WIRE

FOR PEOPLE PASSIONATE ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS
NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2014 VOLUME 44 ISSUE 006

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

CHELSEA MANNING:

‘WHY SPEAKING OUT IS WORTH THE RISK’

Write a letter, sign a petition, send a tweet...

See inside for how your words can change lives.

WRITE FOR RIGHTS

An activist in Moscow holds an impromptu street demo accompanied by placard-wielding mannequins, to highlight Russia's ban on peaceful street protests by more than one person. It was all part of our #SpeakOut global week of action for Russia in October 2014. Together, we stood up for basic freedoms and human rights which are currently under threat across the country. Watch the video of our mannequin stunt: http://bit.ly/RussiaDummy

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INSIDE WIRE

'TOGETHER WE HAVE SUCH POWER'

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STOP TORTURE AROUND THE WORLD

Find out what happened to Moses, Jerryme, Daniel and Erkin, and how we can help them get justice in Nigeria, Philippines, Venezuela and Uzbekistan. **PAGE 22**.

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***Cover image*: Images created by artist Juan Osborne to represent the stories of those featured in Write for Rights 2014.**

EDITORIAL

WRITE A LETTER, CHANGE A LIFE

In this issue of WIRE you'll meet 12 very different people and communities. What they all have in common is that there is a real opportunity, right now, to make a positive difference in their lives.

This December, for the 12th year in a row, women, men and children all over the world will come together – in community centres, on street corners, at home and online – to do one very simple thing: write letters.

Our messages – more than 2.3 million in 2013 – have a particular kind of power. Imagine spending days, months, years thinking the world has forgotten you. Then suddenly, thousands of letters arrive: tangible proof that you are not alone. That's what happened to Ales Bialiatski from Belarus, who was released earlier this year (see page 3).

And that's what will happen to many others as we sharpen our pencils and get typing during the world's largest human rights event, Write for Rights.

Join us! You'll find everything you need to take part in this special edition of WIRE, Amnesty's global campaigning magazine.

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AGENDA

GOOD NEWS & UPDATES

REMEMBERING DROWNED REFUGEES

Memorial services were held worldwide in October to remember over 500 refugees and migrants who lost their lives in two shipwrecks near Lampedusa island off the coast of Italy last year.

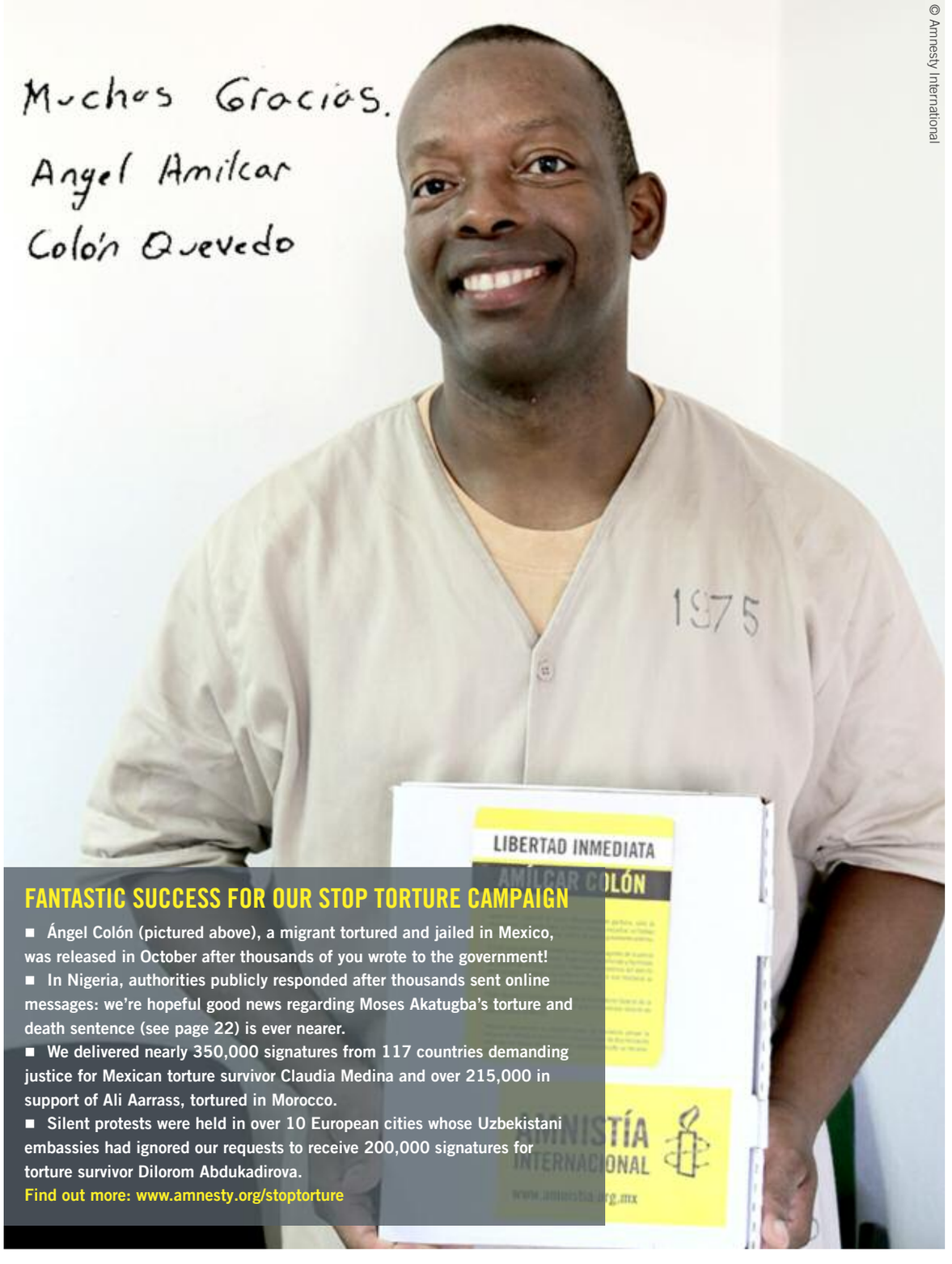
Italy has saved many lives as people attempt the dangerous crossing to Europe. But it recently announced that it will replace its search and rescue operation with a plan we think isn't fit for purpose.

Thank you to the thousands who have already told EU leaders to stop more lives being lost at sea – please keep signing:
http://bit.ly/FortressEurope #SOSEurope

END EL SALVADOR'S TOTAL ABORTION BAN

Activists, lawyers, and women and girls from rural areas joined our My Body My Rights campaign in El Salvador as we launched our new report on the country's total abortion ban in September. Local youth groups staged theatre events, made impassioned speeches, and played music dedicated to 17 women jailed for pregnancy-related issues. Hundreds of people braved driving rain at a women's rights rally.

Amidst the music, banners and chants of "We are women, not incubators", scores of women jostled to sign our petition calling for the decriminalization of abortion. The petition is still open – please sign it:
http://bit.ly/banabortionelsalv



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FANTASTIC SUCCESS FOR OUR STOP TORTURE CAMPAIGN

- Ángel Colón (pictured above), a migrant tortured and jailed in Mexico, was released in October after thousands of you wrote to the government!
- In Nigeria, authorities publicly responded after thousands sent online messages: we're hopeful good news regarding Moses Akatugba's torture and death sentence (see page 22) is ever nearer.
- We delivered nearly 350,000 signatures from 117 countries demanding justice for Mexican torture survivor Claudia Medina and over 215,000 in support of Ali Aarrass, tortured in Morocco.
- Silent protests were held in over 10 European cities whose Uzbekistani embassies had ignored our requests to receive 200,000 signatures for torture survivor Dilorom Abdukadirova.

Find out more: www.amnesty.org/stoptorture

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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REPORT 2014/15

Our respected annual report on the state of the world's human rights will be published in February 2015. Providing a detailed overview of events during 2014 as well as some from 2013, it is a comprehensive and authoritative resource covering 150 countries. It will also feature regional overviews and explore common themes linked to Amnesty's global campaigns and ongoing work.

Find out more: www.amnesty.org

A GIANT LEAP FOR ARMS CONTROL

Fifty-three countries have now ratified the global Arms Trade Treaty. It means these life-saving rules on the international sale of weapons will come into force on 24 December 2014 – a huge step forward. However, too many governments have still not done enough to end the human suffering caused by the irresponsible sale of arms. We need to keep up the pressure on all nations to bite the bullet and implement the treaty.

http://bit.ly/NoAtrocities

DID YOU KNOW?

Amnesty International has grown to become a global movement of more than 7 million people across almost every country in the world.

Join us! www.amnesty.org

NEARLY 200,000 SIGN OUR PETITION FOR FAIRER LAWS FOR WOMEN

Thanks to everyone who signed our petition calling on the Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian authorities to reform laws which endanger women and girls who have survived sexual violence.

An impressive 197,713 of you signed as part of our My Body My Rights campaign. We will deliver the petition to government representatives from all three countries – starting with Tunisia this November. The delivery coincides with the drafting of a new law on violence against women, and is our chance to make sure survivors of sexual violence are heard at this crucial time.

Please join our solidarity action:
http://mb-mr.tumblr.com

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK OF WIRE!

Please take five minutes to complete our WIRE reader survey! We'll use the results to publish the best magazine for you. You could win a beautiful 2015 Amnesty One World gift set of greeting cards, an almanac and a calendar, or one of two Amnesty goody bags.

http://bit.ly/WireSurvey

Above: **Amnesty supporters in Austria demand justice for Mexican torture survivor, Claudia Medina, in September 2014.**

UP FRONT

'I WOULD LIKE TO THANK EVERYONE SO MUCH'

Political prisoner Ales Bialiatski received around 40,000 letters in his Belarus cell, including many sent as part of Write for Rights 2012. He was finally released this June after almost three years. He tells us what difference those letters made.

© Amnesty International

When they arrested me, I thought: "Well, that's it. It's happened and I must have patience and bear it." In any situation a person has a choice – the key is to not rush and make the choice that is right for you, and not for those who wish you ill.

Everything turned 180 degrees. For more than 15 years I had protected other people in trouble, and now I found myself in the same situation. But even in prison I felt that my fight continued.

The main thing was not to allow myself to be broken. The authorities' goal was for me to ask for clemency and, by doing so, confess my guilt, repent. But I knew that I would never write such a request.

PRISON LIFE

In the prison there was little fresh air, and for the first months I had a headache. Walks were permitted for up to an hour, but I couldn't see further than the cell walls or the exercise courtyard. It was forbidden to lie down or sleep during the day so we slept sitting, with our heads turned away from the door so that the guards wouldn't see.

They deprived me of meetings with my wife and of food parcels. This was all a form of pressure on political prisoners. But the huge quantity of letters I received every day gave me a powerful sense of optimism and certainty that my position was right.

Altogether, in nearly three years, I received around 40,000 letters. The value of those letters is significantly greater in prison than in freedom. When I received them I was very, very happy – I spent time looking at all of them. It was the letters and drawings from school children that made the biggest impression. I would like to thank everyone so so much.

Freedom was completely unexpected for me. Like prison, it's a different reality which I'll have to get used to. The greatest happiness is that I can once again be with my family and friends. I continue to work for the protection of human rights in Belarus – we're not going to sit idly by. We won't give up.

WRITE FOR RIGHTS

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

'TOGETHER WE HAVE SUCH POWER'

Amnesty's Secretary General Salil Shetty on why your letters, signatures, emails and tweets can bring about real change across the world.

© Amnesty International

Above: Young campaigners from Portugal pose for a selfie with Salil.
Right: Students in Poland with lanterns during Write for Rights 2012; Letters and cards for Yorm Bopha (see page 5) in 2013.

Activism has defined my entire life. My father was a journalist active on Dalit rights in India, and has always spoken truth to power – even at the age of 83. My mother worked on women's rights, and instilled in me the value of standing up for justice.

I still remember collecting signatures aged 15 for a petition against the state emergency declared by the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, which suspended most civil and political rights in India.

People often say how one small action can't make a difference on its own. But the truth is that nothing we do is in isolation – and that is why our actions have such power.

When Amnesty International was founded in 1961, cynics described it as "one of the larger lunacies of our time". It seemed so unthinkable that "mere" letter-writing and other similar, small protests could make such a significant difference. Those sceptics have, of course, repeatedly been proved wrong in the last half-century.

Not a week goes by without the people we work for – people who have suffered appalling human rights abuses – writing to us or thanking us in person for the work that our millions of members have done on their behalf. For the letters you've written, the actions you've taken, and the noise you've made for justice.

When Aung San Suu Kyi received Amnesty International's Ambassador of Conscience award in 2012, she paid tribute to the many, many Amnesty members who believed human rights could be a reality in Burma. Even when the sceptics thought nothing was achievable, thousands of people like you kept up the pressure to make change happen.

Write for Rights builds on an idea at Amnesty's core, and it is now bigger than ever – thanks to you. You sent more than 2 million letters and messages last year, but I know that we can do even more this year.

And this is not just an empty gesture. Over the years, your letters have led to prisoners of conscience being released. You've brought torturers to justice. And you've helped people in prison be treated more humanely. With your help, I know we can do it all again.

Please write a letter this year, and add your signature for real change around the world.

Thank you for your support

Salil Shetty

AN EASY GUIDE TO WRITE FOR RIGHTS

Write a letter, sign a petition, send a tweet… Whatever you do, your words will help defend people's human rights across the world.

WHAT IS WRITE FOR RIGHTS?

Every December, Amnesty supporters write millions of letters for people whose basic human rights are being attacked. It's the world's biggest human rights event, and last year people organized all kinds of colourful activities right across the globe – from flash mobs in Russia and concerts in Brazil to marathons in Guinea and public stunts in Israel.

WHY DO WE NEED TO TAKE ACTION?

Across the world, people's freedom is under threat. Activists are locked up just for expressing their opinions online. Protestors are tortured and wrongfully imprisoned. Women and girls are dying in childbirth because they can't get the health care they deserve.

WHO DO WE WRITE TO?

Write to the person in authority – it could be a king, president, justice minister or head of police – who can help make change happen. You can also write messages of support to the people we're fighting for.

DOES IT WORK?

Yes! Every year, real change happens because of your letters and actions. People wrongfully imprisoned are released. Torturers are brought to justice. And people in prison are treated more humanely. Below are just a few examples from the last two years…

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© Amnesty International

Pardoned in Azerbaijan

Jabbar Savalan, a youth activist in Azerbaijan, was pardoned and released in 2011 within days of your letters arriving in the country. "The support I received was so great that I did not feel like I was imprisoned. I did not feel alone, I knew that people believed in me."

Released in Russia

In 2013, letters from Amnesty supporters focused attention on three activists arrested following a protest in Bolotnaya Square, Moscow. The pressure led to the release of two of them, Vladimir Akimenkov and Mikhail Kosenko.

Freedom in Cambodia

Yorm Bopha – jailed after protesting forced evictions in her community – was released in November 2013 after authorities received nearly 253,000 letters from Amnesty supporters. "I thank all of the people who devoted their time to write to the government. I am very happy to know that we are not alone."

WRITE A LETTER, CHANGE A LIFE

Here's what you need to do:

1. Look through this issue of Wire for inspiring stories about all the people and communities we're focusing on.

2. Get more info, watch the videos and take action at www.amnesty.org/writeforrights

3. Tweet your support to @AmnestyOnline using the hashtag #W4R

‘WHY SPEAKING OUT IS WORTH THE RISK’

Chelsea Manning is serving a 35-year prison sentence for leaking classified US government documents to the website WikiLeaks. From her prison cell in Kansas, USA, Chelsea tells us why speaking out against injustice can be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Why did you decide to leak documents about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan?
These documents were important because they relate to two connected counter-insurgency conflicts in real-time from the ground. Humanity has never had a record this complete and detailed of what modern warfare actually looks like.

Once you realize that the co-ordinates represent a real place where people live; that the dates happened in our recent history; that the numbers are actually human lives – with all the love, hope, dreams, hatred, fear and nightmares that come with them – then it's difficult to ever forget how important these documents are.

What did you think the consequences might be for you personally?
In 2010, I was a lot younger. The consequences felt very vague. I expected the worst possible outcome, but I didn't have a strong sense of what that might entail.

But I expected to be demonized and have every moment of my life examined and analyzed for every single possible screw-up that I've ever made – every flaw and blemish – and to have them used against me in the court of public opinion. I was especially afraid that my gender identity would be used against me.

"It is absolutely amazing to have this kind of support. If I had the ability to write back to every single person who sends their words of support, I would."

Chelsea Manning on what it means to be featured in Amnesty's Write for Rights campaign.

What was it like to feel the full force of the US justice system and be presented as a traitor?
It was particularly interesting to see the logistics involved in the prosecution: the stacks of money spent; the gallons of fuel burned; the reams of paper printed; the lengthy rolls of security personnel, lawyers and experts – it felt silly at times.

It felt especially silly being presented as a traitor by the officers who prosecuted my case. I saw them out of court for at least 100 days before and during the trial and developed a very good sense of who they were as people. I'm fairly certain that they got a good sense of who I am as a person too. I remain convinced that even the advocates that presented the treason arguments did not believe their own words as they spoke them.

Many people think of you as a whistleblower. Why are whistleblowers important?
In an ideal world, governments, corporations, and other large institutions would be transparent by default. Unfortunately, the world is not ideal. Many institutions begin a slow creep toward being opaque and we need people who recognize that.

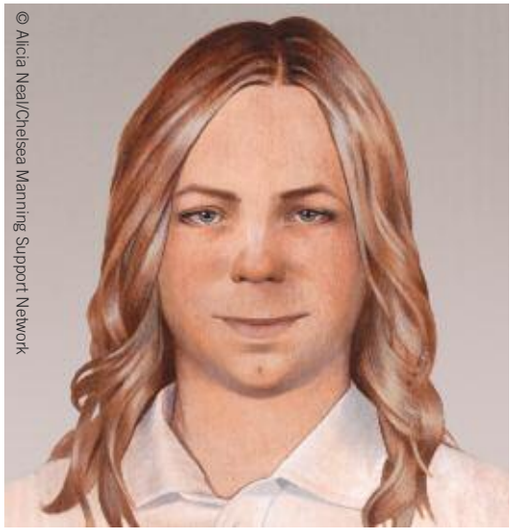
I think the term "whistleblower" has an overwhelmingly negative connotation in government and business, akin to a "tattle-tale" or "snitch". This needs to be addressed somehow. Very often policies that supposedly protect such people are actually used to discredit them.

What would you say to somebody who is afraid to speak out against injustice?
First, I would point out that life is precious. In Iraq in 2009-10, life felt very cheap. It became overwhelming to see the sheer number of people suffering and dying, and the learned indifference to it by everybody around me, including the Iraqis themselves. That really changed my perspective on my life, and made me realize that speaking out about injustices is worth the risk.

Second, in your life, you are rarely given the chance to really make a difference. Every now and then you do come across a significant choice. Do you really want to find yourself asking whether you could have done more, 10-20 years later? These are the kinds of questions I didn't want to haunt me.

Why did you choose this particular artwork (above right) to represent you?
It's the closest representation of what I might look like if I was allowed to present and express myself the way I see fit. Even after I came out as a trans woman (see Factfile on page 15) in 2013, I have not been able to express myself as a woman in public. So I worked with Alicia Neal, an artist in California, to sketch a realistic portrait that more accurately represents who I am.

Unfortunately, with the current rules at military confinement facilities, it is very unlikely that I will have any photos taken until I am released – which, parole and clemency notwithstanding, might not be for another two decades.



© Alicia Neal/Chelsea Manning Support Network

© David Coombs

Top: **This artwork is "the closest representation of what I might look like if I was allowed to present and express myself the way I see fit," Chelsea Manning says.**
Middle: **Chelsea Elizabeth Manning legally changed her name from Bradley earlier this year to reflect the fact that she is transgender and wants to live as a woman.**

WRITE A LETTER, CHANGE HER LIFE >>>

Please urge President Barack Obama to immediately release Chelsea Manning; to investigate any serious abuses she exposed, and protect people who reveal information that is in the public interest instead of charging them.

Start your message 'Dear President Obama' and send it to: President Barack Obama
The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington DC 20500, USA

www.whitehouse.gov/contact/submit-questions-and-comments
www.facebook.com/barackobama
Twitter: @BarackObama @WhiteHouse

Take action online: www.amnesty.org/writeforrights

7 WAYS SAUDI ARABIA IS SILENCING PEOPLE ONLINE

© REUTERS/Kacper Pempel

Raif Badawi is serving a 10-year prison sentence in Saudi Arabia, mainly for setting up a website. We talk to another local blogger – who has to remain anonymous for their own safety – about different tactics the authorities use to silence people online.

1. GAGGING ANYONE WITH AN INDEPENDENT OPINION

"Overall, the situation in Saudi Arabia is very bad, particularly from the point of view of people with independent opinions who go against the grain. Recently, there have been investigations, arrests and short-term detentions of journalists, athletes, poets, bloggers, activists and tweeters."

2. BLAMING EVERYTHING ON TERRORISM

"The authorities are fragile. They seek to gag and stifle dissent using various means, including the shameful Terrorism Law that has become a sword waved in the faces of people with opinions. Courts issue prison sentences of 10 years or more as a result of a single tweet. Atheists and people who contact human rights organizations are attacked as 'terrorists'."

"Courts issue prison sentences of 10 years just for a tweet."

3. PERSONAL ATTACKS ON BLOGGERS

"I have been harassed in many ways. The authorities approached the internet providers hosting my personal website and asked them to block it and delete all the content. They also dispatched security officers to tell me to stop what I was doing in my own and my family's best interests. I was later officially banned from blogging and threatened with arrest if I continued. I succumbed and stopped in order to protect my family."

4. BANS, FALSE ACCUSATIONS AND BEING FIRED FROM YOUR JOB

"There are many cases of bloggers being restricted or banned. Some of them – whom I know – are still being investigated about blogs they wrote in 2008, even though they aren't involved in blogging anymore. Saudi bloggers can also be fired from their jobs and prevented from making a living. Many face false allegations that they are 'atheists' or 'demented'. Restrictions are imposed on almost every aspect of the blogger's life."

5. FAR-REACHING ONLINE SURVEILLANCE AND CENSORSHIP

"Censorship is at its maximum, especially after passing the Terrorism Law. A poet was arrested as a result of a single tweet which indirectly criticized King Abdullah using symbolic language. With millions of web users in Saudi Arabia, this means the authorities are keeping an eye on everything that's being written. We have also received reports through international newspapers that Saudi Arabia uses surveillance to hack and monitor activists' accounts."

6. DEPLOYING AN ELECTRONIC ARMY

"The authorities have powerful cyber armies which give a false impression of the situation in Saudi Arabia to deceive people overseas. They launch websites, YouTube channels and blogs to target activists and opponents, and depict them as atheists, infidels and agents who promote disobedience of the Ruler. By contrast, these websites, channels and blogs often praise the state and its efforts. I have personally been the victim of such state orchestrated campaigns that harmed my reputation."

7. BRUTAL PUNISHMENTS

"Raif Badawi's case (see below) further demonstrates the brutality of a state that still rules through punishments from the Middle Ages, like flogging, hefty fines and exaggerated prison terms. The Saudi government needs to know that it doesn't own the world and that it can't silence the world's voice with its money."

WRITE A LETTER, CHANGE HIS LIFE >>>

Raif was jailed for 10 years after starting an online forum for social and political debate in Saudi Arabia. He was charged with creating the 'Saudi Arabian Liberals' website and insulting Islam. His sentence also included 1,000 lashes, a 10-year travel ban, and a ban on appearing on media outlets.

Please write to the King of Saudi Arabia and urge him to release Raif Badawi now.

Start your letter 'Your Excellency' and send it to:
His Majesty King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud
The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques
Office of His Majesty the King
Royal Court, Riyadh
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Take action online: www.amnesty.org/writeforrights

TORN APART BY HATE

Once they were neighbours. Today, racism and fear have left this quiet Greek town a divided community.

Etoliko is a quiet town in western Greece. Its centre lies on an island, linked to the mainland by a slender bridge that takes you to the town's oldest Romani neighbourhood.

Roma have lived there for generations, side by side with other inhabitants. They went to school with them, worked with them, were friends with them. Now many Roma dare not cross the bridge to the town centre, for fear of being beaten up by them.

Some say it began with a broken economy. As Greece's financial misfortunes plunged in 2010, fear and suspicion grew. Racist attacks and intolerance increased throughout Greece. In June 2012, the Golden Dawn, a neo-Nazi party, took nearly 7% of the national vote.

Together these developments turned the lives of Etoliko's Roma upside down. For Paraskevi Kokoni, aged 35 and a mother of seven, it was the end of everything she knew.

In August 2012, hundreds of people, many believed to be linked to Golden Dawn, descended on her neighbourhood, lobbing Molotov cocktails at Romani houses. "They were shouting that they were going to kill people," she recalls. The police did nothing to repel the hostile crowd. It was the first of a series of violent attacks against Etoliko's Roma.

BEATEN WITH LOGS

In October 2012, Paraskevi was out shopping in Etoliko's town centre with her son and 23-year-old nephew Kostas, when they were ambushed by a gang of locals. "Two of the men went for me and the rest were punching and kicking Kostas," she says. "I was calling for help but nobody came."

She escaped and ran with her son to the local police station, but the officer there said he was too afraid to intervene. Paraskevi's husband later found Kostas unconscious in the street. Both Paraskevi and Kostas were hospitalized because of their injuries.

While the house was empty, intruders broke in. "They broke the windows. They broke the china," she says. "We came in the house and didn't find a single glass to drink some water. We didn't find a single plate. They had broken everything."

Paraskevi took her family and left Etoliko for good. "The police did not protect us," she says. "We… moved to Patra. We left our own home. My children don't want to return to the house. They are afraid."

Three of the men involved in the October attack were charged in November 2013 with serious bodily harm. Their case is still pending.

As for Paraskevi, she now lives in a rented flat. After years of owning her own house, she struggles to pay the rent. She has lost her home, her neighbours, her community.

© Amnesty International/Giorgos Moschakis

Left: **"Death to the gypsies" is spray-painted onto the wall of a basketball court in Etoliko, Greece, which saw mob attacks on Roma in 2012 and 2013.**

WRITE A LETTER, CHANGE HER LIFE >>>

Urge the Greek authorities to make sure that Paraskevi's attackers are swiftly tried, and that any sentence recognizes the racist motive of the crime.

Start your letter 'Dear Minister' and send it to:
Ministry of Justice, Transparency and Human Rights
96 Mesogeion Avenue, 115 27 Athens, Greece

Take action online: www.amnesty.org/writeforrights

KEEPING THE PROTEST ALIVE

Thirty years on, survivors of Bhopal's deadly gas leak are keeping their fight for justice alive, passing the baton on to a new generation.

When toxic gas leaked from a pesticide factory in Bhopal, India, 30 years ago, it killed up to 10,000 people in three days. Hundreds of thousands of people continue to live with the leak's after-effects, and the pollution caused by the factory before the disaster. But these survivors are fighting back.

In 2006, they won clean water for their communities. Still, the site remains contaminated and survivors of the gas leak are demanding proper compensation. Their powerful and persistent movement has united young and old in the struggle for justice.

▲ **Shahzadi Bi** (standing front), at home with her family in Blue Moon Colony, just a few metres from the old Union Carbide factory site, September 2014. She and her family were affected by the gas leak, she has since become a vocal supporter of the campaign for justice.

▶ **Rampyari Bai** is one of Bhopal's most tenacious survivors. Now aged 90, she began campaigning in the wake of the disaster. She was living with her son and his heavily pregnant wife in a slum near the factory in 1984. As the gas fumes filled the air, her daughter-in-law suddenly went into labour and she and her baby died soon afterwards.

Rampyari developed cancer and suffers from breathlessness, yet continues to fight for the compensation she says she has yet to receive. In 2011, she said she was so badly beaten during a demonstration that she now needs help to walk. Still, she says that protesting keeps her alive:

"We had so many rallies. We swam across drains, had to run away when police ran behind us, but we didn't step away from this struggle. I tell this to everyone – my sisters, brothers, mothers and daughters – that they must learn from our struggle.

I will not leave this task of chasing governments. Until I get compensation, I will keep fighting – even till I die. Till my last breath, I will keep fighting."

Rampyari Bai

▶ Aged 20, **Safreen Khan** is part of a new generation of activists. Too young to have experienced the disaster first-hand, she has instead been defined by its aftermath. Her parents, who lived near the factory at the time, have suffered breathing difficulties and problems with their eyes ever since. Safreen's growth is stunted – which local activists say is common among people who live in areas where the water is contaminated.

Safreen first heard about the 1984 disaster when she was at school. She soon joined the campaign for justice, and was among eight children who decided to organize themselves as Children Against Dow-Carbide. Their first act was to walk from Bhopal to Delhi in 2008 – a journey of over 700km.

To mark 30 years since the disaster, Amnesty asked award-winning photographer Raghu Rai to document the long-term effects on people in Bhopal. In 1984, Raghu witnessed the horrific aftermath of the leak. His photographs capture people whose lives were devastated by the tragedy and have led the community's struggle.
All photos © Raghu Rai/Magnum

"People have run out of patience. They still cry and mourn for their family members who died that day. They feel that at least now, our government and the company must listen and take steps, because 30 years is too long to get justice."

Safreen Khan, pictured in front of a Bhopal memorial mural directly opposite the abandoned Union Carbide factory.

WRITE A LETTER, CHANGE THEIR LIVES >>>

Demand justice for the people of Bhopal.

Start your letter 'Dear Prime Minister' and send it to:
Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India
Prime Minister's Office
South Block, Raisina Hill
New Delhi-110011
India

Take action online: www.amnesty.org/writeforrights

© Private

© Private

OPEN SECRET

Submarine Captain John Remø was careful to hide all the evidence, stashing the women's clothes in the cellar. It would take another 30 years before the secret was out in the open.

John was a wild card as a kid. He swore, got into fights, played in a rock band. He joined the navy, reaching the rank of submarine Captain aged 27.

One night the vessel's phone rang for John. It was his wife. She had found a bag of women's clothes in the cellar. John realized he'd been caught, but it was too risky to talk over a military line. He promised to write her a letter.

The next morning John's submarine left to patrol the northern Barents Sea, at the height of the Cold War. His wife was left waiting for the truth about her husband to be unravelled by post.

ON DANGEROUS GROUND

The story starts over 20 years earlier in a small Norwegian coastal town. John, aged about four, was discovered by his mother wearing a dress. She was furious: this was unheard of and forbidden.

"We both got scared. I realized this was dangerous ground, but I've always felt like a girl, wanted to look like one and be part of girls' play."

Growing up in the conservative 1950s, John learned that pretending to be a boy got him the love he needed. A conditional love.

"I started acting, but by trying so hard, I overcompensated and became rather charmless. I quickly learned the nastiest swear words and how to fight." John may have been a bad boy as a teenager, but he also loved music. This opened a door to continue exploring his supressed female side. His aunt had a guitar and gave him the keys to her house to practice.

"She had beautiful clothes, silky underwear and high-heeled shoes. It was such a feeling of freedom and happiness to go there, try it all on, and be myself. But I felt sad that I couldn't show anyone."

Most likely the aunt knew, but she never said a word. "My aunt was a tiny woman, and I still remember the sadness I felt when I grew out of her shoes."

John left home aged 17 and got married in his early 20s. They had a son. As a father with a rugged beard and a macho job, he fulfilled the expectations of his gender.

THE TRUTH COMES OUT

John's wife was strangely relieved when she finally received the letter. Her first thought had been that John had murdered someone and hidden her clothes in the bag.

But once the truth was out, it was clear that their relationship was based on a lie and couldn't continue.

"I loved her, and was scared of losing her. I was hoping that my need to be a woman would go away – that by being married to her I could live without it. But that only lasted for a month before I went back to dressing up in secret."

Thirty years after that bag of clothes turned up in the cellar, the time was finally right to let the secret

out and walk openly down Oslo's busiest shopping street as a woman: "It was such an exhilarating feeling of freedom."

A passer-by would never know that this tall, stylishly dressed and confident woman in her 60s still has a man's body.

GENDER: M

She changed her legal name relatively easily. To her friends, she is just Jeanette now. But in public she uses John Jeanette to highlight the discrimination she and other transgender people in Norway still face.

Because changing her legal gender – to appear as female on identity papers such as a driving licence or passport – was a different story. Norwegian law demands that she undergoes a compulsory 'real sex conversion' based on a crude practice from the 1970s.

It involves having your reproductive organs removed – and therefore becoming sterile. It also requires a psychiatric diagnosis, forcing you to accept that you suffer from a mental disorder.

John Jeanette refuses to put herself through any of this. "The hormones change your body and mind – it's like going through a new puberty," she explains.

All her official documents therefore still refer to her as male. Her transgender identity is humiliatingly public, and often commented on whenever she checks into a hotel, picks up a prescription or borrows a book from the local library.

"I sit in a waiting room as a woman, only to have my male name called out. I'm prepared for it, but I still feel humiliated and frustrated every time."

John Jeanette doesn't want to be forced to trade having surgery for female ID papers. She says she was extremely surprised to hear that Amnesty activists worldwide will be supporting her stance this December.

"I think it means a lot to people in my situation," she said. "Together, we can change things."

WRITE A LETTER, CHANGE HER LIFE >>>

Please urge the Norwegian government to change the law so John Jeanette can change her legal gender without compulsory medical treatment.

Start your letter "Dear Minister" and send it to:
Minister Bent Høie, Ministry of Health and Care Services, PO Box 8011 Dep, 0030 Oslo, Norway

Email: postmottak@hod.dep.no
Twitter: @helse_og_omsorg
www.facebook.com/helseogomsorgsdepartementet
Take action online: www.amnesty.org/writeforrights

FACTFILE

What does being transgender mean?
It describes people whose gender identity is different from the legal gender that they were assigned at birth. Transgender people are often assumed to be gay, but gender identity has nothing to do with sexual orientation.

Why is John Jeanette's situation a human rights issue?
Making transgender people choose between irreversible sterilization surgery, or not having their gender legally recognized, violates their right to live free from discrimination and inhumane, cruel or degrading treatment.

Why is now a good opportunity for change?
Denmark recently passed a landmark law allowing transgender people to change their gender legally without being diagnosed with a mental disorder or having surgery. Only Argentina has similar laws. By changing its law too, Norway will live up to its image as a human rights and equality champion.

***From left to right*: Growing up in a small Norwegian coastal town in the conservative 1950s, John learned that pretending to be a boy got him the love he needed; By the age of 27, John Jeanette had reached the rank of submarine Captain in the Norwegian Navy; Today, John Jeanette is a tall, stylishly dressed and confident woman in her 60s.**

JAILED FOR 'PICKING QUARRELS AND PROVOKING TROUBLES'

An act of kindness transformed Liu Ping (pictured below) from a factory worker into a passionate anti-corruption activist in China. Her daughter, Liao Minyue (pictured right), tells their story.

My mother, Liu Ping, was just an ordinary Chinese woman with a kind heart.

We were very close. I chose to live with her after my parents divorced about 10 years back. We never fought, not even once. We used to go to the markets to collect old and unwanted vegetables for food. It never once struck me as anything to be ashamed of. On the contrary, those were warm and intimate times, because we were together.

But one night, everything changed. My mum was moonlighting as a street vendor in the evenings to supplement her monthly income of RMB800 (£80) as an iron and steel plant worker. Troublemakers turned up at her stall and my uncle tried to help. He was badly beaten up.

Local authorities ignored the incident, but a group of lawyers stepped in to resolve the case free of charge. The kindness they showed sparked my mum's activism – she began actively advocating for workers' rights.

That was in 2011 when I was in high school. Our lives changed drastically after that.

SPEECHES, FLYERS, BEATINGS

My mum started giving speeches on the streets and distributing flyers. She also tried to run for the local People's Congress as an independent candidate so she could help workers who had been forced to retire. She was away from home for days at a stretch.

Strangers whom I now realize were plain clothes police would turn up at our door. I worried about her, especially when I couldn't reach her – that usually meant she had been beaten up. I was completely against what she was doing and tried everything to stop her. The police and local party officials would also approach me in a bid to get her to stop what she was doing.

© AP Photo/Aritz Parra

I had no idea what she was involved in. She protected me by not telling me about it. There was talk in the neighbourhood that she was up to no good, and I started believing what I heard. Our relationship became badly strained as a result.

ARRESTED FOR DENOUNCING CORRUPTION

Then last year, my mum and two other anti-corruption activists, were arrested for holding

© AP Photo/Liao Minyue

Above: **Liu Ping's 22-year-old daughter, Liao Minyue, initially tried to convince her mother to stop her activism. Her attitude changed after police detained her mother last year.**
Left: **A police officer outside the courthouse during a trial of members of the New Citizens' Movement, Jiangxi province, China, October 2013. The movement – a loose network of human rights lawyers, activists like Liu Ping and urban professionals – has come under fire from the authorities for calling for a fairer and more transparent government.**

a small private gathering and displaying a banner demanding that government officials make their assets – like property and investments – public. She was charged with "picking quarrels and provoking troubles". After that, I lost faith in the Chinese Communist party, and I posted an open letter online announcing my withdrawal from it. I was prepared to face the consequences.

Mum and the other two activists are said to be linked to the New Citizens' Movement, a loose network of human rights activists. When she was sentenced to six-and-a-half years in prison in June, I was outraged. I posted another letter online, expressing my deep disappointment.

Over the past year, I've been reflecting on my earlier attitude to my mum's activism. I deeply regret trying to stop her. What my mum and the rest are facing are the direct consequences of all our apathy and cowardice.

Now I have no qualms about accepting interviews with the media to talk about her. My passport has been revoked and I faced pressure from the authorities in my previous job, but I'm not afraid if I face a little harassment because of it. After all, I've only got one mother.

WRITE A LETTER, CHANGE HER LIFE >>>

2 December is Liu Ping's 50th birthday. Send a message of support and birthday wish to:

Liu Ping, Jiangxi Nanchang Women's Prison
630 Changzheng Road
Zhang Leng County
Nanchang City
Jiangxi Province, 330100
People's Republic of China

Upload photos and birthday messages to our tumblr page at http://messagesforliuping.tumblr.com.

Take action online: www.amnesty.org/writeforrights

IT TAKES AN EXTRAORDINARY PERSON...

© Private

Lawyer Mohammed al-Roken was jailed for 10 years in July 2013, following a huge crackdown on political and human rights activists in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). We talk to three people who know him as a courageous, extraordinary defender of human rights.

'HE NEVER STOPPED WORKING'

Jennie Pasquarella is a US lawyer who worked with Mohammed al-Roken in 2011 during a trial of human rights activists (known as the 'UAE 5').

You hear about the glitz and glamour of Dubai, but when you scratch beneath the surface it's pretty ugly. The UAE is an insane surveillance state, where everyone is watched, especially those deemed dangerous to the country in some way. It's a place that does not respect the rule of law – they lock people up for political gain.

During the trial we met with Dr al-Roken every day – he was our total guide to the human rights situation there, and talked us through all the court shenanigans. He was extraordinarily generous with his time – he really believed in the cause of human rights, democracy, and creating a more open society.

"The UAE is an insane surveillance state, where everyone is watched."

We'd meet him in public places, and there were almost always people watching him. He'd sometimes say: 'we have to move because those guys are listening'. But he never stopped working on the case – even when lawyers like him were getting death threats. It takes an extraordinary person to work in an environment like that.

I feel very disheartened and sad about his arrest. He's the one person in the world who least deserves it. I hope there's a huge army fighting for him as he has defended so many people.

'HE BELIEVES IN HUMAN RIGHTS'

Ahmed Mansoor is a high-profile human rights activist whom Mohammed al-Roken defended during the UAE 5 trial in 2011.

When we drew up a petition calling for a parliament to be elected on the basis of universal suffrage, we particularly valued Dr al-Roken's input. He's so prominent in the field of human rights, and knows the ups and downs of what's happening in the region. He's a very trusted person.

He has defended human rights in the UAE for many years. In some cases, people are being harassed simply because of their intellectual background, and they end up being transferred or forced to retire. He's the one person taking on these cases, not for money but because he believes in human rights.

Arresting him is an awful thing to do. A person like him should be an advisor to the highest authority in the country. He shouldn't spend a day in jail. Just a few weeks before his arrest, a high member of the royal family in Abu Dhabi consulted him on a domestic issue. So how can they flip-flop like that?

It's a big loss to the UAE to not have this guy available for us. With him in jail, we have nobody to defend these cases. I want him released today – actually he should have been released yesterday.

'AN AMNESTY PIONEER'

In his former role as Amnesty's Saudi Arabia researcher, Lamri Chirouf worked with Mohammed al-Roken over many years.

At Amnesty, you couldn't go to Dubai and not visit Dr al-Roken. He was one of the pioneers of our work in the Gulf. Whenever we asked for his opinion on some aspect of the law, he would always give it to us free of charge. Without people like him, Amnesty wouldn't be known in the Gulf.

He was such a helpful person – whenever we organised any activities in the region, he was always there. We had a big project on women's rights in the Gulf, and he was instrumental in getting support.

You can't fault him. He is just so active, always writing, attending seminars, taking action. He's a very dynamic man. And he has a great sense of humour, too. I hope he still has that humour now even though he has been in prison for a long time already.

***Above*: Mohammed al-Roken is a lawyer and professor who has defended human rights in the UAE for many years.**

WRITE A LETTER, CHANGE HIS LIFE >>>

Urge the President of the UAE to release Mohammed al-Roken immediately and unconditionally.

Start your letter 'Your Highness' and send it to:
His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan
President of the United Arab Emirates
Ministry of Presidential Affairs
Abu Dhabi PO Box 280
United Arab Emirates

Take action online: www.amnesty.org/writeforrights

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UNITED ARAB EMIRATES FACTFILE

Founded: 2 December 1971

A federation of seven semi-autonomous 'emirates' (territories) – Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Un al-Quwain, Ras al-Khaimah, Fujairah.

Capital: Abu Dhabi. Dubai is the UAE's other cultural and commercial hub.

Population: Nine million. Only 10% are UAE nationals. The majority are migrants, mostly from South Asia, many of whom work on large construction projects.

President: Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, also Ruler of Abu Dhabi, came to power in November 2004, after his father died.

Democracy: The government is not elected.

Media: Restrictive press laws mean censorship is common and criticising UAE's ruling families is risky.

Human rights: Civil society organisations are not allowed to operate freely, leaving little space for open public debate.

Crackdown: A petition in March 2011 calling for democratic reform, signed by 133 prominent citizens, including Mohammed al-Roken, led to scores of arrests, reports of torture, and grossly unfair trials.

Football and flights: Etihad Airways – sponsor of English Premier League football team Manchester City – is based in Abu Dhabi and owned by members of the UAE ruling family. Emirates Airline – sponsor of some of the world's biggest football clubs, including Arsenal, Paris Saint-Germain, Real Madrid and AC Milan – is owned by the government of Dubai.

FORCE FOR CHANGE

Maria Shongwe has overcome obstacles that many women and girls in South Africa face – including poverty and living with HIV – to become an inspirational community activist.

Above: **This image was created by the artist Juan Osborne to represent women and girls in Mkhondo, Mpumalanga Province, during Amnesty's 2014 Write for Rights campaign.**

Maria (right) was the first person in the small town of Amsterdam, near the Swaziland border, to openly reveal she was living with HIV. She also broke new ground by setting up a local branch of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) – a prominent national organization pushing for HIV health care services.

Maria's determination secured anti-retroviral treatment (ART) for 50 people when they couldn't get it through the public health system, and recently got lottery funding to set up a home for orphans. She now works for TAC in Mkhondo Municipality, where health services are among the worst in the country. In her own words, she gives an insight into her life and work:

'HE RAPED ME'

I was born in Swaziland. We had to walk 70km to and from school every day. There was a guy – like an uncle. One day he gave me a lift on a bicycle. He went in the forest and he raped me. It was my first time, and I fell pregnant. But there was nothing I can do. Because maybe if you are a girl and you report something to your parents, they say: "That can't be. It means that you are in love with that guy".

'THE LAW DOESN'T CARE ABOUT US AS WOMEN'

When I grew up, I was married here in South Africa. After [my husband] passed away, his family took everything, even my furniture. I was in and out of court fighting. I don't want to hear about any women being abused. Because the law doesn't care about us as women. I decided to leave everything and move to Amsterdam.

'DON'T TELL ANYBODY'

I spoke to the lady [at the clinic] and disclosed my [HIV] status. She say: "No, don't tell anybody you have tested positive." I say I want to be helped because I don't know what this virus will do to my body. She didn't understand.

BECOMING AN ACTIVIST

My daughter started to be sick. After six months, she tested positive for HIV. There was no medication in this area, so she passed away. She was 19.

I started to do the [TAC] support groups. People started to talk about living with this virus but the medication was nowhere to be seen. I went to [the private] Iswepe Clinic, 56km from here, and talked with the nurse. She said: "People from Amsterdam can start the [ART] programme because people here don't want to take the medication."

But it was difficult because we don't have money to go there. Some of those taking the medication can't walk. I brought them to [my] house until they

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were better. I cared for them. And I was going door-to-door. Without any stipend – I was getting nothing. If I found someone who was sick, I do the counselling to that person and take them to the clinic. Now I am a [paid] mentor, looking after TAC branches in the whole of Mkhondo Municipality.

GIRLS SELLING THEMSELVES

We are on the road to Swaziland and from Nelspruit to Durban – many people pass through. You can see the [young] girls in town going to sell themselves to the drivers. There are many taverns, poverty. The parents die and the children stay alone. If men give them R20 (US$2), they think it is a lot of money. They start sleeping with boys at an early age. Now I have started a group for these girls, educating them about how to keep themselves healthy.

Top: **Women walk through Amsterdam, a small town near South Africa's border with Swaziland.**
Left: **Maria Shongwe at home in Amsterdam, June 2014.**

WRITE A LETTER, CHANGE THEIR LIVES >>>

As Maria's story shows, people in Mkhondo – particularly pregnant women and new mothers – are dying needlessly because they are not getting vital health care. Many also struggle to find out about contraception, and find it difficult to make their partner wear a condom. All this leads to unplanned pregnancies and an increased risk of contracting HIV.

Please tell the South African government to prioritize better health care for women and girls in Mkhondo Municipality.

Start your letter 'Dear Minister' and send it to:
Pravin Gordhan
Chair of the Inter-Ministerial Task Team on Service Delivery, Private Bag X802
Pretoria 0001, South Africa

Fax: +27 12 326 4478
Email: minreg@treasury.gov.za

Take action online: www. amnesty.org/writeforrights

‘HIS HEART BEATS JUST LIKE MINE’

© Amnesty International

Tosin Francis is a passionate human rights activist from Nigeria. She tells us why she is supporting Moses Akatugba, who was just a schoolboy when he was arrested and tortured. Last year he was sentenced to death.

Moses’ case means everything to me. His story could be mine. He’s a Nigerian like me. He has blood flowing in his veins like me and a heart that beats just like mine.

I imagine the anguish he wakes up to every day, thinking about the death sentence that hangs around his neck. I think of his family, not knowing the fate of their child.

When I heard about his case, I began to research torture, to understand what it really is and its effect on the lives of its victims. I read books and watched films and found myself able to talk to others about it fearlessly and with compassion. And the response from everyone I’ve spoken to has been great. Supporting Moses gives me the joy of being an advocate of hope, justice, and fairness.

‘WE ARE HOPEFUL’

As rights activists in Nigeria, we do face challenges in our work: attacks, harassment and smear campaigns. But many are speaking up for their rights; awareness is growing, and we are hopeful. The Governor of the Niger Delta recently responded to pressure from Amnesty supporters and said he is looking into Moses’ case. We're one step closer.

Everyone – regardless of their colour, tribe, race, beliefs or sexuality – needs to have their rights defended. No one deserves unjust punishment.

My message to Moses is: we all feel and share your pain. We are with you every step of the way – stay strong and don’t give up, despite this dark moment. You are always on our mind and in our prayers. There is a bright light at the end of the tunnel, that is what we all see and that is the only thing you should see. We are hopeful for a very positive response and we look forward to rejoicing with you soon.

Lots of love from the Amnesty family worldwide.

***Above*: An artist’s depiction of torture in Nigiera taken from a survivor’s account.**
***Left*: Tosin is one of 80,000 Amnesty members in countries where there is no Amnesty office. Feeling connected to a global movement inspired her to organize Nigeria's first ever Write for Rights event in 2011, and she'll organize more this year.**

Do you live in a country without an Amnesty office? This video explains how to organize your own Write for Rights events this December: http://bit.ly/W4RsEvents.

© Chijioke Ugwu Clement

'I'LL NEVER FORGET THEIR VOICES'

Jerryme Corre's story is another example of how police in the Philippines torture people without ever being held responsible. By putting them in the spotlight, we can help stop this.

"They came on motorcycles. They started running towards me and forced me to lie face down," says Jerryme. "Then they kicked and punched me. I asked them, 'Who are you? Are you the police? If you are, tell me what my crime is. Do you have a warrant?' But they only said I did not have the right to ask questions."

Those terrifying moments replay in Jerryme Corre's mind, three years on, as he languishes in a humid prison cell, sentenced for drug possession – a charge he denies. They were the 34-year-old driver's last minutes of freedom.

What happened to Jerryme next, as the officers tried to force a confession, is common in a country where police use torture on a massive scale and go unpunished. "They put cloth over my mouth and poured water down it. I felt like I was drowning – I could no longer breathe. Then they drenched my body with water and gave me electric shocks, over and over."

RAISE YOUR VOICE

No officer has ever been held accountable for torture in the Philippines. But there is hope for change, as thousands of you raise your voices. Only in June this year, after receiving letters from Amnesty members, the authorities opened an investigation into the torture of Alfreda Disbarro, a 32-year-old single mother.

"I will never forget their voices," admits Jerryme. The memories will be slow to fade. But with justice comes healing, and the possibility that police finally face the law for their actions. As Jerryme said to the officer who beat him: "You were sworn to protect the people, people like me."

WRITE A LETTER, CHANGE HIS LIFE >>>

Moses Akatugba was 16 when he was arrested. He told Amnesty he was hung up for hours, beaten, shot at and had his fingernails pulled out. He was then forced to sign a pre-written confession for armed robbery. Last year he was sentenced to death, despite the fact that he was a child when he was arrested.

Write to the Governor of Delta State, Emmanuel Uduaghan, and demand that he commute Moses' death sentence, and fully investigate Moses' allegations that he was tortured.

Start your message 'His Excellency Dr Emmanuel Uduaghan' and send it to:
Governor of Delta State, Office of the Governor,
Government House, Asaba, Delta State, Nigeria

Email: info@emmanueluduaghan.com.ng
www.facebook.com/euduaghan
Twitter: @euduaghan

Take action online: www.amnesty.org/writeforrights

WRITE A LETTER, CHANGE HIS LIFE >>>

Call on the Philippine National Police to open a prompt, impartial and thorough investigation into Jerryme's torture allegations.

Start your letter 'Dear Inspector General' and send it to:
Police Director Alexander Roldan
Acting Inspector General
Internal Affairs Service
Philippine National Police Compound
Camp General Crame
Quezon City
Metro Manila
Philippines 1100

Email: isapd@pnp.gov.ph, niasprd@yahoo.com.ph, rias_ncr@pnp.gov.ph

Take action online: www.amnesty.org/writeforrights

© Carlos Becerra

‘YOU COULD FEEL THE DANGER’

Daniel Quintero, a 21-year-old student from Venezuela, never imagined that he would end up being tortured after going to an anti-goverment demonstration. He tells us what happened, and how he is doing now.

“I decided to go out on to the streets to protest in February 2014 simply because there is a group of people in our country who don’t respect other people’s way of thinking.

“The atmosphere felt like a war – you could feel the danger, too much adrenaline. There were 100 security officers in the street in front of me with shields, just because we think differently. “I was hoping the situation would calm down but that didn’t happen.”

Instead, Daniel was arrested by members of Venezuela’s national guard: “They kicked and punched me in the face and ribs, and hit me on the forehead with the butts of their guns.”

BEATINGS AND THREATS

He was stripped down to his underwear, handcuffed and forced to spend nine hours doubled up with his hands touching his ankles. If he moved, they beat him.

At one point, the commanding officer told Daniel they were going to burn him. “He had a can of petrol, wires and matches. The whole army surrounded me while he hit me nine times with his baton.” Daniel was also threatened with rape.

“You’d never expect something like this to happen to you, that this could come out of humanity. These archaic methods from eras gone – this physical harm that’s done for no reason – it is inhumane. We should be free of this now.

NEW UNDERSTANDING

“The torture and aggression affected me physically, but spiritually, it has strengthened me. It gives you more tools to continue fighting, and no hate. On the contrary, it gives you a new understanding. If I could say something to my torturers I would say: ‘I forgive you’.

“To come out of this experience to know I have the backing of many people through Amnesty is magnificent. I don’t know how to show my gratitude except to say thanks, many thanks.”

Daniel is one of many who have reported being tortured in Venezuela. The authorities appear to have targeted people they believe took part in protests across the country in February 2014.

***Above*: Security forces take to the streets in Tachira State, Venezuela, following pro- and anti-government demonstrations in February 2014.**

WRITE A LETTER, CHANGE HIS LIFE >>>

Urge Venezuela’s President to order a full, independent investigation into Daniel’s torture allegations and bring those responsible to justice.

Start your letter ‘Dear President’ and send it to:
Sr. Nicolás Maduro Moros, President of Venezuela
Final Avenida Urdaneta
Esq. De Bolero
Palacio de Miraflores, Caracas
Distrito Capital, Venezuela

Twitter: @NicolasMaduro
Take action online: www.amnesty.org/writeforrights

‘MY SON IS NOT A SPY’

© Private

Uzbekistan is one of the world’s most authoritarian states, where speaking out is dangerous. But almost nine years after his son Erkin was accused of spying, and then tortured and jailed, Aidzhan Musaev has decided it’s time to share their story.

By someone’s design, nine precious years of my son’s life have been stolen. It is my duty as a father to defend my wrongly accused son and stand up for justice.

Over the last nine years, I have written countless letters to the authorities. Because of the risk, I don’t allow anyone to work on this case and I write to the authorities myself. I am an elderly man and I fear for the safety of my other children and grandchildren. I spent a year trying to get an appointment with the Prosecutor General but he wouldn’t see me.

But Write for Rights gives us great hope that attention will finally be drawn to Erkin’s case. We’ll make every effort to get justice.

POLITICAL GAMES

In 2006 Erkin was arrested as he was boarding a flight to Kyrgyzstan, where he was planning to attend a conference as part of his work with the UN Development Programme. A file containing sensitive information had been planted in his luggage.

From that moment, we knew nothing of his whereabouts. We didn’t even know if he was alive. Eventually, after 10 days, we found out that he was being held at the National Security Service. It would be four more months until we could see him.

While we had been searching for Erkin, he was being brutally tortured. For a month, he was beaten daily and interrogated nightly. He was told that his family had denounced him. He was forced to sign a confession to spying.

Words cannot express what we felt when we found out what had happened to him. It was grief, frustration, incomprehension and pain. But also – a determination to get justice. Maybe we have become part of some sort of political game and we cannot do anything about it.

CHANGED BY TORTURE

Erkin was known by his friends and colleagues as an honest and decent man. He always did his best to help his loved ones, and this has not changed. But after nine years in prison, there’s no doubt that he has been changed spiritually. The torture and psychological pressure have aged him and he needs serious medical attention. In prison, at best he gets aspirin. Usually he is just ignored.

Each year we are allowed four long visits (two days each), four short visits (two hours each) and to bring him six parcels (10kg each). Erkin loves learning and he once asked me to bring him a French book in order to teach himself the language (his English is almost perfect). But even a simple French course book caused him problems in prison. The prison officials – themselves mostly illiterate – called him a spy for reading foreign books.

Despite everything, Erkin is not giving up hope that justice will prevail. In one of his most recent letters he asked us to see this case through to the end whatever happens to him and to restore his honour.

***Above*: The parents of Erkin Musaev at home in Uzbekistan. Erkin’s father, an 81-year-old retired geology teacher, has spent nine years campaigning at great risk for his son’s release.**

WRITE A LETTER, CHANGE HIS LIFE >>>

Write to the Uzbekistani authorities and demand Erkin’s release on the grounds that repeated calls for a fair retrial have been ignored for more than eight years. Call for a full investigation into the allegations that he was tortured in custody.

Start your letter ‘Dear Prosecutor General’ and send it to:
Prosecutor General Rashidzhon Kodirov
Prosecutor General’s Office of Uzbekistan
ul. Gulyamova 66
Tashkent 700047
Uzbekistan

Take action online: www.amnesty.org/writeforrights

TOGETHER WE CAN STOP ~~TORTURE~~

Thousands of people worldwide are pushing for Daniel, Erkin, Jerryme, Moses and many others like them to get justice as part of our global Stop Torture campaign.
Join us! www.amnesty.org/stoptorture

‘One pen can change the world’

MALALA YOUSAFZAI
2014 NOBEL PEACE PRIZE LAUREATE AND
AMNESTY AMBASSADOR OF CONSCIENCE

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL