannot afford to pay their bail. Once juveniles eventually get to trial, conviction rates are as low as 15-20%.

Pakistan ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 and introduced domestic measures, such as the Juvenile Justice Ordinance (JJO) which came into force in 2001, as part of efforts to fulfil the obligation to protect the rights of juveniles who come in contact with the law. However, a widespread lack of awareness and failure to implement these measures means that the rights of children in police custody or prison in Pakistan are often overlooked.

The JJO does not allow a court to hear juvenile and adult cases on the same day but this happens regularly. This results in children, usually first-time offenders, being transported and held in lock-ups with adults where they are at risk of abuse and which is against the law. The handcuffing of juveniles is also outlawed in Pakistan, yet children are chained to each other, adult prisoners or guards on a regular basis.

The handing down of the death penalty to juveniles is strictly prohibited by both international humanitarian law and the JJO, but juveniles continue to be sentenced to death in Pakistan. This happens in the lower courts where not all magistrates are aware of the JJO and in the Tribally and Provincially Administered Areas where the Ordinance is not in force. Juveniles whose ages are contested remain imprisoned with adults, sometimes on death row, until their age is clarified. Several of the juveniles who had their death sentences commuted by President Musharraf during AI's Secretary General Irene Khan's visit to Pakistan in 2001 remain on death row because the families of the victims have questioned their claim to be juveniles. According to government officials, in Punjab alone, there are over 300 cases where the age of the accused is being contested.

All children who come into contact with the law are entitled to the same rights as adults as well as other protective measures which take into account their particular vulnerability. Despite this, in Pakistan, children are often the victims of abuse or neglect by the very people who have responsibility for their welfare. This neglect can be due to the failure of the legal system to recognize its role as guardian of an imprisoned child or to a lack of knowledge about a child's rights under the law. Abuse may take the form of threatening behaviour or beatings by police or prison staff.

On a recent visit to Pakistan, AI visited several courts and juvenile detention centres and met with journalists, lawyers and judges as well as many imprisoned juveniles. AI is publishing a report on the treatment of juveniles by the justice system in Pakistan in September 2003 to coincide with Pakistan's periodic report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

If you are interested in being involved in the campaigning activities which will accompany this report, please contact your local AI section or visit AI's website www.amnesty.org (from mid-September) for further information.

A conspiracy of silence?

AI joins the families of young soldiers killed in UK Army barracks to demand answers about their deaths

"More than seven and a half years on, what we find most hurtful is that, because of their ineptitude, we will never, ever know for sure how our daughter died." Des James, father of Private Cheryl James

The families of four young soldiers who died at the Royal Logistics Corps headquarters in Deepcut, Surrey, are continuing their campaign to find out how their loved ones died. Their long drawn-out struggle for justice has become a focus for the increasing concern about deaths of members of the armed forces in non-combat situations in and around UK army barracks. Many bereaved families from all over the UK have joined in the call for a full and independent public inquiry into such deaths in disputed circumstances. AI is supporting their call.

Private James Collinson was found dead at Deepcut barracks in March 2002, with a single gunshot wound to the head. He had been sent out on patrol duty unarmed as he was only 17 years old, too young to be armed without the supervision of an officer. Yet when his body was discovered, he had a rifle across his chest.

Private Geoff Gray, also aged 17, was found dead at Deepcut with two shots to the head in September 2001. In June 2002 it emerged that two other young soldiers had died at Deepcut in 1995: 20-year-old Private Sean Benton had five gunshot wounds;

18-year-old Private Cheryl James had a single bullet wound to the head. Terri Lewis, a former Lance Corporal at Deepcut, stated that “bullying at Deepcut was rife” and that sexual harassment by a sergeant may account for the death of Private Cheryl James.

In each of these cases the Royal Military Police’s Special Investigation Branch (SIB) conducted the original investigations and decided that the deaths were “intentional and self inflicted”. However, the families of the young soldiers believe that the original investigations were seriously flawed and claim they have been denied information about their children’s deaths.

There is particular concern about the treatment of young soldiers: one third of all recruits to the UK army are under 18. AI is unconditionally opposed to the recruitment of people under the age of 18 into the armed forces as it believes this ultimately jeopardizes their mental and physical integrity. It continues to call on the UK authorities to stop recruiting under 18s into the armed forces, and to increase the minimum age of recruitment and deployment to 18 as the only way to fulfil the UK’s obligation under international law to take special measures to ensure the protection of children.

Since 1990 there have been nearly 1,800 “non-natural” deaths of members of the armed forces in or around UK Army barracks, some 200 of which have been described as self-inflicted. AI has received allegations that some of these deaths may have involved unlawful killings, either intentional or as a result of negligence, through, for example, the misuse of lethal weapons; deaths during strenuous training exercises; and self-inflicted deaths, at times following bullying and other ill-treatment, including sexual harassment, by other soldiers and superior officers. The circumstances surrounding many of these fatalities continue to be disputed. Serious questions have been raised about the adequacy and effectiveness of the authorities’ response giving rise to an increasing impression that there has been institutional collusion in, and cover-up of, these deaths.

“We feel that the only way to address the mishandling is to have those people come before an independent board of inquiry. We need to find out who and what is behind the deaths of our children and who is conspiring to hide the evidence of their [the army’s] misdeeds”. A statement by the families of young soldiers who died at Deepcut barracks, June 2002

AI supports the families’ call for a wide-ranging public inquiry into all such deaths since 1990. It calls on the UK authorities to undertake prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigations into all deaths in disputed circumstances of UK Armed Forces personnel.

Guatemala’s future – bullets or the ballot box?

Mounting political violence and human rights violations in Guatemala in the run-up to the November presidential elections are threatening to create a situation reminiscent of the killing fields of the country’s years of civil conflict.

Violence explicitly linked to the run-up to presidential elections is on the increase. In Chiquimula Department alone, six opposition party activists have been killed in a recent four-month period, apparently by former military commissioners affiliated to the ruling *Frente Republicano Guatemalteco* (FRG).

In July violence escalated after the courts again blocked General Efraín Ríos Montt

from standing as the FRG candidate in the presidential elections. Days later, after General Ríos Montt's warning that he could not contain the anger of his supporters, thousands of people travelled to the capital in vehicles reportedly belonging to or hired by the FRG to protest against the ruling. Paramilitaries and rioters armed with machetes and clubs brought the centre of Guatemala City to a standstill in what came to be known as "Black Thursday". General Ríos Montt and the FRG denied any responsibility for the riots.

Five days later the Constitutional Court ruled that General Ríos Montt could stand as a candidate. This contradicted previous rulings which declared General Ríos Montt's candidacy inadmissible on grounds that he came to power in a coup in 1982; the Constitution bars participants in coup attempts from public office.

General Ríos Montt was a key figure behind the scorched earth counter-insurgency plan of the 1970s and early 1980s in which tens of thousands of non-combatant civilians were slaughtered. He still faces legal suits both in Guatemala and abroad for genocide and other crimes against humanity.

As the Guatemalan electoral campaign progresses, AI has continued to call on all candidates to make public their support for human rights and the rule of law. AI is gravely concerned that the acceptance of General Ríos Montt's candidacy could undermine progress on human rights issues and signal an end to the vital process of combating impunity for past violations.

[Page 3]

Worldwide appeals

China

Uighur asylum-seekers missing

Muhammed Tohti Metrozi (top left) and Abdulwahab Tohti (bottom left), two ethnic Uighur Chinese nationals, have been missing since 16 July in Rawalpindi, northern Pakistan. AI has not been able to establish if they are still in Pakistan but unconfirmed reports suggest that they may already have been forcibly returned to China where they would be at risk of torture and possible execution.

Muhammed Tohti Metrozi received a telephone call on 16 July, which was apparently from an official at the Pakistani Intelligence Bureau. He left his home shortly afterwards to meet the official, and has not been heard from since. Recognized as a refugee by the UNHCR (Pakistan) in December 2002, he was waiting to be resettled in Sweden at the beginning of August.

Abdulwahab Tohti is believed to have travelled to Pakistan for religious studies but not to have applied for asylum. Little is known about his "disappearance", also on 16 July.

Following the attacks of 11 September 2001 in the USA, China has intensified its political crack-down in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR), branding those in favour of independence for

the region as "ethnic separatists" or "terrorists". Particularly targeted are the Uighur, the majority ethnic group among the predominantly Muslim local population. China has reportedly put significant political pressure on neighbouring countries, including Pakistan, to return those it suspects of being involved in "separatist" activities.

Pakistan has on several occasions returned people to their countries of origin without due process and without regard to the risk to the lives of the people deported.

Uighur asylum-seekers or refugees suspected of being involved in pro-independence groups or activities are at risk of serious human rights violations, including torture, unfair trials and possibly the death penalty if they are forcibly returned to China.

Please call on the authorities of Pakistan to reveal the two men's whereabouts. Urge the authorities not to send them back to China and to ensure that no Chinese nationals are returned to China without due process. Send appeals to: Faisal Saleh Hayat, Minister for the Interior, Block R, Federal Secretariat, Islamabad, Pakistan. Fax: + 92 51 9202624. E-mail: minister@interior.gov.pk

Please also write to the Chinese authorities calling on them to ensure that everyone in XUAR has the right to freedom of expression regardless of race, religion or political belief. Send appeals to: Ismail Tiliwaldi Zhuxi, Chair of the XUAR People's Government, Xinjiang Wiewuer Zizhiqu Renmin Zhengfu, 2 Zhongshanlu, Wulumuqishi 830041, Xinjiang Weiwuer Zizhiqu, People's Republic of China. Telegrams: XUAR Government Chair, Wulumuqishi, Xinjiang, China. Email: webmaster@xinjiang.gov.cn

Syria

Fears for health of long-term prisoner

Palestinian Mustafa Dib Khalil, also known as Abu Ta'an, has been imprisoned in Syria for 20 years. He is in his late sixties. Following his arrest he was held for eight years in solitary confinement and remained in incommunicado detention for about 14 years. It is not clear whether he was ever charged or tried. Repeated appeals by AI to the Syrian authorities for his case to be clarified or resolved have been ignored.

Mustafa Dib Khalil is thought to have a spinal problem and to be suffering from hypertension and loss of sight. His mental health is believed to have been severely affected by his prolonged imprisonment. He is reportedly held at Sednaya prison but there has been no news of him for 18 months and his family has been denied access to him.

Arrested on 7 November 1983 by Syrian intelligence officers near Tripoli in northern Lebanon, Mustafa Dib Khalil was taken to Syria and imprisoned. He was reportedly arrested for belonging to Fatah, the largest faction in the Palestine Liberation Organisation headed by Yasser Arafat, and for coordinating members of Palestinian armed groups in Lebanon.

Scores of Lebanese, Palestinians and Jordanians remain in prolonged and often incommunicado detention in Syria. At least three Lebanese have died during the last three years as a result of lack of medical care or long-term cruel and inhuman prison conditions.

Please write, calling for Mustafa Dib Khalil (also known as Abu Ta'an) to be released and expressing concern about his reported poor health. Call for him to be given prompt access to adequate medical care.

Send appeals to: His Excellency President Bashar al-Assad, President of the Republic, Presidential Palace, Abu Rummaneh, Al-Rashid Street, Damascus, Syria. Fax: + 963 11 332 3410.

Kenya

Former Iraqi pilot detained for nearly two years without charge or trial

Abdel Mohammed Al-Dahas, formerly a pilot with the Iraqi armed forces, has been in detention in Kenya without charge or trial since 8 October 2001 on suspicion of being a “terrorist”. He is a refugee under the protection of the UNHCR but the Kenyan authorities are keeping him in custody “in the interests of public security”. No evidence of any alleged “terrorist” activities has been presented to him.

Abdel Mohammed Al-Dahas opposed the former Iraqi government of Saddam Hussein. He was arrested and severely tortured in 1972 on suspicion of having links with Syria. On his release he was forced to take a job as a pilot in the Ministry of Agriculture. His movements were closely monitored by the authorities who periodically summoned him for questioning.

By 1995 Abdel Mohammed Al-Dahas was afraid for his life because of his political views and fled first to the Kurdish controlled north and then to Yemen. When his Iraqi passport ran out the embassy in Yemen refused to renew it. He left Yemen and travelled to various other countries in Africa and the Middle East. He was refused entry to some countries before arriving in Nairobi, Kenya, in December 1999 where he applied for refugee status from the UNHCR.

While his refugee status was being decided he was arrested by the Kenyan authorities, found guilty of being in the country illegally and ordered to be repatriated to Iraq. His refugee status was granted before the deportation order was enforced. Despite his refugee status, the Kenyan immigration authorities tried to deport him via the United Arab Emirates (UAE). When he informed the UAE authorities about his fears for his life should he be returned to Iraq, he was sent back to Kenya. On arrival he was put in prison where he has remained ever since.

Please write, calling on the Kenyan authorities either to charge Abdel Mohammed Al-Dahas with a recognizably criminal offence and give him a prompt and fair trial or release him immediately.

Send appeals to: Hon. Chris Murungaru, Minister of Provincial Administration and National Security, Office of the President, Harambee House, Harambee Avenue, PO Box 30510, Nairobi, Kenya. Fax: +254 20 210 150/ 336 545.

Updates

Buddhist monk in Viet Nam thanks AI

“Just to know that the ‘outside’ world had not forgotten me and was continuing to work for my release was an immense source of encouragement during those dark days. I know that Amnesty International played a leading role in these efforts, and I am profoundly grateful. I owe you my freedom, and I shall never forget that.”

Thich Quang Do was released on 27 June after spending two years incommunicado under administrative detention. He had previously spent more than 20 years under house arrest, in prison and in internal exile. During his recent solitary confinement, reports were smuggled in to him about the campaigns on his behalf and to defend human rights in Viet Nam. His freedom is still very restricted, his monastery is watched day and night and his visitors are closely monitored. However, he is determined, despite all hardships, to pursue his peaceful struggle for human rights and religious freedom in Viet Nam.

Good news for the Giza 14 and Queen Boat case prisoners in Egypt

Eleven of the 14 men who were given prison sentences by the Giza Criminal Court in April, on charges of “habitual debauchery” in connection with their alleged sexual orientation, were released on appeal on 19 July. The other three who were sentenced in their absence were not included in this appeal; they remain at liberty.

In another similar case the sentences of 14 men were reduced on appeal from three years’ to one year’s imprisonment, a period they had already served, in June and July. The 14 men were among some 60 men arrested in various locations in Cairo on and around 11 May 2001. Over half were arrested on a night club boat known as the Queen Boat. Many reported being tortured or ill-treated, including being beaten with a stick on the soles of the feet (falaka), particularly during the first stages of their detention. The men are currently serving an additional part of their sentence which requires them to be under police supervision during the hours of darkness.

The charge of “habitual debauchery” in Egypt is applied to consensual relations between adult men in private, effectively criminalizing same-sex relations. In order to determine whether they had engaged in sexual relations with other men, in both cases defendants were forced to undergo anal examinations amounting to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

Jamaica disbands crime unit

AI welcomes the Jamaican government’s disbandment of the Crime Management Unit whose police officers have been implicated in numerous abuses of human rights. Jamaica has one of the highest rates of killings by police in the world. It is hoped that the disbandment of this unit will be one step towards a more accountable police force in Jamaica. See: *the Wire*, March 2003.

Justice delayed in Namibia

Nearly four years after their arrest, the trial of 122 prisoners in Namibia is set to take place on 27 October. They are accused of high treason and other offences following the Caprivi secessionist uprising of August 1999. AI believes that at least 70 of them may be prisoners of conscience.

AI fears that their trial will not be fair. Most of them have been tortured or ill-treated and subjected to harsh prison conditions. The Namibian authorities have reportedly concluded their investigations into the widespread allegations of torture by the police and security forces but have not yet made their findings public.

For further information, see *Namibia: Justice delayed is justice denied – the Caprivi treason trial* (AFR 42/001/2003).

Viet Nam reduces sentence

Catholic priest and prisoner of conscience Nguyen Van Ly had his 15-year prison sentence reduced to 10 years by the Vietnamese authorities. He was arrested in May 2001 for his outspoken views on human rights and religious freedom. This sentence reduction is in contrast to continuing arrests, trials and imposition of long prison sentences for people disseminating materials and views perceived as critical of the government and its policies. See: *Worldwide Appeal* September 2001.

A positive step for African women

The African Union’s adoption of the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa is a significant step in the efforts to promote and ensure respect for the rights of African

women. Adopted on 11 July, the Protocol requires African governments to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women in Africa and to promote equality between women and men. AI urges all 53 member states of the African Union to ratify the Protocol.

Charges dropped in Syria

Syrian human rights defender Haytham al-Maleh had charges against him dropped by the judge of a military court in Damascus, under the latest presidential amnesty. Haytham al-Maleh, head of the Human Rights Association in Syria, (HRAS), had faced charges including distribution of the HRAS journal, Teyyarat (Currents), without a licence, involvement with an organization of an international nature and dissemination of “false news”.

However, under separate charges, Haytham al-Maleh and his colleague, Razan Zaytunah, are barred from leaving the country. They are challenging these restrictions before the Administrative Court. Haytham al-Maleh’s son, Iyas, thanked AI members for all their support.

[Page 4]

Crisis in Liberia

International forces deployed as human rights and humanitarian catastrophe reaches critical level

On 4 August 2003 a first contingent of West African troops arrived in Liberia, where hundreds of thousands of civilians were facing an ever-deepening humanitarian and human rights crisis.

Two months earlier, the armed opposition Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) launched an attack on the capital, Monrovia, engaging government forces in intense fighting for control of the city. Fighting between LURD and government forces also continued in Bong and Nimba Counties, and a second armed opposition group, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), took control of Buchanan, Liberia’s second major port.

Hundreds of civilians were killed or injured in Monrovia, many as a result of indiscriminate shelling by the LURD. Mortars and rocket-propelled grenades were fired into residential areas with no obvious military targets, hitting schools, churches and hospitals, many harbouring civilians. Although most shelling was attributed to the LURD, government forces also appeared to be responsible.

A complete break-down of law and order in Monrovia left its inhabitants, including tens of thousands of internally displaced people and Sierra Leonean refugees, even more vulnerable to the widespread human rights abuses which have characterized Liberia’s conflict. Large numbers of people have been killed, women and girls have been raped and children under the age of 18 have been forcibly recruited to fight. In some cases, those resisting forced recruitment were summarily killed. There has been extensive looting by both government and armed opposition forces; among the targets have been the vehicles and supplies of humanitarian agencies.

Most humanitarian agencies were forced to suspend their work, leaving civilians – not only in Monrovia but throughout the country – without access to desperately needed emergency assistance. There were warnings of a deepening public health crisis in Monrovia, where over a million civilians faced acute shortages of clean water, food,

sanitation facilities and medical care. Tens of thousands of displaced people endured appalling conditions in a stadium and other public buildings in Monrovia. The UN estimated that 450,000 people were homeless in the city.

A cease-fire, brokered by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), was signed in Accra, Ghana, on 17 June 2003, but collapsed within a week.

On 1 August 2003, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution authorizing deployment of a multinational force to support implementation of the cease-fire. An ECOWAS “vanguard” force arrived in Monrovia three days later to pave the way for full deployment of the multinational force which was then to be replaced by a UN peace-keeping operation to support an eventual transitional government and implementation of a peace agreement – which had yet to be reached. The cease-fire agreement had envisaged a transitional government, without the participation of President Charles Taylor whose departure from Liberia was widely called for.

AI called on the UN Security Council to give the initial multinational force and subsequent UN peace-keeping force a strong and unambiguous mandate to protect civilians and humanitarian workers at all times and in all parts of the country. AI is calling for all international troops deployed in Liberia to have the necessary training, including in the protection of the rights of women and children, as well as adequate logistical support in order to protect civilians from human rights abuses. They must also themselves comply fully with international human rights and humanitarian law applicable to peace-keeping forces.

Alleged illegal sterilization of Romani women in Slovakia

Human rights defenders have alleged that some Romani women are being forcibly sterilized in Slovakia. The government responded by launching a criminal investigation into the allegations in January. However, it also threatened that if the complaints were found to be false it would initiate criminal proceedings against the human rights defenders who had published the allegations; if they were true they would be charged with failing to report a crime. In June the government withdrew this threat.

There are concerns that during the investigation the women concerned were intimidated and that many were too afraid to come forward. At the start of the investigation several Romani women reported that they were not informed of their rights nor the purpose of the investigation and were questioned by male police officers who intimidated and threatened them. In February AI wrote to the Slovak government expressing concern about these allegations and received assurances that the investigation would be thorough and impartial.

However, AI and other concerned non-governmental organizations are disturbed that the investigation appears to have reached hasty conclusions and ignored key evidence. They have issued specific recommendations to the government urging that it ensure that the investigation complies with international standards. They are also calling on the Slovak government to hold an independent commission of inquiry, separate from the criminal investigation, into all the allegations of past and present illegal sterilization of Romani women. The inquiry must be carried out with sensitivity to the women concerned and to the Romani community.

Timor-Leste

The people of Timor-Leste voted overwhelmingly for independence from Indonesia on 30 August 1999. In the months before and after the ballot Indonesian-backed militia groups opposed to independence mounted a systematic campaign of murder, violence and intimidation considered to be crimes against humanity. One of the most brutal single incidents was the massacre at a church in Suai on 6 September 1999. At least 40 people, and possibly as many as 200, were killed. At least 10 children were among the dead. Four years on the victims and their families still wait for justice.

Russian Federation

On 25 July 2003, Colonel Yuri Budanov was found guilty of kidnapping and murdering Kheda Kungaeva and sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment.

Eighteen-year-old Kheda Kungaeva had been abducted from her home in Chechnya in March 2000. In spite of evidence that she had been raped, no one has been prosecuted for this.

Yuri Budanov confessed to killing Kheda Kungaeva: his lawyers claimed that he did so in a state of "temporary insanity". In December 2002, he was declared not criminally responsible for the murder by a military court. However, the prosecution filed an appeal which resulted in his conviction.

AI members and supporters have been actively campaigning for justice for Kheda Kungaeva and her family for nearly two years.

"We are happy that you did not leave us alone with our terrible tragedy, that you remember us. We feel enormous support from you – that is why we still have the strength to fight for justice... Thanks to Allah that people like you exist in this world. We will always remember you." Letter to AI from Kheda Kungaeva's family, May 2003