

January 2004 Worldwide Appeals

Syria

Arrested for internet use

Prisoner of conscience ‘Abdel Rahman Shaghouri was reportedly tortured and hit on the head after his name was mentioned in a television discussion about human rights in Syria. He is being held in incommunicado detention in Sednaya Prison on the outskirts of the capital Damascus.

It is thought that ‘Abdel Rahman Shaghouri is being held for reasons connected with his accessing Internet sites giving political information about Syria although the exact charges remain unclear. He is expected to be tried before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC). The procedures of the SSSC are known to be seriously flawed and AI is concerned that he will not receive a fair trial.

‘Abdel Rahman Shaghouri was arrested without warrant by security personnel at a checkpoint on 23 February 2003. On the same day, secret police agents reportedly entered his house and confiscated his computer, fax, CDs and other computer-related items.

Internet access in Syria is carefully monitored by the authorities and websites deemed undesirable for political or moral reasons are censored. In 2003 the Syrian authorities reportedly blocked access to two Internet sites, *Maktoub* and *Ilaf*. *Maktoub* is an “on-line Arabic community” and Internet service provider (ISP), and *Ilaf* is an Arabic news and media site.

The cost of Internet use is beyond the means of most Syrians and uncontrolled access can only be achieved by dialling ISPs in neighbouring countries.

Please write, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of ‘Abdel Rahman Shaghouri who is detained solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression. Express concern that he may have been tortured while in detention.

Send appeals to: His Excellency President Bashar al-Assad, Presidential Palace, Damascus, Syria. Fax: + 963 11 332 3410.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Tortured to death

Baudouin Mudahogora, a farmer, and others were tortured in detention in Bunagana, in Rutshuru territory of North-Kivu province, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo in January 2003. Two men, Paul Mbonabihama and Ndibwami Nyanga, did not survive the torture. Baudouin Mudahogora saw the bodies of men who died dragged from the underground pit where the detainees were held. Baudouin Mudahogora himself was tortured by beatings and having a hot iron repeatedly pressed to his back.

Another detainee, Ayinkamiye Baraza, was stripped naked and reportedly had gunpowder set alight across her breasts, with molten plastic poured on to heighten her agony. Her thumbnails were reportedly ripped out. Gilbert Mpezamihigo also had an iron pressed to his back and had a heavy stone attached to his testicles. Another man, Xavier Nzabanita, was beaten, tied up and suspended upside-down.

The survivors were detained without trial until May 2003, when they were released without explanation. All had been accused of collaboration with opponents of the armed political group, the *Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie - Goma* (RCD-Goma). The true

motive of the arrests, however, may relate to a court case Baudouin Mudahogora had brought against an official from Bunagana, alleging theft of cattle.

The suspected torturers have been identified. Most are agents of the *Direction générale des migrations* (DGM), a security arm of the RCD-Goma, in Bunagana. Since July the RCD-Goma has been part of the DRC's new transitional government.

A formal complaint was made against the alleged torturers. However, senior officers in the RCD-Goma have reportedly blocked any investigation. The surviving victims suffer grave health problems, but cannot afford appropriate medical care.

Please write, calling for an investigation into the torture of Baudouin Mudahogora, Ayinkamiye Baraza, Gilbert Mpezamihigo and Xavier Nzabanita, and into the death through torture of Paul Mbonabihima and Ndibwami Nyanga; for the torturers to be brought to justice and for the victims or their relatives to be compensated.

Send appeals to: Son Excellence Azarias Ruberwa, Vice-Président de la République et Secrétaire Général du RCD-Goma, Présidence de la République, Kinshasa-Ngaliema, Democratic Republic of Congo.

China

Uighur refugee executed after forcible return

Uighur Chinese nationals Shaheer Ali, Kheyum Whashim Ali and Abdu Allah Sattar were forcibly returned to China from Nepal in 2002. Shaheer Ali has reportedly been executed after being sentenced to death in March 2003 and there are fears that the other two are at risk of torture and execution.

All three men were recognized as refugees by the UNHCR after they fled to Nepal in 2000. While in Nepal, Shaheer Ali gave an interview to Radio Free Asia in which he described eight months of torture in 1994 in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR), China. He said he was beaten, given electric shocks and repeatedly kicked unconscious.

According to a report on the Chinese website www.tianshan.net on 21 October, Shaheer Ali was accused of leading a number of "terrorist" organizations including the East Turkistan Islamic Party of Allah also known as the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM). The Chinese authorities claim that ETIM was linked to a demonstration on 5 February 1997 in Gulja (Yining) which they described as an incident of "beating, smashing and looting". Independent eyewitness reports said that this was a peaceful demonstration by local people calling for equal treatment for Uighurs. It degenerated into violence after security forces fired into the crowd to disperse the protesters. Hundreds were arrested in the aftermath and many were tortured.

Following the 11 September 2001 attacks in the USA, China has intensified its political crackdown against the mainly Muslim ethnic Uighur community in the XUAR, branding those in favour of independence as "ethnic separatists" or "terrorists". The authorities make little distinction between acts of violence and acts of peaceful dissent. There are fears that a current 100-day security crackdown due to last until the Chinese New Year, in January 2004, will lead to increased repression of peaceful political dissent in the region.

Please write, condemning the recent execution of Shaheer Ali after a secret trial. Express concern for the safety of Kheyum Whashim Ali and Abdu Allah Sattar and call on the authorities to guarantee that if they are being held in detention they will not be tortured, ill-treated or executed.

Send appeals to: Chairman of XUAR Regional People's Government, Ismail Tiliwaldi Zhuxi, Xinjiang Weiwuer Zizhiqu Renmin Zhengfu, 2 Zhongshanlu, Wulumuqishi 830041, Xinjiang Weiwuer Zizhiqu, China. Email: webmaster@xinjiang.gov.cn and copies to Minister of Justice, Zhang Fusen: minister@legalinfo.gov.cn