

Stop Torture campaign – Roundup

The global Stop Torture campaign came to an end in May 2016. Working to eradicate torture from the world will always be a core element of who we are and what we do. There will still be ways for Amnesty supporters to continue working on the issue, even though there won't be a dedicated AIUK campaign, led by staff. This update will give a summary of some of the key achievements of the campaign and highlight how you can continue to take action against torture.

Mexico

In August Mexico's Attorney General approved a new National Protocol for Investigation of Torture. This was one of the key safeguards that the Stop Torture campaign called for. Amnesty supporters across the country have sent letters, action cards and emails to the Attorney General calling for this and AIUK contributed 17,139 signatures to 112,374 strong petition, delivered to the Federal Attorney General in advance of the conference where the protocol was agreed.

Casework

On June 7, 2016, Yecenia Armenta was released after almost four years in prison. Yecenia was taken into police custody in July 2012 and brutally tortured into confessing to the murder of her husband. Her attackers beat her for hours, raped her and threatened to kill her children.

In February 2015, all charges against Claudia Medina were dropped. In August 2012, marines broke into Claudia's home. She was blindfolded and taken to the local naval base where she was severely tortured and sexually assaulted. She was then transferred to the local branch of the Federal Attorney General's Office where she was pressured into signing a statement that she wasn't allowed to read.

Morocco

In November 2014 Morocco ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT). This strengthened Morocco's international commitment to the prevention of torture and other ill-treatment in detention.

Casework

The investigation into Ali Aarrass's claims of torture was closed by authorities late last year. On 14 December 2010, Ali, a Belgian-Moroccan national, was forcibly returned to Morocco from Spain, where he had been caring for his ageing father. Ali said he was tortured for 12 days in a secret detention centre. He was beaten on the soles of his feet, given electric shocks to his testicles, suspended from his wrists, and burned with cigarettes.

Ali has personally received a great psychological boost from solidarity by AIUK supporters. Ali's wife Farida said:

'I went to see Ali Aarrass early November 2015, when he entered his 70th day of hunger strike. When speaking to him, in order to encourage and motivate him, we discussed what people were doing for him, including young people in the UK who created a joke book and who also sent me a copy here in Brussels. His eyes opened suddenly, he gave me a big smile and told me:

"Yes I received it, I really liked. Frankly I really enjoyed it. I was deeply moved to know that young people devoted time to think about it, to create it and to finalize it when they could have spent that

time for themselves, they did it for me. I find it to be a beautiful gesture. It's very touching, really. Please do not forget to thank them for me, do not forget!"

Nigeria

In June 2015, Nigerian lawmakers passed the Anti-Torture Bill, which was one of the major advocacy calls of the campaign in Nigeria. It is currently being reviewed by the Nigerian Law Reform Commission.

In December 2014, the Nigerian police released a Human Rights Practice Manual setting out standards expected of police officers and guidance on how to achieve these.

Casework

In May 2015, Moses Akatugba, was pardoned and released from prison. In 2005, 16-year-old Moses Akatugba was arrested by the Nigerian army and, he says, shot in the hand, beaten on the head and back, and then charged with stealing mobile phones. In a police station pliers were used to pull out his finger and toe nails to force him to sign two 'confessions' – which formed the sole basis of his conviction and ultimately to sentence him to death.

In April 2016 Moses gave a message to AIUK supporters:

Please tell Amnesty UK supporters that I appreciate them, for they participated so much in getting me out of prison and saving my life.

I really cherish all of their efforts. I am now a human rights activist in HURSDEF and a member of Amnesty International Nigeria section, to help save other people's lives.

I am now part of the Amnesty family.

Philippines

The Philippines' Senate opened an inquiry into Amnesty International's report, Above the law: Police torture in the Philippines, on the day of its launch. Since then, two Senate inquiries have taken place to respond to the evidence included in the report regarding widespread torture in the Philippine National Police.

Casework

The Philippines National Police (PNP) Internal Affairs Service (IAS) commenced administrative investigations into the campaign's key cases of Alfreda Disbarro and Jerryyme Corre upon receipt of letters from Amnesty members and activists.

Two police officers linked to the torture of Alfreda Disbarro have been demoted. On 3 October 2013 police in the Philippines accused 32-year-old mother of two, Alfreda Disbarro, of being a drug dealer. She said that once police officers had got her inside their headquarters they pinned her to a wall, repeatedly punched her in her face and stomach, hit her with a club, poked their fingers into her eyes, slapped her, forced a mop into her mouth and banged her head against a wall.

Uzbekistan

Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and relatives of torture survivors felt supported, encouraged by solidarity actions, contact with Amnesty International groups/members and with research team. At the UN Human Rights Committee review of Uzbekistan's fourth periodic report in July 2015, the head of the government delegation referred to Amnesty's report, *Secret and Lies. Forced confessions under torture in Uzbekistan*, and said that the government would consider some of the recommendations on legislative changes put forward in the report.

UK / EU specific work

Shaker Aamer

In October 2014 Shaker Aamer was released after 14 years, detained without charge or trial. The majority of these years were spent in Guantánamo Bay. Shaker Aamer has alleged that he was mistreated in detention, both in Afghanistan and in Guantánamo. Amnesty first issued an Urgent Action for Shaker Aamer in 2005 and many AIUK supporters campaigned tirelessly for his release. Upon his release, he thanked everyone who fought for his release:

"I can't tell you how much I want to speak to all of you and stand with all of you, carrying on the struggle for justice for everybody who has been oppressed and needs our help. If there is one thing we can do to save the whole world, it is to fight for justice. We will work hard together to close Guantánamo and every unlawful facility run by any government worldwide. Justice has no colour or religion or race."

EU Tools of Torture campaign

In October 2015 the European Parliament voted overwhelmingly to close the loopholes we identified in the EU law prohibiting the trade in torture equipment. The vote was in the region of 630-30.

In the same month, AIUK's director Kate Allen received a personal - and unprompted - letter from Anna Soubry, a Minister in the Department of Business, in direct response to our campaign to stop torture equipment being illegally promoted at the DSEI Arms Fair in London.

In the letter the Minister acknowledged the - 'very large number of emails....by members of the public responding to Amnesty's "Torture on your Doorstep" campaign, which is evidence of the strength of feeling on the issue.'

The letter also states that as far as they are aware, there was no torture equipment advertised at this year's arms fair. It went on to say that the UK Government supports many of Amnesty's recommendations to strengthen the EU controls and that they want to continue to work closely with us on this issue. This is a significant achievement; given the other areas the UK Government is distancing itself from regarding the importance of strong human rights safeguards.

Following the European Parliament vote, individual member states still need to agree to the proposals. This process has not progressed swiftly in 2016.

Continuing the work

AIUK's country co-ordinators will continue to work on torture and human rights in each of the five countries of focus. They share actions and updates with any activist groups who are interested in signing up to their region. To find out the contact details for the Mexico, Morocco, Nigeria, Philippines or Uzbekistan country co-ordinators please contact activism@amnesty.org.uk

There are numerous long term torture cases within AIUK's Individuals At Risk Portfolio, including the priority Stop Torture campaign cases of Ali Aarrass and Alfreda Disbarro. To find out more of these case, either contact the relevant Country Co-ordinator, or the IAR programme at iar@amnesty.org.uk

In 2015 there were 80 new Urgent Actions, which had a concern of torture or risk of torture. This was approximately 30% of all new UAs issued. To join the Urgent Action Network go to: www.amnesty.org.uk/join-urgent-action-network