

WIRED

FOR PEOPLE PASSIONATE ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS
JULY/AUGUST 2014 VOLUME 44 ISSUE 004

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL

A stylized illustration of several hands of different colors (white, yellow, black) reaching out and holding a large black heart. The heart contains the text 'STOP TORTURE' and 'SUPPORT THE SURVIVORS'. A yellow diagonal line crosses through the word 'TORTURE'. The background consists of a grid of black lines.

**STOP
TORTURE**
**SUPPORT THE
SURVIVORS**

A demonstrator in Hong Kong holds a candle during a vigil remembering the victims of China's 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown, 4 June 2014. Amnesty documented at least 30 activists being persecuted by the Chinese authorities in relation to this year's commemorations.



INSIDE THIS WIRE



THE AIR WE NEED TO BREATHE

Farida Aarrass was faced with two options when her brother was locked up and tortured: fight or turn away. **PAGE 5.**



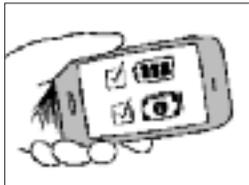
ROOM TO HEAL

Find out why a leafy garden in England has become a haven for torture survivors. **PAGE 6.**



SO THAT THEY ARE NOT FORGOTTEN

Two generations of women tell us why they write letters appealing for the freedom of someone they've never met. **PAGE 8.**



DON'T PANIC – PUSH THE BUTTON

A new app could make the difference between being abducted and tortured, or being protected by a network of activists. **PAGE 12.**



GIVING LIFE A CHANCE

What do you do if you're in labour and the ambulance doesn't turn up? Women in rural South Africa talk about the difficulties they face when trying to access maternal healthcare. **PAGE 14.**



THE HUMAN COST OF BUILDING FENCES

While the EU spends millions keeping people out, the human cost of Fortress Europe keeps growing. **PAGE 18.**



'WE HAVE NO FEAR ANYMORE'

Their husbands, brothers and fathers have been jailed for criticizing the government, but these women in the United Arab Emirates fight on. **PAGE 24.**



ALSO IN WIRE

Challenging sexist attitudes in Burkina Faso (**PAGE 3**); Our Stop Torture campaign gets going (**PAGE 10**); Behind the scenes at the International Criminal Court (**PAGE 20**); Worldwide Appeals – write a letter, stop torture (**PAGE 22**).

Published by Editorial Studio, Amnesty International, International Secretariat, Peter Benenson House, 1 Easton Street, London WC1X 0DW, UK
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Cover image: © Amnesty International

EDITORIAL

TAKING TORTURE PERSONALLY

How do you support someone who has been tortured? That's what this issue of WIRE explores, to mark the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture on 26 June.

We speak to Farida Aarrass about why she will never give up fighting for her brother Ali. We discover how the psychotherapeutic legacy of Amnesty legend Helen Bamber lives on in a quiet London garden. We meet two very different women who regularly protest on behalf of people they've never met. And we learn how our new Panic Button app could help protect people.

Meeting these inspiring people answered our question. We can support torture survivors by taking what happened to them personally. By never giving up on them, and giving them room to rebuild their lives. By sticking with people until they get justice. And by making sure torture doesn't happen to somebody else.

Join us by supporting Ali, Alfreda, Claudia, Dilorom and Moses (see page 22-23).

Together, we can stop torture.

ABOUT WIRE

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AGENDA

GOOD NEWS & UPDATES

#SPEAKOUT FOR FREEDOM IN RUSSIA

Many Russians call their parliament the “mad printer” because it frantically keeps passing new laws. These laws are strangling people’s right to protest, disagree or criticize their government. Hundreds of peaceful protesters have been arrested, detained or given extortionate fines since 2012. Non-governmental organizations are being targeted. Independent news sites like www.grani.ru have been blocked, and anti-extremism and libel laws are being used to silence dissenting voices.

“Silence is a sign of agreement,” goes a Russian saying. Don’t be silent: stand with Russian activists by joining us on Twitter:

[#SpeakOut for freedom](#)

RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE IN INDONESIA

Whistling while praying, claiming to be a prophet or receiving a revelation from God: just some of the things that could land you in prison for up to five years in Indonesia.

The Indonesian authorities are increasingly using “blasphemy laws” to silence and criminalize people they think have insulted Islam or other official religions.

Although long seen a “haven of tolerance”, and praised as a model of democracy by many Western governments, over the last few years religious freedom has slowly disappeared.

[Find out more about the absurdity of intolerance in Indonesia:](#)

<http://bit.ly/IndonesiaIntolerance>

CAR: KEEPING UP THE PRESSURE

Thank you to the more than 67,000 people who signed our petition to protect civilians in Central African Republic (CAR). We delivered all your

signatures to the US authorities in May, urging them to support a strong UN peacekeeping mission in CAR. We are now pressing for that mission to be in place by September and able to do an effective job. We will also publish fresh research in July on the country’s human rights crisis, including war crimes and crimes against humanity.

[Find out more from our interactive story](#)

[map: http://bit.ly/CARmap](http://bit.ly/CARmap)

NO MORE FEAR IN GAMBIA

On 22 July, Gambia celebrates the 20th anniversary of President Yahya Jammeh’s rise to power. It won’t be a day of celebration for everyone. Many people, including journalists, political opponents and human rights activists, have disappeared or been tortured during his rule. They include Ebrima Manneh and Imam Baba Leigh, whom many Amnesty activists have appealed on behalf of.

We will mark the anniversary by staging a Global Day of Action.

[Join us – on www.facebook.com/amnestygolbal](#)

[or email francois.patuel@amnesty.org](#)

[for more information.](#)

SIGNIFICANT WIN ON SRI LANKA

After five years of campaigning for accountability in Sri Lanka, we’ve gained a significant win. On 27 March 2014, the UN finally voted for an independent investigation into war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by state forces and armed groups at the end of the war in Sri Lanka. Amnesty has been campaigning for this for years, most recently through our #TellTheTruth campaign. The UN investigation brings new hope to thousands of survivors of torture, abduction and other abuses. We will be working with them and monitoring the investigation’s progress in the coming year.



A man from an Indigenous group kicks a football with the words “no FIFA” at a protest in front of the Brazilian congress in Brasilia, 28 May 2014. Huge public demonstrations kicked off around the country against social inequality and the cost of hosting the football extravaganza. Police sometimes responded with excessive force, tear gas and rubber bullets. Amnesty supporters worldwide are giving Brazil’s government more than 100,000 yellow cards to remind them that protest is not a crime. [Send yours at www.aiyellowcard.org until 20 July and watch our video: http://bit.ly/NoFoulPlayBrazil](#)

NO MORE EXCUSES FOR SEXUAL VIOLENCE

My Body My Rights, our campaign on sexual and reproductive rights, ramps up the pressure on the Moroccan, Algerian and Tunisian authorities this summer. We’re asking them to stop making excuses for sexual violence, and repeal laws that discriminate against women. In January 2014, a law that allowed rapists to walk free if they married their victim was abolished in Morocco-Western Sahara. But similar laws exist in Algeria and Tunisia. And discrimination – such as making the severity of punishment for rape dependent on whether the victim was a virgin – still persists in Moroccan law.

[Sign our petition at](#)

<http://bit.ly/stopmakexcuses> before 31 July.

AND THE WINNERS ARE...

This bold piece of ARTivism (right) from the Iloilo Group in the Philippines was one of five winners of our My Body My Rights competition. Launched with our campaign in March, the competition attracted hundreds of entries. People worldwide sent us selfies, artwork and more, telling us what their sexual and reproductive rights mean to them. We judged each work on its originality, effort and relevance.

[Check out the winning entries –](#)

[and find out what they won –](#)

[at http://bit.ly/mbmrwinners](http://bit.ly/mbmrwinners)

UP FRONT

CHALLENGING ATTITUDES

Gaetan Mootoo, West Africa researcher, speaks to one of Amnesty's supporters in the struggle to protect sexual and reproductive rights in Burkina Faso.

It is difficult to wake someone who is not sleeping. This is the African proverb that Claire Rouamba quotes from the outset to explain how impossible it feels to get information across to men who think they know it all. Women have the power in their hands, she says, but they face obstacles – namely social pressure: *what will people think of me?*

I am in Ouagadougou, capital of Burkina Faso, speaking to Claire about the difficulties women and girls face when trying to make decisions about whether or when to have children. When I arrived in Ouagadougou, she was busy campaigning on this issue in the rural areas, but today she found time to drop by my hotel to say hello.

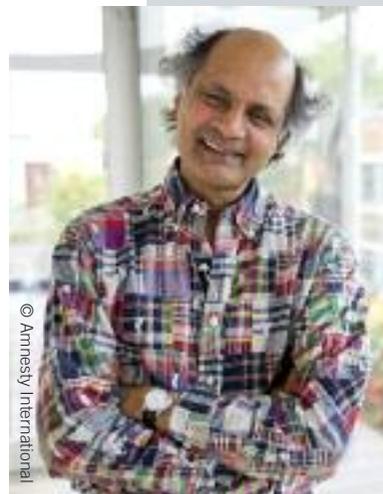
At one point in our conversation, Claire tells me about a woman whose husband rejected her because she had used contraception. Husbands sometimes believe that women use it to deceive them. Being pregnant is considered a “pledge of loyalty”, she explains. Young girls seeking contraception could be suspected of “playing around”.

Claire Rouamba is President of the Association Songtaaba des femmes unies et développement (AFSUD) in Tanghin Dassouri, a rural town 35km from Ouagadougou. I first met her in 2008 while researching maternal health in Burkina Faso.

Claire started working with local women to bring clean water to their community in Tanghin Dassouri. Now, she works to promote their right to reproductive health. She still has the same energy I remember, and the same faith in her activism supporting women to be independent. Independence is key to removing financial barriers to contraception, she says, and this can only be achieved through education and outreach.

AFSUD reaches more than 800 people across 14 villages through its activities. Claire hopes that eventually the 35 villages of the municipality of Tanghin Dassouri will also be included. She smiles, saying that men now make up 100 of the 800 people in AFSUD.

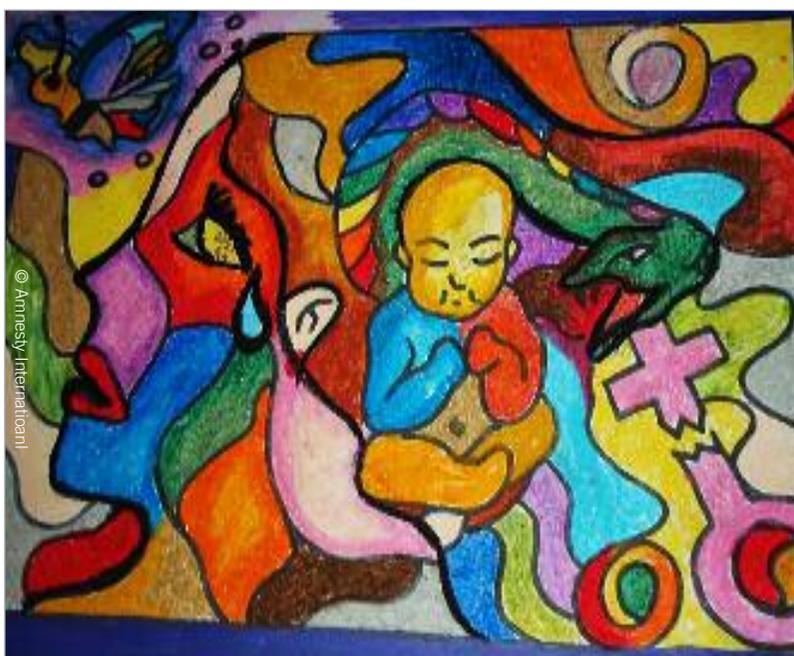
Claire has been a great support with our past research and campaigns. Since then, we have been doing our best to make her work more visible. Together, through Amnesty's My Body My Rights campaign, we are working towards the same goal in Burkina Faso – better access to sexual and reproductive health services and information for everyone.



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© Reuters/Jedson Alves



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EMAIL US

We welcome your feedback and ideas! Write to us at thewire@amnesty.org



THE AIR WE NEED TO BREATHE

How do people cope when a family member is locked up and tortured?

“When your brother is detained and tortured you have two options: fight, or abandon him.” Farida Aarrass (pictured left) decided to fight.

Farida is an impressive woman: a mother of seven who works with a local organization for homeless people in Brussels, Belgium. She has also spent the last five years campaigning for justice for her younger brother, Ali.

Ali is currently serving 12 years in a Moroccan prison for terrorism. He has always denied the charges and says he was tortured into confessing. We featured his graphic drawings of being tortured in WIRE May/June.

Right now, Amnesty activists worldwide are campaigning for Ali as part of our global Stop Torture campaign. Encouraging news came in May, when Moroccan authorities announced that they had opened an investigation into Ali's torture. We have yet to confirm this.

Meanwhile, Farida told us what a difference international support makes to Ali and their family.

GIVING ALI BACK HIS HUMANITY

“Ali and I have always been very close and I'm convinced of his innocence. Lots of people said ‘there's no smoke without fire’, that he must have done something. The [Spanish, Moroccan and Belgian] governments presented my brother as a terrorist – a devil.

“Little by little, I got to know people who supported me, and these people's support has humanized him. That's very important – giving my brother back his humanity.

“Ali has always been a very honourable man, known for not doing anything bad to anyone.

“We gathered testimony from people who knew my brother, made a documentary, published a book, and his case appeared on Belgian TV.

“The more people knew about his case, the less fearful they were. Many others – politicians, lawyers, activists – became interested in my brother's story. They see that this is a very serious case of injustice.”

THE WORST IS TO BE FORGOTTEN

“Ali runs the risk every day that he will be ill-treated again. He gains strength from people supporting him. ‘The worst that can happen to a prisoner is that people forget him,’ he says.

“There isn't a day when I wake up and don't think of Ali, or a night when I go to bed without remembering him. He is with us all the time and he knows that.

“He calls me now and then if he hasn't been having problems. When he doesn't call it's torture for his relatives. He can receive letters but the ones he sends don't get out of the prison.

“Knowing that the UN and Amnesty are working on his case gives him enormous satisfaction. He feels great knowing that the definition of him as a terrorist is fading.”

KEEP FIGHTING

“Ali says his case should be used to make sure that there are no more extraditions, no more torture. ‘I want mine to be the last of those injustices,’ he tells me. What they do to the prisoners is barbaric. He doesn't want his suffering to be in vain.

“The people supporting us are the most wonderful part of this struggle. The spirit they give us – it's like giving water to a thirsty person crossing the Sahara. They – you – are the water we need to live, the air we need to breathe. That's where I get my strength.

“We don't feel alone. We are very thankful. Keep fighting, because the lives of many unjustly detained people depend on it.”

TAKE ACTION >>>

You message can help Ali: <http://bit.ly/JusticeForAli>

ROOM TO HEAL

Torture breaks people. In a peaceful London garden, some survivors are slowly rebuilding their lives – simply by being together.



Rosa* pulls up her trouser leg to reveal coffee-coloured marks dotted round her ankle. They are scars from the months she spent in chains after being forced into prostitution in East Africa.

“How can I ever forget what happened?” she asks, “when every time I look at my own body I am reminded of what they did to me?”

Rosa is spending the afternoon in a leafy London garden with people she would never have met under different circumstances. Two things bind them together: they have all survived torture, and they have all been brought here by a project called Room To Heal.

Rosa still feels devastated. She cries as she recounts how she and her sister were kidnapped, beaten, raped and forced into prostitution and drug smuggling. She knew she would be killed if she didn't comply. She talks of seeing other girls beaten to death, and being forced to watch as their bodies were disposed of. Within a year, her sister was among them.

ONE OF THE LUCKY ONES

It sounds strange, but Rosa is one of the lucky ones. She found Room to Heal, a “healing community” that provides specialist psychological support for refugees and asylum-seekers who have survived torture and similar violence.

“People who have survived torture have been stripped of everything. They have been physically, psychologically and spiritually destroyed,” says Room to Heal's founder, counsellor and psychotherapist Mark Fish (mark.fish@roomtoheal.org.uk).

Mark worked for many years alongside Helen Bamber, a founding member of Amnesty International. She went on to set up the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, now known as Freedom from Torture, and later the Helen Bamber Foundation.



© Room to Heal

THE POWER OF COMMUNITY

Mark describes Helen as a force of nature who “provided a forum for people to speak the unspeakable”. Her work was forever shaped by the “grey ghosts” she met as a 20-year-old volunteer during the 1945 relief operation at Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Germany.

Helen supported torture survivors from all over the world during her impressive career. Along with a stint doing conflict resolution work in northern Uganda, her work also inspired Mark to set up Room to Heal in 2007.

Room to Heal focuses on the power of the community, encouraging people to cook and sing together, explore nature and grow flowers and vegetables.

“It’s precisely because torture comes from another human being that it is so destructive,” Mark explains. “That means that over time, the deepest healing resource is rebuilding bonds with other people.”

A GOOD CRY AND A LAUGH

Here, Rosa has found people who understand what she went through. People like Amir, tortured because he was a musician. Or Armand, imprisoned because he was a journalist. Or Leila, locked up for years as a domestic slave.

The gardening project in particular has been a huge success. Every Friday, people gather in this leafy little corner of the big city to chat, eat a meal together and tend to the plants. Mark calls it a “therapeutic community”, and it is widely recognized as very successful.

As Okello from Uganda puts it: “On Wednesdays we come to therapy and we often have a really good cry. Then on Fridays we go to the garden and we often have a really good laugh.”

A SENSE OF BELONGING

At one such Friday gathering, 43-year-old Mohammed describes not seeing his family for four years. His youngest daughter – just two years old when he fled – no longer recognizes him.

A teacher and keen footballer from west Africa, Mohammed jumped at the chance of taking his students on a two-week footballing exchange to the UK in 2010. When he returned the authorities beat him up, abducted and nearly killed him.

“I was taken to a place that I cannot describe,” he says. “They wanted me to confess that my time in the UK was politically motivated, but I could only tell them it was a school visit and I had no political agenda. I was seriously tortured. They tried everything on me. They almost beat me to death.”

Mohammed was eventually dumped by the roadside after being warned that he wouldn’t live to see the upcoming elections. After five days in hospital he fled to the UK taking just the clothes he was wearing with him.

As in Rosa’s case, it was Mohammed’s sympathetic lawyer who put him in touch with Room to Heal. Therapy is helping him to start coming to terms with what happened. By getting legal advice he is regaining some sort of control over his life.

Left: Room to Heal is a therapeutic community for refugees and asylum-seekers who have survived torture and other forms of organized violence.

Below: Psychotherapist Helen Bamber (left, wearing a red headscarf) and friends at an Amnesty protest in London, UK, 1960s.



© Helen Bamber Foundation

But all Mohammed really wants is to go home. His shoulders are heavy, but he smiles when he talks about Room to Heal. “It’s the only place I feel comfortable,” he says. “To be surrounded by these people, I am no longer alone. I have a sense of belonging again.”

For a short while on a Friday afternoon, in a drizzly London garden, Mohammed and Rosa are part of a small, close-knit community. The fire has been lit, and laughter comes from the kitchen where a huge pot of pasta is bubbling away. Children run around as people greet each other and gather round the fire.

This could be any group of friends getting together to have fun and relax. And that, for this fleeting moment at least, is enough.

**The names of all torture survivors have been changed.*

TAKE ACTION >>>

Your message can help people who have survived torture – visit www.amnesty.org/StopTorture or see page 22-23.

FIND OUT MORE >>>

www.roomtoheal.org
www.freedomfromtorture.org
www.helenbamber.org

SO THAT THEY ARE NOT FORGOTTEN



© Private

What inspires someone to write a letter for a person they have never met?

At opposite ends of Germany, two women are writing messages asking for the release of Dilorom Abdukadirova. She is serving 18 years in prison in Uzbekistan, just for going to a protest (see box).

Ilse and Sophie couldn't be more different, but their passions are the same. They are both part of Amnesty's vibrant Worldwide Appeal Network, which has championed the cases of prisoners of conscience since 1961.

In Germany alone, more than 5,000 activists have written millions of "letters against oblivion", achieving positive developments in almost half of all cases.

Eighty-three-year-old Ilse Garbers (pictured above), lives in a residential home in Karlsruhe, south-western Germany. She writes up to 18 letters a month on her electric typewriter.

"I grew up during the war in Nazi Germany. In my school days, I experienced the dictatorship of the former German Democratic Republic [East Germany]. All this had a profound influence on me as a person.

"I've always loved writing letters. When I was in secondary school we were given the details of soldiers at war and I wrote letters to them. There were sad aspects to this: sometimes the correspondence would be discontinued, or a different soldier would write back to me, explaining that his friend had died.

"Two of my relatives also died in the field. Those soldiers were all boys, often drafted even before they had finished their A levels. They sacrificed their young lives for no higher purpose.

"After I retired I wanted to continue volunteering, so I contacted Amnesty. It was there that I learned

about writing letters to protest against the fate of prisoners of conscience.

"I am deeply moved by the thought of those oppressed people who are not free, who have to live with abuse and torture and who have no means of standing up for themselves. Just like Dilorom Abdukadirova and her awful fate in Uzbekistan (see box on right).

"I hope to be able to continue on behalf of Amnesty for many more years. It is especially rewarding that over the years, I have received several answers to my letters. This proves that my correspondence – which is not done via email or fax, but in a rather old-fashioned way: typed up with my electric typewriter – was indeed noted and elicited a reaction.

"These letters serve a purpose. If just one out of 50 letters has an effect, it leaves me with a sense of achievement."

Twenty-year-old Sophie Rogalski (pictured right), lives in Berlin and is studying to become a sign language interpreter. She prefers to take action online.

“I got involved with Amnesty’s women’s rights group in Berlin in 2012. Amnesty is just my thing – I’m convinced that this work really can make a difference.

“I think appeal messages do have an effect. For example, it was great to see a young man from South Korea, Yoo Yun-Jong, imprisoned for objecting to military service, being released in 2013.

“Our Amnesty youth group had written to the authorities and sent solidarity messages to him in prison. Of course we know it was not our activism alone, but it was very motivating. We received a thankyou note from Yoo Yun-Jong after his release.

“I think torture is one of the most horrendous human rights violations. It’s unbelievable that it is still used in so many parts of the world. I was really moved by Dilorom’s story (see box below), because all she did was to protest against the bad economic situation in her country.

“We must not shut our eyes. Amnesty, with its worldwide network, has influence, and I can do my share. That’s why I’m an Amnesty activist.

Left: Ilse’s appeal letter for Dilorom.

TAKE ACTION >>>

Dilorom’s story

When Dilorom Abdukadirova attended a protest in Andizhan, Uzbekistan, in 2005, security forces opened fire on the crowd. She panicked and fled. When she returned home she was detained and later sentenced to 18 years in prison.

We believe Dilorom is a prisoner of conscience. You can support her and other torture survivors by joining our Stop Torture campaign. See page 22-23 and visit <https://bit.ly/dilorom>



© Private

STOP TORTURE

THE PRESSURE STARTS TO BUILD...

Our Stop Torture campaign got off to a great start in May. We turned the world's attention back to torture, with international headlines warning of hypocritical governments that ban torture in law but still allow it in practice.

Amnesty's revelation that 44% of people around the world still fear torture if taken into custody further exposed this global crisis. So did our activists, by staging events worldwide (see photos on right).

On the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture on 26 June, we stand again in solidarity with people who have been tortured, showing governments that we have them firmly in our sights.

TAKE ACTION >>>

See images from the day and upload your own at <http://stoptorture.tumblr.com>



Amnesty: 141 countries still torture

30 years after UN Convention on Torture, 44 percent believe they are not safe from torture if detained by authorities

Al Jazeera, 12 May 2014



© Grzegorz Zukowski/Amnesty International





© N. Kraemer



Nearly half of people around world fear torture in custody: Amnesty

(Reuters, 12 May 2014) - Nearly half of people around the world fear becoming a victim of torture if taken into custody, a poll for human rights organization Amnesty International showed on Tuesday.

Amnesty: Torture Use 'Systematic' in Many Countries

LONDON – Governments around the world are failing to keep the promises they made in the 1984 U.N. Convention on Torture, according to human rights group Amnesty International.

Voice of America, 12 May 2014



Photos, clockwise from top left: Former Black Panther member Robert King, who spent 29 years in solitary confinement, attends Amnesty's Stop Torture campaign launch in Paris, France; interesting facts from our new global survey (see <http://bit.ly/TortureAttitudes>); wear a button, stop torture; a very special football boot in Togo; Amnesty Nepal speak their minds; activist Loretta Rosales from the Philippines at our launch in London, UK; standing between the torturer and the tortured in Poland; in the media spotlight in Berlin, Germany; attending a Stop Torture football match in Togo. Centre: youth activists in Berne, Switzerland. All other images ©Amnesty International

DON'T PANIC PUSH THE BUTTON

Amnesty's new Panic Button app shows how people can protect themselves – and each other – using simple technology.

WHAT IS PANIC BUTTON?

Panic Button is a modern-day SOS signal. We challenged designers and activists in 2012 to fight human rights abuses in innovative ways. Our winner, Amy Bonsall, focused on how people working in risky environments would create a "PACT" with each other by agreeing to be prepared to act if anyone finds themselves in a threatening situation.

Panic Button was born from this. It has evolved into an Android app that sends out distress signals to contacts pre-programmed into a user's mobile phone.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

You start by quickly pressing the phone's power button repeatedly. That triggers a pre-set text alert to be sent to three pre-entered contacts. If you have GPS activated on your phone, it will also reveal your location on a map and update it regularly. Because the app is cleverly disguised and easy to access it can be used secretly. Anyone threatening you won't realize that the phone is sending out distress signals.

By Tanya O'Carroll,
Amnesty's Technology
and Human Rights
Project Officer



"We think Panic Button is a tool that can be useful in countries like Sudan where mass arrests and detention of human rights defenders are common, and where often families of the victims struggle to know the whereabouts of their loved one."

Activist from Sudan

WHAT POTENTIAL DOES PANIC BUTTON HAVE?

Right now, 130 volunteers and activists in 16 countries across Central America, East Africa and the Philippines are helping us refine it by using it and giving us feedback. We're really excited that so many people feel the app can make a tangible difference to how safe they feel. In human terms, having it on your phone could potentially mean the difference between being abducted and tortured, or being protected by people who are looking out for you.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

We're still testing the app, and activists can apply to take part in the testing period – just sign up here: <https://panicbutton.io/#download>

As soon as we have resolved any remaining bugs, Panic Button will be available on the Google Playstore and F-Droid (a privacy-respecting app store for those concerned about tracking by Google). This means anyone, anywhere who owns a cheap Android smartphone can install the app. You'll find step-by-step instructions, security advice and tips at www.panicbutton.io

We are delighted that – after two years of hard work and testing – Panic Button could soon be helping people protect themselves, and others, in real life situations. It just goes to show what relatively simple technology can achieve when it is used in the right way.

"I wish I might not have to use it in the future. But the threat is so real that having a tool like the Panic Button could be of help in an emergency."

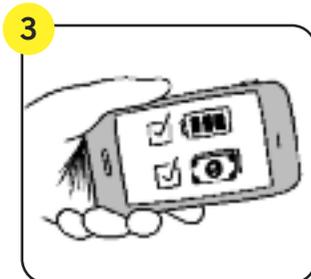
Activist from the Philippines



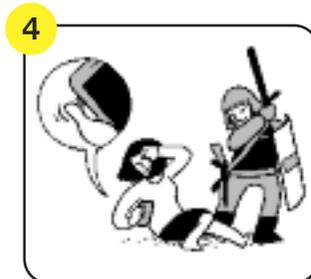
1 TAKE TIME to set up Panic Button somewhere safe and quiet



2 Make sure your contacts are PREPARED to ACT



3 CHECK that your mobile phone has credit and battery



4 ACTIVATE Panic Button by rapidly pressing the power button



5 Your network will receive an SMS and updates about your location

All illustrations © Tim Gaedke

A digital security trainer leads a Panic Button training session with activists from the Meso American Women Human Rights Defenders Initiative, El Salvador, April 2014.



© Amnesty International

FIND OUT MORE >>>

Get updates about Panic Button on our blog:
www.panicalert.tumblr.com

GIVING LIFE A CHANCE

Why are so many pregnant women and new mothers dying in South Africa? HIV, problems at clinics, discrimination and poor transport all play a role, say these rural women who want a better life for their children.

Grace Ngema, a community and women's rights activist, welcomes us to her homestead in Njomelwane village in KwaZulu-Natal.

We've travelled nearly 400km southeast of Johannesburg to speak to her and other rural women about the difficulties they face in accessing maternal healthcare. Access to such services is key to women and girls' sexual and reproductive rights.

Like so many other women in South Africa, Grace looks after her own children as well as other young people. She cares for 11 children, including some of her grandchildren and two teenage girls.

"HIV and AIDS has a big impact in my community and even in my family," she says. "My husband's son died of HIV and then he left these three kids. I felt I needed to take them and care for them properly."

FIVE TIMES MORE LIKELY TO DIE

As Grace says, the impact of the virus is wide-reaching.

Nearly a third of pregnant women in South Africa are living with HIV. They are nearly five times more likely to die than pregnant women without the virus. The government says that a sharp rise in maternal deaths in the last decade is partly linked to the high rate of HIV. Around 1,400 women die every year in South Africa during pregnancy or shortly after giving birth.

Part of Grace's work involves supporting pregnant women and new mothers in villages in Uthungulu district, navigating risky terrain to safeguard new lives. This remarkable woman has become a rock for women in her community.

Through Grace and other activists, we met pregnant women and new mothers in rural areas of

KwaZulu-Natal. They describe the barriers they face when trying to access vital healthcare.

'FORCED' TO TEST FOR HIV

Many women feel that they are made to take an HIV test at the clinics.

"You are forced to test," says a woman from Eshowe. "If you don't, you can't get an antenatal card... and you won't be admitted to hospital unless you have those results."

Such perceived compulsion about testing – which breaches government guidelines – raises fears in women and girls.

Many also tell us they are scared that their HIV status will become known because clinics don't respect confidentiality.

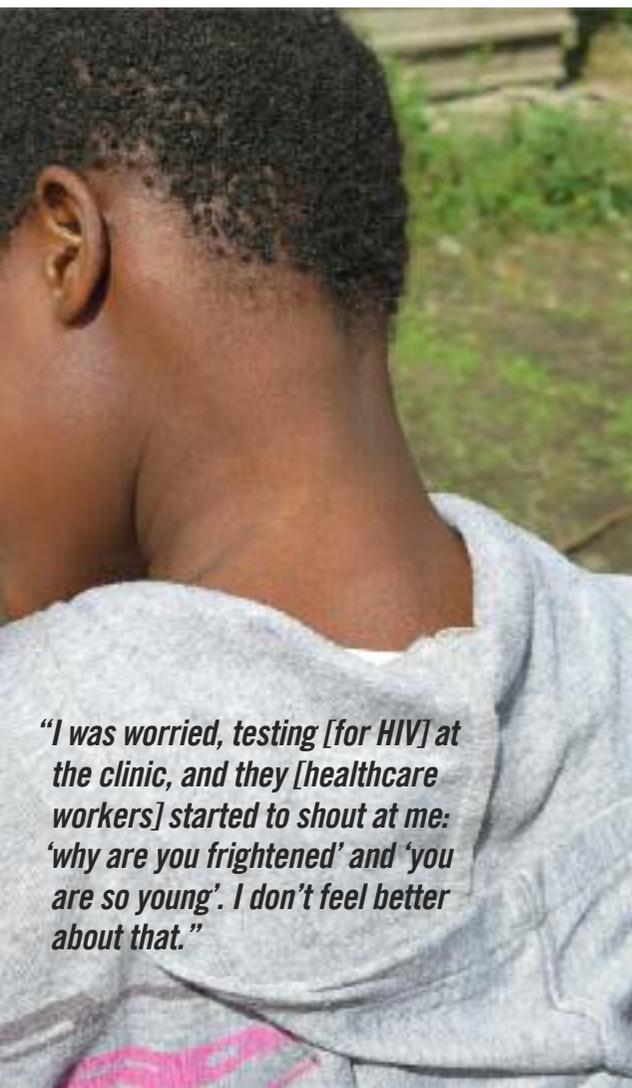
"[I] was afraid to go to the clinic," says one woman, a mother of two children from Yanguye village. "I said, 'Wow, what if I find out that I am

Clockwise from top left: A *bakkie*, often the only form of public transport serving rural areas like this one in Uthungulu district. The district has the third highest maternal mortality rate in health facilities in South Africa. Many women have to walk long distances on treacherous roads to get to clinics. Find out more in this trailer to our film, *A broken lifeline* <http://bit.ly/LifelineSA>

"I feel angry because the nurses are shouting," says Zama, 24, from Eshowe. Holding her six-month-old son, she describes a visit to an antenatal clinic.

Grace Ngema, a community project coordinator in Uthungulu District, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. This schoolgirl was 17 when she became pregnant. All photos © Amnesty International





"I was worried, testing [for HIV] at the clinic, and they [healthcare workers] started to shout at me: 'why are you frightened' and 'you are so young'. I don't feel better about that."







HIV positive? Wooh! Ah, too much *yarra yarra* [gossip] there. No! I won't go there'."

This is a serious problem, given that the stigma attached to people living with HIV remains particularly high in rural communities.

Another common complaint is that health workers at antenatal clinics humiliate and shout at patients, particularly if they are young, poor or living with HIV.

LIFE-SAVING TREATMENT

For over a decade, the government has been providing antiretroviral treatment (ART) to HIV-positive pregnant women to prevent them passing on the virus to their babies. As a result, today less than 3% of babies are born with the HIV virus. Since 2010, Highly Active ART is also being provided to pregnant women to protect their own health, reducing maternal deaths by 13%.

Success of programmes like these depends on women accessing antenatal care early in their pregnancy. However, as we have heard, poor implementation is making some pregnant women delay attending antenatal clinics or avoid them altogether.

POOR TRANSPORT

Transport problems pose another dangerous barrier to healthcare.

"Most men are no longer working," says Grace. "So for women to get money to support their children and to also maintain their pregnancy and to pay for transport if they are going to hospital is really, really a problem. For instance, in some areas there are no local clinics.

Clockwise from top left:

Homes typical of rural KwaZulu-Natal.

A meeting of a women's community savings group in Uthungulu district. These groups give women financial independence, and allow them to borrow money cheaply to pay for transport to health facilities, among other things.

"We have people coming here and sitting by the tree there waiting for the ambulance," says Mbali Ndlovu, a biochemistry and microbiology undergraduate student from KwaZulu-Natal. "Maybe three or four of the ladies in the area have given birth there."

Zanele Ndlovu with her two-week-old baby, who was born five minutes after the ambulance arrived at the hospital in Melmoth.

All photos © Amnesty International

"For women to go to the antenatal clinics they have to take a *bakkie* [converted van] from their rural area to town, which is a lot of money for women who are very, very poor."

In Uthungulu, ambulances regularly take over six hours to arrive. Sometimes 12 hours. Sometimes they don't come at all.

In emergencies, the cost of private transport to hospitals is prohibitive – up to US\$80, the monthly income of many families.

As a result of these problems, many women delay going to antenatal clinics to save transport costs. Some end up giving birth at home or by the side of a road because they can't afford to hire a car when the ambulance doesn't turn up.

WOMEN OF HOPE

We've met many activists in these rural areas who, despite such difficulties, are fighting to change their communities for the better. Women much like Grace.

"When I think back... I was a rural woman. I was trying hard," she says. "I was not satisfied about my life and things that are happening to me. I felt oppressed.

"[But] there was that feeling, there was hope.

"[Now] I am in a better space. I can say 'no' to things, I can care for other people."

Look out for our report and campaign on maternal health in South Africa this October.

TAKE ACTION >>>

These women and girls deserve better. That's why we're launching a new campaign to improve women's access to maternal healthcare in South Africa.

Join us by writing to President Jacob Zuma, urging him to:

>> ensure that all branches of government are involved in the fight against maternal mortality, HIV/AIDS and gender-based discrimination

>> vigorously prioritize rural development including improved road access and affordable transport links for all communities.

Write to:

Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma, President of the Republic of South Africa, Union Buildings, Private bag X1000, Pretoria 0001, South Africa

THE HUMAN COST OF BUILDING FENCES

While the EU spends millions on keeping people out, a quiet tragedy is unfolding at the gates of 'Fortress Europe'.

Europe is a continent shaped by warfare, with a history of people moving around seeking sanctuary and a better life. Thousands fleeing war and poverty are still arriving at the EU's borders, thinking they have reached safety.

Many of today's refugees and migrants have fled desperate situations in countries like Syria, Afghanistan and Eritrea. They make their – often dangerous – journeys to Europe in the belief that it will protect their human rights.

But these days, very few of them ever get the chance to enter "Fortress Europe". Over the last few years, EU countries have been busy building fences, real and invisible, to keep people out.

Bulgaria is the latest example of this. Almost 8,000 refugees and migrants – more than half from Syria – crossed its border with Turkey between September and November 2013. Between January and the end of March 2014, just 302 made it across.

WHAT CHANGED?

The answer is clear: keeping people out is EU strategy. This works on two fronts: It enlists its non-EU neighbours, such as Turkey, to intercept people heading for Europe. It also encourages EU countries to secure their borders, invest in sophisticated technology and deploy thousands of border guards.

As our new research shows, this has recently happened in both Bulgaria and Greece.

Since 2007, the EU has spent €1.82 billion on managing its outer borders. Frontex – the agency

that co-ordinates border operations between EU states – has a budget of €89.2 million for 2014. By contrast, the European Asylum Support Office has a budget of just €15.6 million.

Keeping people out is an expensive business. And it offers no solutions – it simply pushes people from one border to another, forcing them to take ever-riskier journeys to reach safety. The Mediterranean route from north Africa to Italy claimed over 400 lives in October last year alone.

The human cost of Fortress Europe is growing. An estimated 23,000 people have lost their lives trying to reach Europe since 2000. Millions are stuck in limbo, often without even basic support, in refugee camps in countries like Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

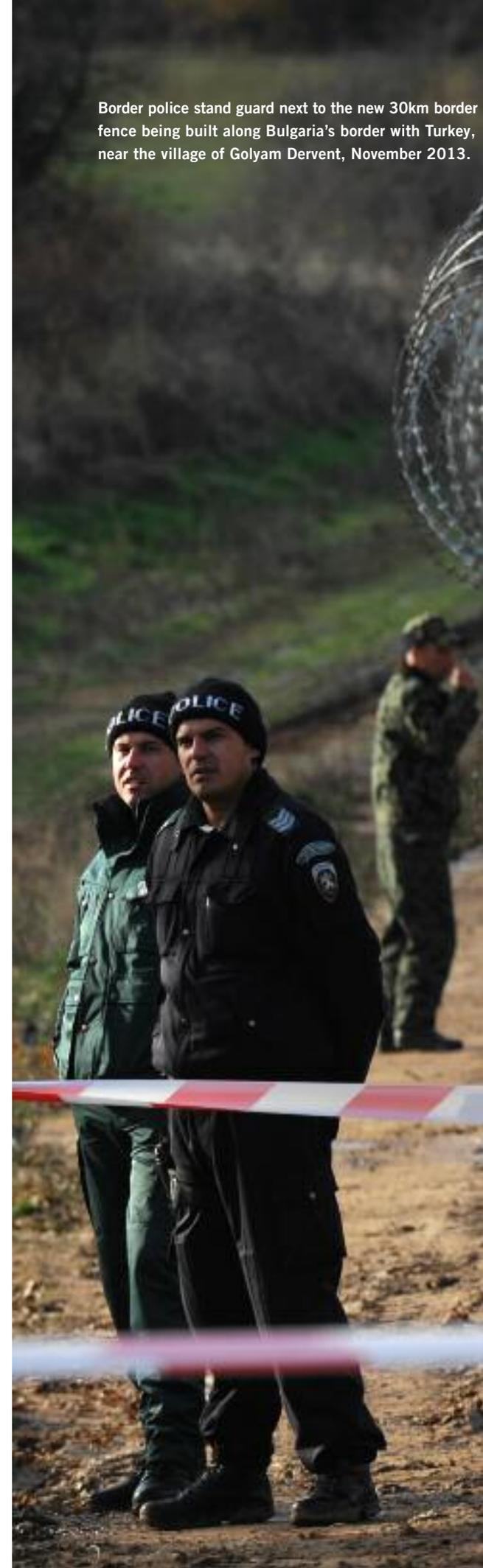
Through our S.O.S. Europe campaign, Amnesty is calling on all European governments to stop the spiralling human cost of the fortress they are building. We want them to protect people before borders, and shoulder their responsibility to care for some of the world's most vulnerable children, women and men.

Building fences is not the answer – we can do better than this.

TAKE ACTION >>>

Join our S.O.S. Europe campaign – visit www.whenyoudontexist.eu and use #SOSEurope and follow @dontexisteurope on Twitter

Border police stand guard next to the new 30km border fence being built along Bulgaria's border with Turkey, near the village of Golyam Dervent, November 2013.



FACTFILE

MYTH: Europe is being flooded by refugees.

REALITY: Most refugees stay in their home region. The countries hosting the largest numbers of refugees in mid-2013 were Chad, China, Ethiopia, Iran, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Pakistan, Turkey and the USA.

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

1 million: Syrian refugees living in Lebanon by April 2014.

4.5 million: The original population of Lebanon.

96,326: Number of Syrian refugees seeking asylum in Europe from the beginning of the crisis until April 2014.

KEEPING WATCH ON WORLD JUSTICE

WIRE goes behind the scenes of the International Criminal Court with Stephanie Barbour, Head of Amnesty's Centre for International Justice in The Hague.



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**-WANTED-
BY THE ICC**

For crimes against humanity

Murder, rape and other acts that are part of a widespread or systematic attack on civilians to fulfil a state or organizational policy

For genocide

Acts carried out with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group

For war crimes

Serious violations of the laws of war (such as direct attacks on civilians, schools and hospitals or torture of captives) which must be prosecuted as crimes

**SIMONE GBAGBO
COTE D'IVOIRE**



© SIA KAMBOU/AF/PI/Getty Images

CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY:



GENOCIDE:

WAR CRIMES:

What is the Centre for International Justice and why is it important?

The Centre for International Justice was set up by Amnesty in the Netherlands and Amnesty's International Secretariat (or headquarters) in The Hague in September 2012. Known as the "city of peace and justice", The Hague is the seat of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and has become synonymous with war crimes trials. The Centre plays an important role sitting on the frontline of international criminal justice. It monitors the work of the ICC and advocates for a fair, effective and robust system of international justice.

What does a typical work day look like for you?

I represent Amnesty's views to the ICC, to the large diplomatic and legal community here, and to the media. At the moment, I'm the only staff member in The Hague but I'm strongly supported

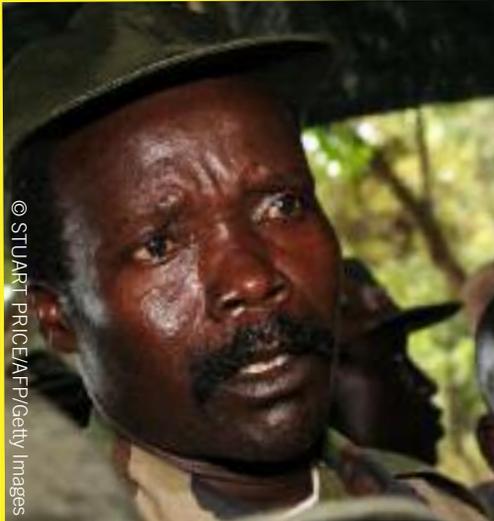
by Amnesty legal advisers and a team of interns and volunteers.

Each day at the Centre is different. Last September, in one day I monitored the opening of the trial of the Deputy President of Kenya, took part in an NGO press conference with Kenyan media to highlight victims' demands for justice, and then lobbied the ICC's finance committee to make sure future investigations are properly resourced.

What is the most dramatic thing that has happened since you arrived at the Centre?

Since July 2013 (when I first moved here), the African Union has led a strong political backlash against the ICC, seeking to stop the trials of the Kenyan leaders. It lobbied the UN Security Council to defer the trials. It is also supporting Kenya's proposals to change the ICC's Statute to exempt current heads of state from prosecution before international courts – something that is currently banned.

JOSEPH KONY UGANDA



© STUART PRICE/AFP/Getty Images

CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY:



GENOCIDE:



WAR CRIMES:



OMAR AL BASHIR SUDAN



© ASHRAF SHAZLY/AFP/Getty Images

CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY:



GENOCIDE:



WAR CRIMES:



SO, WHAT IS THE ICC?

Also known as:
The International Criminal Court

Date of birth:
1 July 2002 (when the Rome Statute, the law that established the ICC, came into force)

Keeps busy:
Investigating and prosecuting genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes when national authorities are unable or unwilling to genuinely do so

Current interests:
Crimes in Central African Republic (2003), Côte d'Ivoire, Darfur, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Libya, Mali, Uganda

Thinking about:
Whether to investigate crimes in Afghanistan, Colombia, Central African Republic (2012 on), Comoros, Georgia, Guinea, Honduras, Iraq, Republic of Korea, Nigeria and Ukraine

Who's in?
Almost two-thirds of all UN member states – that's 122 countries

Who's not?
China, Israel, Russia and the USA

What impact has the African Union-led backlash had on the ICC and how has the Centre responded to it?

Political attacks like these threaten to wither away the ICC's legitimacy, and the voices of victims who are counting on it will be drowned out. Amnesty International and others are a bulwark against that – we refuse to be silent about the need for the ICC to do its work. We speak up for victims and stand up for principles of justice. At the same time we demand that the ICC meets its own standards and delivers its mandate effectively to fight impunity for grave crimes.

We have been working with a coalition of NGOs to push back against the political efforts to interfere with the ICC's cases. In November last year the UN Security Council rejected the African Union's calls to defer the trial of the Kenyan leaders when it was pushed to a vote. Some damaging proposals to change the ICC are still alive though. But I am confident that with strong advocacy by Amnesty and

our partners, states will hopefully say "enough" and stand firmly against any erosion of the integrity of the Rome Statute or the ICC's ability to work effectively.

What do you feel has been your greatest achievement so far?

When the Rome Statute (the law that created the ICC) was being drafted in 1998, Amnesty worked to make sure victims could appear with their own lawyers alongside the Prosecution and Defence. That was a huge achievement then, but in the Centre's first year we saw gaps in the way victim participation was actually working in the ICC's first cases.

Alongside the NGO REDRESS, we proposed to the ICC the idea of convening an Independent Panel of Experts on Victim Participation. Our proposal was accepted and in June 2013 the panel set out seven key principles that the ICC should apply in order to develop more meaningful victim participation. For us, this represents the first step towards ensuring that

the ICC is living up to the true spirit of victim's rights set out in the Rome Statute and shifting the debate away from how to make victim participation more cost effective for the states that hold the purse-strings.

Are there any areas in particular where the ICC should be doing more?

The ICC has yet to convict anyone in its first cases of crimes of sexual violence. In February 2014, we were invited to propose recommendations on the ICC's new policy on Sexual and Gender Based Crimes. It's this kind of close engagement, while still respecting the confidentiality of investigations, and the independence of the court, where Amnesty can make the most difference in ensuring that the ICC lives up to its goal to combat impunity.

WORLDWIDE APPEALS

WRITE A LETTER
CHANGE A LIFE

A letter from you could help free a prisoner, stop an execution or help a bereaved family receive justice.



© Amnesty International

HELP CLAUDIA GET JUSTICE

NAME: CLAUDIA MEDINA
LOCATION: MEXICO

At around 3am on 7 August 2012, marines broke into the home Claudia Medina shared with her husband and three children in Veracruz City, eastern Mexico. They tied her hands and blindfolded her, bundled her into a truck and took her to a local naval base.

There, Claudia says the marines gave her electric shocks and wrapped her in plastic to stop her bruising when they beat and kicked her. They sexually assaulted her. Then they tied her to a chair and left her outside in the scorching afternoon sun.

The next day, Claudia was pressured into signing testimony she had not even read. She was paraded before the media as a dangerous criminal. Later that month she was released on bail. She is appealing against two criminal charges made against her.

Claudia was able to tell a judge that she had been tortured, and he ordered an investigation. But those responsible for the enquiry – the Federal Attorney General's Office – still haven't followed up. Almost two years later, Claudia is still waiting for justice.

Your message can help Claudia:

Visit <http://bit.ly/ClaudiaMedina> or write a letter urging the Federal Attorney General to investigate her torture allegations fully and promptly, to publish the results and bring those responsible to justice. Independent medical examinations that confirm Claudia's allegations should also be accepted as evidence.

Start your message 'Dear Attorney General/ Estimado Señor Procurador' and send it to:

Jesús Murillo Karam, Federal Attorney General/Procurador General de la República, Procuraduría General de la República
Paseo de la reforma 211-213
Col. Cuauhtémoc, C.P. 06500
Mexico City, Mexico

Email: ofproc@pgr.gob.mx

Fax: +52 55 5346 0908 (keep trying, and ask for "fax")



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TORTURED IN A SECRET PRISON

NAME: ALI AARRASS
LOCATION: MOROCCO/WESTERN SAHARA

Ali Aarrass is serving a 12-year sentence for terrorism in Morocco. He denies all the charges and says he was forced to confess after being tortured.

Born in 1962 in the Spanish enclave of Melilla in northern Morocco, Ali moved to Belgium aged 15 and has dual Belgian/Moroccan nationality. He returned to Melilla in 2005 to live closer to his ageing father.

The Spanish authorities suspected Ali of terrorism in 2006, but found no evidence. They imprisoned him in 2008 after the Moroccan authorities asked for him to be extradited on fresh terrorism charges. Kept in solitary confinement for over two years, he protested by going on hunger strike three times.

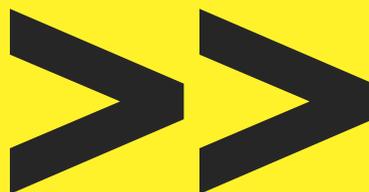
In December 2010, Ali was extradited to Morocco. He says Moroccan intelligence officers then tortured him in a secret prison for 12 days. When he arrived at the notorious Salé II prison near Rabat, other inmates were shocked by the torture marks on Ali's body and by how traumatized he was. Ali was convicted of using weapons illegally and participating in a group intending to commit terrorist acts in November 2011. His conviction was based solely on statements made after he was tortured. Ali says he has since been forced to strip naked and prevented from sleeping at night.

Your message can help Ali:

Visit <http://bit.ly/JusticeForAli> or write a letter urging the Minister of Justice to investigate his torture allegations fully and promptly, and to implement the recent decision of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention calling for his immediate release.

Start your letter 'Your Excellency' and send it to: El Mustapha Ramid, Minister of Justice and Liberties, Ministère de la Justice et des libertés, Place El Mamounia – BP 1015, Rabat, Morocco

Fax: +212 537 73 47 25





SECURE A FUTURE FOR MOSES

NAME: MOSES AKATUGBA
LOCATION: NIGERIA

Sixteen-year-old Moses Akatugba was awaiting the results of his secondary school exams when his life changed forever in November 2005. The Nigerian army arrested him on his way home and accused him of stealing three phones, some money and vouchers in an armed robbery. He has always denied these charges.

Moses says the soldiers then shot him in one hand, beat him on the head and back, and took him to a local army barracks. There, they showed him a corpse and asked him to identify it.

When Moses said he didn't know the dead man, the soldiers beat him again. They then took him to a police station, where he says the officers beat him, left him hanging upside down for hours, and pulled out his toe- and finger nails with pliers.

"The pain I went through was unimaginable," Moses says. The officers forced him to sign two pre-written "confessions", which were later used as evidence during his trial.

Moses spent the next eight years in prison. On 12 November 2013, he was sentenced to death by hanging. The conviction was based on his "confession" and the alleged robbery victim's testimony. The police officer who investigated his case didn't turn up in court.

Because Moses was a child when he was arrested, he should never have been sentenced to death. It is illegal under international law. Also, any "confession" obtained after torture should not be allowed as evidence in court.

Your message can help Moses:

Visit <http://bit.ly/MosesAkatugba> or write a letter urging the authorities to commute his death sentence and carry out an independent investigation into his torture allegations.

Start your letter 'Your Excellency' and send it to:

Dr. Emmanuel Uduaghan, Governor of Delta State, Office of the Governor, Government House, Asaba, Delta State, Nigeria



PUNCHED BY THE POLICE

NAME: ALFREDA DISBARRO
LOCATION: PHILIPPINES

Alfreda Disbarro is a single mother from Quezon City, Philippines. In October 2013, she was at an internet café near her house when the police stopped her and accused her of drug dealing. She denied this and emptied her pockets voluntarily, revealing just a mobile phone and a five-peso coin.

The police then pointed a gun at her, punched her in the chest, handcuffed her and took her to the police headquarters. To force her to confess to the crime, Alfreda says a senior police officer then pinned her against a wall, punched her repeatedly in the stomach and face, hit her with a club, poked his fingers into her eyes, slapped her, forced a mop into her mouth and banged her head against the wall.

Alfreda was told to sign a blank sheet of paper. She was also photographed with three one-hundred-dollar bills and a sachet of drugs that she claims were produced by the police. She was in such pain after the beatings that she couldn't eat, had difficulty breathing and kept vomiting for days.

Today, she is awaiting trial in a local jail charged with selling and possessing illegal drugs. Although she has been examined by a medical officer, who found numerous marks and injuries on Alfreda's body, her torture allegations against the police have not been investigated.

Your message can help Alfreda:

Visit <http://bit.ly/AlfredaDisbarro> or write a letter calling on Acting Inspector General Alexander Roldan to investigate her torture allegations, promptly and fully, and bring anyone found responsible to justice.

Start your letter 'Dear Inspector General' and send it to:

Police Director Alexander Roldan, Inspector General, Internal Affairs Service, Philippine National Police Compound, Camp General Crame, Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines 1100

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



18 YEARS IN PRISON FOR PROTESTING

NAME: DILOROM ABDUKADIROVA
LOCATION: UZBEKISTAN

Dilorom Abdukadirova is a farmer and mother of four from Andizhan, south-eastern Uzbekistan. On 13 May 2005, she went to a public protest in the city centre.

Speakers called for justice and an end to poverty. Suddenly the security forces started shooting, killing hundreds of people. Caught up in the panicking crowds, Dilorom just ran. Confused and scared, she crossed the border into neighbouring Kyrgyzstan without realising.

She was sent on to a refugee camp in Romania, and granted permanent residency as a refugee in Australia in 2006. But Dilorom wanted to go home. The authorities in Andizhan assured her family that she had nothing to fear. But when she arrived at Tashkent airport in January 2010, the police immediately detained her for four days.

She was briefly reunited with her family, and then detained again. She wasn't allowed to speak to a lawyer or see her family for two weeks. In April 2010, Dilorom was sentenced to 10 years in prison for "attempting to overthrow the constitutional order" and exiting Uzbekistan without a travel permit.

Her family said she looked emaciated in court, with bruises on her face. They think she was tortured and forced to appear without her hijab. Her sentence was extended by eight years for "deliberately breaking prison rules" in 2012. We believe Dilorom was punished for taking part in the Andizhan demonstration, and that she is a prisoner of conscience.

Your message can help Dilorom: Visit

<http://bit.ly/Dilorom> or write a letter urging the President to drop all charges against her, to release her immediately and unconditionally, and to investigate the torture allegations promptly and impartially.

Start your letter 'Dear President' and send it to:

President Islam Karimov, Rezidentsia prezidenta ul. Uzbekistanskaia 43, Tashkent 700163, Uzbekistan

‘WE HAVE NO FEAR ANYMORE’

How do you cope when your husband, son or brother is detained for criticizing the authorities? With determination and hope, say these women in the United Arab Emirates.

“They did the ultimate thing,” says Aziza. “They took him so we’re not scared now. At first we had fear, but we don’t now.”

Aziza’s relative was jailed in the continuing crackdown on reform advocates in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Now, she, too, has become a target.

Since 2011, many of those calling for democratic reforms and greater respect for human rights in the UAE have been targeted for arrest by the authorities. Most have been linked to al-Islah, a non-violent Islamist group that has engaged in peaceful social and political debate since it was legally established in 1974.

Dozens of people have been detained on trumped-up accusations related to national security. Once detained, people have been held without charge, often secretly and in solitary confinement, where some have been tortured.

Family members of those arrested often go for months not knowing where their relatives are held. When they ask public officials for help, they are ignored.

PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE

In 2013, 69 advocates for reform – including human rights lawyers, judges, academics and students allegedly linked to al-Islah – were sentenced to between seven and 15 years in prison after a grossly unfair mass trial. Charged with “attempting to overthrow the government”, many are prisoners of conscience, detained solely for peacefully calling for democratic reforms.

This ongoing campaign of harassment and intimidation has not only deprived activists of their freedom, but has had a damaging impact on their families, too. “We feel sadness, injustice, subjugation because a member of our family has been taken away from us,” says one woman.

In her case and that of so many others, we can’t even tell you which relative was taken away because of the danger that would pose to the women and their families.

UNDAUNTED ACTIVISTS

Despite living in an atmosphere of fear and anxiety, family members have refused to allow pessimism to rule them or their children. They have become activists and have taken to social media platforms such as Twitter to raise awareness. They write of the secret detentions, torture, unfair trials, and continuing ill-treatment of their loved ones in prison.

“I tried very hard to follow up the legal procedures required, saying to myself that I am able to overcome this hurdle with determination, struggle and patience,” says one woman. “I try to tell the world about the injustice that has fallen upon the detainees: their struggle, their case, via any medium or platform I can use,” vows another.

But as the mothers, wives and children of detainees have tried to come to terms with the injustice their families have faced – publicly campaigning for their freedom – they themselves are now being followed, harassed, threatened, even imprisoned.

“The harassment sometimes comes in the form of threats from officials [who tell me] that I will not be

able to find a job and that I would be framed with a criminal offence,” says Habiba. “I was always threatened on Twitter with arrest.”

Such threats and obstacles have made day-to-day survival even more difficult. With the breadwinners of their families taken away and family incomes cut, many women have had to assume the role of both parents. But their efforts to support their families are thwarted by the UAE’s State Security, which has been known to use “security clearance forms” to deny jobs to relatives, like Habiba, at the final stage of recruitment. It is only through the goodwill of their relatives that some of these families survive.

BRAVING THREATS AND INTIMIDATION

Facing repeated threats and fearing repercussions, many family members have stopped campaigning on Twitter. For some, the threats have become a reality, with a number of family members ending up in jail as a result of publicly advocating for their loved ones. For others, their confinement is more psychological:

one woman, who can no longer use her Twitter account, describes it as a kind of imprisonment, albeit in a different way to her loved one.

For some women, the ongoing intimidation has proved too much. “Life is scary and depressing since his arrest,” says Youstra. “We feel unsafe in our homes. Our greatest fear is for our children.”

Still, mixed in with that fear is hope – a hope that justice is within reach. “I hope that we can live in safety, that the State Security apparatus stops dominating civilian life, that secret detention centres are destroyed and that all those who have participated in this disaster are held accountable,” says one woman.

It is this hope that drives many other women to go beyond the fear, to do whatever it takes to secure justice for their loved ones. “This is what we have to do to be heard,” says Aziza. “We have to defend our loved ones. This is their message, that we have our rights.”

“We’re braver now and we have no problems speaking,” says Aziza. “We have no fear anymore.”

All names have been changed. Look out for our new report on the UAE this autumn.

‘History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again.’

MAYA ANGELOU
WRITER AND ACTIVIST
1928-2014

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL

