

WIRED

FOR PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS
AUGUST 2011 SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

50
YEARS

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL

50 YEARS OF DEFENDING RIGHTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA



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“Some pro-Israeli government groups literally count the number of words Amnesty International has published on Israel in a given year.”



“It is astonishing how consistent human rights violations have been from the mid-1960s until now, despite the dramatic political changes.”



“Our communications with the Saudi Arabian authorities are like a one way street. It’s as if they think, wrongly, that we will be deterred by their silence.”

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WELCOME TO THIS VERY SPECIAL WIRE SUPPLEMENT...

In recent months, the Middle East and North Africa region has been shaken by people’s demand for more freedom, more respect for political and civil rights and more social justice.

Uprisings have spread like wildfire across the region. Some have succeeded despite fierce repression. Some have been knocked back, at least temporarily. Others are continuing. All have created a new human rights landscape and sense of hope.

For 50 years, Amnesty International has been exposing the grim reality of repression in the region and campaigning for human rights.

Here, our researchers take a candid look at the challenges of working in such a volatile and complex part of the world – the unresponsive and secretive authorities, the armed conflicts, the relentless accusations of bias. They also highlight how the human spirit – the courage of local human rights defenders and the determination of our members and supporters – can overcome these challenges.

Get updates on our work in the Middle East and North Africa on www.amnesty.org/middle-east-crisis

CLARE FERMONT, editor

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Cover photo: Egyptian protesters in Cairo’s Tahrir Square, Egypt. 8 Feb 2011. The recent uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa have created a new human rights landscape in the region. © AP Photo/Emilio Morenatti

Inside cover photos from top: Amnesty International researcher Donatella Rovera taking testimony from a man whose children were shot dead by Israeli forces and his house destroyed, Gaza, 23 January 2009.

Delara Darabi, a juvenile offender, was executed in Iran on 1 May 2009 even though the Head of the Judiciary had granted her a two-month stay of execution. Amnesty International members in the UK organized a flower-laying protest in front of the embassy of Iran in London five days after her execution.

Amnesty International activists from across the Asia Pacific region demonstrate against human rights violations in Saudi Arabia. June 2000, the Philippines.

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INTRODUCTION

By MALCOLM SMART, Programme Director
for the Middle East and North Africa

Looking back at the Middle East and North Africa region over the past 50 years, a bleak picture can emerge of relentless repression and widespread abuse of rights. Recurrent themes have been and remain torture and unjust imprisonment; unjustified restrictions on freedom of expression; and discrimination and suppression of the rights of women and members of ethnic, religious and other minorities.

Violations of international humanitarian law have been common during internal conflicts such as the civil wars in Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen, and during international armed conflicts – the two Gulf Wars, the bloody conflict between Iraq and Iran, the wars between Israel and its neighbours, as well as the enduring struggle between Israel and the Palestinians subject to Israeli occupation.

Amnesty International's work in the region has been carried out despite many obstacles – the governments of Iran and Saudi Arabia, for example, have refused for decades to allow us to conduct human rights research on their soil. These and other governments have also targeted their citizens who have dared to speak out for human rights, a continuing pattern as new waves of repression have been unleashed this year against protesters in Bahrain, Libya, Syria and Yemen, among other states. Indeed, over much of the past 50 years most countries in the region have been ruled by autocratic regimes who have maintained their grip on power only by deploying unaccountable secret police, intelligence agencies and military forces to commit human rights violations with impunity.

Yet, despite such brutality, courageous individuals have stood up for their rights and the rights of others, whatever the cost to them and

their families; they have been the true inspiration for Amnesty International and without them we could not have achieved what we have.

Now, across the region, people's long pent-up frustrations have been given new expression in what has been widely termed the "Arab Spring" but which in truth is nothing less than a popular uprising in which many different communities – including the Amazigh, Kurds and others – have participated. It has been marked too by the prominent role that women – so long the disenfranchised majority – have assumed in the protests.

These are heady days, indeed, even though the struggle for human rights is as yet far from won and victory is still far from assured. But the ties of repression that have bound the region and its people for so long are now critically weakened and, even more important, have been rejected by the region's peoples in the most convincing manner.

Since its earliest days Amnesty International have been shining a light – a flickering candle, at least – on human rights violations in the very darkest recesses of the Middle East and North Africa, as well as elsewhere in the world.

Formed in 1961 to campaign for the release of prisoners of conscience – people imprisoned for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression – Amnesty International has mobilized people around the globe to stand in international solidarity with those, often far away, whose rights are being abused.

Over the decades, the scope of our work has broadened – at first to address torture, the death penalty, enforced disappearances, political killings, unfair trials and other



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Residents of Manshiyet Nasser informal settlement in Cairo, with an Amnesty International petition urging the authorities to protect the lives and health of the residents in "unsafe areas", December 2009. Amnesty International has carried out in-depth research and campaigning in recent years on the rights of the millions of people living in Egypt's vast slums. This work reflects the widening scope of our agenda to cover social, economic and cultural rights as well as political and civil rights. One aspect of the worldwide Demand Dignity campaign, launched in 2009, is campaigning against forced evictions of slum-dwellers.

violations by governments; then to cover armed conflicts and abuses by armed political groups; then to highlight the human rights responsibilities of private actors, including business corporations; and most recently to address violations of economic, social and cultural rights, such as our work on the rights of the millions of slum-dwellers in Egypt.

Throughout, Amnesty International has striven to remain independent and impartial, above the partisan political

fray. In doing so, it has achieved moving and notable successes, some of which are highlighted in these pages.

Amnesty International has been there in solidarity with people in the Middle East and North Africa through their trials and tribulations of the past 50 years, and it will be there with them – speaking up for them and amplifying their voices, particularly the most vulnerable – for as long as it takes to guarantee their human rights and allow them to live in dignity.



Amnesty International has been following human rights developments in Yemen since colonial times in the 1960s. Senior editor **CLARE FERMONT** recently glimpsed the impact we have had over the years.

ESTABLISHING ROOTS

In late 2009, as we were preparing to go to Yemen to investigate the disturbingly high maternal mortality rate in the region's poorest state, a man with links to Yemen was caught with an explosive device on a US airliner bound for Detroit. In response, the Yemeni authorities, encouraged by the US government, ramped up already repressive counter-terrorism measures. It quickly became clear that human rights were taking a battering and another sort of Amnesty International research visit was needed.

A couple of months later we set off for Yemen with a remit that strangely echoed that of our first ever country report, issued in 1966 on Aden, then a British colony in the south of the present-day state, where human rights abuses were being committed in the name of combating terrorism. Back then, our work, done in the context of a conflict that began with a grenade attack by insurgents against the British High Commissioner, highlighted political detentions and torture in the British crown colony. In that report, the author documented how,

"Upon mentioning the word political detainees, the [British] High Commissioner answered 'THERE ARE NO POLITICAL DETAINEES IN ADEN'. I produced a list of 164 prisoners... and asked the High Commissioner if all these prisoners... were terrorists. [He answered:] 'HOW CAN WE KNOW? WE CANNOT PRODUCE ANY EVIDENCE AGAINST THESE PEOPLE AS NO ONE IS WILLING TO WITNESS AGAINST THEM'."

We heard similar denials about political imprisonment in 2010. Detained journalists had been "found with guns" (virtually every man is armed in Yemen). Southern Movement activists were said to be "al-Qa'ida". Members of the Zaidi Shi'a community were accused of "terrorism".

Our research confirmed that the Yemeni authorities were turning back years of human rights progress while conducting security operations targeting simultaneously al-Qa'ida in central Yemen, secessionists in the south and a rebel movement in the north. We also exposed US military involvement and the use of cluster bombs in an attack on two rural settlements that killed 41 people, 21 of them children.



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Amnesty International team in front of a detention camp in Yemen during the civil war, 1994. On that visit, the team found that both sides in the war were committing a wide range of abuses.

During our visit, we met dozens of victims, activists and many others who made me realize the impact that Amnesty International has had over the years – the lawyers who quickly appeared with their latest batch of cases for us to take up; a young man determined to repay Amnesty International for helping to prevent his execution; desperate relatives of political prisoners who turned up at our hotel having heard we were in town; the state officials keen to welcome us and answer our questions; the queues of victims of repression in the south patiently waiting to be interviewed; the brave human rights activists with whom my colleagues, particularly Lamri Chirouf, had worked closely for decades. At one point Lamri succumbed to pressure by some of these activists and addressed a human rights day school, an inspiring event dominated by young women.

We also met Tawakkol Karman, the irrepressible head of Women Journalists Without Chains. At the time, she was organizing weekly protests to demand the release of political prisoners. Her arrest in early 2011 sparked a protest that quickly led to her release. Weeks later, she and many others took to the streets across Yemen in their hundreds of thousands to demand change and an end to their rulers' lack of accountability. They appear to have shaken the old order to the core. The future is still uncertain, but hope is in the air.

Referring to that first 1966 report on Aden, Amnesty International's founder Peter Benenson wrote:

"Nothing so inflames suspicion or breeds resentment as needless secrecy... It is for this reason that our movement, which has as its emblem a candle shining out of barbed wire, has thought it fit to publish this report..."

That continues to be our guiding motto.

1960s



1961

Kuwait gains independence. Syria leaves union with Egypt.

1962

Algeria gains independence after long war with France. Military coup leads to establishment of Yemen Arab Republic, sparking a civil war between royalists

supported by Saudi Arabia and republicans backed by Egypt. Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann executed in Israel after trial.

1963

Ba'ath coups oust President Qasim in Iraq and President Qudsi in Syria.

1964

First Arab Summit held. Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) formed.

1965

In Algeria, Colonel Houari Boumediene overthrows President Ahmed Ben Bella.

1967

Six Day War, during which Israeli forces defeat armed forces of Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Iraq, seize and occupy Sinai and Gaza from Egypt, the West Bank from Jordan and the Golan Heights from Syria. UN Resolution 242 calls for Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories.

People's Republic of Southern Yemen formed (later renamed the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen) and British troops leave Aden.

1968

Ba'ath Party takes power in Iraq.

1969

Military coup in Libya overthrows King Idris: Colonel Mu'ammar al-Gaddafi becomes leader. Organisation of the Islamic Conference founded.



In 1991, more than 300 men who had disappeared decades earlier in Morocco and Western Sahara were released. Some had miraculously survived years of incarceration in dark underground cells in Tazmamert, a secret prison. All that time, Amnesty International members refused to stop campaigning on their behalf.

By LIZ HODGKIN, researcher in the 1990s.

NOT GIVING UP

Soon after I started working for Amnesty International, we decided in 1991 to launch a sustained year-long campaign to expose the appalling human rights violations being committed in Morocco, including Western Sahara, particularly the enforced disappearance of hundreds of government opponents, and to press for much-needed and far-reaching change.

Government opponents had begun disappearing soon after the autocratic King Hassan II succeeded as King in 1961. One of the victims was the charismatic opposition leader, Mehdi Ben Barka, kidnapped in France in 1965; he was almost certainly killed soon after his abduction. Others arrested in the 1960s and 1970s, however, were seen alive in secret detention centres after their arrest, including Abdelhaq Rouissi, who disappeared in 1964, and the trade unionist Houcine Manouzi, who disappeared in 1972.

By far the greatest number of disappeared, however, were men and women of Western Saharan origin (Sahrawis), arrested after Morocco forcibly annexed Western Sahara in 1975. Hundreds went missing between 1975 and 1987. In all cases, the government repeatedly denied holding the missing people and any responsibility for them.

From 1977 onwards, Amnesty International groups began campaigning for 88 Sahrawis who

had disappeared. Year after year they kept writing, even though the government failed to respond or said that the individuals did not exist.

From 1981, for example, a group in Leiden, the Netherlands, wrote 400 letters to King Hassan, government ministers, prisons, hospitals, local authorities, headmasters, mayors and the Moroccan Ambassador in the Netherlands asking for information about Abdiould Labbatould Mayara, who had not been seen since 1976. Over 1,000 postcards were also sent. The group only ever received two identical replies stating that “this person cannot be found on any prisoner lists”.

In 1989, after 12 apparently fruitless years, the Morocco team at Amnesty International’s headquarters proposed to our activist groups that we close the individual files and instead begin working on the cases of the Sahrawi disappeared as one large group. Most of the activist groups refused. One wrote: “The Moroccan Government has already made these people ‘disappear’; if Amnesty International does the same, what hope do they have?”

They were right. Our campaigning was widely credited for the release of over 300 men whom no one ever expected to see again. To the particular joy of members in Leiden, among them was Abdiould Labbatould Mayara, released in June 1991, three months after the worldwide campaign began and over 15 years after his disappearance.

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Agdez palace, in the Atlas Mountains, was used as a secret detention centre between 1976 and 1982. Hundreds of government opponents disappeared after arrest during those years.

Also among the released were 27 army officers held for 19 years in Tazmamert. All but one had been kept permanently in the dark, denied almost all human contact, given meagre rations, and offered no protection from the extreme heat and cold in the mountains. Sadly, 31 of their fellow officers died there – one, Sergeant Mimoun Fagouri, committed suicide after 18 years of darkness and isolation.

The campaign was helped by internal and external developments. The increasingly bold and active Moroccan human rights movement and Sahrawi human rights groups, the UN Human Rights Committee’s examination of Morocco’s practice of secret detention; and a book by French author Gilles Perrault, *Our friend, the King*, which helped expose Morocco’s appalling human rights record.

However, most credit must go to the determined Amnesty International members, who simply refused to give up on men they had never met and were never likely to meet but whose fate was of utmost concern to them.



Amnesty International formed (1961).
Publishes two major reports on Aden.

Amnesty International campaigned for years on behalf of Algeria’s first post-independence President, Mohamed Ahmed Ben Bella (right). He was released in 1980 after more than 14 years as a prisoner of conscience following his ousting by a military coup in 1965.

© AP photo





In an area fraught with tensions and complexities such as Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Amnesty International is subject to criticism by both sides. **CLAUDIO CORDONE**, Senior Director for Research and Regions, explains the challenges of working in such a political minefield.

ON THE SIDE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights work in situations of prolonged conflict is always difficult, but possibly never more so than in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

There is the constant international media spotlight, whether on acts of violence or political developments, and an almost permanent debate about the objectivity of reporting. There is “overscrutiny” of human rights NGOs, especially by Israel and supporters of Israeli government policies. Every Amnesty International statement is dissected and accusations of bias abound – occasionally sliding into the extreme accusation that by denouncing human rights violations by Israel we incite violence against Israelis. For instance, the popular Israeli news website Ynet ran a piece in June 2011 entitled “Amnesty’s anti-Israel pogrom”, sub-titled “Human rights group helps create climate that sanctions the murder of Israelis.”

Sometimes the attacks are highly personal, as was the case with Justice Richard Goldstone after he concluded in his UN report on the 22-day Gaza conflict in 2008-2009 that there was strong evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity by both sides.

I have been involved in long discussions with Israeli officials over the choice of words, the length of

our annual report entries and volume of publications on Israel. Some pro-Israeli government groups literally count the number of words Amnesty International has published on Israel in a given year, comparing it to the number written on other countries in the region.

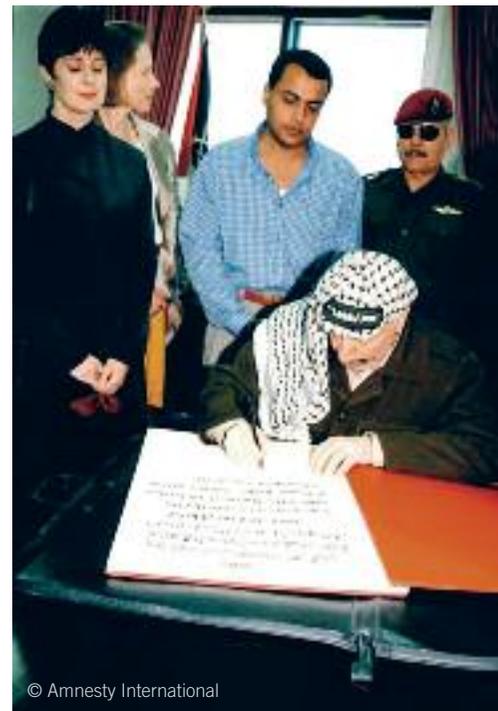
In such a highly politicized environment, anything can acquire political significance. In the 1980s, Israeli Ministry of Justice officials would ask me why I was staying at the American Colony Hotel (then affordable to NGOs) as it was seen by them as a “Palestinian” hotel. My answer was that it was near the former line dividing West from East Jerusalem, and close to the Ministry of Justice.

On the Palestinian side, we have been accused of being soft on Israeli violations and harsh on Palestinian abuses. Particularly sensitive is that Amnesty International does not call for an end of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories – generally seen as the root cause of many of the violations we campaign against. Maintaining our impartiality, so vital for our work, has required us to stay away from the debate over the occupation per se, the two-state solution, and similar issues.

Critical for Amnesty International’s work on this conflict was the decision taken by the organization in 1991 to address abuses by armed groups in addition to those of governments. From the perspective of the victims, the identity of those abusing them – whether by torturing them or blowing them up – mattered little. Our work on Israel and the Palestinians was one – but just one – of the situations that contributed to shaping that policy shift. Amnesty International’s absolute opposition to administrative detention and to punitive house demolition – practices widely used by Israel – were also adopted at the same meeting.

In 2002 we published *Without distinction*, our first report solely covering abuses by Palestinian

armed groups, who at the time were carrying out suicide bombings and other deliberate attacks on civilians. Our analysis was that these attacks were crimes against humanity. Among other things, we were criticized for not recognizing the asymmetry in the conflict and the relatively weak position of the Palestinians. However, being impartial meant that we needed then as we need now to apply the same international law standards to the abuses committed by both sides.



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Another challenge is that political considerations seem regularly to trump international law. The status of Israel as the occupying power of the West Bank and Gaza Strip has never been formally accepted by Israel even though it is nearly universally acknowledged. Israeli settlements in the West Bank are often described as an obstacle to peace to be dealt with politically rather than as a breach of international law. Similarly, the right of return for Palestinian refugees is usually dismissed out of hand. And key peace agreements such as that reached in Oslo in 1993 hardly mention human rights commitments by either side, a factor that must have contributed to their failure to deliver peace.

Another breach of international law has been

1970s



1970

“Black September” in Jordan during which troops loyal to King Hussein attack PLO and drive the organization into Lebanon. Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser dies. Hafez al-Assad seizes power in Syria.

1971

Bahrain and Qatar become independent,

and United Arab Emirates is formed.

1972

An armed Palestinian group, Black September, takes hostage Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics; 11 athletes are killed by the group or during the rescue attempt.

1973

Polisario Front formed to campaign for an independent state in Spanish Sahara. Yom Kippur or October War during which Egypt

briefly retakes the Suez Canal and Syria briefly retakes the Golan Heights; UN Security Council Resolution 338 calls for ceasefire and peace talks.

1975

15-year civil war begins in Lebanon. Bahrain’s Emir dissolves the elected National Assembly, annuls the 1973 Constitution, and rules by decree. Morocco annexes most of Spanish Sahara which is subsequently renamed Western Sahara.

1976

Syrian forces intervene in Lebanese civil war in support of Maronite Christian government. Lebanese militia massacre some 2,000 Palestinians in Tel al-Zaa’ter refugee camp with acquiescence of Syrian forces. Emir of Kuwait suspends National Assembly (until 1981).

1978

Israel invades Lebanon, killing some 1,000 people and displacing 250,000.

the torture of Palestinian detainees during interrogation, which received political, popular and indeed legal legitimacy in Israel. Citing the “ticking bomb” argument, an Israeli commission of inquiry drew up in 1987 instructions regarding sleep deprivation, hooding, shackling in painful positions, violent shaking and similar methods, which General Security Service (Shin Bet) interrogators could use with impunity against Palestinian security detainees. These torture methods were applied against tens of thousands of Palestinians.

Amnesty International, together with Israeli, Palestinian and other NGOs, campaigned for years against these practices and their justification. In 1999, Israel’s Supreme Court found the rules to be unlawful but nevertheless maintained that “physical means” would be legitimate in “ticking bomb” scenarios. One such method was violent shaking, which Amnesty International and other NGOs helped to identify and link to the death of ‘Abd al-Samad Harizat in 1995.

Other abuses remained shrouded in secrecy. This was one of the reasons why Amnesty International investigated the Khiam detention centre in south Lebanon, which was run by a Lebanese militia under the control of Israeli forces occupying south Lebanon. People were held there outside any legal framework, tortured and kept without access to the outside world for years, with Israel refusing to acknowledge any responsibility for their situation.

I was part of an Amnesty International delegation that visited the centre within days of the hasty Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon in 2000, and saw much evidence confirming what we had learned about the prison through our painstaking research. The centre was then turned into a museum. I returned to Khiam in 2006 to find it had been mostly bulldozed by Israeli forces when they briefly occupied the area during the 2006 war with Hizbullah.

Some of the most challenging moments for our work have been during major Israeli military operations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Lebanon, specifically with regard to the killings of civilians and destruction of civilian infrastructure. Issues such as who is a civilian, what is a proportionate attack, and what was the intention behind an attack are among the most

Left: Yasser Arafat, President of the Palestinian Authority, signs Amnesty International’s campaign pledge to mark the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human rights. Palestinian Authority, 1998.

Right from top: Researcher Donatella Rovera speaks to journalists in the aftermath of the Israeli military offence on the Gaza Strip, January 2009; Former researcher Liz Hodgkin with an Israeli woman who was injured in a suicide bombing, Israel, March 2002; Amnesty members and human rights activists press the Lebanese authorities to declare ‘Torture Free Zones’ at Khiam detention centre, in Lebanon, 2000.

difficult ones to research and assess conclusively. But Amnesty International has reached clear conclusions, for example that the indiscriminate artillery and other attacks by Israeli forces against villages and the use of cluster bombs were breaches of the laws of war, as was the firing of indiscriminate rockets into Israel by Palestinian or Lebanese-based groups.

My work on this part of the world has also thrown up strange experiences. I once met a group of young volunteers used by the Israeli Ministry of Justice to answer appeals sent by Amnesty International members. I was just thinking that the volunteers looked like a typical Amnesty International group when one of them told me that he was in fact an Amnesty International member, just like those who were sending the letters to which he was responding...

The human rights situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories is bad – indeed, as bad as it has ever been in my experience. But one reason to be hopeful is the work of Palestinian and Israeli human rights activists who are doing what political leaders have failed to do – building human bridges and solidarity despite restrictions and public attacks, sometimes also from within their communities. If it was not for Israeli activists visiting the West Bank, Palestinians, who can no longer enter Israel, would only know the Israeli soldiers and settlers who occupy and attack them. And Israelis would mainly hear of Palestinians through the media and as security threats. Everyone living in this part of the world deserves peace, and lasting peace can only be founded on recognition of and respect for human rights.



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Egypt and Israel sign Camp David peace accords in the USA.

1979

Shah of Iran forced into exile by revolution and the Islamic Republic of Iran is proclaimed with Ayatollah Khomeini as Supreme Leader. Iranian hostage crisis begins (ends 1981). Saddam Hussein becomes President of Iraq. In Saudi Arabia, Islamists seize Grand Mosque of Mecca for 10 days; government executes those captured.



Major reports published on Iran (3 reports), Israel, Syria (2 reports), Tunisia, People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen. Launch of major international campaign on Tunisia (1976).

Riad al-Turk, aged 73, holding one of many Urgent Actions issued by Amnesty International on his behalf. A prominent Syrian opposition activist, he was imprisoned in virtually every decade since the 1950s. He was a prisoner of conscience in Syria from 1980 to 1998, and again for 14 months in 2001-2002.



CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

© Javad Montazeri



Revolutions, and new governments, do not necessarily bring new attitudes to human rights. Researcher DREWERY DYKE looks at our work on Iran before and since the 1979 revolution.

Successive Iranian governments, whether under the Shah until 1979 or the Islamic Republic since then – have prided themselves on what they proclaim to be their advanced laws and commitment to international human rights standards. What strikes me, though, is the astonishing consistency of human rights violations from the mid-1960s until now, despite the dramatic political changes. The long-term trends – punctuated by spells of mass violations, such as the executions of left-wing activists in 1969-1971; the wave of violations following the 1979 revolution; the mass executions of political prisoners in 1988-1989; the unfair trials of students in 1999-2000; and the brutal repression following the disputed presidential election in 2009 – show that in practice the “Persian Empire” and the “Islamic Republic” have both treated international human rights law with contempt.

The concerns that appear time and again in Amnesty International’s campaigns on Iran are the frequent resort to the death penalty; the persistent use of torture and other ill-treatment; grossly unfair trials; and the routine denial of freedoms of expression, association and assembly. In 1971, for example, we wrote: “There is little freedom of expression in

Drewery Dyke (right) talks in Iran with Emadeddin Baghi, head of the NGO Society for the Defence of the Rights of Prisoners, and then editor of *Jomhuriyat* (The Republic). The newspaper, which was a platform for human rights defenders and free-thinkers, was later closed down by the authorities.

Iran... [The secret intelligence] keeps a close check on newspapers and magazines, which are in any case under the sedation of public subsidy and advertising.” Inside the square brackets was SAVAK, the Shah’s much-feared security and intelligence agency, but the sentence could just as well be written today substituting any of the numerous shadowy intelligence bodies of the present Islamic Republic.

Before the revolution, the government occasionally spoke to Amnesty International and allowed us several visits. Our last visit was during the chaos of the 1979 revolution. Since then, the Tehran authorities have not allowed us to visit Iran to research human rights issues or discuss our concerns face-to-face with the government, although we have participated in a few international conferences.

Before 1979, military tribunals were used as an instrument of repression against Iranians; since then it has been the Revolutionary Court.

Amnesty International observers at a 1969 trial of 14 intellectuals concluded that it was a grotesque parody of justice. This was precisely how, 40 years later, we described the “show trials” of 2009-2010 of over 100 people accused of rioting and other offences during post-election demonstrations.

Some groups and indeed individuals have been targeted for decades. Mahmoud Dolatabadi, a writer, was imprisoned for about a year in 1975 for preparing a production of a Maxim Gorky play; 25 years later he was interrogated for simply participating in a conference in Germany.

Students have consistently been under fire.

Manuchehr Sabetian, formerly a leading member of the Confederation of Iranian Students, recently reminded me how student activists occupied Amnesty International’s London headquarters in the early 1970s to highlight their plight. Today, many Iranian students remain behind bars for their part in recent protests.

Of course, not everything remained the same after the revolution. The adoption of Shari’a (Islamic law) introduced the punishments of stoning to death, flogging and amputation, and the execution of juvenile offenders. It also imposed a restrictive dress code on women, paved the way for polygamy, and gave women a lower status than men before the law.

Before the revolution, Amnesty International’s mandate meant we did not address women’s issues per se, although we did campaign on behalf of women political prisoners. Since the revolution, we have tried to support Iran’s many women’s rights campaigners. For example, following her release in 2001, lawyer and human rights activist Mehrangiz Kar told Amnesty International that the authorities cleaned her cell following appeals from our Urgent Action network. We have also had a long relationship with Shirin Ebadi, the first woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. We continue to highlight the work and persecution of Iranian women’s rights activists.

Where now for Iran? With parliamentary elections due in 2012, it remains to be seen whether elected officials can begin to build an Iran that respects its own laws and people. One thing is certain – we will keep working to try to make this happen.

1980s



1980

Eight-year Iran-Iraq war begins, leading to around half a million deaths.

1981

Egyptian President Anwar Sadat assassinated; Hosni Mubarak becomes President and state of emergency declared. Israel annexes Golan Heights.

President Bourguiba’s party wins Tunisia’s first post-independence elections.

1982

Muslim Brotherhood leads uprising in Hama, Syria, which army crushes, killing thousands of people. Israel returns remainder of occupied Sinai to Egypt. Israeli forces invade Lebanon. US government brokers PLO departure from Lebanon and PLO leadership goes to Tunisia. Lebanese President-elect Bashir

Gemayel assassinated. Lebanese Christian Phalange forces massacre up to 3,000 Palestinians and others in Sabra and Chatilla, with the support of Israeli armed forces.

1987

President Ben Ali seizes power in Tunisia in a bloodless coup. First Palestinian intifada (uprising) begins against Israeli occupation (ends 1993).

1988

Iraqi forces massacre thousands of Kurds in Halabja using chemical and other weapons. Iran-Iraq war ends under UN Security Council Resolution 598.

In Iran, thousands of political prisoners are summarily executed in secret.

1989

Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, dies; replaced by Ayatollah Ali Khamene’i. Taif Accords end Lebanese civil war.



Many countries in the region are casualties of international power struggles. Researcher SAID BOUMEDOUHA looks at how our work in Iraq is at risk of being manipulated for political gain.

DANGEROUS WORK

Under the Ba'ath regime of President Saddam Hussein, the feared security agencies committed massive human rights violations for more than two decades. These included the mass killings of civilians, especially of Kurds in the north at the end of the 1980s during the Anfal operation and the Halabja poison gas attack, but also of Shi'a in the south after the first Gulf War in 1991. In the 1980s, thousands of people were executed and tens of thousands of people disappeared during the Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988).

A particularly chilling event was in 1998 when Saddam's son Qusay, head of the special forces, visited the infamous Abu Ghraib prison outside Baghdad, home to thousands of political prisoners, including many on death row. He was unhappy about the state of the prison and ordered the execution of all those on death row. Up to 2,000 prisoners were massacred in what became known as the "cleansing of the prison".

Some of these gross violations, many of which amounted to war crimes and crimes against humanity, took place while the people of Iraq were also suffering because of the stringent UN economic sanctions that are alleged to have led or contributed to the deaths of many

Iraqi children – up to almost half a million according to some sources – and other civilians.

Saddam Hussein generally did not allow Amnesty International into Iraq, so obtaining information about human rights violations was difficult and labour intensive. We relied mainly on the Iraqi diaspora, including refugees, especially in Jordan but also in Europe. It was not possible to speak to contacts inside the country because people dared not talk to outsiders for fear of reprisal.

Despite the difficulties, we published numerous reports, statements and urgent appeals documenting patterns and individual cases of human rights violations. We received good feedback from Iraqis in the diaspora and there was always media interest.

The issue of economic sanctions and their impact was beyond the scope of Amnesty International's mandate at the time, yet many of our members were so concerned that they argued that we should speak out against them. Members were also concerned in 1991 when then US President George Bush was pictured holding our report on Iraqi abuses in Kuwait as if using it to justify his decision to go to war against Iraq in the first Gulf War.

Because of this, some people, including our members, criticized the report and its timing. It would set a dangerous precedent, however, if Amnesty International were to remain silent in the face of grave violations for fear that its findings could be misused by others.

New challenges and problems followed the 2003 US-led war on Iraq and the subsequent occupation of the country. However, there have also been some striking similarities, especially in the nature and scale of human rights violations committed by all sides. These included the torture of detainees by US forces in Abu Ghraib prison in 2003-2004, the images of which so shocked the world, and the sectarian war in 2006-2007 that led to tens of thousands of deaths and many enforced disappearances.

The war and its aftermath brought to prominence powerful religious parties and individuals in Iraq. Society became more conservative and women particularly have borne the brunt of new restrictions and the consequences of a generally more violent society.

Even though more than eight years have elapsed since Saddam Hussein was toppled, Iraq remains an extremely dangerous place. For

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Members of Amnesty International in Morocco, 2005, demanding an end to torture – a key focus of our work in the region.

this reason Amnesty International is still unable to undertake first-hand research there because of the risks to which this would expose our teams and those who provide us with information. The exception is the Kurdish provinces in the north, which have been relatively untouched by the conflict but which continue to experience rampant corruption under the rule of the two dominant political parties.

Access to information from Iraq remains difficult, although it is a lot easier now to speak to people directly by phone and generally people are less afraid to talk to us or send e-mails. This was almost unheard of before 2003.

Saddam Hussein and his administration paid very little attention to what international human rights organizations said about Iraq. Worryingly, it looks like some of the country's current leaders have the same attitude. But we will not be deterred.



Major reports published on Egypt (4 reports), Iran (2 reports), Iraq (2 reports), Israel, Morocco, Syria (3 reports). Launch of major international campaigns on Iran (1982), Egypt (1982-1983) and Iran (1987).

Mordechai Vanunu was kidnapped in Italy by Israeli agents in 1986 and subsequently sentenced to 18 years in prison for revealing that Israel had a nuclear weapons industry. Amnesty International campaigned against his ill-treatment by the Israeli authorities, including his detention in solitary confinement for the first 11 years of his imprisonment. Since his release in 2004, Amnesty International has campaigned against the draconian conditions imposed on him that severely restrict his freedom of movement, expression and association.

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Some governments try to deter us by denying us entry and ignoring our requests for information. Researcher **DINA EL-MAMOUN** reflects on her work in Saudi Arabia.

PUNCTURING THE SECRECY

A radio interviewer just asked me two questions about Saudi Arabia for which I had no exact answers – why has there been a recent surge in executions and how many people are on death row? Such questions highlight the challenges of working on a country that is not only closed to Amnesty International and other human rights organizations, but also maintains a virtual information blackout on “sensitive issues”. The challenges are exacerbated by the lack of a vibrant civil society, itself a result of the choking repression.

We cannot explain why, every now and then, we see a rise in executions in Saudi Arabia. The authorities have not announced any change in policy or law. All Amnesty International can do, therefore, is identify and react to the increase and publicize our concerns.

We do know that over 100 people are on death row. We know that many of them were not allowed a lawyer or, in some cases involving migrant workers, even a translator at their trial. We often hear that confessions were obtained using torture or deception. We also believe that the cases we hear about are no more than the tip of the iceberg.

Our communications with the Saudi Arabian authorities are like a one-way street – they virtually never respond to our inquiries or appeals. It’s as if they think, wrongly, that we will be deterred by their silence. Oddly, they announce executions, ostensibly “to send a clear message” to lawbreakers about the punishment they may face while simultaneously failing to reveal how many

people are held on death row. Could it be that the number of people facing execution is so high that it would undermine their deterrence argument? We cannot know as no debate is allowed.

The climate of fear in Saudi Arabia also hampers our ability to obtain and verify information; people are often too scared of reprisals to report human rights abuses. Sometimes, people contact us to say that their relative has been detained for months or years, but when we try to get more information, they panic and stay silent or put the phone down. Usually, they ask us not to reveal names.

Even when we have verified information, we have to be very careful to avoid inadvertently putting people at risk.

Another challenge relates to working around judicial punishments based on Shari’a. Saudi Arabia maintains that it is upholding Shari’a, and activists who campaign against Shari’a-based punishments risk being portrayed as anti-Islamic. For us, it is vital that we do not feed or fuel Islamophobia; at the same time, we cannot shirk from raising our human rights concerns about Saudi Arabia’s unfair justice system. During our major campaign on Saudi Arabia in 2000, for example, we tried to show how improvements to the justice system based on universally accepted human rights standards would have a positive impact for all those living in the country.

We also have to be careful not to alienate or risk damaging the work of local activists. For example, the women who defy the driving ban in

Saudi Arabia have said that they do not want to appear to be influenced by foreign circles, so we have to find ways of highlighting the concerns they are raising while respecting their wishes.

Despite all these challenges, I believe our work has made a difference over the decades, particularly in raising awareness about Saudi Arabia’s appalling human rights record and patterns of abuse. I remember in particular two cases involving people who had been sentenced to death – Sarah Jane Dematera, a Filipina migrant worker, and Majda Mustafa Mahir, a Moroccan national. The plight of both was virtually unknown to the world at large before Amnesty International took up their cases and campaigned vigorously on their behalf for years. Not only were they pardoned and allowed to go home, but in the case of Majda we also obtained a response from the authorities – a truly rare event indeed.

I also believe that there is light at the end of this very long and dark tunnel. When I first started working on Saudi Arabia 11 years ago, there were no human rights NGOs in the country, no individuals who called themselves human rights activists, and the media rarely mentioned human rights violations. Now we know of activists, we hear of people forming NGOs and, despite official censorship, reports of violations have begun to find their way into print. There is also more awareness of rights than ever before, and some people are breaking the fear barrier to challenge violations and discrimination.

1990s



1990

Unified Republic of Yemen proclaimed. Iraq invades and annexes Kuwait.

1991

First Gulf War (Operation Desert Storm), in which international coalition led by US forces ousts Iraq from Kuwait within weeks. Iraqi forces brutally suppress

rebellions by Shi’a in the south and Kurds in the north of Iraq; no-fly zones established in northern and southern Iraq; and the Kurds establish a semi-autonomous entity in the three Kurdish provinces. UN-monitored ceasefire begins in Western Sahara with deployment of the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria wins first round of first multi-party elections; the government cancels

the second round and declares a state of emergency, sparking a long civil war.

1993

Oslo Declaration of Principles (“Oslo accords”) signed; Israel and PLO agree to mutual recognition. Civil war breaks out between main Kurdish parties in Kurdistan region of Iraq.

1994

Israeli forces withdraw from Jericho and Gaza City in compliance with Oslo

accords. Israel-Jordan peace treaty. Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres and Yasser Arafat awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

1995

Oslo II agreement signed; Palestinian Authority given limited control in major cities of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. USA imposes sanctions on Iraq.

1996

Israel attacks Lebanon, killing at least 150 civilians.

AHMED KARAUD was a prisoner of conscience in Tunisia in the 1970s. After his release, he went on to set up the first Amnesty International group there. He now heads our office in Beirut, Lebanon.

POWER OF SOLIDARITY

The place: Cell #14, Wing E – solitary confinement – Civilians Prison in Tunis, Tunisia. The date: 24 August, 1974.

I have been held in solitary confinement for seven months. Before that, I was detained for six weeks at the State Security administration or “Idarat Salamet Amnel Dawla” – part of the political police apparatus at the Tunisian Ministry of Interior. I was detained, alongside hundreds of my comrades, for belonging to the leftist political organization Perspectives Tunisiennes. Membership in any political organization other than the ruling Destour Party is a crime punished by imprisonment under a series of false allegations such as conspiracy against the security of the state or “spreading rumours” and “insulting” the president and other national figures.

The cell door opens. A prisoner gives me my lunch and a guard hands me a letter. It is the first letter I receive in prison.

The small letter, written on a typewriter in French, is from Mrs and Mr J.M.J. Spaans – from The Hague in the Netherlands! They write that they are members of Amnesty International, that they are aware of my case and that they are doing their best to improve my prison conditions. My joy was almost inexpressible. I was no longer in solitude in my solitary confinement.

There are people, who are not even in my country, who are following up on my case!

That night, after the guards lock the solitary confinement wing, and as we, the prisoners of Wing E, talk to each other and share information in

various ways, I tell my comrades that I have received a letter from the Netherlands. I find out that they also received letters – from Sweden, Denmark and the UK. Watching the full moon from behind the cell window bars, as I do on such nights, I share the letter with the moon! I share my joy and the end of my solitude.

That night in August 1974 was the beginning of a life-long journey with Amnesty International.

I was released in 1979 and together with my comrades, former prisoners of conscience Nour Eddine Ben Kheder and Ahmed Bin Othman Raddawi, and other human rights defenders, established the first Amnesty International group in Tunisia.

Joining Amnesty International has opened new horizons for me and for many men and women around the world who shared a dedication for supporting the oppressed, regardless of religion, language, nationality or social status.

In my years at Amnesty International Tunisia, I met many dedicated people who never got tired defending and promoting human rights. I will never forget the 70-year-old Dutch woman who for two decades kept writing to Syrian President Hafez al-Assad, asking him to release Syrian and Arab prisoners in the horrible Tadmur Prison. She never got a reply.

I will never forget the late Gerson GuKonu from Togo, the head of our development team for Africa, who for years fought for Amnesty International to establish a presence in Tunisia and in other parts of Africa so that men and women in the region



“From a prison cell in Tunisia to the boundaries of the globe”: Ahmed Karaoud (centre) with colleagues, Beirut.

could join this organization just like European and North Americans.

I will never forget Ana Christina Torrealba, Director of Villa Grimaldi from Chile, who introduced me to the history of torture during the Pinochet years.

With the help of many brave activists, we have been able to make Amnesty International more visible, and its voice better heard in Morocco, Algeria, Iraq, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Syria, Iran, Egypt and other countries in the Middle East and North Africa.

Since 2002, my colleagues and I at the Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa in Beirut, have been working to empower and support human rights defenders and develop human rights education in the region. We organize training in how to monitor human rights abuses and combat violence against women and developed a biannual specialized human rights education programme in Arabic. We also run a website, in Arabic and English, to help spread a human rights culture in the region and provide activists with practical tools to support their human rights work.

It was that letter that I received on 24 August in 1974 that ended my solitude and introduced me to this big family and great network. From that cell in a Tunisian prison, to the boundaries of the globe, our only mission is to defend the human dignity.

1997
Sultan Qaboos of Qatar decrees that women can vote and stand for election to Consultative Council.

1999
Mass student protests in Iran. Emir of Kuwait suspends National Assembly.



Major reports published on Algeria, Iran, Jordan, Morocco, including Western Sahara (2 reports) and Women in the Middle East. Launch of major campaigns on Morocco, including Western Sahara (1990) and Kuwait/Iraq (1990-1991).

Antoinette Chahin, a Lebanese former death row inmate, seen here (right) on an anti-death penalty protest in Switzerland, February 2010. She was arrested, tortured and sentenced to death in January 1997 for a murder she did not commit. Amnesty International campaigned on her behalf, and she was eventually retried and, in 1999, acquitted.





ONE BATTLE, MANY FRONTS

The challenges to women's rights are not the same everywhere in the region, says **HASSIBA HADJ SAHRAOUI**, Deputy Director of the Middle East and North Africa.

This year, within the mass chorus of people demanding their basic rights and liberties across the region, the voices of women could be heard loud and clear.

These women were equal partners with men during the popular uprisings. They were out there on the streets, leading demonstrations, protesting, being beaten and arrested – and breaking decades of social barriers on the way.

At these moments, it felt like women were at last taking their rightful place as full and equal participants on the social and political stage.

But they were only transitory moments. Women in Egypt and Tunisia soon found themselves either excluded from the new processes of transition and undermined, or at risk of losing some of the advances they had made in the past decades – leaving them still facing, like other women in the region, a life of systemic inequality and discrimination.

Contrary to one common perception, the problems that women in the region face are not all the result of oppressive interpretations of Islamic

teachings. The challenges to women's rights vary significantly and also relate to factors such as their ethnicity, religious affiliation, and economic circumstances, as well as prevailing social and cultural attitudes.

For example, restrictions on what women can or cannot wear vary considerably. In Iran and Saudi Arabia, women are required by law to wear the *hijab* (headscarf) and are liable to punishment if they fail to do so and, in some instances, if they fail to cover their faces as well. Yet in Egypt, Tunisia and Syria, the authorities have previously banned women who wear the *niqab*, or full-face veil, from entering public buildings.

Amnesty International champions the right of women to decide for themselves what they should or should not wear and the freedom to do so without fear of sanction.

The extent and degree of discrimination against women in both law and in practice also varies significantly from country to country. Tunisia, for instance, has a relatively progressive family law, but most other countries in the region have laws that discriminate significantly against women in relation to marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance. In Saudi Arabia, women are not even protected by a codified family law.

As the problems differ, so too do the demands and the campaigns for equality and rights. Women in Egypt have been campaigning for their right to equal participation in the ongoing political and reform process and in shaping their country's future. In Saudi Arabia, they have been focusing on demanding more independence from male guardianship and an end to the ban on women driving.

The role and status of women in the region is often considered an extremely sensitive issue that

should be outside the remit of an international human rights organization. However, our work for the rights of women is based on the international obligations of every state. We are aware of the need to tread carefully and adapt our campaigns to echo the local demands of women. Whatever we do, our priority has always been to protect and support women rights activists. For example, we have sought to give a greater international voice to Iran's Campaign for Equality. Since 2006, this grassroots movement has aimed to collect a million signatures for a petition calling for equality under the law for women. Many of its activists, such as Mahboubeh Karami and Alieh Aghdam-Doust, have been arbitrarily arrested and imprisoned. We continue to call for these and other prisoners of conscience to be released immediately and unconditionally, and allowed to carry on their legitimate activities.

We also document and campaign against discriminatory laws and practices that impact on women in the region. Violence against women is a common and widespread problem, whose full dimensions are impossible to calculate because such violence is so often shrouded in secrecy. Our research shows that the discriminatory laws perpetuate the lack of legal, economic and social protection of women. We have put forward and advocated specific recommendations to various governments in the region for enhancing the rights and protection of women, and continue to do so.

In these pivotal times for the region, we are determined to help ensure that women's rights are kept at the forefront of the political agenda. They are an essential element that must be achieved if the recent protests and uprisings are to bring a better future for everyone in the Middle East and North Africa.

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Working together for equality and justice. Amnesty International workshop on women's rights in Morocco, March 2003.

2000s



2000

Israeli troops withdraw from south Lebanon ending an 18-year occupation. Syrian President Hafez al-Assad dies and his son Bashar takes over: a partial easing of political repression results in a short-lived "Damascus Spring". Longstanding Palestinian discontent with

the Oslo peace process erupts into the second (Al-Aqsa) intifada against Israeli occupation.

2001

The 9/11 attacks in New York and Washington DC, and the US government's "war on terror" prompt several governments in the Middle East and North Africa to increase repression in the name of security and collaborate in secret detentions and torture under the US

government's secret renditions programme.

2002

Bahrain becomes a constitutional monarchy. UN Security Council Resolution 1397 endorses an independent Palestinian state and renewed negotiations. Israeli troops invade major West Bank cities following attacks by Palestinian armed groups. Israel begins construction of the fence/wall in the West Bank.

2003

US forces invade Iraq and quickly topple Saddam Hussain's government. US government releases "road map" for Israeli-Palestinian peace. Shirin Ebadi, an Iranian human rights lawyer and campaigner, awarded Nobel Peace Prize. 300 Saudi Arabian intellectuals sign a petition calling for reforms.

2004

Hundreds of people killed during US



UNEASY MOSAIC

The struggle for minorities' rights runs across borders in a diverse and volatile region, says researcher ANN HARRISON.

The map of the Middle East and North Africa is a remnant of the region's colonial past and evidence of its volatile present. It shows borders dividing communities, sometimes even close families, and countries with a mosaic of cultures, ethnicities and religions.

The fabric of the majority Arab region is interwoven with Amazigh in North Africa and Kurds in Iraq, Iran, and Syria, as well as in Turkey. There are Turks in Syria, Iraq and Iran, and the latter is also home to Azerbaijanis, Arabs, Baluch and many other minority communities.

While Muslims – Shi'a, Sunni and others – predominate, there are also large Christian communities, with an array of denominations, as well as Jews, Ahl-e Haq, Baha'is and Druze. The list is long.

Some of these minorities are in conflict with their country's rulers. Others are sometimes regarded with deep-seated suspicion and hostility that make them vulnerable to abuses of their human rights.

The nature of such abuses varies. Some have been extremely severe. The world witnessed the brutal oppression of Kurds in Iraq when Saddam Hussein's forces used chemical weapons against the town of Halabja in 1988, killing thousands of civilians. During the so-called Anfal Operation in the late 1980s, Iraqi forces attacked and destroyed some 4,000 Kurdish villages and towns, killing thousands. Tens of thousands more became victims of enforced disappearance – Amnesty International

managed to compile the names of around 17,000, each one a story of gross abuse and family heartache.

In Kuwait, it was Palestinian refugees who bore much of the brunt of Kuwaiti anger following the Iraqi invasion in 1990. Our team visited Kuwait and documented killings, torture and disappearances of Palestinians, who some Kuwaitis accused of collaborating with the Iraqi invaders.

More recently, when Amnesty International expanded its work to cover freedom from discrimination, and

their employment opportunities and deny them full enjoyment of their linguistic, cultural and political rights.

State authorities are not always the primary perpetrator of violence against minorities. Egypt has experienced repeated waves of sectarian violence which have seen attacks on the country's Coptic community. Copts have repeatedly complained that the authorities are not doing enough to protect them or prosecute their attackers.

In Israel, discrimination against non-Jewish minorities is established

services, and houses in these villages are deemed illegal and continue to be destroyed.

Migrant workers make up a large proportion of the workforce in many of the Gulf States. Desperate to work their way out of poverty, they are virtually helpless in the face of abuse. Women domestic workers have told us of sexual abuse, physical violence and horrific mistreatment at the hands of employers. Our work on the death penalty in Saudi Arabia, for example, has consistently shown that migrant workers are more likely to be sentenced to death and executed than Saudi Arabian citizens. In Libya, the current conflict has had a particularly harsh impact on migrant workers, thousands of whom have fled while others have been attacked.

We have also begun work on human rights issues relating to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in the region, who face severe discrimination and repression – at times even the death penalty. The pressures have been so acute that, as yet, there has been little opportunity for them to find a common language to describe their identities in their own terms and form a community with a collective voice. This poses a real challenge for us – while we have worked on cases of individuals persecuted because of their sexuality, we rarely have the opportunity to work with representative groups or activists to promote the comprehensive call for rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in the region. Hopefully, this will change with time.



Amnesty International members in the Philippines outside the Saudi Arabian embassy in Manila, June 2000. Migrant workers from south and south-east Asia make up a large part of the workforce in the Gulf States, and many are vulnerable to abuse.

as we began to focus our attention on the fulfilment of rights (in addition to opposing their violation), the scope for working on the particular issues that affect minorities also grew.

For example, in Iran, where up to half of the population belong to ethnic minorities, discriminatory laws and practices restrict their access to housing, water and sanitation, limit

in law and practice. One example is the policy of demolishing homes built without permits, which are often impossible for Palestinian citizens of Israel to obtain. We have been closely following the situation in the Negev region, where some 60,000-70,000 Bedouins live in more than 40 “unrecognized” villages. They are denied recognition and basic

military siege of Falluja in Iraq. Major Israeli military operation in southern Gaza city of Rafah destroys hundreds of homes. USA hands Iraqi sovereignty to interim Iraqi government of Prime Minister Iyad Allawi. Israel ignores International Court of Justice's order to dismantle the fence/wall and compensate the victims. Fighting intensifies in Iraq between forces of USA and Shi'a cleric Moqtada al-Sadr. In Yemen, government forces kill dissident cleric Hussein al-Houthi,

intensifying revolt in the north. Yasser Arafat dies.

2005 Mahmoud Abbas elected President of the Palestinian Authority. Former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri assassinated. Mass anti-government demonstrations in Egypt. Syrian forces withdraw from Lebanon. All Jewish settlers leave Gaza Strip. Iraqis vote for new constitution and later for first government since US-led invasion.

2006 Hamas wins Palestinian legislative elections, ending 40 years of Fatah-PLO dominance. Donor countries suspend aid in response. In Iraq, bomb attack at Shi'a shrine in Samarra unleashes wave of sectarian violence. Women in Kuwait vote for the first time, in municipal elections. Israeli forces attack Hezbollah in Lebanon causing hundreds of civilian deaths. UN Security Council imposes sanctions on Iran. Saddam Hussain executed following

trial in Iraq. UN says 34,000 civilians killed in violence in Iraq during the year.

2007 Major clashes in Nahr el-Bared Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon between Lebanese army and Fatah al-Islam armed group. UN Security Council establishes a tribunal to try people accused of assassinating Lebanon's former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri. Following escalating conflict between Hamas and Fatah, Hamas assumes control

A REGION IN REVOLT

In early 2011 the people of North Africa and the Middle East seemed to rise up as one to demand many of the rights for which Amnesty International had been campaigning for decades. Our teams travelled to the hotspots wherever possible and reported from the ground to swiftly publicize our findings and mobilize our members worldwide.



TUNISIA

On 17 December 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi set himself alight to protest against unemployment, poverty and humiliation by officials. His protest sparked an uprising that overthrew the corrupt and repressive 23-year rule of President Ben Ali within three weeks and triggered a wave of protests around the region. Our team witnessed events first-hand.

15 JANUARY

"From the moment of my arrival... I could feel that Tunisia was a different country. Unlike previous visits, we were not followed by security forces from the airport..."

Researcher Diana Eltahawy, blogging from Tunis

1 MARCH

We publish the report *Tunisia in revolt: State violence during anti-government protests*

31 MARCH

"In the last few weeks and months, thousands of Tunisians, mainly young men, have found themselves stranded on this tiny island after leaving poverty-stricken Tunisia since the onset of the political unrest there..."

Campaigner Charlotte Phillips, blogging from Lampedusa island, Italy

EGYPT

Millions of Egyptians took to the streets during the "25 January Revolution" and ousted President Hosni Mubarak in just 18 days, ending a regime that had ruled for 30 years under a continuous state of emergency. Two Amnesty International researchers who had travelled to Egypt were detained for almost two days by the authorities.

3 FEBRUARY

"We were interviewing a father who lost his 16-year-old son in the recent unrest when news of the arrest of our colleagues reached us..."

Amnesty International research team in Cairo

19 MAY

We publish *Egypt rises: Killings, detentions and torture in the "25 January Revolution"*

YEMEN

In the region's poorest country, mass demonstrations have continued since January 2011 despite violent repression and mass arrests. On 5 June, President Ali Abdullah Saleh, in power for over 30 years, was taken to Saudi Arabia for treatment for injuries sustained when the presidential palace was attacked; it was unclear if he would ever return as President.

18 MARCH

"The shooting started from different buildings around the same time and continued for more than 30 minutes."

Yemeni human rights activist calling Amnesty International during an attack on a protest camp in Sana'a, which reportedly left dozens dead.

6 APRIL

We publish *Moment of truth for Yemen*

LIBYA

Protests against the government of Colonel Mu'ammar al-Gaddafi erupted across the country from mid-February provoking a harsh clampdown. Opposition forces quickly took control of many towns, and an opposition government was established in Benghazi. As the Libyan authorities' military counter-offensive gained momentum, the international community became increasingly involved. On 17 March the UN Security Council referred Libya to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. On 19 March, foreign forces began an aerial bombardment of Colonel al-Gaddafi's forces in the name of protecting civilians. By June, as fighting continued, hundreds of Libyans had been killed, over half a million people had fled the country, and the outcome of the conflict remained uncertain.

2000s

of Gaza. US authorities attempt to relaunch negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority at Annapolis conference. UK military forces withdrawn from southern Iraq.

2008

Israel launches 22-day military operation in Gaza against Hamas; about 1,400 Palestinians, including some 300 children, and three Israeli civilians, are killed.

2009

Huge protests erupt in Iran after Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is named as winner in presidential elections; mass repression follows against the opposition Green Movement and supporters. In Iraq, US troops hand over prisons to Iraqi forces. Yemeni and Saudi forces in conflict with rebels in northern Yemen. UN Fact-Finding Mission on the 2008-2009 Gaza conflict accuses both Israeli

and Palestinian armed groups of war crimes.

2010

Yemeni government signs ceasefire with rebels in north. No party wins clear majority in Iraqi parliamentary elections leading to several months' political stalemate. Israeli forces storm the *Marmara*, part of a flotilla aiming to breach the blockade on Gaza, and kill nine people. The last US combat troops

leave Iraq. Moroccan security forces storm a protest camp in Western Sahara, triggering protests.

📅 24 MARCH

"Hanan, a mother of six, showed me the smashed up bedroom where she had been sleeping with three of her children when a rocket smashed through the ceiling last Saturday morning ..."

Researcher Donatella Rovera, Benghazi

📅 18 APRIL

"We have just experienced four more days of relentless shelling by Colonel al-Gaddafi's forces... I found cluster bombs all over the place..."

Donatella Rovera, Misrata

📅 13 MAY

"It is fair to say that there is a state of denial when it comes to the less palatable aspects of the post-17 February situation in eastern Libya – notably the behaviour of some opposition fighters..."

Donatella Rovera, Benghazi

📅 18 MAY

"We arrived in Misrata... the impact of a two-month long siege and heavy shelling and fighting can be seen and felt in virtually every neighbourhood, street and home..."

Amnesty International research team in Misrata

BAHRAIN

On 14 February, thousands of people converged on central Manama triggering a mass pro-reform movement. Protesters were violently dispersed first in February and then with even greater ferocity after Saudi Arabian military reinforcements entered the country on 15 March; hundreds were detained amid allegations of torture and some were put on trial before a special military court. Amnesty International delegates went twice to Bahrain to investigate alleged abuses by government forces and some of the protesters.

📅 17 MARCH

We publish *Bloodied but unbowed: Unwarranted state violence against Bahraini protesters*

📅 12 JUNE

"Ayat al-Qarmez, aged 20, a poet and student, was sentenced in a Manama court today following her arrest in March for reading out a poem at a pro-reform rally. She was reportedly tortured."

Amnesty International news alert

SYRIA

Small protests in February developed into widespread mass protests from mid-March after the authorities brutally suppressed a demonstration in the southern city of Dera'a. As the protests intensified, so did state repression. By June, unlawful killings of protesters, and mourners at funerals of killed protesters, were being reported almost daily and thousands of Syrians fled to Lebanon and Turkey.

📅 APRIL

165,000 Amnesty International members and activists signed a petition calling on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to stop the killing and respect Syrians' right to hold peaceful protest.

📅 3 JUNE

"He is a 21-year-old soldier and illiterate. But this young man does not need to read and write to know that shooting at unarmed protesters by government forces is wrong... He spoke to me on condition that I do not reveal his name."

Researcher Cilina Nasser, Wadi Khaled, northern Lebanon

📅 13 JUNE

"I entered the hospital... These three Syrian men, all from the Jisr al-Shughur area, have been wounded in the recent clashes with security forces. I sensed their unease each time the door opened..."

Researcher Neil Sammonds, the Turkish-Syrian border

ELSEWHERE IN THE REGION

In **Algeria**, protests began on 12 February, prompting the government to repeal the 19-year state of emergency and promise further reforms. Since then, the authorities have cracked down on protests while introducing some reforms. In **Iran**, demonstrators filled the streets of many cities on 14 February for the first time since the brutal repression of protests following the disputed presidential elections in June 2009. Once again, repression followed. In **Iraq**, from early February, tens of thousands of people protested against lack of basic services, unemployment and endemic corruption, and to demand greater civil and political rights. Security forces responded with excessive force, killing and injuring protesters. In **Jordan**, largely peaceful demonstrations prompted the King to sack the government and introduce some reforms. In **Morocco**, demonstrations have continued since 20 February, resulting in a national referendum on proposed reforms. In the **Occupied Palestinian Territories**, sporadic protests against the authorities erupted in February. In **Oman**, peaceful protests have led to some reforms but have also been met by police violence. In **Saudi Arabia**, planned protests in early 2011 prompted the authorities to announce handouts to citizens worth around US\$127 billion. Sporadic protests by the minority Shi'a community continued, and a combination of threats and a mass security force mobilization prevented a planned "Day of Rage" on 11 March. Hundreds of people have been arrested in connection with the protests; many have been detained without charge. In the **United Arab Emirates**, the government arrested civil society activists and took control of four NGOs.

Amnesty International repeatedly called on the governments in these and other countries to allow peaceful protests and to refrain from using violence and other forms of repression against protesters.

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Opposite: Protesters demonstrate against Tunisian President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali in Tunis.



Major reports published on Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel/occupied Palestinian Territories/Palestinian Authority, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia. Launch of major campaigns on Stop Violence against Women (Gulf Cooperation Council countries, Iraq, Israel/OPT, Saudi Arabia); Counter Terror with Justice (Egypt, Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula, Saudi Arabia, Yemen); and Demand Dignity (Egypt slums).

Amnesty International members and other activists in Switzerland demonstrating in November 2010 against the planned execution by stoning of Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani in Iran. She was convicted of the "crime" of "adultery" in 2006. After worldwide campaigning by many organizations, her execution was stayed indefinitely, although she remains on death row, possibly serving a prison sentence for her involvement in the murder of her husband.



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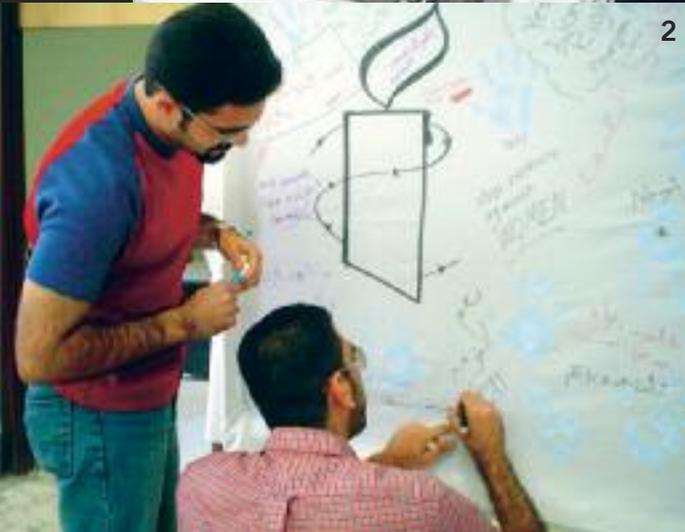
1. Amnesty International in Kuwait at an annual book fair, December 1992.

2. Stop Violence Against Women: Amnesty International in Kuwait launches the campaign, March 2004.

3. Marking the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at the human rights festival, Casablanca, Morocco, June 1998.

4. Amnesty International 50th anniversary in Paris, France, May 2011.

5. A new generation of human rights defenders: Amnesty International's first Middle East and North Africa Regional Youth Forum, Bouznika, Morocco, September 2002.



6. Amnesty International members in Switzerland demonstrate against the execution of Azerbaijani Iranian woman Sakineh Ashtiani, who was sentenced in 2006 to be stoned to death for "adultery while married". Berne, 3 November 2010.

7. Thousands of people worldwide rallied to demand respect for human rights in the Middle East and North Africa on Amnesty International's global day of action. London, UK, 12 February 2011.

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