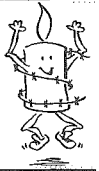


UA NEWS



Amnesty International Urgent Action Newsletter...JANUARY 1995...Amnesty International Urgent Action Newsletter

"Keep fighting"

"there are a lot of other Wili Oteys out there"

"Dear Mr President: There is now ample evidence that death sentences are imposed disproportionately on the poor, on minorities, on the mentally ill or retarded and - perhaps most crucially of all - on those without adequate legal counsel. This shameful state of affairs is a matter for the US federal authorities to investigate and remedy with the utmost urgency."

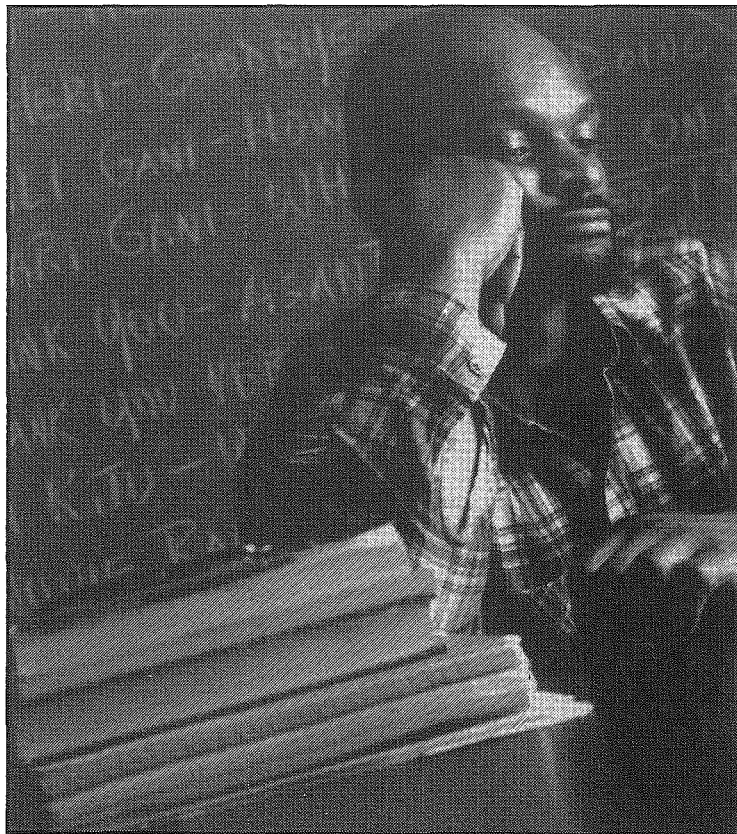
(USA: Open letter to the President on the death penalty, AMR 51/01/94, Jan 1994)

In the case of the USA, the UA Network ended 1994 the same way it began: appealing for clemency for individuals facing execution on death row in that country. Many were executed.

One such man was Harold Lamont "Wili" Otey, taken to the electric chair on 2 September - the first execution in Nebraska since June 1959.

Wili Otey was born into poverty, the third of 13 children. At the age of four, he was sent to live with relatives where he was neglected, beaten and abused. As a teenager he began taking drugs and was permanently suspended from school when he was 15.

But on death row Wili began to study, and in 1980 passed his General Education Diploma. He studied literature, logic and philosophy, and published three volumes of poetry.



Wili Otey (c. Lou Jones)

After Wili was executed, Donna Schneweis, an AIUSA Death Penalty Coordinator, wrote:

"I just wanted to formally convey to each of you gratitude for all the efforts made to save Wili's life.

When I saw him just after 10pm on September 1st, he specifically thanked Amnesty for all we had done. He also urged us to "keep fighting. There are a lot of other Wili Otey's out there." He expressed his firm belief that his spirit would remain with us after his death.

I still ponder my experiences with him that day. Wili was so other-oriented... being singularly concerned about the pain of his family and friends.

He did not voice concern for himself. He did not speak with hate or revenge about what was going to happen. I take that calmness in the midst of all that stress and then I think of Governor Nelson's assessment that Wili remained dangerous. I felt no danger with Wili, but certainly did later at the vigil given the raucous behaviour of the pro-death penalty crowd.

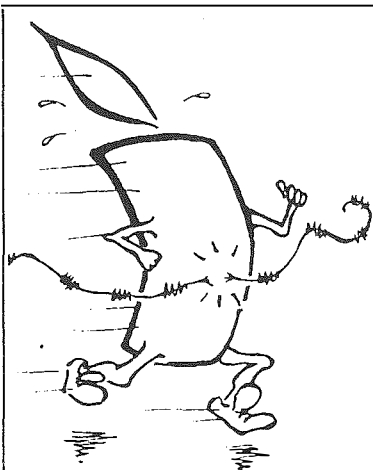
Yesterday I spoke with Vic Covalt of the Otey defence team. He too expressed thanks for all that Amnesty had done.

My hope is that enough Nebraskans who are ambivalent about the death penalty were so sickened by the events of the other night that we might be able to move forward with repeal.

Thanks again. Hope to keep on receiving your invaluable help."

The UA Network will continue to be active in 1995 on behalf of all the other Wili Oteys around the world - victims of the injustice and brutality that is the death penalty.

news in brief



UA NEWS welcomes letters about your experiences in the UA Network. Please address them to: Rapid Actions Team, Amnesty International, International Secretariat, 1 Easton St, London, WC1X 8DJ, UK

PERU. *"We would like to thank you in the name of the Center of Studies and Action for Peace (CEAPAZ), but also in the name of the numerous persons and organizations who work for the defence of human rights here in Peru for your quick and effective appeal for these people.*

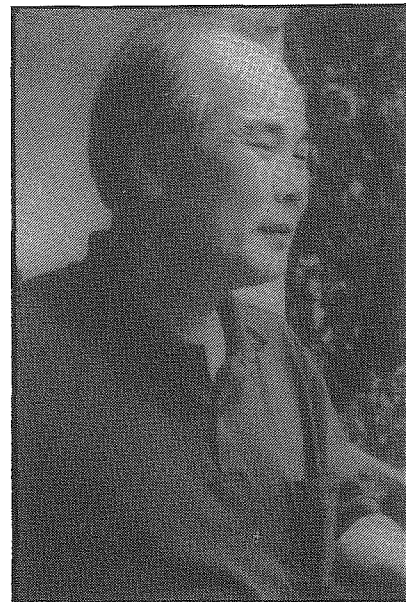
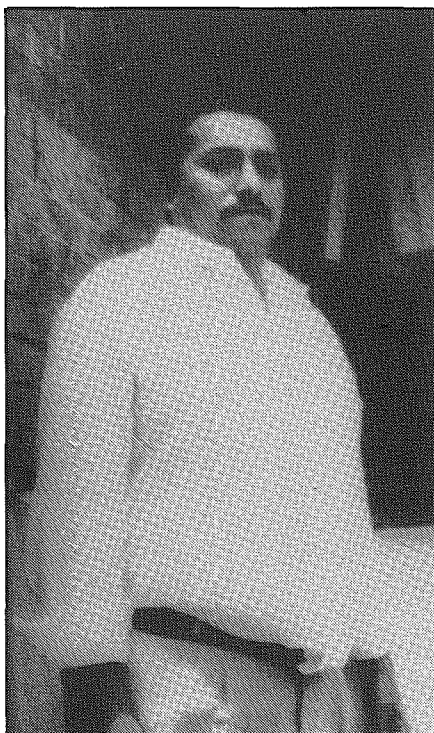
Appeals made by persons and institutions like you/yours are of great importance. Many times the life, physical safety and respect to the human dignity of many innocent people depend on them. That is the case with Reverend Father Fidelis and Governor Ulises Espinoza Sanchez, who no longer suffer violations, thanks to your letters. (UA 165/94).

PAKISTAN. On 9 November 1992, a UA was issued for Gul Masih, a Christian prisoner of conscience sentenced to death for blasphemy. He was not executed, and now over two years later he has finally been acquitted, and - after Lahore High Court's 28 November ruling -

released. AI continues to press for legislative changes to prevent similar miscarriages of justice.

TADZHIKISTAN. Four television journalists, the subject of UA 61/93, have been released, but allege that they were tortured during their 22 months in custody. Mirbobo Mirrakhimov, Akhmadsho Kamilov, Khayriddin Kasymov and Khurshed Nazarov were released in late November as part of a prisoner exchange between the Tajik government and armed opposition forces. The four men have now travelled to Afghanistan for medical treatment.

MEXICO. In a phone call from prison to AI's International Secretariat, Manuel Manríquez San Agustín (photo below), prisoner of conscience, spoke of the thousands of letters of support that had been sent from UA participants and other AI members. He continues to campaign for his freedom and the respect of human rights in Mexico (UA 306/94).



SOUTH KOREA. *"I am writing to thank you on behalf of my father, Ahn Jae-ku... the warm concern you have shown for my father and others involved in the same case have consoled my family and others'. My father has especially asked me to convey his message of thanks to you all, and says that your devotion and efforts have helped to imbue him with as sense of strength..."* Extract of a letter dated 11 December 1994 from Ahn So yung. Ahn Jae-ku, prisoner of conscience (photo above), has been sentenced to life imprisonment (UA 237/94).

INDIA. *"... I tender my heartiest thanks and gratitude to you and workers of Amnesty International for your timely intervention into the Arunachal Chakma issue - as a result of which thousands of Chakmas and Hajongs were protected... Now the central security forces have taken up position in all vulnerable points and averted possible outbreak of violence temporarily..."* Extract of a letter sent to AI from a Chakma organization in India following UA 354/94.

BEWARE THE OFFICIAL VERSION

*"At a time when governments are appropriating the language of human rights to promote their standing in the world, there can be few more eager than the government of Tunisia... However, Tunisia's growing mastery in deploying the vocabulary and diplomacy of human rights abroad serves to mask a practice of serious and systematic human rights violations at home" **

Tunisia is not alone. The language of human rights is being hijacked by governments everywhere as official bureaucrats and politicians look for new and more subtle ways to undermine the human rights movement.

The manipulation of language is increasingly recognized by governments as having the power to sell their version of events, with many employing public relations experts to promote their image at home and abroad. This is especially true in times of conflict, when the brutal realities may be too much for public opinion to accept. With images of war transmitted ever faster around the world, the wordplay used to justify military operations takes on a new importance, and mastering the art of euphemism to sanitize the reality of warfare can become as much a part of military strategy as the fighting itself.

Likewise in the field of human rights. Having seen the initiative seized from them by

the human rights movement, many governments have begun to adopt the very language of those accusing them of violating their citizens' rights, in an effort to convince the rest of the world that they are not. Rather than being our new allies in the struggle for human rights, however, their new-found vocabulary is often simply a means to an official cover-up or an exercise in self-promotion.

The Urgent Action Network is already on the receiving end of this official propaganda - indeed was probably one of the main catalysts for its growth, as governments floundered with the waves of international opinion flooding their fax machines and postbags whenever a violation was committed. In any event, when a UA is issued nowadays, state bureaucrats around the world begin to generate responses to appeal-writers, in many cases not seeking to open a dialogue or disclose new facts, but rather to distort or to soothe, or simply to perpetuate lies, while using the language of human rights to lend credence to their official version.

In this way UA participants are increasingly having their faith in the accuracy of AI's information tested, in the face of often cleverly framed replies to their appeals - whether it be from the Turkish State Minister for Human Rights claiming to have investigated the events reported in a UA while denying any knowledge of the existence of the village central to those events (despite it

appearing on official maps), or Brazilian embassies seeking to deflect concerns about street children in Rio de Janeiro by enclosing copies of misleading comparisons with the situation of children in the USA attributed to the president of UNICEF, or the Venezuelan authorities describing the legal reforms being enacted in the country to protect human rights, while failing to address the specific concerns raised in a UA, or the Tunisian government, which, true to form during 1994, has continued to employ its extensive human rights bureaucracy to respond (often at length) to UA appeal-writers, while typically failing to address the concerns raised and putting forward incorrect information, such as falsified arrest dates.

For the bureaucrat to defeat the activist, the latter must be lulled into a false sense of solidarity or have their energy and confidence eroded. When faced with this insidious bombardment from government officials, those in the UA Network should remember that AI will issue a correction whenever it discovers it has put out incorrect reports. After all, we welcome the news that our concerns are unfounded. Governments, on the other hand, seldom admit their mistakes, let alone the human rights violations committed in their name.

** Tunisia: Rhetoric versus reality: the failure of a human rights bureaucracy (AI, January 1994, MDE 30/01/94)*

PROOF

two exiles in Canada tell

Humberto Geovo Almanza and Dr Taisier Mohamed Ali have something in common: both have been the subject of Urgent Action appeals (*). Both are also currently living in exile in Toronto, Canada, where UA participants recently had the chance to hear them speak about their experiences in their respective countries and what UAs meant to them.

Humberto Geovo Almanza worked as a human rights ombudsman (*personero*) in his birthplace, San Vicente de Chucurí, one of the most violent areas of Colombia. His work was dangerous - many before him had been forced to stop in the face of threats.

After Humberto himself received death threats, colleagues in Bogotá encouraged him to leave the country. When the government began receiving appeals for his protection from UA appeal-writers, they felt they had to protect him, if not in San Vicente de Chucurí, then outside. He went to Bucaramanga but discovered that his name was on a death list. He moved eight or nine times before deciding he had to leave his country.

"It was hard to leave a place I had lived for 28 years, but I had to think about my life. It's hard being here too, and hearing about the worsening

situation at home, but one tries to be courageous." Humberto is now taking English classes, and is an active AI volunteer in Toronto.

The Colombian government, he said, pays a great deal of attention to UA appeals, especially because they come from outside the country. A maze of bureaucratic institutions has been set up to respond to UA mail. Some appeals get lost on someone's desk, but in the majority of cases, Humberto feels that appeals do find their way to the right people and do make a difference. Letters asking for specific information about a particular person make officials feel more accountable, he said.

Humberto spoke of friends involved with the national peasant organization. They were forced to dig their own graves but their executions were preempted when the patrol received a phone call warning them *"not to touch this guy"* because appeals from UA appeal-writers had started arriving.

Humberto recognized our frustrations in UA work: *"You don't know these people on the UA, and you don't know what happens after you've responded"* but the solidarity *"is a source of great hope for us - someone is reaching out from another country and trying to help."*

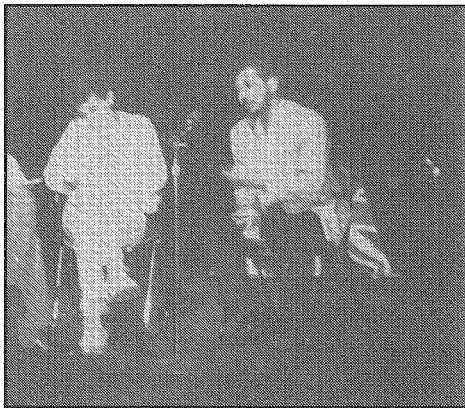


Marilyn McKim with Humberto Geovo Almanza

POSITIVE

of how UAs helped them

By Marilyn McKim, UA Coordinator, Toronto



Sudanese academic Dr Taisier Mohamed Ali wanted to share his experiences with the UA Network because it was "*an opportunity to say thank you from the bottom of my heart*". Urgent action on his behalf, he claimed, meant the difference between jail - and freedom.

Early in his career, Taisier became interested in why a country like his, rich in potential, was failing to provide for the basic needs of its citizens. His thesis (completed in 1978 at the University of Toronto), on the "Cultivation of Hunger", prompted much interest in Sudan because of the famine at the time, and Taisier found himself working more actively for peace and democracy. Between 1985 and 1989, he and his colleagues mediated between the government and armed groups

in an attempt to end the civil war as tensions in the country mounted.

At 3am on 30 June 1989, Taisier was at home working on a draft peace agreement. Two hours later there was a military coup. Taisier went to find out what was happening, but, returning home, found his house surrounded by the army. He went into hiding for 10 days until he thought it safe, but, on returning to the university, he was detained and taken to security headquarters. He was released after 24 hours, but the next day security officials returned and summoned him to meet the Council of the Revolution. The top generals asked him to join the new government. Taisier refused and again they let him go.

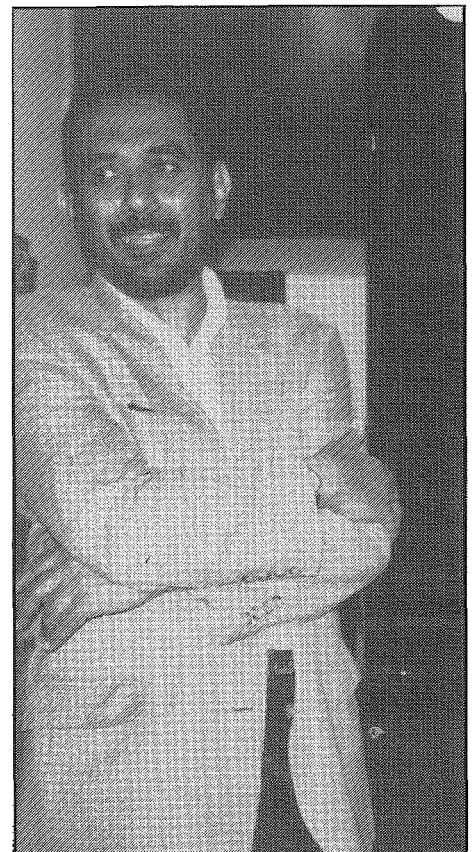
Why? Because his colleagues at the University of Toronto had joined UA activists around the world to protect him with appeals that began arriving even while he was still in hiding. The authorities had no doubt of his popularity abroad!

Taisier did not get off without harassment, however; he was dismissed from the university by presidential decree. He eventually left Sudan, where his wife still lives, and is writing a book about the conflict in Sudan.

Taisier has only positive

things to say about the UA technique. In his case, UAs prevented a lengthy period of unlawful detention and helped him leave Sudan for medical treatment abroad. Government officials, he says, "*smell trouble*", when appeals start arriving: "*a name and a stamp from overseas is what counts.*"

* UA 269/89, AFR 54/04/89, 26 July 1989 (Taisier) and UA 34/93, AMR 23/10/93, 10 February 1993 (Humberto)



Dr Taisier Mohamed Ali in Toronto

ISLAND ACTION

the ua network in the Canary Islands

By Henry Language, Press Officer, AI Las Palmas

Less than 100 miles off the coast of West Africa, but almost three hours by plane from Madrid, the Canary Islands barely feature on many world maps. This autonomous region of Spain, made up of seven tiny islands, boast not only an active tourist trade, but also a thriving Urgent Action network.

More than 300 Spanish-speaking letter-writers form the UA network run by the AI group in one of the two capitals, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. English or German speakers are also offered UAs in their languages supplied to AI Las Palmas by the UA teams in London and Bonn. Dozens of Canarians, Spanish residents in the islands and foreigners with access to fax machines belong to the EXTRA network, too, which aims for the first faxes or telexes to reach their destinations abroad within 24 hours of an EXTRA being launched by the IS.

Miguel Angel García Tobías (photo) is the UA Coordinator who, with a small team of other volunteers, is in charge of both the EXTRA and Spanish language UA databases and distribution to the networks. What is really special is that this Canarian does this while operating the keyboard of his personal computer with a kind of plastic spoon held in his mouth. When not yet 15 years old, an almost fatal swim at Las Palmas' Canteras Beach forced him into a wheelchair. Far from giving up hope, however, he is not only one of the most

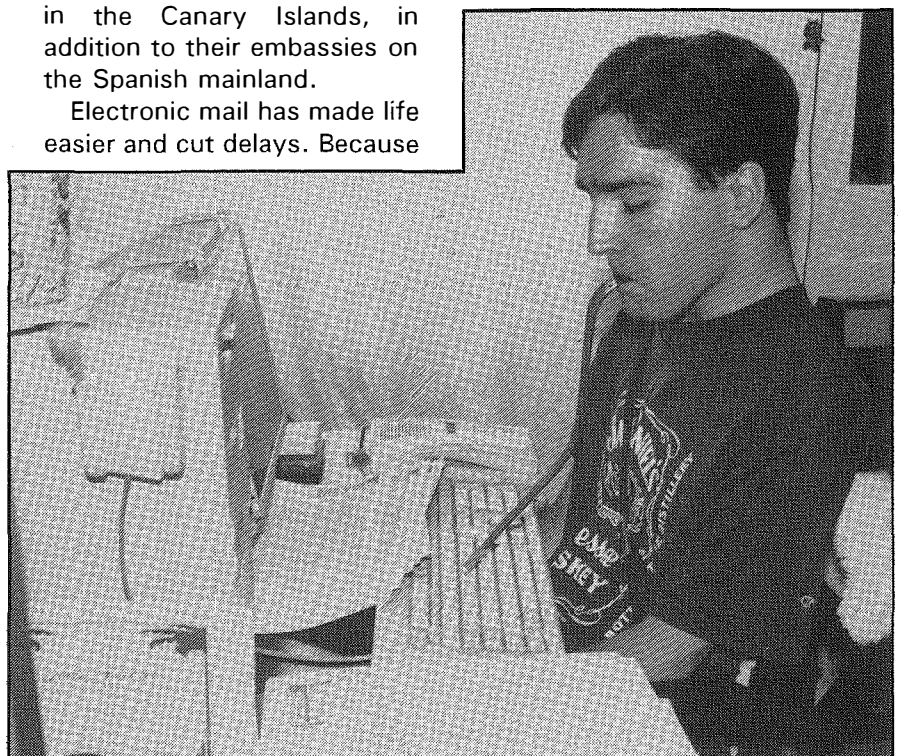
engaged members of his local AI group but also attends daily classes to study law at the capital's university.

Although others in the team are in charge of photocopying UAs and putting them into envelopes because Miguel Angel can hardly move his fingers, hands and arms, he does the time-consuming part of the job: updating the computer records and printing out letters welcoming new members to the network and envelopes for mailing new cases to others, answering their questions, and sending out faxes directly from the screen, after providing them with AI and UA headers, and local AI telephone number, as well as adding embassy and consulate addresses - dozens of countries have their consuls in the Canary Islands, in addition to their embassies on the Spanish mainland.

Electronic mail has made life easier and cut delays. Because

of slow mail and bad telephone lines to and from the islands, which used to cause severe problems in receiving faxes, the e-mail connection from Las Palmas to the IS in London - now maintained daily via EDAI, the Spanish translation unit in Madrid - was established years ago, even before the Spanish Section office in Madrid or AI offices elsewhere in Spain had joined the system.

For Miguel Angel, the advantage of being able to use computers in getting fast messages to governments is even more obvious than for others. Thanks to modern technology the Canary Islands UA Network continues to play an important role in international efforts to fight human rights violations and abuses worldwide.



STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

Recently we received a letter from the Church Land Commission, Comissão Pastoral da Terra for the Bahia/Sergipe Region in Brazil. It was in response to copies of appeals they received re UA 381/93. The CPT had analysed your appeals in depth, and even included a graph of responses (see below). Although we do not have the space to reprint their letter in full, here are some translated extracts from it:

"Dear friends, The regional CPT wishes to express its gratitude for the international solidarity of Amnesty International in relation to the attempted assassination of sister Cecilia Petrina de Carvalho on 22 October 1993.

We received 328 copies of Amnesty letters sent to Brazilian federal, state and municipal authorities... Written in English, French, German, Spanish and Portuguese, these letters arrived from 24 countries, including Germany, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Benin, Canada, Japan, Luxembourg, Mexico, Nigeria, Norway, New Zealand, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, Uruguay and the U.S.A. If it were possible we would write to everyone...

- Of the 328 letters received, 249 were personal and 79 from groups or organizations.

- Of the 249, we found many people who didn't identify themselves, they simply signed as members of AI; others identified themselves as professionals, engineers, lawyers, journalists, university lecturers and technicians; others included politicians and students.

- The 79 included AI groups, religious groups, student and school organizations.

Through your letters we were able to see a true network of

human solidarity. The pressure which you exerted on the Brazilian authorities definitely contributed to our work... We know that the Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs had to officially reply to various Embassies and give them information on this case. Because of the vacuum that exists between federal and local levels... this sort of pressure is very important.

The same promptness of reply does not occur at the local level. Nonetheless, we feel strengthened in the work we do locally. Even if they delay, the local authorities have to justify themselves to Brasília at some point [about these cases]. Thus, these crimes are no longer left in isolation and those who have to deal with judges and police chiefs to demand these rights, feel that they have important back-up.

Finally, sister Cecilia is now much better and has started work again with the rural workers in that region...

If on other occasions, we have felt it is enough to attach the letters received from all over the world to the court proceedings [for judges etc. to see], this time we would like to return not only our appreciation and friendship, but also our acknowledgment and recognition of the strength you have given us."

In 1994 there were 450 new Urgent Actions and 82 new EXTRAs on 91 different countries:

- Albania (3), Algeria (2), Angola (2), Argentina (2), Armenia (1), Azerbaijan (2), Bahrain (5), Belarus (1), Belize (1), Bolivia (1), Bosnia (4), Brazil (9), Burundi (7), Cambodia (8), Cameroon (3), Central African Republic (1), Chad (1), Chile (1), China (9), Colombia (61), Costa Rica (1), Cote d'Ivoire (1), Croatia (2), Cuba (7), Cyprus (2), Djibouti (4), Dominican Republic (1), Ecuador (1), Egypt (7), El Salvador (8), Equatorial Guinea (4), Ethiopia (9), Gabon (1), Georgia (3), Guatemala (31), Haiti (24), Honduras (5), India (13), Indonesia/East Timor (6), Iran (6), Iraq (3), Israel and Occupied Territories (5), Japan (2), Jordan (1), Kazakhstan (3), Kenya (3), Kyrgyzstan (1), Latvia (1), Lebanon (4), Libya (1), Macau (1), Malaysia (5), Mali (2), Mauritania (2), Mexico (15), Morocco (2), Myanmar (4), Niger (2), Nigeria (6), Pakistan (2), Peru (9), Philippines (3), Russia (1), Rwanda (2), Saudi Arabia (2), Senegal (1), Sierra Leone (1), Singapore (6), South Africa (15), South Korea (3), Sri Lanka (1), Sudan (14), Swaziland (1), Syria (2), Tadzikistan (1), Tanzania (1), Thailand (1), Togo (2), Trinidad (1), Tunisia (6), Turkey (65), Turkmenistan (1), United Arab Emirates (2), Ukraine (6), USA (30), Uzbekistan (5), Venezuela (7), Vietnam (5), W. Samoa (1), Yemen (3), Yugoslavia (10)

AI's concerns included: death penalty (100); fear for safety, inc. death threats (203); "disappearance", fear of or actual (80); torture, fear of or actual (166); killings by governments and armed opposition (88); medical (37); legal, inc. prisoners of conscience (79); amputation (2); *refoulement* (3); forcible exile (2); lethal force (4).

There were also 415 follow-ups to UAs and EXTRAs of which 276 requested further action. 36 WARNs were issued during the year.

QUADRO GERAL : CARTAS DA AMNISTIA INTERNACIONAL - novembro de 93 a janeiro de 94 - SOLIDARIEDADE A IR. CECILIA PETRINA DE CARVALHO, atentado de morte (22.10.93), região de Itiúba-BA.

PAÍSES	DE PESSOAS	DE GRUPOS	DE ENTIDADES	DE IGRUJAS	DE PROF/ANAI	DE ADVOGADO	DE UNIV/COL.	DE POLITICO	DE ESTUDANTE	TOTAL
1. ALEMANHA	30	2	9	8	5	1		1	1	57
2. ANTONIÁPOLIS	8						1	1		10
3. ÁUSTRIA	33	7	2	1	12					55
4. BELGICA	4	2								6
5. BENLUX	1									1
6. CANADÁ	5	2	1			1				9
7. DINAMARCA	2	2								4
8. ESCÓCIA	1									1
9. ESPANHA	7					1	1			9
10. FRANÇA	29	4			1					34
11. HOLANDA	5	1				1				7
12. INGLATERRA	20			2	2					24
13. ITÁLIA	1									1
14. JAPÃO	2									2
15. LUXEMBURGO	1									1
16. MÉXICO	1						1		1	3
17. NIGÉRIA	1									1
18. NORUEGA	2		1	3	1					7
19. NORUEGA SET. SUDOESTE	1									1
20. NORUEGA	1	1								2
21. SUÉCIA	6	5								11
22. SUÍÇA	3	4	1	6	2					16
23. SUÍÇA	1									1
24. USA	47	4	3	2	2	5	3			66
TOTAL	211	33	18	22	25	9	2	6	2	328



CANDLES & COMPUTERS

a UA meeting in Ghana

For three days in October 1994, things came to a standstill in Koforidua, Ghana, as UA coordinators from West Africa gathered at AI's headquarters in the heart of the city for the first ever Africa regional meeting on the UA technique. Expectations were high.

Jim Ken-Addo, head of AI Ghana, had everything under control as delegates began arriving: Amadu Shour and David Gbao from AI Sierra Leone (photo), then Marcellin Hounkpevi



and Nafiou Arakou from Benin. Eke Ubiji, head of the Nigerian section, strolled in after a night trapped in Accra's main airport, to be joined later by delegates from Togo and Cote d'Ivoire.

The temperature was in the 90s as Graham Lane from the IS computer team made a dramatic entrance. Dressed to kill in a chic beige suit, Graham (photo, bottom) was evidently in the mood for any challenge. "Just give me a modem!" he cried, catching sight of two computers in the corner of the office, "I'll soon have you all on e-mail!"

"This is the first meeting of its kind," said Patrice Vahard, AI's fieldworker for Africa, as he welcomed delegates. "Our principal aim will be to improve the effectiveness of the UA network in West Africa and to confront local challenges."

At that moment the lights went out, making it rather difficult to see who anyone was. However, the meeting went on uninterrupted - by candlelight - with sessions on crisis response and developing a sub-regional UA Network in West Africa.

The next day, Coordinators gathered to discuss "UA Work in

Africa: Beating the System", led by Omowunmi Segun, Nigeria's UA Coordinator, which focused on the difficulties faced by the Network in Africa due to situational or infrastructural problems. For example, when Omowunmi received the special UA, "Last Chance to Save Burundi", neither she nor the Nigerian UA Network were able to join the action because of rioting and demonstrations in Ibadan and Lagos.

That night Graham Lane excelled. Loosening his tie and spraying vast quantities of mosquito repellent over himself and his IS colleague, Angela Robson, Graham marched up to give his presentation on "Information Technology: The Challenges for Africa." The absence of lighting meant that no-one was able to read from Graham's 40-page document which he had photocopied the day before in blistering heat, nor could Graham demonstrate e-mail without electricity, but when the power returned later he was able to give a spectacular presentation of his software.

Three delegates from Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire formed a separate group to explore strategic thinking, their discussions going into the night.

The final day was taken up by report-backs and resolutions, including

one for the formation of a West African UA Network and one for a second UA meeting in a year's time on a continent-wide scale. There was much praise for the Ghanaian section's superb organization of the meeting.

Most delegates spent the final evening at a local restaurant. Apart from Graham, that is, who was already packing for the next leg of his African trip. "Amnesty Sierra Leone here I come!" he shouted gleefully, climbing into a taxi with his computer.

It was the last glimpse UA Coordinators had of Graham before he disappeared into the night, suitcase in tow.

