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## Myanmar Releases

Prisoners of conscience **Zarganar, Su Su Nway** and **Zaw Htet Ko Ko** have been released in Myanmar's latest mass prisoner amnesty. "We are celebrating the freedom of people for whom we have campaigned for years," said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific Director, on 14 October. "The now confirmed release of more than 200 political prisoners this month shows that all those letters and petitions can have a real impact in individual cases. But the work is far from over while many more political prisoners remain behind bars. This amnesty should inspire the international community to keep pressuring Myanmar to release all political prisoners immediately."



Cartoon by journalist **Prageeth Eknaligoda**, who has been made to "disappear" in Sri Lanka (see next page to take action on his behalf)

### Another Anniversary

The 16th of October 2011 was the 5th anniversary of the death in Myanmar custody — in the 9th year of a 59-year sentence — of student leader & prisoner of conscience **Thet Win Aung**, 34, whose case was in the care of Group 549 in Waterville. Maine Amnesty members continue to mourn the loss of his life.

**Zarganar**, 50, Myanmar's best-known comedian, had been serving a 35-year prison sentence at the time of his release and reportedly had been suffering health problems in prison. He was jailed in 2007 for leading a private donor movement in response to the government's blocking of foreign aid in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis.

Labor rights activist **Su Su Nway**, 39, had been serving a seven and a half-year sentence for treason and other vaguely defined security offenses. Her acts of political protest even while in prison caused her to be sent to a jail near the border with India's Nagaland, far from her family and medical treatment, despite her heart problem. She had been arrested in November 2007 in the wake of the "Saffron Revolution", after putting up an anti-government banner near a hotel where the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar was staying.

Earlier, **Su Su Nway** was the first person in Myanmar to sue the government successfully for subjecting her and her village to forced labor; she was imprisoned for eight months in retaliation.

**Zaw Htet Ko Ko**, 30, had been serving a 10-year sentence for "inciting offences against public tranquility" because of his involvement in the 2007 "Saffron Revolution" protests as a member and official photographer of the "88 Generation Students" group. His father, **U Aung Myint**, a political exile living in the Netherlands, told Amnesty International that he had asked his son in the past if he understood the risks of political activism. His son replied: "Yes, I've considered everything about dangers. If I don't do what I'm doing, who will do it for the Burmese people?"



# Banned Books Week 2011



## Sri Lanka

### Prageeth Eknaligoda

Journalist, cartoonist and political analyst Prageeth Eknaligoda disappeared from Homagama, near the capital, Colombo, shortly after leaving work at the Lanka-e-News office on 24 January 2010.



His wife, Sandya Eknaligoda, was taken into custody for several hours when she went to lodge a complaint with the Homagama Police on 25 January. She believes her husband was abducted by the government because of his criticism of President Rajapaksa.

Shortly before his disappearance, Prageeth Eknaligoda had completed a comparative analysis of the two main candidates, coming out in favour of the opposition candidate, Sarath Fonseka (who lost in the election, when President Rajapaksa was re-elected). In the days leading up to his disappearance, Mr. Eknaligoda had told a close friend that he believed he was being followed. Local residents reported seeing a white van without number plates close to his house around the time he went missing on 24 January.

Prageeth Eknaligoda had previously been abducted in August 2009 by a group who also arrived in a white van; that time, he was released the following day. White vans have been used in many abductions and enforced disappearances in Sri Lanka, particularly since 2006, when the security forces and allied paramilitary groups stepped up attacks on government critics.

There still has been no evidence of a proper, effective investigation into the disappearance of Prageeth Eknaligoda.

Please call on the Sri Lankan government to conduct a thorough investigation into the disappearance of Prageeth Eknaligoda, to make the results of the investigation public, and to hold accountable those found responsible for the disappearance; also urge an end to the climate of impunity that has allowed a long campaign of intimidation and violence against independent journalists in Sri Lanka.

His Excellency  
President Mahinda Rajapaksa  
Presidential Secretariat  
Colombo 1  
Sri Lanka

Ambassador Jaliya Wickramasuriya  
Embassy of the Democratic  
Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka  
2148 Wyoming Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20008

Salutation: *Your Excellency*

Salutation: *Your Excellency*

## Iran

### Isa Saharkhiz

The health of Isa Saharkhiz, 58, a prominent reformist commentator & journalist, has deteriorated alarmingly during his two years as a prisoner of conscience, and his period of incarceration is being lengthened.



Isa Saharkhiz is the co-founder of Iran's Association for the Defense of Press Freedom. He is the former editor of the monthly magazine *Aftab* and the newspaper *Eghtesad*, both suspended in 2004 and 2005 respectively.

Isa Saharkhiz's family home in Tehran was raided on 20 June 2009 while he was travelling in Northern Iran, and campaign materials for the opposition presidential candidate he was supporting were confiscated. On 2 July, he posted an article on the news website Rooz in which he criticized the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei. On 4 July, Isa Saharkhiz was arrested in Northern Iran and taken to an undisclosed location. He has said that his ribs were broken as a result of beatings sustained during his arrest.

He has a torn eardrum and has lost mobility of his right leg for unknown reasons but has been denied medical leave to seek treatment. In late November/early December 2010, he was reported to have been suffering from severe pain; it was discovered that he was bleeding internally and a medical team was brought to perform surgery on him in the prison clinic. In June 2011, Isa Saharkhiz was among several prisoners who went on a hunger strike to protest against the deaths of Haleh Sahabi and Hoda Saber. He was transferred to the Raja'i Shahr Prison clinic on 27 June 2011 because of his deteriorating health.

Although in May 2010 the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found Isa Saharkhiz's detention to be arbitrary and requested that the government release him immediately and unconditionally, he was sentenced to three years' imprisonment in September 2010 on charges of "insulting the leadership" and "propaganda against the system". On 5 August 2011, he was sentenced to an additional two years in prison for his former journalistic activities.

Addressing the Head of the Judiciary, **please call for the immediate & unconditional release of prisoner of conscience Isa Saharkhiz**, held solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression. He should be allowed immediate access to any medical treatment he may require. Unlawful restrictions on freedom of expression and association in Iran should be removed, in accordance with international standards.

Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani  
Office of the Head of the Judiciary  
Pasteur Street, Vali Asr Avenue,  
South of Serah-e Jomhuri  
Tehran 1316814737  
Islamic Republic of Iran  
Salutation: *Your Excellency*

## BANNED BOOKS WEEK UPDATES

**RUSSIA** - Elena Milashina, a journalist and former colleague of Anna Politkovskaya at the *Novaya Gazeta* newspaper, says that the situation for journalists and human rights defenders has taken a turn for the worse after Politkovskaya's killing five years ago. "The number of journalists and human rights activists who are killed and beaten every year has steadily grown. Few of these crimes have been investigated." She believes Anna Politkovskaya's murder has silenced many Russian journalists. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 22 journalists and media workers were killed in Russia between 2000 and 2010. Amnesty repeatedly has documented that very little is being done to address the threats Russian journalists face and ensure the attacks are effectively investigated (AI Web News, 14 October).

**SYRIA** - Razan Zaitouneh, 34, a lawyer and journalist who was forced into hiding in April, after defying the Syrian authorities' crackdown in dissent, has won the 2011 Anna Politkovskaya Award, given to a woman human rights defender standing up for victims in a conflict zone. "Razan Zaitouneh's bravery and commitment to human rights have been highlighted during the current crisis in Syria," said AI (7 October). The award is for her extraordinary contribution to human rights over the past decade, and particularly for her role in the anti-government movement in Syria since protests began in March. She has monitored and documented the human rights situation in the country for the Local Coordination Committees, a network responsible for planning and organizing peaceful protests. Before the outbreak of popular protests, she documented human rights violations and provided legal support to the families of political prisoners. After winning the award, she told Amnesty: "Living in suspense of what may happen next is not easy. But we all know the price I'm paying is modest in comparison to others. Some paid with their lives and others [including her husband] suffered imprisonment, torture and other ill-treatment."

Kurdish writer and pro-reform activist, Hussein 'Essou, 59, was placed in incommunicado detention after arrest in al-Hasakah, north-eastern Syria, on 3 September. He suffers from a heart condition and may not be receiving the regular medication he requires.

**OMAN** - Two newspaper journalists were sentenced to five months in prison for "insulting" the country's justice minister, Amnesty International said on 22 September. A court in Musat, the capital, also ordered the closing of Yusuf al-Haj and Ibrahim al-Maamary's newspaper, *Azzamn*, for one month.

**SUDAN** - On 2 September, Sudanese activist and poet Abdelmoniem Raham was arrested in Ed Damazin, Blue Nile state. At last word, he was being detained by the National Intelligence and Security Service and reportedly has been tortured.

**ETHIOPIA** - Journalist Eskinder Nega and four opposition politicians were arrested on 14 September. Journalist Sileshi Hagos was arrested on 9 September. They been detained on accusations of involvement with the Ginbot 7 group, a banned political party. All are vocal critics of the government and recently had undertaken public or written activities calling for reform.

**TAJIKISTAN** - On 14 October 2011, a court in the northern city of Khujand in the Soghd region, Tajikistan, found journalist Makhmadyusuf Ismoilov — who wrote for the weekly newspaper *Nuri Zindagi* (Ray of Starlight), based in the capital of Tajikistan, Dushanbe — guilty of the charges brought against him of libel, insult and inciting hatred. His fellow journalists believe that the charges relate to an article he wrote about the local authorities in Asht, criticizing law-enforcement agencies in particular and the lack of justice in the district. He will appeal, and Amnesty International will continue to monitor his case.

At the same time and place, Tajik BBC journalist Urunboy Usmonov, arrested in June 2011, was found guilty of charges brought against him, which implicate him in criminal activities related to banned religious groups. He was sentenced to three years' imprisonment but released immediately under an amnesty. He, too, will appeal, and we will monitor.

Thanks to those who took action on behalf of both journalists.

# ARMS TRADE TREATY / MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA

## failure of export controls

The USA, Russia and European countries supplied large quantities of weapons to repressive governments in the Middle East and North Africa before this year's uprisings despite having evidence of a substantial risk that they could be used to commit serious human rights violations, Amnesty International said on 19 October in a new report, *Arms Transfers To The Middle East And North Africa: Lessons For An Effective Arms Trade Treaty*, examining arms transfers to Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen since 2005. "These findings highlight the stark failure of existing arms export controls, with all their loopholes, and underline the need for an effective global Arms Trade Treaty that takes full account of the need to uphold human rights," said Helen Hughes, AI's principal arms trade researcher.

"Governments that now say they stand in solidarity with people across the Middle East and North Africa are the very same as those who until recently supplied the weapons, bullets and military and police equipment that were used to kill, injure, and arbitrarily detain thousands of peaceful protesters in states such as Tunisia and Egypt and are even now being deployed by security forces in Syria and Yemen."

The main arms suppliers to the five countries included in the report were Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, the UK, and the USA. At least 11 states have provided military assistance or allowed exports of weaponry, munitions and related equipment to Yemen, where some 200 protesters have lost their lives in 2011. These include Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, the Russian Federation, Turkey, Ukraine, the UK, and the USA.

Despite a continuing brutal crackdown against protesters, the international community has failed to take strong action to stem arms transfers to Yemen.

Obtaining arms data for Syria is difficult, as few governments officially report on their arms trade with the Syrian government. But it is known that the biggest arms supplier to Syria is the Russian Federation with reportedly about 10 per cent of all Russian arms exports going there. Russia does not publish an annual report on its arms exports meaning that its arms transfers to the region cannot be quantified. India authorized the supply of armoured vehicles to Syria, while France sold munitions between 2005 and 2009.

Amnesty International has identified 10 states whose governments licensed the supply of weaponry, munitions and related equipment to Colonel Mu'ammar al-Gaddafi's Libyan regime since 2005, including Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Spain, and the UK. During the conflict, al-Gaddafi forces have committed war crimes and abuses which may amount to crimes against humanity. Spanish cluster submunitions and MAT-120 cargo mortar projectiles, licensed for sale in 2007, were found by AI in Misratah when it was being shelled by al-Gaddafi forces earlier this year. This

equipment is now prohibited by the Cluster Munitions Convention which Spain signed less than a year after supplying the submunitions to Libya. Much of the heavy weaponry found in Libya by Amnesty International researchers appears to have been manufactured during the Soviet-era – Russian or Soviet-made, especially the Grad rockets which are inherently indiscriminate and have been used extensively by both sides during the conflict. Some of the munitions found were also Chinese, Bulgarian and Italian such as the Type 72 anti-tank mines, rocket fuses and 155mm artillery rounds, respectively.

At least 20 states have sold and supplied small arms, ammunition, tear gas and riot control agents, and other equipment to Egypt. The USA has been the biggest supplier – annually providing \$1.3 billion. Others include Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Italy, and Switzerland. Shotguns were widely used in Egypt and Bahrain by the security forces with devastating effect.

Although some steps were taken this year to restrict international arms transfers to Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen, existing arms export controls failed to prevent the transfer of arms in the preceding years. "Arms embargoes are usually a case of 'too little too late' when faced with human rights crises," said Helen Hughes. "What the world needs is rigorous case by case evaluation of each proposed arms transfer so that if there is a substantial risk that the arms are likely to be used to commit or facilitate serious human rights violations, then the government must show the red stop light. This proactive 'Golden Rule' is already in the UN draft paper for the Arms Trade Treaty talks which resume at the United Nations in February. If the major arms exporters fail to adopt the Golden Rule, and recklessly continue a 'business as usual' approach, fuelling human rights crises as we have witnessed across the Middle East and North African region this year, it will needlessly shatter lives and undermine global security."



## Libya

### stained by detainee abuse

The new authorities in Libya must stamp out arbitrary detention and widespread abuse of detainees, Amnesty International said on 12 October in a new briefing paper. *Detention Abuses Staining the New Libya* reveals a pattern of beatings and ill-treatment of captured al-Gaddafi soldiers, suspected loyalists, and alleged mercenaries in western Libya. In some cases there is clear evidence of torture in order to extract confessions or as a punishment. "There is a real risk that without firm and immediate action, some patterns of the past might be repeated. Arbitrary arrest and torture were a hallmark of Colonel al-Gaddafi's rule," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, AI's Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa. "We understand that the transitional authorities are facing many challenges, but if they do not make a clear break with the past now, they will effectively be sending out a message that treating detainees like this is to be tolerated in the new Libya."

## Libya justice after Colonel al-Gaddafi

Since late August, armed militia had arrested and detained as many as 2,500 people in Tripoli and al-Zawiya (at the time of the report). Detainees were almost always held without legal orders and mostly without the involvement of the General Prosecution. They were held by local councils, local military councils, or armed brigades – far from the oversight of the Ministry of Justice. Approximately 300 prisoners were interviewed by Amnesty International in August and September. None had been shown any kind of arrest warrant and many were effectively abducted from their homes by unidentified captors carrying out raids of suspected al-Gaddafi fighters or loyalists. Children have been held together with adults and women detainees have been supervised by male guards.

At least two guards — in separate detention facilities — admitted to Amnesty that they beat detainees in order to extract “confessions” more quickly. Researchers found a wooden stick and rope, and a rubber hose, of the kind that could be used to beat detainees, on a detention centre floor. In one detention center they heard the sound of whipping and screams from a nearby cell. AI said that detainees appear to suffer beatings and torture particularly at the start of their detention, being given a “welcome” on arrival.

Sub-Saharan Africans suspected of being mercenaries made up between a third and a half of those detained. Some have been released after no evidence was found to link them to fighting. A man from Niger, initially presented to Amnesty International as a “mercenary and killer”, broke down and explained that he had “confessed” after being beaten nearly continuously for two days. He denied being involved in fighting. Black Libyans — particularly from the Tawargha region, which was a base for al-Gaddafi forces in their efforts to regain control of Misratah — are also particularly vulnerable. Dozens of Tawarghans have been taken from their homes, checkpoints, and even hospitals.

Amnesty International called on the National Transitional Council (NTC) to ensure that people are not detained without orders from the General Prosecution, and to bring detention facilities under the control of the Minister of Justice. Those being held must be allowed to challenge the lawfulness of their detention or should be released. Trial proceedings in western Libya have been suspended since the NTC took control. In eastern Libya, which fell under their control in February, they remain suspended.

In meetings with Amnesty International in September, NTC officials acknowledged concerns over arbitrary detention and ill-treatment, and vowed to do more to get a grip on armed militias and ensure that all those detained enjoy equal protection of the law.

“The NTC has to act urgently to translate their public commitments into action, before such abuses become entrenched and stain the new Libya’s human rights record,” said Hassiba Hadj Saharaoui. “These detainees have in most cases been arrested without a warrant, beaten — and sometimes worse — on arrest and arrival in detention. They are vulnerable to abuse by armed militias who often act on their own initiative. The authorities cannot simply allow this to carry on because they are in a ‘transitional’ phase. These people must be allowed to defend themselves properly or be released.”

The death of Colonel al-Gaddafi would close a chapter of Libya’s history marked by repression and abuse but does not end the story, Amnesty International said on 20 October as the news broke. “The legacy of repression and abuse from Colonel Mu’ammarr al-Gaddafi’s rule will not end until there is a full accounting for the past and human rights are embedded in Libya’s new institutions,” said Hassiba Hadj Saharaoui, AI’s Deputy Director for North Africa & the Middle East. “Colonel al-Gaddafi’s death must not stop his victims in Libya from seeing justice being done. The many Libyan officials suspected of serious human rights violations committed during and before this year’s uprising, including the infamous Abu Salim prison massacre in 1996, must answer for their crimes. The new authorities must make a complete break from the culture of abuse that Colonel al-Gaddafi’s regime perpetuated and initiate the human rights reforms that are urgently needed in the country.” Amnesty called on the NTC to reveal “the full facts” about how Colonel al-Gaddafi died; to conduct a full, independent and impartial inquiry to establish the circumstances; and AI to “ensure that all those suspected of human rights abuses and war crimes, including Colonel al-Gaddafi’s inner circle and family members, are treated humanely and, if captured, given fair trials”.

Later in the month, as video footage and various conflicting accounts emerged, AI Senior Director Claudio Cordone said that “if Colonel al-Gaddafi was killed after his capture, it would constitute a war crime and those responsible should be brought to justice. Investigating whether or not his death was a war crime might be unpopular. However, the NTC must apply the same standards to all, affording justice even to those who categorically denied it to others. Bringing al-Gaddafi to trial would have finally given his numerous victims answers as to why they were targeted and an opportunity for justice and reparations.”

## Syria betrayal at UNSC

Permanent members of the Security Council that used their veto on 4 October to block a binding resolution on Syria have “utterly failed in their responsibilities to protect the Syrian people”, Amnesty International said. “It is shocking that after more than six months of horrific bloodshed on the streets and in the detention centers of Syria, the governments of both Russia and China still felt able to veto what was already a seriously watered down resolution,” said Malcolm Smart, AI’s Middle East & North Africa director. “Those countries which ducked this decision by abstaining must also bear a heavy responsibility for allowing the brutal crackdown on legitimate dissent in Syria to continue unchecked. Attempts to justify this position by referring to the military intervention in Libya is utterly irresponsible. The Syrian people should not have to suffer because of political disagreements about the situation in a different country. [The] veto was nothing short of a betrayal of the Syrian people.”

[continued]

Nine members of the Security Council voted in favor of the draft resolution, which condemned Syria's crackdown on protesters and left open the possibility of sanctions. Permanent members Russia and China used their vetoes to prevent the resolution from being passed, while South Africa, India, Brazil and Lebanon abstained. AI has continued to call on the UN Security Council to take stronger action on Syria, in particular: to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court; to impose an arms embargo on Syria; and to implement an asset freeze against President Bashar al-Assad and his senior associates.

## Syria other developments

On 7 October, three days after the resolution on Syria failed in the UN Security Council, Mesh'al al-Tammo, a prominent Kurdish minority leader and a founding member of Syria's new opposition National Council, was shot dead by unidentified gunmen while lurching at a friend's house near Syria's border with Turkey.

The US authorities' arrest of a man accused of spying on Syrian activists in the country sends a message that the Syrian government's crackdown on opposition has its limits, Amnesty International said on 12 October, when Syrian-born naturalized US citizen Mohamad Anas Haitham Soueid was due to appear before a District Court in Alexandria, Virginia, charged with spying on US-based Syrian activists between April and June of this year and sharing audio and video files with the Mukhabaraat, Syria's intelligence agencies. "It's a very positive development that authorities in the USA have acted on the numerous credible allegations of abuse brought forward by Syrian activists living there," said Neil Sammonds, AI Syria researcher. "Their actions show that the long reach of Syria's intelligence apparatus has its limits. Given the pattern of harassment apparently emanating from Syrian embassies internationally, this investigation and subsequent arrest by the US authorities is precisely the kind of robust action from host governments that we would like to see also in other countries where there is credible information about the threats and harassment faced by Syrian nationals living abroad."

Earlier in October, Amnesty released a briefing paper on the systematic monitoring and harassment of more than 30 Syrian pro-reform activists living in Europe and the Americas in recent months. *The Long Reach of Mukhabaraat* details how embassy officials and others collaborating with the Syrian government have spied on and intimidated activists across eight countries. In some cases, those still living in Syria have been harassed, detained or even tortured following their relatives' participation in pro-reform protests abroad. "The freedoms to gather together with others and to speak one's mind are universal rights that are highly valued in the countries where Syrian activists have reported being monitored and threatened," said Neil Sammonds. "If the host governments' support for these rights is to be credible, they must take concrete action to put an end to Syria's intimidation of peaceful activists."

Meanwhile, the Syrian government has turned hospitals into instruments of repression in its efforts to crush opposition, Amnesty

International said in a new report issued on 25 October. *Health Crisis: Syrian Government Targets the Wounded and Health Workers* documents how wounded patients in at least four government-run hospitals have been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, including by medical workers. Meanwhile, hospital workers suspected of treating protesters and others injured in unrest-related incidents have themselves faced arrest and torture. "It is deeply alarming that the Syrian authorities seem to have given the security forces a free rein in hospitals, and that in many cases hospital staff appear to have taken part in torture and ill treatment of the very people they are supposed to care for," said Cilina Nasser, AI Middle East & North Africa researcher. "Given the scale and seriousness of the injuries being sustained by people across the country, it is disturbing to find that many consider it safer to risk not having major wounds treated rather than going to proper medical facilities." Amnesty found that patients have been assaulted by medical staff, health workers and security personnel in at least the National Hospitals in Baniyas, Homs and Tell Kalakh and the military hospital in Homs. Amnesty International called on the Syrian authorities to give strict and clear instructions to all hospitals to accept and treat all wounded patients without delay, and to prioritize the interests of the patients over any other priorities. "Syrian medical workers are being placed in an impossible situation — forced to choose between treating wounded people and preserving their own safety," said Cilina Nasser. "The Syrian authorities must see sense and urgently act to ensure that all patients are treated equally, without discrimination based on their suspected political loyalties or activities. Anyone, whether a health worker or a member of the security forces, who is suspected of delaying, obstructing or interfering in the work of health workers providing treatment to the wounded must be held to account."

AI also has urged the Syrian Bar Association to desist from disciplining lawyers for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, opinion or assembly. While the Bar Association has a mandate to take disciplinary proceedings against members whose professional conduct falls below the appropriate standard, this must not be interpreted in such a way as to penalize lawyers for pursuing the defense of human rights or for legitimately exercising those rights.



## MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA upheaval ~ other notes

**YEMEN** - The UN Security Council's 21 October condemnation of the ongoing grave human rights violations in Yemen is welcome, but any call for accountability is doomed to fail if officials are granted immunity from investigation for abuses, Amnesty International said. The resolution calls for the signature and implementation of a power-transfer deal on the basis of the Gulf Cooperation Council initiative (GCC) which appears to shield President Ali Abdullah Saleh and his inner circle from any possibility of being investigated or brought to trial. Such immunity would obstruct justice for hundreds of deaths during months of protest in Yemen, as well as a past string of serious human rights violations, including extra-judicial executions and torture.

“The UN Security Council’s efforts and those of the GCC to break the impasse and end the current torment in Yemen are to be lauded, but President Saleh must not be given immunity as a prize for stepping down,” said Malcolm Smart, AI’s Director for the Middle East & North Africa. “If he and others are given legal immunity, it would be a gross betrayal for the many victims of human rights violations under his rule, who still demand reparations and for all those responsible to be brought to justice.”

Amnesty International repeatedly has called on the GCC to remove the immunity clause from its transition proposal. The UN Security Council’s references to such a deal must under no circumstance be interpreted to give immunity to anyone, regardless of rank or affiliation, in our view. Long before this year’s pro-reform protests, the Yemeni government has been responsible for serious human rights violations, including extra-judicial executions, torture, and enforced disappearances. More than 200 protesters have been killed in the crackdown on pro-reform protests that began last February, and attacks on protesters continue in the capital Sana’a.

Dozens of women reportedly were injured in Ta’izz, Yemen’s second-largest city, on 10 October, when government supporters attacked an anti-government rally celebrating Yemeni activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner Tawakkol Karman.

In a report published earlier this year, *Moment of Truth for Yemen*, Amnesty International called on the international community to play a more active role if Yemenis are to receive accountability for human rights violations.

**UAE** - Ahead of national elections on 24 September, four international human rights organizations urged emirate authorities to drop all charges against five activists imprisoned after calling for greater political rights and freedoms. Amnesty International, the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, Front Line Defenders, and Human Rights Watch also requested permission to attend the trial of the five, charged with “publicly insulting” the United Arab Emirates president and other top officials.

**BAHRAIN** - There are fears for the safety of a former vice-president of the Bahrain Teacher’s Association after she was arrested in heavy-handed fashion before dawn on the morning of 18 October, after recently speaking out about earlier abuses. Jalila al-Salman was taken from her home in Bahrain by a force of more than 30 security officials, including riot police, who arrived in seven vehicles. The officials reportedly said that they were enforcing a court order for her arrest though they refused to produce a formal arrest warrant. In September Jalila al-Salman was convicted, on charges that included attempting to overthrow the Bahrain government, after a trial before the military National Safety Court, although she is a civilian. Her appeal is due to be heard in a civilian court on 1 December.

On 6 October, Ahmed al-Jaber al-Qatan, 16, was shot while participating in an anti-government protest near the capital Manama after anti-riot police used shotguns and sound bombs to disperse

protestors. This tragic death “must be independently investigated and those responsible must be brought to justice,” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Deputy Director of AI’s Middle East & North Africa Program. “If it is found that security forces have opened fire on peaceful protesters when they were not in a life threatening situation, that would be yet again another unacceptable case of excessive use of force.”

**SAUDI ARABIA** - Human rights activist Fadhel Maki al-Manasif, 26, was arrested on 2 October in the Eastern Province. He has had no access to a lawyer or been allowed visits from his family. Like many held in custody by the Saudi Arabian authorities, he is at risk of torture and other human rights violations.

Since the end of the Holy month of Ramadan, executions have resumed in Saudi Arabia at an alarming rate, after court proceedings that fall far short of international standards for fair trial. On 7 October, eight Bangladeshi migrant workers were beheaded in public in Riyadh, after having been sentenced to death for the alleged murder of an Egyptian man in April 2007. According to reports, the Egyptian man was killed during a clash between the Bangladeshi workers and a group of men who allegedly were stealing electric cable from a building complex where the Bangladeshis worked. Three other Bangladeshis were sentenced to prison terms and flogging. The beheadings brought the number of executions in Saudi Arabia this year to at least 58, more than double the 2010 figures. Twenty of those executed so far in 2011 were foreign nationals. One of them was a Sudanese man convicted of “sorcery” and put to death in September.

**EGYPT** - Egypt’s Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) must urgently explain how a Coptic protest against religious discrimination turned into a bloodbath, Amnesty International said after deadly protests in Cairo on Sunday, 9 October left at least 25 dead and hundreds wounded. Hospital reports were consistent with video footage that showed military vehicles running over protesters while driving through crowded streets. “One can only wonder what orders were given that could have led to military vehicles running down protesters on the streets,” said Amnesty. “If the military police and other security forces were not acting under orders, it raises questions about their ability to police demonstrations in the first place. Now, Egypt’s SCAF must show it can and will rein in the security forces and ensure they do not use excessive force. Instructions to security forces must be immediately issued and an independent investigation opened.” The latest incident took place against a backdrop of rising sectarian tensions in recent months in Egypt.

**ALGERIA** - The European Union firmly condemned the abduction of three humanitarian workers, two Spaniards and an Italian, from a Sahrawi refugee camp near Tindouf in the south-west of Algeria on 23 October and called for their immediate release (Agence Europe, 24 October).



## Israel/OPT/Gaza prisoner exchange

### Israel-Hamas prisoner swap casts harsh light on detention practices of all sides

The prisoner exchange involving Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit and 477 Palestinian prisoners highlights the need for the humane treatment of all detainees in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), Amnesty International said on 18 October.

“This deal will bring relief to Gilad Shalit and his family after an ordeal that has lasted more than five years. Many Palestinian families will feel a similar sense of relief today when they are reunited with their relatives, many of whom have spent decades under harsh conditions in Israeli detention,” said Malcolm Smart, AI’s Middle East and North Africa Director. “However, more needs to be done to protect the rights of thousands of others who remain in detention. The Israeli authorities, the Hamas de facto administration in Gaza, and the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank must seize this opportunity to ensure respect for the rights of all prisoners and detainees in their custody.”

Amnesty International repeatedly has called on the Hamas authorities not to treat Gilad Shalit as a hostage and a bargaining chip, in violation of their obligations under international humanitarian law. He had been allowed no contact with his family, nor was he allowed access to the International Committee of the Red Cross, despite repeated appeals by Amnesty and other organizations, which made it impossible to verify the conditions of his captivity.

AI also has consistently raised concerns with the Israeli authorities about the prison conditions of Palestinian detainees and the fact that Israel continues to imprison Palestinians from the OPT inside Israel, in violation of its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention. Over 5,200 Palestinians from the West Bank – including East Jerusalem – and the Gaza Strip, which together comprise the OPT, are detained in facilities run by the Israel Prison Service. The vast majority are detained inside Israel. Since 27 September, hundreds of Palestinian prisoners have been on hunger strike in protest against recent punitive measures imposed by the Israeli authorities. Prisoners are demanding that the Israel Prison Service end the arbitrary isolation of prisoners and allow them regular family visits. The fact that they are detained on Israeli territory makes it difficult, if not impossible, for their families to visit them, as the Israeli authorities often refuse to grant them travel permits. Israel suspended family visits for all prisoners from Gaza in June 2007, in a punitive policy that penalizes both the detainees and their families.

“International human rights standards and international humanitarian law guarantee every person deprived of liberty the right to humane and dignified conditions of detention, adequate medical care, and regular family visits,” said Malcolm Smart. “Israel, the Hamas de facto administration, and the Palestinian Authority must ensure that all detainees receive fair and prompt trials meeting international standards, and that judicial rulings on the release of detainees are implemented.”

## Israel/Palestine Authority UN membership and the ICC

### Human rights implications of the Palestinian bid for UN membership

Excerpts from an Amnesty International Q&A Press Statement on 26 September 2011:

Q: ... Will the Palestinian Authority’s statehood bid allow it to ratify international human rights conventions and treaties, including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC)?

A: ... All states are allowed to sign and ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Legal opinion varies on whether further recognition of Palestinian statehood, a General Assembly resolution, or an upgraded status at the UN would allow Palestine to ratify the Rome Statute. However, any of these would bolster Palestinian claims to statehood, enabling the Palestinian Authority to argue that it was eligible to become a party to the ICC.

However, the current political maneuvering surrounding Palestine’s statehood bid could also harm its ability to access the ICC. Media reports have suggested that the EU has proposed upgrading Palestine to a non-member observer state on condition that the Palestinians forgo recourse to the ICC. The EU High Representative, Catherine Ashton, has reportedly proposed creating a new status at the General Assembly which would not allow the PA to ratify the Rome Statute.

Amnesty International opposes any attempts to prevent the Palestinians from accessing the ICC. Such attempts contravene the fundamental principle that justice should be accessible to all. They also seem designed to offer impunity for crimes committed during the 2008-2009 conflict in Gaza and southern Israel, by preventing both Palestinian and Israeli victims from accessing justice through the ICC.

Q: How would the statehood bid affect efforts to pursue accountability for crimes under international law committed during the 2008-2009 conflict in Gaza and southern Israel?

A: Amnesty International has documented evidence that war crimes were committed by both Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups during the 2008-2009 conflict in Gaza and southern Israel. The UN Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict concurred with this assessment. AI has concluded that both the Israeli government and the Hamas de facto administration have failed to conduct credible, independent investigations and failed to prosecute perpetrators of crimes under international law.

In January 2009, the Palestinian Authority submitted a declaration accepting the ICC’s jurisdiction over crimes committed on its territory since July 2002. This declaration would potentially cover all crimes committed in Gaza and southern Israel during the 2008-2009 Gaza conflict. The ICC Prosecutor has been considering the legal implications of this declaration since it was submitted, but no determination has yet been made on its validity. If this or any similar future declaration by the Palestinian Authority were considered valid, the ICC might be able to prosecute crimes committed during the 2008-2009 Gaza conflict.

[continued]

Amnesty International has been calling on the UN General Assembly to urge the Security Council to refer the situation to the ICC. In addition, it has been appealing to all states to investigate and prosecute before their national courts crimes under international law allegedly committed during the conflict by exercising universal jurisdiction....

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## Iran hiking, executing, flogging

In September Amnesty International welcomed as “long overdue” the release of the two young US hikers who had been imprisoned for more than two years in Iran.

The release happened on the same day that a 17-year old convicted of killing an athlete was publicly hanged in the city of Karaj, near Tehran. Amnesty International had called on the authorities to halt the execution, a gross breach of international law. “While we acknowledge the seriousness of the crime for which Alireza Molla-Soltani was convicted, hanging a minor for acting in what appears to be self-defence is wrong and legally dubious,” said AI’s Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui.

According to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, international treaties to which Iran is a state party, sentencing someone under the age of 18 at the time of their offense to death is unlawful. Iran is one of the very few countries still executing juvenile offenders. Two were executed in the southern port of Bandar Abbas in April of this year; Amnesty also received reports that 16-year-old was executed near Hamidiya, Khuzestan province, in April. The authorities did not announce his execution.

As of 20 September, Amnesty International had recorded over 400 executions this year, over 30 of which took place in public. At least 96 executions were reported since the start of that month. Not all of Iran’s executions have been acknowledged by the authorities.

In mid-October Amnesty International renewed our call on the Iranian authorities to stop cruel, inhuman and degrading punishments such as flogging, after a spate of those penalties. We feared that such punishment is being meted out to deter others from criticizing the authorities, particularly in the run-up to parliamentary elections scheduled for March 2012.

Actress Marzieh Vafamehr is one of the most recent persons to face such a sentence, after she was sentenced on or around 8 October to a year in prison and 90 lashes in connection with her appearance in the film *My Tehran for Sale*, in which she appears in one scene without the mandatory head covering and appears to drink alcohol in another, although her husband has denied that she actually drank any. Her lawyer is reported to have appealed against her conviction and sentence. Believed to have been arrested in late June 2011, Marzieh Vafamehr is held in Gharchak

(or Qarchak) Prison in Varamin, where conditions are harsh. If she is held solely on account of the peaceful exercise of her right to freedom of expression, she should be released immediately and unconditionally.

The consumption of alcohol is punishable by 80 lashes for a first offense. Article 640 of the Penal Code also provides for between 3–12 months’ imprisonment and up to 74 lashes for “anyone who exhibits or puts for public viewing ... films ... which offend public decency or morals”. AI considers the imposition of mandatory dress codes to be a violation of the internationally recognized rights to freedom of expression and belief.

In September, Somayeh Tohidlou, a well known blogger and opposition activist, was flogged 50 times for “insulting” the country’s President. Afterwards, she recounted on her blog how she was taken to Tehran’s Evin Prison on 14 September and chained hand and foot before being lashed 50 times. She stated that, while her lashing was largely “symbolic”, it was deeply humiliating.

Also for “insulting the president”, student activist Peyman Aref was flogged 74 times on the day of his release after serving a one year prison sentence for his peaceful political activities. He said that the flogging had been carried in a harsher manner than that prescribed by law. (Under the law, flogging sentences should be carried out more or less harshly, depending on the offense.) He left prison supported by friends, as his injuries left him unable to walk unaided.

Treating “insults” to officials as a criminal offense breaches international law and standards on freedom of expression, which permit only such restrictions as are demonstrably necessary and proportionate for the protection of certain public interests or the rights or reputations of others. It is well established in international human rights law that public officials should tolerate more, rather than less, criticism than private individuals.

The Iranian courts impose flogging sentences for a wide range of other offenses, including sexual offenses, drug-related offenses, drinking alcohol, theft, and “disturbing public order”. Most flogging sentences are imposed on men and are in some cases commuted to cash fines.

Another cruel punishment, amputation, is also provided as punishment for certain cases of theft; cross amputation, where a hand and opposite foot is cut off is one of four possible punishments for the offenses of “enmity against God” and “corruption on earth”. Amnesty International recorded at least 12 cases of amputation for theft in 2010, and one case of cross-amputation.

As judicial punishments, flogging and amputation both violate the international prohibition on torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. According to Article 7 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Iran is a state party, “no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”.

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## EUROPEAN UNION ACTION NETWORK

**LITHUANIA • CIA prisons-** Lithuanian authorities must reconsider a decision not to re-open an investigation into CIA secret prisons on Lithuanian territory, Amnesty International said on 21 October. The announcement by the country's Prosecutor General came just weeks after AI issued a report with new information about extraordinary rendition flights into Lithuania during the time the sites were alleged to be operating. Along with London-based Reprieve, we had urged the authorities to reinstate a criminal investigation into the country's role in the US-led rendition and secret detention programs. Reprieve had provided new information about rendition flights for the report. "The Prosecutor's claim that there's nothing left to investigate is simply not credible," said Julia Hall, an Amnesty expert on counter-terrorism. "There is a significant amount of information, old and new, that has not been fully investigated. The only reason left to refuse to re-open the investigation is fear of the truth." A Lithuanian parliamentary inquiry conducted in 2009 concluded that two secret detention facilities had been prepared to receive detainees. The Prosecutor General began an investigation into the matter in January 2010, but closed it a year later on highly dubious grounds, including the claim that information gathered by the prosecutor's office could not be disclosed because it constituted a "state secret". The new report released by Amnesty International, *Unlock the Truth in Lithuania: Investigate Secret Prisons Now*, argued that critical evidence from the first investigation had not been investigated adequately. A delegation from Amnesty and the Vilnius-based Human Rights Monitoring Institute met government officials in September to urge that the investigation be re-opened. Among the new citations were credible allegations that Abu Zubaydah, currently detained at the US detention facility in Guantánamo, had been detained in a Lithuanian secret prison. "We know people were tortured in facilities just like the ones discovered in Lithuania," said Julia Hall. "If such abuse occurred in Lithuania too, the public has a right to know; the victims have a right to the truth; and the government has an obligation to bring to justice those who were responsible. The Prosecutor's refusal to investigate his country's role in the CIA's secret detention programme is a disgraceful dereliction of duty and a serious violation of Lithuania's human rights commitments."

**SPAIN • ETA** - The announcement by Spain's armed Basque group, ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna) "the definitive cessation of all armed activity" — a 40-year campaign during which over 800 people were killed and thousands injured — provides an opportunity to reform the country's counter-terrorism laws and improve accountability for rights violations, Amnesty International said on 21 October. "Amnesty International has waited a long time for ETA to announce an end to violence," said Nicola Duckworth, Director of the Europe & Central Asia programme. "We have consistently condemned the serious human rights abuses it has carried out in the Basque country and other parts of Spain, including attacks on civilians and indiscriminate attacks. ETA must now live up to its word by ending human rights abuses definitively and permanently. All perpetrators of past abuses must be brought to justice."

"The Spanish government must also ensure that security forces are held accountable for human rights violations they have com-

mitted," said Nicola Duckworth. "Counter-terrorism laws and practices which caused or contributed to these violations must be reformed." Amnesty consistently has called on the Spanish authorities to abolish incommunicado detention and guarantee that detainees are given prompt and effective access to their lawyer of choice. They also should reform the practice of detaining terror suspects and those convicted on terrorism charges in locations far from their families, and should remove ambiguities in the Law on Political Parties that could infringe upon freedom of thought, expression, association or assembly.

Last year ETA announced that it would not carry out any "offensive armed actions". This January it declared a permanent and general ceasefire, open to verification by the international community. On 17 October, an international conference, attended by prominent figures including former Secretary General Kofi Annan, was held in San Sebastian in the Basque Country. ETA's statement of 20 October was made in response to a call made by the conference for an explicit renunciation of armed action.

**UNITED KINGDOM / NORTHERN IRELAND • promise broken** - Amnesty International deplored — as a failure to ensure full accountability — the 12 October announcement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Owen Paterson, that there would be no public inquiry into the 1989 killing of Belfast solicitor Patrick Finucane after all. In an appearance before Parliament, the Secretary accepted the conclusions from previous reports that there had been collusion in Patrick Finucane's killing, and apologized to the family for that, but stated that instead of an inquiry he had instructed a senior lawyer, Sir Desmond de Silva QC, to conduct a review of all the available documentation in relation to the case of Patrick Finucane in order "to produce a full public account of any involvement by the Army, the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the Security Service or other UK Government body in the murder". In our view, this decision reneged on past promises that the government would establish a public inquiry, with powers to compel witnesses and testimony, and conducted with the full participation of family members. AI has urged the government to honor its commitment to hold a public inquiry without further delay.

**UNITED KINGDOM • Dow Olympic contract** - "Chemical giant Dow's high profile contract with London's 2012 Olympic Games is a slap in the face for the survivors of India's Bhopal poison gas disaster who, 27 years on, still wait for justice," Amnesty International said on 24 October. Dow Chemical Company — current owner of Union Carbide Corporation, the company which held a majority share in the Indian subsidiary that owned and operated its plant responsible for the 1984 Bhopal disaster — has been granted a contract to provide a decorative fabric wrap to encircle London's Olympic stadium during the next year's Games. In an open letter, AI has asked the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games to explain how the contract complies with the committee's Sustainable Sourcing Code's social and ethical priorities. "The Olympic Committee's guidelines on sustainable sourcing are meant to place a high priority on environmental, social and ethical issues when procuring material for the Games," said Seema Joshi, AI's Head of Business and Human Rights. "In light of these principles, it is shocking to find out that it has granted such a high

profile contract to a firm which has failed to address one of the worst corporate related human rights disasters of the 20th century. We feel that this denigrates the suffering of Bhopal's survivors, and their long struggle for justice." Thousands of people died and more than 100,000 continue to suffer from health problems as a result of the Bhopal leak. Survivors have not received fair compensation or access to the medical care they need. They and human rights groups have been campaigning for Dow to deal with the ongoing health and environmental impacts of the disaster. The site still awaits clean-up, and a thorough investigation into the leak and its impact is still required. But Dow has consistently rejected any responsibility for liabilities in Bhopal.

**UNITED KINGDOM (Essex) • eviction of Irish Travellers** - The residents of the part of Dale Farm that Basildon Council, the local authority, regards as an "unauthorized development" left their homes en masse on 20 October, in order to avoid confrontation with bailiffs contracted by the Council to carry out a forced eviction. The eviction is expected to last a few weeks. The Irish Traveller residents issued a statement outlining their intention to walk out peacefully with their dignity. Activists who had camped out at Dale Farm in support of the residents left the site at the same time. On 19 October, Essex Police began an operation to clear access to the site in order to enable bailiffs who had been contracted by Basildon Council to carry out the forced eviction. The operation began after the Court of Appeal ruled on 17 October that the authorities could proceed with the eviction. During the police operation there were confrontations between police and activists supporting the Dale Farm residents; Essex Police confirmed that 39 people were arrested during the confrontations. It remains unclear where former residents of Dale Farm will make their next homes.

**HUNGARY • Roma** - AI contributed information during the UN Human Rights Council's recent Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Hungary, and welcomed Hungary's engagement with the UPR and its support for several important recommendations, including adoption of measures to curtail discrimination and to promote equal opportunities for disadvantaged and marginalized groups, such as Roma. We continue to press for full and effective investigation and prosecution of racially motivated crimes in Hungary.

**SLOVAKIA • Roma** - Political complexities (mostly related to the European financial crisis) have occasioned temporary suspension of our Slovakia actions concerning discrimination against Roma, while the IS continues to monitor the situation.

## CENTRAL AMERICA ACTION NETWORK

**GUATEMALA • eviction** - In mid-October, members were alerted that 14 Q'echi indigenous communities in Guatemala, who were forcibly evicted in March 2011, had been told that the Guatemalan government won't support or protect them, leaving up to 800 families in the Valle de Polochic in northeastern Guatemala at risk of being attacked and without access to adequate food, water and housing. On 14 September, community representatives submitted a report to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights detailing a series of attacks, threats and killings that they have suffered between March and September 2011.

**MEXICO • posting** - Journalist Maria de Jesus Bravo Pagola and teacher Gilberto Martinez Vera, who had been detained and charged with terrorism and sabotage after being accused of posting messages on Twitter and Facebook, were released without charge on 21 September after the state governor ordered the prosecution halted. Both expressed gratitude for support from the international community and pressure put on the authorities by activists from all over the world. Many thanks to those who sent appeals. • **hunger strike** - Amnesty has called on the authorities to conduct a full review of the legal cases against indigenous prisoners on hunger strike in Chiapas since 29 September 2011. According to available evidence, their detention, trial and convictions were marred by irregularities and abuses, including allegations of ill-treatment and torture. We believe that they should be retried in accordance with international fair trial standards or released. AI is also concerned that the 20 October transfer of one of the leading strikers is in direct reprisal for his role and that authorities have employed threats & intimidation in order to stop prisoners from continuing their protest. According to inmates, the only woman prisoner on strike has been threatened with removal of her young child from her care. Other participants have reported that they have been threatened with forced feeding. AI is calling on authorities to provide medical attention in accordance with the wishes of those participating in the protest and refrain from resorting to forced feeding. Forcible feeding of a mentally competent hunger-striker, carried out without medical supervision or before there is any plausible medical rationale for it, is unjustifiable. • **death threats** - Chiapas community activists Margarita Martinez and Adolfo Guzman Ordaz received a new death threat on 20 October, despite having police outside their house, as ordered by the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights following previous threats and a kidnapping. We are calling on the authorities to ensure effective and immediate protection for the couple & their children, and for a full review of existing measures in accordance with of their wishes, and are urging a thorough and impartial investigation into the latest death threat and other threats received since 2009, with those responsible brought to justice. • **intimidation of human rights defenders** - Two human rights defenders in Tehuacan, Puebla state, who have been representing staff in an industrial dispute, were threatened in early October and are at risk of further threats and intimidation. In addition to seeking appropriate investigation and protective measures in this case, we are calling on the authorities to implement an effective protection program for all Mexican human rights defenders at risk — in consultation with civil society — as stipulated in the presidential agreement signed on 6 July 2011. • **intimidation of migrants' rights defenders** - This autumn, migrants' rights defenders working at a shelter in Tenosique, Southern Mexico have been threatened and intimidated by state police and members of the military. • **attacks on migrants** - In October the beaten body of a female migrant from Honduras was found near the San Juan Diego migrants' shelter in Lecheria, Mexico state. AI is gravely concerned about migrants travelling through the area, where criminal gangs prey on them and operate with impunity; the authorities have not done enough to improve protection for migrants.

**HONDURAS • abduction** - At the end of September, the fate of abducted Honduran community leader Jose Reynaldo Cruz Palma was still unknown.

## USA

As this newsletter is being prepared, the Senate is expected to vote soon on deplorable Guantánamo detention provisions in the 2012 National Defense Authorization Act. On 24 October, leading members of the Senate Intelligence and Judiciary Committees, Senators Feinstein and Leahy, sent a letter to Majority Leader Reid opposing the provisions (Associated Press). Three days earlier, a close vote defeated an appropriations amendment by Senator Ayotte that would block fair federal trials for terror suspects, but Maine's Senators voted in favor of it. This was noted in *NY Times* & *LA Times* editorials on 22 October, strongly supporting federal trials.

In mid-October, the UN special rapporteur on torture, Juan Mendez, called on nations to end lengthy solitary confinement in prisons, saying it can cause serious damage and amount to torture. It is used for reasons ranging from punishment to protection of prisoners from fellow inmates (briefly admissible under certain limited circumstances) but is subject to widespread abuse, he warned. For example, he cited isolation in China on national security grounds. In a written report submitted to the General Assembly, he also described as "problematic" the use of super maximum security jails where solitary confinement is routine, citing the United States, where he said between 20,000 and 25,000 people are being held in isolation (Reuters, 18 October 2011). Solitary confinement "can amount to torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment when used as a punishment, during pretrial detention, indefinitely or for a prolonged period, [and] for persons with mental disabilities or juveniles," he told the UN General Assembly's human rights committee. Whatever it's called in different places, "solitary confinement should be banned by states as a punishment or extortion (of information) technique", Mendez said.

Ahead of former President George W. Bush's visit to Canada on 20 October, Amnesty International today urged Canadian authorities to arrest and either prosecute or extradite him for his role in torture. "Canada is required by its international obligations to arrest and prosecute former President Bush given his responsibility for crimes under international law including torture," said Susan Lee, AI Americas Director. "As the US authorities have, so far, failed to bring [him] to justice, the international community must step in. A failure by Canada to take action during his visit would violate the UN Convention against Torture and demonstrate contempt for fundamental human rights." Amnesty International submitted a memorandum to the Canadian authorities on 21 September 2011 that makes a substantial case for the former president's legal responsibility for a series of human rights violations that took place during the CIA's secret detention program between 2002 and 2009 – include torture (which he has admitted specifically) and other cruel, inhuman & degrading treatment and enforced disappearances. AI's submission presents further evidence of torture and other crimes under international law committed against detainees held under US military custody in Guantánamo, Afghanistan and Iraq. While Bush was on Canadian soil, a representative of the Canadian Centre for International Justice asked the courts to approve a draft indictment against him, a move supported by a letter signed by more than 50 individuals and human rights organizations, including Amnesty International (The Canadian Press, 21 October).

## local notes . . .

- **AIUSA Northeast Regional Director Joshua Rubenstein** was interviewed about AI's position on George Bush's visit to Canada by Don Cookson of Zone Radio in Bangor. A separate interview dealt with concerns about the use of Tasers.

- MOFGA reports 59,000 **Common Ground Fairgoers** in Unity this September. Many of them visited the AI-Maine table in the "Social & Political Action" tents. It was organized and overseen by **Travis Chapman**. His report:

*This year's tabling for Amnesty International at the Common Ground Country Fair went very well. Among postcards and petitions, 1045 signatures were collected. This year's actions focused on many petitions about Banned Books Week cases, along with other individuals such as Aleksei Sokolov (Russia), Dr Ali Lakhdar-Chaouch (Algeria), Truong Quoc Huy (Viet Nam). There was a wide variety of postcard actions ranging from abolishing the death penalty in Ghana, to individual prisoners of conscience, and Banned Books Week. We heard numerous questions about Troy Davis, the Fair being only days after his execution. Sadness of his passing seemed to be the general mood of the public at our booth.*

*Several people asked about AI in Portland, and were guided to sign up for AI-Maine's newsletter, but a positive trend all the same. Every copy of AI Maine's annual report was taken. We sold all but one of the remaining "Free Range People" T-shirts from last year, so maybe we can create another for next year!*

*This year's volunteers were Debbie Huck, Mitch Kihn, David Jenney, Ida Koller, Stella Chapman (our 9-month-old baby, whose smile brought numerous people to the booth!), Mollie Schmidt, Fiona Boyd, Nora Willauer, Hannah Haendschke, Jennifer Oddleifson, Martha Grant, Ellen Pariser and husband, Abby Blakely, Fiona Fisher, and Sarah Haselton. Thanks to all the volunteers for making this year go smoothly and providing a positive attitude at our booth.*



Mitch Kihn and Debbie Huck at the Common Ground Country Fair

## ... local notes



Nora Willauer  
at the Common Ground  
Country Fair in Unity



Shenna Bellows, Executive Director of Maine Civil Liberties Union,  
speaking during Colby Week of Action

• **Fiona Boyd** blogs on the **Watershed School** website (26 September): *The Watershed Amnesty International Group is off to a great start for the 2011-2012 school year! [At] our first meeting, [while] ... enjoying pizza, we signed and sent Urgent Actions to the Head of State of Azerbaijan, watched several videos on the importance of Amnesty's work, and established an agenda ...*

*... Nora, Hannah, Teal, Clio, and myself traveled all the way to Unity to volunteer at the Amnesty booth at the Common Ground Fair. We worked the booth from 3-6pm, urging passersby to sign petitions and postcards, and informing the curious of Amnesty's work. It was a rewarding experience, and a lot of fun. ...*

*I am excited for another great year with the Watershed Group!*

• In September, **Colby College AI's** Week of Action for Troy Davis reportedly stirred a strong activist spirit on campus. Over 60 people (students and faculty) showed up for the education session/talk & film, "most of whom were actively engaged in the dialogue, says coordinator **Aquib Yacoob** (below); "our students were highly motivated, and horrified at such a grave act of injustice towards a fellow human being — many still are."



Student testing mock execution chair during Colby Week of Action

• In September, the **Bowdoin College AI** group co-sponsored a talk by the authors of "Crossing Zero: The Af-Pak story". On 12 October, they hosted Don Kraus, CEO of DC-based Citizens for Global Solutions, speaking on "Tribalism, Globalism, and the Responsibility to Protect". Members plan to attend the AIUSA NE Regional Conference in Boston (see calendar below).



On 13 October, the Colby AI group was involved in presentation of a talk by Sarah Ray and Donovan Kennedy, co-founders of Yobel Market, titled "Redemption Song: How Lives are Transformed by Addressing Slavery and Injustice in Global Supply Chains". The group also plans to host a speaker on immigrant rights and the DREAM Act, and to lobby on that issue.

## calendar

**NOVEMBER 10 - Death Penalty Event** - Screening of "The Thin Blue Line" plus speakers (Bowdoin Professor Selinger and Jonathan Gaither of Maine Civil Liberties Union) - 7:30 pm, Beam classroom, Visual Arts Center, Bowdoin College, Brunswick

**NOVEMBER 12 - NE Regional Conference** - Boston University; speakers will include Colby College Oak Fellow Fatima Burnad from India and Sowore Omoyele, former POC from Nigeria

**DECEMBER 10 - Human Rights Day**

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Information cutoff date for this issue: 25 October 2011

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<b>MONTHLY MEETINGS:</b>		
<p><b><u>Group 169 - Bath/Brunswick</u></b></p> <p><b>6:00, 4th Monday of month</b> Basement Conference Room Bath City Hall, 55 Front Street</p> <p>Group 169 ~ 442-7137 PO Box 203, Bath, ME 04530</p>	<p><b><u>Group 549 - Waterville</u></b></p> <p><b>6:30, 2nd Monday of month</b> St Mark's Church, Eustis Parkway Waterville</p> <p>Group 549 ~ 453-7075 522 Norridgewock Rd, Fairfield, ME 04937</p>	<p><b>STUDENT GROUPS!</b> Register for the school year at &lt;<a href="http://www.amnestyusa.org">www.amnestyusa.org</a>&gt;</p>
<p><b>Newsletter Editor &amp; Area Coordinator for Maine:</b> Thesil Morlan (207-832-6863) &lt;<a href="mailto:thesil@midcoast.com">thesil@midcoast.com</a>&gt;</p>		<p><b>Student Area Coordinator:</b> Aquib Yacoob &lt;<a href="mailto:asyacoob@colby.edu">asyacoob@colby.edu</a>&gt;</p>

Amnesty International focuses on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical & mental integrity, freedom of conscience & expression, and freedom from discrimination, while promoting all human rights. Funded by donations, Amnesty has 3 million members and supporters in 150 countries. Its multi-national staff is headquartered in London. AI-Maine coordinators are volunteers.