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## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS FOR HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

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### Summary

**AI reports & statements:** Cuba / Egypt / UN: Optional Protocol to Convention against Torture

**Further news:** students held incommunicado in hospital, Afghanistan / HIV/AIDS, India / Dr Amir Aziz held without charge, Pakistan / rape of children, South Africa / death of Prof Frances Ames, South Africa / 'confession through torture is invalid', South Korea / mental health, learning difficulties and the death penalty, USA / solitary confinement, USA

**Conferences:** Empirical Research Methodologies of Transitional Justice Mechanisms (including perspective from health sector)

### Publications

### Amnesty International reports & statements

*Cuba: Freedom of expression still curtailed despite recent release.* 6 November (AMR 25/009/2002).

Dr Oscar Elias Biscet, physician and human rights activist, was released after three years' imprisonment:

<http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/index/AMR250092002>

*Egypt: Stop systematic torture.* 13 November (MDE 12/038/2002).

Everyone taken into detention in Egypt is at risk of torture, Amnesty International stated in a new report. In recent trials of police officers, forensic evidence has been presented to the courts noting that marks found on the bodies of detainees who had died in police custody were consistent with traces left by electric shocks and other forms of torture.

<http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/index/MDE120382002>

*UN: NGOs welcome new treaty to prevent torture.* 7 November (IOR 40/038/2002).

Amnesty International, the Association for the Prevention of Torture, the International Commission of Jurists and Human Rights Watch applauded the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture. It will establish a system of regular visits to places of detention, which are an important tool in the prevention of torture.

<http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/index/IOR400382002>

This is a small selection of Amnesty International reports and statements. For a comprehensive overview, please check Amnesty International's website:

<http://www.amnesty.org/>

### Further news

**Afghanistan - students held incommunicado in hospital.** Human Rights Watch reported that, following protests at Kabul University, Kabul police are holding several injured students

incommunicado at a hospital. One student was reportedly beaten in his hospital bed (14 November).

<http://www.hrw.org/press/2002/11/afghan1114.htm>

**India - HIV/AIDS.** A number of articles appeared in the medical and other press on the spread of HIV/AIDS in India and a donation by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to the Indian government to counter the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Mudur G. India must change health priorities to tackle HIV. *BMJ* 2002;325:1132 (16 November).

<http://bmj.com/cgi/content/full/325/7373/1132/b>

Human Rights Watch, *AIDS in India: Money won't solve crisis - Rising violence against AIDS-affected people*. (13 November): <http://www.hrw.org/press/2002/11/india111302.htm>

*New York Times*, 'Slowing the spread of AIDS in India' (13 November):

<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/11/09/opinion/09GATE.html>

Sharma D C. US charity donation for HIV/AIDS in India sparks government row. *Lancet* 2002;360:9345 (16 November).

<http://www.thelancet.com/journal/vol360/iss9345/full/llan.360.9345.news.23167.5>

**Pakistan - Dr Amir Aziz held without charge.** The *BBC* reported on the case of Dr Amir Aziz, an orthopaedic surgeon, who is being held without charge on suspicion of links with the Taliban (7 November).

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/2415019.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/2415019.stm)

**South Africa - rape of children.** The *Mail and Guardian* (Johannesburg) looks at 'the reality behind child rape' in South Africa and challenges the belief that children are raped by men who believe they will be cured of HIV as a result (8 November). See:

<http://allafrica.com/stories/200211070409.html>

**South Africa - death of Prof Frances Ames.** Professor Ames was a former head of neurology at the University of Cape Town. She gained renown for her work with other physicians in getting the South African Medical and Dental Council to hold a disciplinary enquiry into the conduct of doctors involved in the case of Steve Biko who died in 1977 (South African Press Agency, 12 November).

<http://allafrica.com/stories/200211130013.html>

**South Korea - 'confession through torture is invalid'.** The South Korean Justice Ministry reminded investigators that any confession gained from suspects through torture is invalid, reported the *Korean Times* (14 November).

[http://www.hankooki.com/kt\\_nation/200211/t2002111518084541110.htm](http://www.hankooki.com/kt_nation/200211/t2002111518084541110.htm)

On 26 October a torture suspect had died in custody, the *Chosun Ilbo* reported (8 November).

<http://english.chosun.com/w21data/html/news/200211/200211080029.html>

**UN - Women and armed conflict.** A report by two independent experts commissioned by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) on the impact of armed conflict on women in the world has recommended that an international Truth and Reconciliation Commission on violence against women in armed conflict be set up as a step towards ending impunity. See: [http://www.undp.org/unifem/governance/ind\\_expert\\_assessment.html](http://www.undp.org/unifem/governance/ind_expert_assessment.html)

<http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/s/EBA7776B37B979E749256C6900068BF8>

[http://www.undp.org/unifem/newsroom/press/pr\\_021031.html](http://www.undp.org/unifem/newsroom/press/pr_021031.html)

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/N3180567>

See also the United Nations Security Council document S/2002/1154: report of the Secretary-General on women, peace and security (16 October 2002).

<http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/reports/2002/sgrep02.htm>

**USA - mental health / learning difficulties and the death penalty.** The *LA Weekly* has a feature on the case of Clarence Ray Jr, currently on death row. A petition has been filed on

his behalf asking to commute his death sentence because of his severe learning difficulties (8-14 November).

<http://www.laweekly.com/ink/02/51/news-catania.php>

An editorial in the *New York Times* describes the case of Abu-Ali Abdur Rahman, who has been held on death row in Tennessee since 1987. He has a history of mental illness, which his lawyers failed to mention during his trial (6 November).

<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/11/06/opinion/06WED3.html>

The *Houston Chronicle* reported on the case of James Colburn, a paranoid schizophrenic on death row (5 November).

<http://www.chron.com/cs/CDA/story.hts/editorial/1648887>

The US Supreme Court which denied a stay on 5 November (<http://www.chron.com/cs/CDA/story.hts/editorial/1648887>) granted a temporary stay on 6 November to allow the full Supreme Court to consider his appeal. *CNN* reported officials saying that the appeal was received one minute before James Colburn could have been taken from his cell and strapped to the death chamber gurney (6 November).

<http://www.cnn.com/2002/LAW/11/06/texas.execution.ap/index.html>

**USA - solitary confinement.** The *Times Union* (Albany, NY) examines the link between solitary confinement and mental illness (21 October).

<http://www.timesunion.com/AspStories/story.asp?storyID=63619>

## Conferences

The **American Association for the Advancement of Science** (Human Rights Program) is organising a conference on **Empirical Research Methodologies of Transitional Justice Mechanisms**, including a perspective from the health sector. Date and place: 18-20 November 2002, Stellenbosch, South Africa. See agenda:

<http://shr.aaas.org/mtjm/agenda.html>

## Awards

The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network and Human Rights Watch are calling for nominations for the **Awards for Action on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights**. The awards have been established to recognize individuals or organizations that have made an outstanding contribution to addressing HIV/AIDS and human rights issues.

For information about the Awards visit:

<http://www.aidslaw.ca/Maincontent/awards/nominationform2003.htm>

or contact Anne Renaud at [arenaud@aidslaw.ca](mailto:arenaud@aidslaw.ca) or +1 514 397 6828, ext. 222. (fax: +1 514 397 8570) Nominations should be sent to the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, 417, rue St-Pierre, bureau 408, Montréal (Québec) Canada H2Y 2M4. Submissions must be received on or before 23 May 2003.

## Publications

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<http://www.thelancet.com/journal/vol360/iss9345/full/lan.360.9345.news.23165.1>

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Harris B. Child murders in Central America. *Lancet* 2002; 360:9344 (9 November).  
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Heckl, U. *Mit Weisheitszahn ist man erwachsen. Fragwürdige Abstimmung bei minderjährigen Flüchtlingen.*  
Report *Psychologie*, 7, 386-387 (2002).  
[http://www.ai-aktionsnetz-heilberufe.de/docs/texte/texte/report\\_psychologie/weisheitszahn-heckl.pdf](http://www.ai-aktionsnetz-heilberufe.de/docs/texte/texte/report_psychologie/weisheitszahn-heckl.pdf)

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Human Rights Watch. *The FTAA [Free Trade Area of the Americas], Access to HIV/AIDS Treatment, and Human Rights* (29 October) <http://www.hrw.org/press/2002/10/ftaa1029-bck.htm>

Hussein A. Iraq: harm reduction through health. *Lancet* 2002; 360:9344 (9 November).  
<http://www.thelancet.com/journal/vol360/iss9344/full/llan.360.9344.correspondence.23011.1>

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See *BMJ* news item (16 November): <http://bmj.com/cgi/content/full/325/7373/1134>

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