

Network Update

New forms of fast response?

Amnesty's Urgent Actions may soon be joined by other new or expanded forms of fast response and anticipatory action on human rights concerns.

The International Council Meeting of AI in Boston this Summer set the development of rapid response and anticipatory action mechanisms as one of the objectives for the next period. This is foreshadowed in the draft text of resolution P111 which sets the priorities for the next few years. The same text refers to developing our capacity to respond more rapidly and effectively to human rights crisis situations and UAs may have an important part to play on this front.

International Meeting on Urgent Actions

This meeting brought together UA coordinators from over 21 different countries (see page 8).

The following resolutions were passed by the meeting:

- 1) That a library of databases & software used by UA coordinators and others in AI sections be collected by the IS;
- 2) To endorse SYSTEC's 24 hour cover recommendation;
- 3) To set up a committee of ten UA coordinators (two from each region) which would

be recognized by the IEC whose function it would be to redress the balance between large and small sections through support, training and the exchange of resources; to be a voice for UA coordinators; to monitor the outcome of resolutions from international UA meetings; to organize international meeting of UA coordinators;

- 4) The meeting urged that the Research Department at the IS issue more UAs on "first world" countries;
- 5) The meeting urged UA coordinators to volunteer to distribute UAs to organizations and individuals in countries where no AI membership structures exist;
- 6) That the UA team at the IS provide UA coordinators with regular feedback on UA appeals which are featured in the press;
- 7) That there be another international meeting of UA coordinators within three years and that the meeting, if possible, should be hosted by a small section.

UA NEWS welcomes your letters and any interesting stories about your UA networks. Write to: Angela Robson & Rob Freer, UA Team, Amnesty, 1 Easton Street London WC1X 8DJ

Gary, a highly intelligent and articulate man, has devoted his energies in prison to his education. He has obtained a GED diploma, has co-founded the prison newspaper, *Endeavour*, and is now training to be a para-legal worker.

Graham writes in *Endeavour* that he is deeply grateful to his friends and supporters worldwide for their dedication to his cause: "I thank you from the bottom of my heart", he says, "the concern you have expressed for my plight replaces my despair with hope, my sadness with joy and my fear with courage."

Gary Graham's next execution date is imminent. His life and other death row inmates can be saved. Please send your protest appeals to:

1) Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles
 Executive Clemency Unit
 Texas Dept of Criminal Justice
 Pardons and Paroles Division
 PO Box 13401
 Austin, TX 78711, USA
Telegrams: Board Pardons & Paroles Austin TX 78711 USA Faxes: + 1 512 467 0945 Telephone: + 1 512 406 5852

2) The Honorable Ann Richards
 Governor of Texas
 Office of the Governor
 PO Box 12428, Capitol Station
 Austin, TX 78711, USA
Faxes: +1 512 463 1849

Actions speak louder than words

- UAs at the World Conference

Birgit Stegmayer & Martin Dlugosch report...

In June, Urgent Actions were in action at the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights. While government delegates from 180 countries talked human rights in the main conference hall, Vienna city centre became home to a special urgent action network for appeals against human rights abuses happening right then around the world. On a busy street near St Stephen's cathedral, the German and Austrian sections organized an "Urgent Action stall" with five fax machines. Passers-by, attracted by the sight and sound of these machines were encouraged to send appeals to help the individuals described in the latest UAs. These were printed in large format and pasted on pillars for all to read.

The first UA had a direct connection to the conference: a student leader in Tunisia who had planned to attend the NGO Forum in Vienna had been detained for his non-violent beliefs and denied adequate medical care. Up to 1500 appeals were sent daily on behalf of him and all the other people whose cases were described in the 16 subsequent UAs. Colombia, Kuwait, China, Greece, USA, South Africa, India and Turkey were among the countries which featured.

All in all, more than 25,000 faxes were sent from the UA stand during the fortnight of the conference. And by the third day, there was already cause for celebration: a Peruvian journalist was released a few days after a UA was issued on his behalf.

Governments cannot fail but take notice of the sheer pressure generated by UAs, and this was no less true at the Vienna fax stand.

the Tunisian student was released from custody. He thanked

The Peruvian Minister of Justice personally paid a visit to gain some insight into AI's incessant activities, and members of the official Thai delegation promised to contact their government after reading about Burmese asylum-seekers ill-treated Thailand.

During the second week, in an impromptu press conference while visiting the stall, AI's Secretary General, Pierre Sané, denounced the lack of progress being achieved at the main conference. However shortly afterwards the UA stand could provide some further good news in contrast. A message came that one Turkish detainee had been released, and one week later even

everyone who had appealed on his behalf.

Meanwhile back in London, a fax was received at the International Secretariat from the Egyptian embassy. It read, "the Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt understands your concern with human rights affairs and your activities in connection with them. Between us working people, though, we have a request: would it be possible for you NOT to block our fax? Please send your letters by mail or some other way. We cannot use our fax machine due to your continuous engagement of it."

Needless to say we will stop blocking faxes when governments stop blocking human rights.

yoU Are

Profiles from the UA network

EDAI in Madrid, receive all UAs by E-mail from the Urgent Action office at the IS. They translate them into Spanish and then fax them to us. We then distribute the UAs by mail to our members all over Ecuador. If there are postal strikes we institute what we call a "telephone network" - calling up our various AI contacts in the country and dictating the UA over the phone.

Subsequent to the excellent training given at the Toronto International UA meeting, I have recently set up an E-mail system in the Quito UA office. If everything goes to plan, Ecuador will soon be able to respond to appeals immediately!

If any of you out there are ever passing through Quito, please drop in to visit us. We will give you a very warm welcome!

Ecuador

Hello! My name is Dalton Reyes Martínez and I am the Urgent Action coordinator for Ecuador.

I live and work in Quito, the capital of Ecuador. I've been responsible for UAs for about a year now and it's a job I really love. In my "spare" time - when I'm not doing Amnesty work - I am a student at Quito University. UAs are a vital component of Amnesty's work in Ecuador. The UA office is based in the AI Quito section headquarters and the network started almost at the same time as the section began in 1984.

Ecuador has 300 UA participants in twelve different regions of the country. Participants work most effectively on other Latin American countries so we encourage the various regional UA groups in Ecuador to specialize on these cases.

resources. Inflation has hit Nigeria hard and the cost of stamps has risen by an incredible 500%. The average UA writer in Nigeria just cannot afford to post letters on behalf of human rights victims. However, Momodu and Omowunmi have come up with a unique way of dealing with this problem. UA writers who cannot afford to mail letters or cards, forward them to Momodu or to the AI section office staff in Ibadan. They then deliver all the letters and cards to the relevant country Embassy in the capital, Lagos. If the country concerned has no Embassy or representative office in Nigeria, Momodu puts all letters and post cards in one pack and mails them together.

Nigeria

The Nigeria UA network is run by Omowunmi Segun, a researcher and author at the University of Ibadan and Momodu Kassim-Momodu, a lawyer. They both work as volunteers and manage to run an efficient network under very difficult conditions.

The Nigerian section has approximately 800 UA letter writers. Omowunmi and Momodu also involve all the civil liberties and human rights groups in the country in UA work.

At the International Meeting of UA coordinators in Toronto, Momodu's presentation about UA work highlighted the difficulties UA writers in Nigeria face with financial constraints and poor

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Life or Death Debate



If you ask Gary Graham the meaning of the word horror he can tell you in no uncertain terms: **Death Row.** For the past 12 years, Gary has been a prisoner on Texas death row for a 1981 murder he says he did not commit.

Gary was only 17 when he was sentenced to death for the murder of Bobby Lambert during a robbery attempt outside a Houston supermarket. Graham has always denied killing Lambert. He was convicted solely on the testimony of one eye-witness whose evidence has since been challenged. Other witnesses swear that Gary Graham could not have committed the crime. These witnesses were not called upon to testify during Gary's trial.

To date 14 Texas death row inmates have been executed this year. Two of them, like Gary Graham, were only 17 at the time of the crime. Most juvenile offenders on death row in the USA are also black or members of racial minorities.

If executed, Gary will die by lethal injection. He has been given three stays of execution this year

alone, the latest, on August 16, halting the execution just hours before it was scheduled to go ahead.

"I have never seen this kind of evidence pointing to innocence", says Dick Burr, a lawyer with the US NAACP Legal and Educational Fund, speaking of Gary Graham. "It is overwhelming."

"It's just like a corner of the world where it seems like civilization and any notion of human respect has ended," Ashanti Chimurenga, director of Amnesty International USA's Programme to Abolish the Death Penalty, says of Texas justice.

Gary's case has attracted international attention. Amnesty International, along with other organisations, is campaigning fervently for Gary Graham and the countless other inmates on death row. Public figures such as Bishop Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama have also risen to his defence. Even Bobby Lambert's widow has joined calls for Gary's execution to be halted.

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Press the Issue!

UAs making news in West Africa

Writers of Urgent Action appeals letters must often wonder what happens to the copies of their letters which they send to newspapers in target countries. A look through the West African press shows that they are certainly serving a useful purpose.

Newspapers often draw heavily on the information contained in Urgent Action appeals to write articles and editorials about human rights abuses in their own countries. They also print extracts and sometimes the complete text of Urgent Actions and will often print copies of letters from individuals in Urgent Action Groups on their letters pages. A random selection from March and May 1993 includes the following:

The Togolese *Courrier du Golfe* carries letters from Urgent Action Network members from the Netherlands and France about extra-judicial executions, torture and "disappearances" in Togo. It also prints a letter from Group 28 of the French Section to the Togolese President, as well as letters from other UA participants about the killing of demonstrators by the Security Services.

The Côte d'Ivoirien *La Voie* carries an editorial article about human rights illustrated by an Urgent Action appeal letter to the Ivoirien Prime Minister in French. The same paper prints a long article about prisoners of conscience in Côte d'Ivoire using text from Amnesty's Urgent Action, carrying the original recommended actions and showing a copy of the addresses for appeals from the UA.

A *Cameroon Post* editorial in March includes a two-page spread of photocopied letters from UA network members in an article about human rights abuses. The letters are from many countries, including Belgium, Bénin, Canada, Germany, Japan, Spain and UK.

It is strangely moving to see how the imaginative use of fax machines and photocopiers contributes to the fight for human rights.

Zaire: International pressure releases gains

In December 1992 an Urgent Action appeal was issued on behalf of Mukendi wa Mulumba, a Zairean lawyer and seven others who had been arrested and detained incommunicado without charge by the *Division Speciale Presidentiale*, notorious for its human rights violations.

The eight men arrested had been waiting at the airport in Kinshasa to welcome a delegation of French-based human rights activists. Those arrested were later released and Peter Kretzschmar, a member of a German Urgent Action Group has received a letter from Buana Kabue, President of the Zairean League of Human Rights:

"Following the pressure of public opinion to which you have contributed, Maître Mukendi and his colleagues have been released after three days of arbitrary detention and psychological torture".

Taiwan: UAs test a government

Taiwan TV News of 23 March 1993 showed a copy of an Urgent Action on Liu Huan-jong who was executed on that day. In the same news bulletin the newsreader mentions appeals from Amnesty International, and a reporter comments that this case has led people to question the death penalty. Liu Huan-jong, aged 36, a Taiwanese former gang member was found guilty of murder and sentenced to death in 1984. He has since been widely regarded as a reformed "model" prisoner.

In Taiwan at least 59 people were executed in 1991 and no accurate statistics are available for 1992, although local TV has reported at least 35.

In the TV report of Liu's execution, the reporter asks how such a tragedy can be avoided in the future. He comments that the Legislature will be examining retention of the death penalty. It seems clear that Amnesty's urgent action appeals have helped make abolition of the death penalty a live issue in Taiwan.

Death News

USA: Missouri hearkens to mass appeals

argued that he was incapable of this understanding and should, therefore, have his sentence commuted.

Bobby's lawyer, Sean D. O'Brien, believes that the work of Amnesty International made a dramatic difference to the clemency decision:

"Local Amnesty representatives were able to very effectively expose the "findings" of the state court judge. This was a key factor in our ability to win clemency for Bobby...The Governor's legal counsel showed me huge boxes overflowing with letters urging Governor Carnahan to spare Bobby's life. When I was in the Reception Room outside the Governor's office waiting to address him on Bobby's clemency application, the phone rang constantly with people calling from all over the world to support our clemency application."

The Governor of Missouri has ruled that Bobby cannot understand the nature of execution. We might wonder how *anyone* is capable of understanding this grotesque and chilling ritual.

Estonian President comes out against death penalty

How encouraging it is to read of cases like Oleg Pyatnicky's. He was sentenced to death by the Estonian Supreme Court on September 1992. In early December Amnesty learned that Oleg Pyatnicky's death sentence had been commuted. In a letter to

the Swiss organization, "Action of Christians for the Abolition of Torture", President Lennart Meri stated that he shared the view that the death penalty is a violation of the right not to be subjected to inhuman punishment, as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This is what he writes in his letter:

"I completely share your view that the death penalty is a violation of the universally accepted human right not to be subjected to inhuman punishment, as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

It is therefore that I have commuted the death sentence of Mr Oleg Pyatnicky into a prison term."

In 1980 Bobby Lewis Shaw was sentenced to death for murdering a white prison officer in Missouri, USA. After thirteen years on death row, in June 1993, Bobby Shaw was granted clemency by the Governor of Missouri.

The case had been the subject of three appeals by the Amnesty International Urgent Action Network. Members of the Network know that Bobby comes from an extremely poor black family and that he has been diagnosed as suffering from dementia, schizophrenia and brain damage.

Bobby Shaw's fate revolved around whether he was "competent" to be executed. "Competent" in this case means "capable of understanding the nature of execution". Bobby's sister, his lawyers and psychiatrists

"The Miracle of Freedom"

Thus Vera Chirwa, Africa's longest serving prisoner of conscience, describes her joy at being released. Here she speaks to the Urgent Action team about her ordeal in prison...

"Every day of freedom is like a miracle to me. If it had not been for Amnesty International, I would not be standing before you today."

Vera Chirwa smiles and her eyes light up. She speaks of her 11 year detention in Malawi and her joy at being released. Her audience - a gathering of exiled Malawians, human rights activists and prominent church leaders - sits captivated throughout her speech.

In January this year Vera Chirwa was freed from Zomba prison, Malawi, her 11 years in detention making her one of Africa's longest serving prisoners of conscience. She and her husband, Orton, were abducted from Zambia by Malawian agents on Christmas Eve 1981. During the first eight years of her detention she never saw her husband. "I was aware we were both in the same prison", she says, "but the prison guards never allowed us to see or speak to one another."

The Chirwas were convicted in 1983 of

treason on fabricated charges and sentenced to death - a sentence

11 years in detention chained to a wall.

Vera saw her husband only once when a delegation of

which was commuted to life imprisonment later that year. During her years in prison she was treated, she says, "like an animal". Until his death in October 1992, Orton spent much of his

the prison. I lost all reason for living". Her release, three months later, came, she says, entirely by surprise. She was escorted to her cousin's house in the capital, Blantyre, and left alone. "I just couldn't believe it", she smiles broadly. "Then I suddenly realised that I was free."

What sustained her during the long years in prison, Vera says, was the knowledge that people all over the world were working for her release. "My freedom is due entirely to the international outcry about our case. I shall never be able to thank Amnesty International enough for fighting for Orton and myself. I shall be indebted to all of you for the rest of my life".

One day, Vera Chirwa believes, multi party government will be achieved in her country. Until then, the world must continue to put pressure on Malawi. "Although my husband is gone", she says, "he remains with us in memory. His blood has watered the spirit of the Malawian people - his fight for human rights will never be forgotten."

British lawyers were given permission to see the Chirwas together. Three weeks later Orton was dead. Vera was told he had passed away in his sleep. She was refused permission to attend the funeral.

It was after Orton's death that Vera gave up all hope. "I thought I would never get out of

...Urgent Action.....Acción Urgente.....Acción Urgente.....Urgent Action.....Acción Urgente.....Acción Urgente.....

International

UA

Meeting

Marilyn McKim, Canadian UA coordinator and prime organizer of the International Meeting reports from Toronto...

Urgent Action Networks from 21 different countries were represented at the second International UA Meeting in Amnesty's history, in Toronto, Canada between June 25 and 27. While it was wonderful to be together for three days of work - and a few more of play - I can assure you that those of you who were **not** with us were very much in our minds, too. We were wishing that each of you could be sharing with us the joys of collective problem-solving and mutual curiosity about how we each organize our network. There's always next time -in Ecuador? or Tunisia?

We gathered in Toronto's UA office on Friday, June 25, to see where I work and how I've set up my network. Graham Lane (IS) and Ray Mitchell (UK) also provided a demonstration of AI's electronic mail network and showed the delegates what AI "conferences" look like on a Canadian E-mail system. A convoy of cars then took us to the

conference centre where we spent the next 48 hours together. After setting up the UA material we had each brought for display, each delegate was able to introduce themselves and describe how UA work is conducted in their own country.

I thoroughly enjoyed learning about the international UA network during the meeting and exchanging views both on how we are structured and what directions UA work is headed. But equally enjoyable were having the delegates drop into my office before and after the meeting, buying AI T-shirts and posters from the Philippines and Ecuador, practising my French with Chokri Ben Jannet from Tunisia, dining with Gunther from Austria on Queen Street, and going up the CN Tower with Monica from Brazil.

The AI members in Toronto were not unaffected by the meeting, either. Two organized the cruise of Toronto Harbour on Sunday, another arranged the bus

tour to Niagara Falls, 9 helped with translations or minute-taking, 22 took delegates into their homes and made AI friendships which are of a special kind. The contact we had with Amnesty members from around the world has certainly given us a different perspective on our organization. It's no longer made up of "RDs" and "RANs" and "SYSTECs" but of me and you and many other individuals all working for the same purpose.

Refugees at risk in Sweden

Surely there's some mistake here - an Urgent Action on Sweden, the country we all think of as leading the vanguard of human rights defenders? But yes, it really is true. Sweden, that seat of humane values, home of the Nobel Peace Prize, stands accused of refusing asylum to Mónica Castillo Páez, a Peruvian woman aged 20, who fears for her life if she returns to Peru.

Nor is Mónica's case an isolated incident. Over the past year or so, there have been a number of similar cases where Peruvians have been refused asylum in Sweden, although there is strong evidence to suggest that they are at risk of torture, "disappearance" or being killed in Peru.

It seems that another challenge Amnesty now faces is the "Fortress Europe" mentality apparently gaining a grip on even those countries with the most impeccable human rights credentials.