

AI works on the cases of between four and five thousand known or possible prisoners of conscience at any one time. They are only the tip of the iceberg—for each name that is known to AI there may be 50 or another 100 that are unknown. Last month the organization launched an international petition for an amnesty for all prisoners of conscience everywhere.

Nobel laureates help to launch worldwide amnesty appeals

Seven Nobel Peace Prize winners, including Willy Brandt and Andrei Sakharov, have helped launch a worldwide signature drive by AI for the release of people imprisoned solely for their ideas or origins.

The petitions were launched on international Human Rights Day, 10 December 1982, and will be circulated throughout most of 1983 before they are presented to all heads of state and the President of the United Nations General Assembly.

Peace laureates supporting the drive include Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, who won the prize for his efforts to protect human rights in Argentina, and Mairead Corrigan, awarded it for her work for peace in Northern Ireland.

Also signing was Coretta King, widow of the assassinated US civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr, who received the prize in 1964.

The petitions call for the release of all prisoners of conscience—men and women imprisoned in many countries solely because of their political or religious beliefs, their colour or ethnic origin, who have not used or advocated violence. The amnesty is urged for thousands of such prisoners known to AI and all others who come within the definition.

The new appeal for a “Universal Amnesty for All Prisoners of Conscience” declares: “None of these people should be in prison. The fact that they have been arrested and punished because of their beliefs or origins is an affront to humanity.”

The signers state their belief that “there is an indissoluble link between

human rights and peace”. They say the amnesty would build international confidence, promote fundamental freedoms and advance respect for human rights everywhere.

The seven Peace laureates are Willy Brandt (Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), 1971), Mairead Corrigan (United Kingdom (UK), 1976), Sean MacBride (Ireland, 1974), Alva Myrdal (Sweden, 1982), the late Philip Noel-Baker (UK, 1959), Adolfo Pérez Esquivel (Argentina, 1980) and Andrei Sakharov (USSR, 1975).

Andrei Sakharov, noted Soviet scientist and human rights advocate, is currently confined to the city of Gorky in internal exile in the USSR.

Other Nobel laureates signing the first petitions were Heinrich Böll (FRG, Literature, 1972), Gunnar Myrdal (Sweden, Economics, 1974) and Elias Canetti (UK, Literature, 1981) □



The picture shows (top row, from left to right): Sean MacBride, Andrei Sakharov, Alva Myrdal and Mairead Corrigan; below her, the late Philip Noel-Baker; (bottom row, from left to right): Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, Coretta King and (bottom right) Willy Brandt.

(Photograph of Philip Noel-Baker by John Birdshall/Rentasnap.)

About this appeal . . .

Prisoners of conscience have been the central concern of Amnesty International since the movement was launched. More than 20,000 individual cases have been taken up by Amnesty International groups over the years. It is impossible to calculate how many prisoners of conscience are held throughout the world today. Many are held in remote locations. Some have "disappeared" into secret detention. All, however, are detained solely for their political or religious beliefs or for their colour, national or ethnic origin. None has used or advocated violence.

In 1977, recognizing the continuing scale on which prisoners of conscience were being held in countries throughout the world, Amnesty International marked Prisoners of Conscience Year. One aim of that year-long campaign was to bring the issue of prisoners of conscience to the attention of the United Nations. A petition was delivered to the General Assembly and its text circulated to all member states.

At the 1981 session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Amnesty International called for international procedures to gather information on prisoners of conscience and to check on how member states have observed UN resolutions for the release of certain categories of prisoners, which have included prisoners of conscience.

Despite these efforts and despite continuous work by Amnesty International groups working for the release of individual prisoners of conscience, the problem persists. Nearly half the member states of the United Nations are believed to be holding prisoners of conscience.

Amnesty International therefore decided to launch a worldwide public appeal for a Universal Amnesty for All Prisoners of Conscience. The appeal opened on 10 December 1982, Human Rights Day. It may be signed by any individual, institution or organization and will be presented by Amnesty International to the President of the General Assembly of the United Nations. It is also being sent to all heads of state.

The Appeal

The appeal has been drawn up by Amnesty International. It takes into account international standards for the protection of human rights and the movement's own experience in working for the release of prisoners of conscience.

It is concerned solely with the question of

prisoners of conscience and does not touch on the other parts of Amnesty International's mandate. It aims to focus attention on the injustice of the continued detention of these non-violent prisoners. That imprisonment, in itself, violates the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The appeal is addressed both to the United Nations General Assembly and to all governments. It does not call explicitly for a UN resolution, but states that the amnesty would be consistent with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and that such an amnesty backed by the United Nations and declared by all governments is possible.

The Amnesty for All Prisoners of Conscience is foreseen in the appeal as "an unparalleled act in the building of international confidence and the promotion of fundamental freedoms". The appeal is issued "in the belief that there is an indissoluble link between peace and human rights". This link was emphasized by Amnesty International when it received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1977. In his lecture, accepting the award on behalf of Amnesty International, the then Vice-chairperson of the International Executive Committee, Mumtaz Soysal, stated:

"We are gratified for this acknowledgement that the concern for peace and the promotion of human rights are inseparable. Peace is not to be measured by the absence of conventional war, but constructed upon foundations of justice. Where there is injustice, there is the seed of conflict. Where human rights are violated, there are threats to peace. . . ."

"People everywhere need to be continually reminded that violations of human rights, whether arbitrary arrest and detention, unjust imprisonment, torture or political assassination, are threats to world peace. Each violation, wherever it occurs, can set in motion a trend towards the debasement of human dignity. From individuals to groups, from groups to nations, from nations to groups of nations, in chain reaction a pattern sets in of violence and repression and a lack of concern for human welfare."

"This must never be allowed to start. And the place to stop it is at the level of the individual. Therefore, the protection of the rights of individuals to think freely, to express themselves freely, to associate freely with others and to disseminate their thoughts is essential to the preservation of world peace."

A Universal Amnesty for All Prisoners of Conscience



THOUSANDS of men and women are in prison throughout the world solely because of their political or religious beliefs. Others are held because of their colour or ethnic origin. These are Prisoners of Conscience — none has used or advocated violence.

NONE of these people should be in prison. The fact that they have been arrested and punished because of their beliefs or origins is an affront to humanity. They should be freed unconditionally.

WE CALL FOR A UNIVERSAL AMNESTY FOR ALL PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE

WE BELIEVE that such an amnesty, backed by the United Nations and declared by all governments, is possible. It would give effect to the moral and legal principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

WE ISSUE this call in the belief that there is an indissoluble link between human rights and peace. An amnesty for all prisoners of conscience would be an unparalleled act in the building of international confidence and the promotion of fundamental freedoms. It would advance respect for human rights everywhere, securing thereby the foundations for justice, freedom and peace.

Name

Address

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This Appeal extends to all those adopted as prisoners of conscience by Amnesty International and to those falling within its definition of such prisoners. The appeal will be presented to the President of the General Assembly of the United Nations and to all Heads of State.

All signed petitions should be returned to Amnesty International's International Secretariat, 10 Southampton Street, London WC2E 7HF, United Kingdom.

