

The Wire

February 2006 Vol. 36. No. 01

AI Index: NWS 21/001/2006

[Page 1]

Abuse of women endemic in Papua New Guinea

In the early hours of the morning on 9 November 2005, 12 teenage schoolgirls were abducted by armed gunmen from their boarding school in the Eastern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea. They were taken to nearby bushes and raped. The incident provoked public outrage but not surprise. The men were strongly condemned in the media and in parliament, but over a fortnight later little progress had been made on the investigation. This is the reality of violence against women in Papua New Guinea.

On a recent visit to the country, AI met many women whose lives had been changed by violence. In a hospital in Kujip, AI spoke to a woman who had been attacked and imprisoned by men in her village who accused her of practicing witchcraft. Her hands had been burned to the bone and the doctor treating her told AI that she would never have full use of them again.

In a police station in Mount Hagen, AI spoke to a 19-year-old college student who earlier that day had been pulled in broad daylight from the street outside her school and raped at gunpoint by two men. Fearing HIV/AIDS, the wrath of her uncles and the prospect of a further attack, she told AI that she would drop out of college and wished she had simply died.

In Angoram, AI spoke to a woman who had been beaten so severely and so often by her husband that she had suffered brain damage and was no longer able to work as a nurse. Her greatest concern was not the injuries she had suffered but that her husband, who had recently taken a younger second wife, would leave her destitute.

Violence against women has become the norm in many parts of the country, but it would be wrong to suggest that all women in Papua New Guinea are merely passive victims. There are also many dynamic women fighting to build safer homes and communities. Although they are grossly under-represented in national and provincial parliaments, in local government, in village courts, in the police force and judiciary, they continue to struggle for protection from violence and redress for victims.

In Banz, Sister Rose, an elderly nun, confronts villagers who ostracize and harass members of the community living with HIV/AIDS. She gives them the facts about the disease, preaches compassion and case by case, village by village, she is dramatically changing attitudes.

In Morata settlement, Port Moresby, Anna and Margaret have turned their homes into a refuge for local women who need emergency protection from violent husbands. When a woman comes to the refuge, a bell is rung to advise other women in the network that they need to pool their limited resources to provide food, shelter and advice.

In East Sepik Province, desperate victims of violence come to Lucy Goro for assistance when their cases go nowhere. She is the appointed women's representative in the provincial assembly and has a long history of persistently lobbying police and demanding action on cases involving violence against women.

There are many more women like them. They face institutional inertia. They are told there are no resources available. They are told the problems they face are cultural and may never change or will only change slowly with time. Nonetheless, they continue their struggle. Later this year, AI will publish a report on violence against women in Papua New Guinea and is planning to work with local groups to build their campaigning capacity.

Indigenous Brazilians forced from their land

On 15 December 2005, a community of 400 indigenous Guarani-Kaiowá was violently evicted from its land in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil. The eviction was carried out by 150 Federal Police with unofficial support from local landowners.

The eviction is the latest blow in the long struggle of the Guarani-Kaiowá to claim the right to live on the land of their ancestors. The Brazilian Constitution obliges the federal government to transfer ancestral lands to the country's Indian population. But with strong resistance from powerful landowners, the process has been slow and marred by violence.

In 2004, 9,000 hectares of land were identified as ancestral Guarani-Kaiowá lands, but implementation was delayed by legal challenges from local landowners. In desperation at the delay, the community, who were crammed onto 11 hectares of land, peacefully occupied part of the land promised to them. In response, a local judge ordered their eviction from all the land they occupied.

Guarani-Kaiowá hopes of gaining their ancestral lands were raised in March 2005 when President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva ratified the territories that had been marked out. These hopes were dashed on 14 September with a decision in Brazil's Supreme Court which suspended the ratification process pending the resolution of legal challenges, effectively upholding the eviction order.

The Guarani-Kaiowá are now encamped along the edge of a busy highway, with insufficient shelter, food and sanitation. One woman, who was seven months pregnant, has miscarried after suffering a fall during the eviction. A one-year-old baby has died from severe diarrhoea and dehydration and 27 children are suffering from malnutrition.

"We spend the whole night in fear. We lose sleep with each passing car," said Eugênio Morales, one of the leaders of the encampment.

The plight of the Guarani-Kaiowá is typical of what happens when the land ratification process is stalled or reversed by court order. Indigenous people are forced to squat on the margins of their ancestral lands, in constant fear of reprisal from gunmen hired by landowners or poorly monitored security firms. AI and other non-

governmental organizations (NGOs) repeatedly warned that the eviction would lead to further violence. This proved to be the case.

Nine days after the eviction, on 24 December, 39-year-old indigenous leader Dorvalino Rocha was killed by a private security guard employed by Gaspem Segurança Ltd, and hired by landowners. According to indigenous sources, he was waiting for his wife by the side of the road near the landowners' ranch. Four security guards approached him in a car. One got out of the car and shot him in the chest. The guard admits the killing, but claimed that he was ambushed and shot in self-defence.

According to the Brazilian NGO the Indigenous Missionary Council, Dorvalino Rocha was the 38th indigenous person killed in 2005. Twenty-eight of these killings took place in Mato Grosso do Sul alone.

[Page 2]

Adequate housing – a human right

Around 100 million people in the world have no place to live and over a billion are inadequately housed, according to UN estimates. Most homelessness stems not from natural disaster or conflicts, but from mass forced evictions, land-grabbing, unaffordable rents or discrimination. These human rights violations fuel conflict and drive excluded and disadvantaged groups further into poverty.

The right to adequate housing is widely recognized as a human right, and enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as other laws and standards. Yet governments are failing to create conditions for people to house and feed themselves. Around the world, homelessness and forced eviction is on the increase.

In this difficult climate, the right to adequate housing has become an increasingly important area of AI's work. So it was a significant moment for AI when, in November 2005, Miloon Kothari, UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, visited AI's International Secretariat in London to share ideas on promoting housing rights.

The Special Rapporteur on adequate housing is appointed by the UN Commission on Human Rights. His work includes talking to governmental and non-governmental organizations, UN bodies and international financial institutions; taking up individual cases; visiting countries and making recommendations to governments.

Miloon Kothari has called particularly for public housing schemes for the poor, land and agrarian reform to protect the rights of the rural poor and for laws that protect women's housing rights.

On his visit to the International Secretariat Miloon Kothari encouraged AI to continue its work in this important area of human rights. He emphasized the impact of land-grabbing and discriminatory urban renewal schemes, saying that the resulting displacement has reached epidemic proportions. The majority of those made homeless are the poor and marginalized.

RECENT AI WORK ON HOUSING RIGHTS INCLUDES:

Campaigning against mass forced evictions in Angola, Nigeria, Zimbabwe and elsewhere.

Calling for the recognition of indigenous people's land rights in Brazil, where people such as the Guarani-Kaiowá continue to suffer violent forced evictions from their lands, which contribute to extreme social and economic deprivation. Many indigenous leaders have been threatened, attacked and even killed for campaigning for land rights. (See article on page 1.)

Raising awareness of and campaigning against the significant escalation of the Israeli policy of demolishing the homes and destroying or confiscating the land of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and Israeli Arabs in Israel. In the past five years the destruction has reached an unprecedented level. Forced evictions and destruction, often carried out without warning, have left tens of thousands homeless and destitute.

Protesting against the failure of Greek police to investigate arson attacks against Romani homes in Greece in June 2005.

Calling for action to resettle approximately 530 displaced Roma, Ashkali and Egyptiani people whose camps had been built on former lead-smelting sites near Mitrovica in Kosovo. Many of them, particularly the children, showed high lead levels in their blood. (See *the Wire* November 2005.)

Protesting against the arrest of about 60 housing rights activists by Chinese police in December 2005. The activists were detained when trying to deliver a letter to the UN officials attending the UN Global Compact Summit in Shanghai. They were released shortly afterwards. Their detentions followed a pattern of arrests of activists protesting, among other things, about alleged forced evictions in the context of China's economic reforms.

Ethnic discrimination still rife in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Denial of equal access to work makes return impossible for victims of 'ethnic cleansing'

"Of course we would like the jobs and to go back to the way it was, but it cannot be. There is no way to survive. I am not coming back. I have no money to build a house... I have no hope that I will be compensated. Life is the only thing that I have left to lose. This is killing me slowly."

A former employee of the Ljubija mines, now living in Sweden

On 22 May 1992, workers at the then state-owned Ljubija mines, north-west of Banja Luka, heard announcements on the radio informing them that, in view of the war, Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) and Bosnian Croat workers must not report for work anymore. Within weeks letters arrived, addressed to each non-Serb worker, informing

them that their services were terminated. At least 2,000 workers were dismissed en masse solely because of their ethnicity.

Such discriminatory dismissals were in many cases the first step in an aggressive campaign of “ethnic cleansing” which included killings, forcible transfers and deportations. Thousands of Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats in the area, reportedly including former workers at the mines, were taken to the Omarska detention camp, which was situated in part of the Ljubija mines complex. In Omarska torture and mass killings were carried out.

Between 1992 and 1995 the three major ethnic groups of today’s Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) – Bosniaks, Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats – fought a bitter conflict for political and economic power. Tens of thousands of people were killed and millions were driven from their homes as attempts were made to create “ethnically cleansed” territories. Tens of thousands of workers in these territories were unfairly dismissed because of their ethnicity.

As part of the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement, all sides made commitments to encourage the return of the thousands who fled during the war and to address ethnic discrimination. But although the war is over, the discrimination continues.

Workers hoping to return to their old employment have been turned away. At the Aluminij factory in Mostar, non-Croat workers who had been dismissed on the grounds of their ethnicity reported having been physically barred from the factory and taunted with racial abuse by the security guards when they tried to return to their jobs after the war. Before the war, Aluminij had a multi-ethnic workforce. Today, the vast majority of its workers are Bosnian Croats.

Many of the unfairly dismissed workers are fighting to get their jobs back, for their pensions, for compensation and for equal access to work without discrimination. In 1998, around 300 former workers of the Ljubija mines (now partially privatized) organized themselves in a trade union to seek reinstatement in their old jobs and to have their rights as former workers, including pension rights, recognized. The workers’ demands were not even partially met by the company.

Those seeking new jobs are faced with discrimination on ethnic grounds, as a result of deliberate policies or failure by the authorities and employers to eliminate ethnic discrimination in employment.

Without the chance of work and financial security those who fled “ethnic cleansing” in the early 1990s cannot hope to return and re-establish themselves in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Until this happens, the scars of the conflict that set neighbour against neighbour will never heal.

For more information see *Bosnia and Herzegovina: Behind closed gates – ethnic discrimination in employment* (EUR 63/001/2006).

Turkish man held for refusing to join military

“I... refuse to be transformed into a murder machine by taking a course in dying and killing.” Mehmet Tarhan, speaking at his trial, August 2004

Conscientious objector Mehmet Tarhan, 27 years old, is currently serving a four-year sentence in Sivas military prison after refusing to take up military service. He has allegedly suffered severe ill-treatment during his imprisonment. AI considers him to be a prisoner of conscience and calls for his immediate and unconditional release.

Mehmet Tarhan first voiced his conscientious objection to military service in October 2001. “I think that wars caused by power-mongering states are first and foremost a violation of the right to life,” he said at a press conference in Ankara. “The violation of the right to life is a crime against humanity... I therefore declare that I won’t be an agent of such crime under any circumstances. I will not serve any military apparatus.”

Mehmet Tarhan was detained twice, first on 8 April 2005 for two months and again upon his release in June. On both occasions he was held in Sivas for refusing military service. Tried on 10 August, he was given a prison sentence of two years for each charge of insubordination, totalling four years. The Military Court of Appeal overturned the sentence in November on grounds that it was disproportionately high and therefore unfair. However, the court’s final written decision recommended that Mehmet Tarhan’s homosexuality (which, if established, would make him “unfit for military service”) be identified via “proper physical examination procedures”. On 15 December the military court in Sivas chose to ignore this recommendation. The case was referred back to the Military Court of Appeal. Meanwhile his four-year sentence was upheld and he remains in prison.

ACT NOW!

Call on the Turkish authorities to release Mehmet Tarhan immediately and unconditionally, and to stop trying individuals for the same crime more than once. Urge them to recognize the right to conscientious objection and establish an alternative civilian service, which is not discriminatory or of punitive length, for those who object to military service.

Send letters to: Abdullah Gül, State Minister with responsibility for Human Rights, Office of the Prime Minister, Basbakanlik, 06573 Ankara, Turkey. Fax: +90 312 287 8811. E-mail: abdullah.gul@basbakanlik.gov.tr

[Page 3]

Worldwide Appeals

Yemen

Execution imminent

Fatima Hussein al-Badi could be executed at any time if the President of Yemen, His Excellency General ‘Ali ‘Abdullah Saleh, ratifies the death sentence against her. Her brother ‘Abdullah Hussein al-Badi, who was accused with her of murdering her husband, was executed on 2 May 2005.

Fatima Hussein al-Badi and her brother were arrested on 13 July 2000 for the murder of her husband, Hamoud Ali al-Jalal, and were sentenced to death. During their trial, they reportedly had no legal representation, and were not allowed to speak in court.

According to her lawyer, Fatima Hussein al-Badi has maintained her innocence since her arrest. She was reportedly tortured by police in detention, but refused to “confess”. According to reports, her brother denied that he and his sister were involved in the murder, but later “confessed” to police after he was assured that his “confession” would lead to Fatima’s release.

Fatima and her brother appealed against their sentences before the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court. President ‘Ali ‘Abdullah Saleh initially ratified both death sentences and ‘Abdullah Hussein al-Badi was executed on 2 May 2005. However, in October 2005, Fatima Hussein al-Badi lodged a special personal appeal with the President, asking him to commute her sentence on the basis that her trial was unfair. The President is believed to be considering the appeal. If he rejects it, Fatima Hussein al-Badi could be executed immediately.

Please write, calling on the President to commute the death sentence against Fatima Hussein al-Badi. Express concern that she was reportedly convicted after an unfair trial and call for her allegations of torture to be investigated.

Send appeals to: His Excellency General ‘Ali ‘Abdullah Saleh, President of the Republic of Yemen, Sanaa, Yemen. Fax: +967 127 4147.

China

Prisoner of conscience at risk

AI is extremely concerned about the health of Zhang Shanguang, a prisoner of conscience who has been imprisoned since December 1998. During a previous detention, from 1989 to 1996 for “counter-revolutionary” activity, he contracted tuberculosis and is still suffering from the disease.

Zhang Shanguang is said to be receiving medical treatment for tuberculosis only when his condition becomes critical; once his health improves, the treatment stops. Such an approach conflicts with the treatment of tuberculosis recommended by the World Health Organization. He is reported to be coughing persistently and has lost most of his teeth, which makes eating difficult for him.

Those close to Zhang Shanguang say that his family are able to visit him only once a year in Hunan No.1 Prison where he is held, because the journey takes them three days. The visits are limited to about 10 minutes each time. Zhang Shanguang is not allowed telephone contact with his family, and cannot receive any letters. According to ex-prisoners he is monitored closely at all times, has little freedom of movement and is not even allowed to talk to other inmates.

Zhang Shanguang, former middle-school teacher and labour activist, is serving a 10-year sentence for “illegally supplying intelligence to hostile organizations and people outside the country”. It is believed that his arrest was partly in connection with his plans to register his organization, the Association to Protect the Rights and Interests of Laid-off Workers.

Please write, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Zhang Shanguang, as prisoner of conscience; and that pending his release he be given adequate medical care.

Send appeals to: Governor of the Hunan Provincial People's Government, Zhou Bohua Shengzhang, Hunansheng Renmin Zhengfu, 69 Wuyizhonglu, Changshashi 410011, Hunansheng, China. Email: WebMaster@hunan.gov.cn

Honduras

Indigenous community leaders imprisoned

On 5 June 2005 Feliciano Pineda, an indigenous community leader, was attacked and seriously injured, allegedly by three men with machetes, in Vertientes, Montaña Verde. According to Feliciano, the men, who are from his community, told him they had been paid to kill him.

On 6 June he was taken to a hospital in the capital, Tegucigalpa. Police officers were reportedly waiting at the hospital to arrest him on charges of theft, damages, housebreaking and homicide. They took him to prison before he could receive proper treatment.

Although prosecution witnesses did not name Feliciano Pineda in their testimony, the homicide charge, for the 2001 killing of Juan Reyes Gómez in an alleged land dispute, was reportedly based on the same fabricated evidence that was used to convict Montaña Verde community leaders Marcelino and Leonardo Miranda for the murder. The brothers are currently serving a 25-year sentence, even though 10 witnesses place them far away from the scene of the crime at the time of the murder.

AI believes that the criminal charges against Feliciano Pineda, Marcelino Miranda and Leonardo Miranda are part of a pattern of politically motivated charges against activists in Montaña Verde aimed at deterring them and other activists from their work, and considers all three men to be prisoners of conscience. Feliciano Pineda was the fifth Montaña Verde community leader to be detained since the start of a dispute with local landowners over communal land titles.

Feliciano Pineda has been acquitted of the crime of homicide but remains in prison on the other charges, despite the fact that the legal period for bringing him to trial on these charges has elapsed. As a result of the assault on him, he has difficulty walking, does not have the use of his right hand and has lost hearing in his left ear. In September 2005 he was reportedly threatened with an assault rifle and urged to sign a confession by a prison guard who had reportedly also tortured the Miranda brothers.

Please write, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of prisoners of conscience Feliciano Pineda, Marcelino Miranda and Leonardo Miranda.
Send appeals to: President José Manuel Zelaya Rosales, Casa Presidencial, Boulevard Juan Pablo Segundo, Palacio José Cecilio del Valle, Tegucigalpa, Honduras. Fax: +504 235 7700.

Updates

Torture ‘evidence’ ruled unacceptable in UK

In a landmark decision, the UK Law Lords confirmed in December 2005 that information obtained through torture is inadmissible in court proceedings (except in proceedings against the alleged torturer).

The decision was the outcome of an appeal heard by the Law Lords in October 2005 against an August 2004 judgement of the Court of Appeal of England and Wales which had ruled admissible as “evidence” before the courts information obtained through torture providing that the torture was not committed or connived at by UK agents.

The appeal had been brought by 10 foreign nationals who had all been interned after being labelled by the UK authorities as “suspected international terrorists”. AI, leading a coalition of 13 other bodies, had made written and oral submissions to the Law Lords, asking them to overturn the August 2004 ruling. The December judgement means that the judiciary would have to reconsider all of the “evidence” and ensure that none of it was obtained through torture.

For further information see *the Wire* December 2005 and *United Kingdom: Human rights are not a game* (EUR 45/043/2005).

Syria

Haythem Muhammed Yasin al-Hamwi, Muhammed Khaled Shehada, Mu’atez Muhammed Zuheyr Murad and Yahya Taha Sharabajee were among 190 prisoners ordered to be released under a presidential amnesty to mark the Muslim ‘Eid holiday in November. The four men were arrested in May 2003 after taking part in a march to protest against the US-led invasion of Iraq. See *Worldwide Appeal* October 2004. At least one of the four has been harassed by the security forces since his release.

‘Ali al-’Abdullah and Muhammad Ra’dun – both human rights workers and prisoners of conscience – were also released. However, Nizar Ristnawi, founding member of the Arab Organisation for Human Rights – Syria, is being held in Sednaya prison awaiting trial before the Supreme State Security Court. Please continue to send appeals for his release. See *Worldwide Appeal* July 2005.

Libya

On 19 October 2005 Abdurrazig al-Mansouri was sentenced by a court in Tripoli to one and a half years in prison for possessing an unlicensed pistol. He reportedly admitted possessing an old gun belonging to his father.

AI believes that the real reason for his imprisonment is his writing on political and human rights issues, including articles critical of the authorities which appeared on a website. Following his arrest his papers and computer files were confiscated.

Abdurrazig al-Mansouri’s family wrote an open letter to the authorities denouncing his arrest and sentence which they insist are aimed at silencing his dissenting views. It is rare for detainees’ families to speak out in this way in Libya because of fear of reprisal.

AI believes that Abdurrazig al-Mansouri may be a prisoner of conscience. Please continue writing, calling for Abdurrazig al-Mansouri to be released immediately and unconditionally if he is being held solely for the non-violent expression of his opinions.

Send appeals to: Colonel Mu' ammar al-Gaddafi, Leader of the Revolution, Office of the Leader of the Revolution, Tripoli, Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. Telex: 70 0901 20162 ALKHASU LY.

See *Worldwide Appeal* November 2005.

Yemen

Fuad 'Ali Mohsen al-Shahari was executed by firing squad on the morning of 29 November. His family thanked AI "for all your efforts and standing by Fuad and with us".

AI campaigned tirelessly on behalf of Fuad al-Shahari for over nine years, and appealed continually to the President to commute the death sentence, right up until Fuad al-Shahari was executed.

See *Worldwide Appeal* October 2005.

Death penalty

In 2005, Mexico and Liberia brought the number of countries which have abolished the death penalty for all crimes to 86. In December Mexico's Congress formally approved reform of the military code which contained the sole remaining death penalty provision.

In September Liberia ratified the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which provides for the total abolition of the death penalty. Liberia's last execution took place in the 1980s.

[Page 4]

The International Criminal Court poised to hear first cases

The jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate and prosecute crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes began on 1 July 2002. Less than three years later, the ICC has made significant progress. With effective cooperation from states, it should hear its first cases in 2006.

Following a referral by the UN Security Council in June 2005, the ICC Prosecutor launched an investigation into crimes committed in Darfur, Sudan. His report to the Security Council showed significant evidence of grave crimes, including the killing of thousands of civilians; the widespread destruction and looting of villages, leading to the displacement of almost two million people; and a pervasive pattern of rape and sexual violence.

In October 2005, the ICC issued its first arrest warrants for five leaders of the Lord's Resistance Army – Joseph Kony, Vincent Otti, Raska Lukwiya, Okot Odhiambo, and Dominic Ongwen – charging them with war crimes and crimes against humanity in northern Uganda, including rape and sexual enslavement.

In November 2005, the Prosecutor announced that despite major challenges of logistics and security in the ongoing conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), investigations have advanced and arrest warrants are expected in the near future.

However, further progress is now threatened by the failure of the governments of Sudan, Uganda and DRC, and of the African Union, to ensure full cooperation with the ICC.

None of the three governments have enacted laws providing for full cooperation with the ICC and authorizing their national courts to investigate and prosecute the thousands of other crimes that the ICC will not be able to address.

Uganda continues to refuse to repeal a national amnesty law which, in violation of international law, prevents national courts from prosecuting war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during the 18-year conflict. Sudan, which has not ratified the Rome Statute of the ICC, has publicly refused to comply with its obligation to surrender persons to the ICC, although it has agreed to permit the Prosecutor to visit Sudan in February 2006.

The African Union has failed to complete a cooperation agreement with the ICC which would be an important political endorsement of the ICC and its work in the three countries, and which would ensure greater support and cooperation in the region. This situation must be addressed immediately to ensure that those charged are brought to justice and that international justice becomes an effective tool to prevent future crimes.

Please write to the Chairperson of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union (address available on www.amnesty.org/wire/February2006/ICC) urging the Assembly to:

call on Sudan to ratify the Rome Statute;

call on the governments of DRC, Sudan, Uganda and all African states to enact laws providing for full cooperation with the ICC, including arresting and surrendering indicted persons;

call on the governments of DRC, Sudan, Uganda and all African states to enact laws ensuring that national courts are able to investigate and prosecute all persons accused of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes (so far only South Africa has done so);

call on the government of Uganda to repeal its amnesty law so that all other crimes committed during the 18-year conflict can be investigated and prosecuted;

sign the cooperation agreement between the African Union and the ICC, to demonstrate full regional support for the work of the ICC.

Working towards a new era for human rights at the UN

At the 2005 UN World Summit in September world leaders made the historic decision to create a Human Rights Council to strengthen the capacity of the UN to promote and protect human rights. The Council will replace the Commission on Human Rights. If established properly, this new body would offer far-reaching, long-lasting and very positive opportunities for AI's work to protect human rights.

The UN General Assembly is now negotiating the details of how the Council will work. AI is following the negotiations closely, making frequent contributions to ensure a powerful and effective Council.

Despite the strong support from many countries at the Summit for the creation of a Council with more powers than the Commission, negotiations have been hampered by resistance from a handful of countries, including China, Cuba, Egypt, Pakistan, Sudan and the Russian Federation. The USA has also made proposals regarding membership which risk undermining the credibility of the new Council and further weakening the outcome of the negotiations.

As negotiations resumed in January, AI issued a renewed appeal to the General Assembly highlighting essential points that must be included in its resolution establishing the Council:

The Council must be able to publicly address human rights violations in individual countries, including chronic or deteriorating situations, as well as crisis situations.

The Council must have a range of responses at its disposal, from dialogue and cooperation for governments committed to improving protection of human rights to condemnation where the country concerned deliberately violates human rights as a matter of policy.

The Council's review of human rights situations must be based on objective and reliable sources of information.

The Council must retain and make full use of the independent experts used by the Commission.

The Council must be a standing body, able to meet regularly throughout the year. In addition to scheduled meetings, the Council must be able to convene easily and promptly to address urgent situations.

Membership of the Council must be open to all UN member states that should be elected to the Council through genuine, contested elections.

NGOs must be able to participate effectively in the work of the Council to at least the same extent that they have been able to participate in the Commission.

If these points are not included in the General Assembly resolution, AI will continue to push for them when the Council draws up its procedures and working methods. The Council is expected to hold its first meeting by mid-2006.

Make Some Noise for Human Rights

“Music speaks the language of freedom, revolution and solidarity. Without that freedom – without music that is angry, joyful and necessary – we are nothing.” Yoko Ono

High-profile international artists. Classic Lennon tracks. United for human rights. This is Make Some Noise – a mix of music, celebration and action in support of AI.

Launched on 10 December 2005, Make Some Noise is harnessing the power of music to inspire a new generation to stand up for human rights. Thanks to an extraordinary gift from Yoko Ono – the recording rights to “Imagine” and John Lennon’s entire solo songbook – artists like The Cure, The Black Eyed Peas, Snow Patrol, Avril Lavigne, Maroon 5 and The Postal Service have re-recorded iconic Lennon originals for AI.

Over the coming year, Make Some Noise will be campaigning for tighter controls on the weapons trade, an end to the use of torture in the “war on terror” and an end to violence against women – a human rights scandal that has blighted lives everywhere.

Support AI’s human rights work worldwide. Check out www.amnesty.org/noise where you can download exclusive tracks, take action online, view behind-the-scenes video footage and find out more about AI’s latest global venture.

Recent documents

Defending women’s right to health (ACT 77/033/2005)

Sexual rights are human rights (ACT 77/036/2005)