

Children's Action 2000 Appeal Leaflets
AI Index: ACT 76/07/00

Common text

Join our campaign

Torture is used in well over half the countries of the world. Torture is neither inevitable nor natural. There is no shortage of information on how to stop it – only a shortage of political will. Amnesty International's campaign aims to put pressure on those with the power to stop torture. Help us to make a difference.

Make the world a torture free zone

Contact your national Amnesty International office to find out more about the campaign
Become a member of Amnesty International
Make a donation to support Amnesty International's work
Tell friends and family about the campaign and ask them to join too
Register to take action against torture at www.stoptorture.org

I would like to join your campaign.

Please send me more information

I would like to join Amnesty International.

Please send me details

I would like to donate to Amnesty International's campaign to stamp out torture

Amount

Credit card number

Expiry date

Signature

Name

Address

Take more action online – www.stoptorture.org

Amnesty International, International Secretariat, 1 Easton Street, London WC1X 0DW, United Kingdom
AI Index: ACT 76/07/00

The Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article 19

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

Article 37

States Parties shall ensure that:

(a) No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment...

(d) Every child deprived of his or her liberty shall have the right to prompt access to legal and other appropriate assistance...

Article 39

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.

End of common text

Bangladesh

‘He had a pair of pliers in his hand. He pressed it hard and crushed my thumb.’

Investigate allegations that Firoz was tortured and bring those responsible to justice.

Bangladesh police allegedly tortured a nine-year-old boy by binding him with rope, hanging him up from a high bar and crushing his thumb with pliers. They thought he had stolen a mobile telephone. Firoz, now aged 10, took months to recover from his physical injuries and is still receiving psychiatric treatment for the trauma he suffered.

Although Firoz’ case was taken up by human rights activists – and highlighted both by the Bangladesh Rehabilitation Centre for Trauma Victims and the local press – the government has so far failed to conduct an investigation and bring the perpetrators to justice.

Firoz and his father, a rickshaw puller, were helping a family to move house in July 1999 when the phone went missing. While Firoz’ father was away transporting household items, the family accused the boy of stealing the phone; he denied the allegations. According to Firoz, the family were about to let him go when their 25-year-old son took him to the toilet area of the house and began beating him.

“He kept slapping me on the face and punching me on the shoulder, and then he got hold of a stick and was just about to hit me on my head. I thought he was going to kill me so I began to scream. Then a neighbour, who knew my father, came to the house with his wife and told the man to stop beating me, so he let go of me.”

Upon his return, the father protested about the beating and took Firoz home with him. That night, at around 3am, the police came to the house and arrested Firoz. He said they began to beat him in the house.

“They first slapped me on the face, and then pulled my arms down to my sides and tied a rope very tightly over my arms and stomach. It hurt and I could not breathe properly. They kept asking me where the mobile was and when I told them I had not seen it, they slapped and beat me.”

Firoz was then taken to Mohammadpur Thana Police Station in Dhaka. He was told to squat on the floor. A policeman brought over his chair and sat down facing Firoz.

“He lifted his foot and placed his boot on my left knee and began to press it down as hard as he could. My knee was so badly injured that I could not move it. They left me in the cell until the morning. They then came and hung me from a bar. They pulled me up and held my shoulders against the bar and rolled my arms over the bar and left me in that hung position for many hours.”

The next day the policeman returned to the cell.

“He had a pair of pliers in his hand. He kept asking where the mobile was. I told him I had not seen it. He then told me to bring my thumb forward. He got hold of my thumb and placed it between the pliers. He pressed it hard and crushed my thumb. I do not remember what happened next.”

Firoz' family were not allowed to see him while he was being detained. Eventually, his father managed to get a letter from a local politician requesting the officer-in-charge of the police station to release Firoz. His father was made to sign a blank piece of paper – with his thumb print because he cannot read or write. Firoz' family have decided not to file a case against the police for fear of further recriminations.

Take a step to stamp out torture

Please write letters, or send faxes, calling on the government to:

- * ensure that the allegations of torture made by Firoz are thoroughly and impartially investigated
- * ensure that anyone found responsible for the alleged acts of torture is promptly brought to justice
- * if the allegations are substantiated, compensate Firoz for the torture to which he was subjected
- * ensure that police officers and all staff who deal with children within the justice system receive training on international standards, children's rights and the principles of child development
- * ensure that any detained child is brought before a judicial authority without delay and given immediate access to relatives, legal counsel and medical assistance

Send your letters to:

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Office of the Prime Minister,
Dhaka, Bangladesh
Telegrams: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Dhaka, Bangladesh
Fax: +880 2 811 3243
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Mr Nurul Huda, Inspector-General of Police, Police Headquarters, Fulbaria, Dhaka, Bangladesh
Telegrams: Inspector-General Huda, Fulbaria, Dhaka, Bangladesh
Fax: +880 2 956 3362
Salutation: Dear Sir

caption:

Photos: Firoz displaying the thumb crushed by the police © AI

Malawi

'These juveniles agreed to have sex with these men because they have no clothes, no blanket and they were hungry. We try to tell these boys that they will die of AIDS.'

End the sexual violence against children in custody in Malawi.

These juveniles agreed to have sex with these men because they have no clothes and no blanket, and they were hungry. One day these boys started to cry and refused to have sex. The men took away their blankets and after spending a night in the cold they agreed to allow the men to have sex with them again. We try to tell these boys that they will die of AIDS, but what can these boys do? They have nothing...."

HIV/AIDS in Malawi Prisons, Penal Reform International

An adult prisoner describes a common feature of life in Malawi's overcrowded prisons – the trade in boys for sex. They are abused by older inmates or recruited into well-established prostitution rings. Their rape is a form of torture. Instead of stopping the violence, prison officers promote it —

smuggling the boys into adult blocks for a bribe of 30 US cents. In two prisons, nearly every inmate with peri-anal abscesses is under 18 years old. In all prisons, HIV/AIDS is rife, with little done to prevent the spread of the virus or treat patients already infected.

Up to 120 boys, aged between 12 and 18, are being held in Zomba Central Prison, the largest in Malawi. Some are detained awaiting trial while others are serving prison sentences, some for minor offences such as stealing food. They come from all over the country, many with no relatives nearby to care for them. A study into HIV/AIDS in Malawi Prisons, by Penal Reform International (PRI), found that appalling conditions and the lack of protection made these young boys vulnerable to abuse, including sexual violence by adults. In a country where homosexuality is illegal, prison authorities refute any suggestion that sexual violence is happening on a large scale within prisons.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child obliges states to hold child offenders separately from adults (Article 37c). Although boys are supposed to be kept apart from adults in Malawi's prisons, they do come into contact. At Zomba prison, the most common way of smuggling boys into adult blocks is through the clinic, which is used by both adults and children.

“An adult prisoner approaches a prison officer, gives him some money and asks him to get him a boy. You know some prisoners are rich compared to the guards. The guard then smuggles a juvenile into the adult blocks when they are out of the juvenile wing. Once they are there they can be hidden for months, and the man who paid for them rents them out to other prisoners...”

HIV/AIDS in Malawi Prisons, Penal Reform International

In 1998 Amnesty International drew worldwide attention to the issue of 180 child offenders in Zomba — prompting the Malawian authorities to work with PRI to review the cases of inmates in the juvenile facility. By May 1999 there were no under-18s left in Zomba prison. However, due to the absence of a long-term structural prison reform program, that figure has climbed back up. Malawi prisons are considered fertile grounds for transmission of HIV/AIDS. Of the 167 deaths in Malawi prisons during 1997, 40 per cent were attributed to AIDS; and in six months during 1998, 49 per cent of all persons treated had AIDS and were HIV positive. Prisoners believe that sufferers have an accelerated death in prison due to poor diet and living conditions.

Take a step to stamp out torture

Please write letters, or send faxes, calling on the government to:

- * prevent rape and sexual violence in Malawi prisons as they may constitute torture
- * investigate all complaints of sexual abuse of people in custody independently, promptly and thoroughly
- * provide victims of sexual violence in custody with appropriate care and redress, including adequate compensation and health care
- * ensure that children in custody are always held separately from adult prisoners unless it can be shown to be in the child's best interest not to do so
- * inform all inmates that they have the right not to be sexually abused and have the right to complain if they are abused
- * protect from retaliation inmates and staff who report abuse

Send your letters to:

Hon. Peter Fachi, Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs,

PO Box 333, Lilongwe 3, Malawi
Fax: +265 782 176
Salutation: Dear Minister

Chief Commissioner, Malawi Prison Service, Headquarters,
PO Box 28, Zomba, Malawi
Salutation: Dear Chief Commissioner

caption:

Photo: Children crammed into the compound at Zomba Central Prison
© Penal Reform International

Morocco

‘They lifted my legs and beat me on my bare feet. Later I saw that they had used a black rubber hose.’

Investigate allegations that Hamid Muntassir was tortured and bring those responsible to justice.

Hamid Muntassir said he was blindfolded, repeatedly beaten on the soles of his feet and threatened with electric shocks by police officers. He was held in incommunicado detention for three days after his arrest on suspicion of killing a fellow school student. Hamid’s feet were so badly bruised and swollen from his ordeal in custody that he had difficulty walking.

Hamid, aged 16 at the time, and his friend, Mustafa Mansour, had been studying together on a building site in Azemmour, near Al-Jadida, on 7 June 1998. Hamid claimed they had decided to go their separate ways. Mustafa Mansour was later found, by a 17-year-old shepherd, lying dead in front of the building. Hamid says he first learned of his friend’s death from the shepherd, and went to get a nearby relative before returning to the scene where both the guardian of the building and three or four policemen had already gathered.

The police took Hamid, the shepherd and the guardian of the building to the police station in Azemmour. “I was the first to be interrogated,” Hamid told AI. “I was taken into a separate room with about three to four policemen present.” He was questioned about Mustafa Mansour. “I explained that we had been studying together and later separated. But the police did not believe me. They accused me of not telling the truth. Then they blindfolded me with a black piece of cloth. They made me sit on the floor. They took off my sandals, lifted my legs and beat me on my bare feet. Later I saw that they had used a black rubber hose to beat me. They told me that I should confess that I had pushed my friend from the building. They beat me several times. They also threatened me with electric shocks.”

Hamid said the shepherd was the second person to be interviewed. “I could hear his screams. The first night I stayed with [the shepherd and guardian of the building] in the same cell. The other two were released the next day. But they held me for five days. They beat me every day. My mother and uncle visited me on the third day. I was once beaten in front of my mother. We could not talk freely, because there were policemen always present.” He said that, on several occasions during his detention, he was escorted by as many as five policemen to the site of Mustafa Mansour’s death.

The police claim that Hamid changed his account several times and finally confessed on the third day of interrogation, signing a testimony by using his thumb. On 11 June 1998 Hamid was brought before the examining magistrate who noticed that he had difficulty standing up. Although the magistrate ordered a medical examination, it was not carried out until 26 June and concluded no traces of torture. However, a medical examination requested by Hamid’s lawyer, and carried out on 12 June, noted bruises and swelling on the soles of his feet as well as difficulties in walking.

A complaint of torture was filed by Hamid's family on 22 June 1998 with the Appeal Court of Al-Jadida, but no public investigation is known to have been carried out. An internal investigation was undertaken within the police force but the results of this are confidential. The officers alleged to have tortured Hamid are still in active service. On 20 July 1998 the examining magistrate decided that the case against Hamid be closed because of insufficient evidence. The prosecutor appealed and the courts agreed that the case should continue to be investigated. The trial of Hamid Muntassir opened at the beginning of April 1999 and is still continuing. The charges brought against him are based on the confession which he later withdrew because he said it was made under torture.

Take a step to stamp out torture

Please write letters, or send faxes, calling on the government to:

- * ensure that the allegations of torture made by Hamid Muntassir are thoroughly and impartially investigated and that security force members are suspended while they are being investigated
- * ensure that anyone found responsible for the alleged acts of torture is promptly brought to justice
- * end incommunicado detention by ensuring access to legal counsel within 24 hours
- * provide redress, including compensation, to those who have been tortured

Send your letters to:

Minister of Justice,
Son Excellence M. Omar AZZIMAN,
Ministère de la Justice, Place Mamounia, Rabat, Maroc
Fax: +212 7 72 37 10, or +212 7 73 07 72

Minister of Human Rights,
Son Excellence M. Mohamed AOUIAR,
Ministère des Droits de l'Homme, 47 Avenue Ibn Sina, Agdal, Rabat, Maroc
Fax: +212 7 67 19 67

caption

Photo: Hamid Muntassir © private