



URGENT ACTION NEWSLETTER

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Welcome to the second Urgent Action Newsletter in 2009. Please let the Urgent Action office know if you would prefer to receive it by mail instead.

Marilyn McKim

Marilyn McKim

A special person joins the Urgent Action Network



The help Amnesty members gave Saidzhakhon Zainabitdinov moved him to join our Network! © Private

Saidzhakhon Zainabitdinov was overwhelmed by the support he received from Amnesty International members while he was in jail. It inspired him to join our Urgent Action Network.

Saidzhakhon is a former prisoner of conscience in Uzbekistan. As chair of the human rights group Appelliatsia, part of his job was to monitor the violent protests in Andizhan in May 2005. International media coverage used his account of the events and of the hundreds of deaths. His reports were very different from the official government reports. When he was arrested and went

missing in detention, Amnesty International issued UA 138/05 on 25 May 2005. In January 2006 Saidzhakhon received a seven-year sentence, but he walked free just two years later.

Saidzhakhon wrote a letter of thanks to an Amnesty member in Scotland. He was so happy that people in 20 countries had sent him 10,000 letters of support. "You are the hero!" he wrote. "Your compatriots and other people in the world who wrote messages like 'We think of you', 'You are always in our thoughts' are the heroes. You may be thinking 'What kind of hero am I? I live in a small village in the very north of Scotland and have written only a couple of letters.' Yes, this is true. But you and other thousands of such people just like yourself were saving the life of a human being. In this case you have saved me."

Saidzhakhon now responds to Urgent Actions himself. One Urgent Action involved executions in Iran. He posted it to a large email list and encouraged everyone to send appeals to the authorities with these words: "This is about people who are facing execution, an act incompatible with common sense." Write on, Saidzhakhon!

Cuban activist sends thanks after letters get through

Edgard López Moreno was surprised when five letters of solidarity arrived at his door. The postal service in Cuba is subject to police scrutiny and communications routinely get "lost". He wrote back, "I want to thank everyone who selflessly dedicated a few minutes of their time to write and show their support."

Edgard is the president of a pro-democracy movement. As such, people often harass him. Even though the USA has accepted him as a refugee, Cuban authorities will only permit him an exit visa if he stops his political activities. These restrictions on Edgard's freedom of movement punish him for exercising his right to freedom of expression. Amnesty International had issued UA 115/09 after Edgard went on hunger strike in protest.



Edgard López Moreno reading unexpected letters from Amnesty members © Private

Have you made your donation to help fund Amnesty International's work this year? To make a secure, tax deductible donation, call 1-800-AMNESTY or head to **Donate**. It costs \$100,000 to run the UA Network annually and there are 2,500 of us across Canada. That's \$40 each if we all pitch in. Thanks for considering a gift, especially when you already give your time, fax costs and postage!

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Urgent Action results in investigation, protection and appreciation

In January, UA writers asked Brazilian authorities to protect a land rights activist and his family. Your appeals worked immediately!

José Luis da Silva, his wife Severina dos Santos Silva, and their daughter

Edisandra, say that four men attacked their family in December 2007. They think the attack was connected to an argument with a local farm owner over land. When their complaint went to court, someone threatened the family with death. A local group supporting them reports, "As a consequence of the Urgent Action, a special police investigator was appointed to follow the investigations into the attack on the Silva family. Federal and state authorities appointed the investigator after receiving letters from Amnesty members from around the world." Thanks to those of you who responded to UA 5/09, the Silva family is safe for the moment.

How will you spend Human Rights Day 2009?

Join Write for Rights! The United Nations marks the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10 each year. Amnesty International has turned the day into a worldwide event. We



encourage every member and supporter to participate.

It's easy. You can write one letter or ten. You can write on your own from home or work, create a letter-writing party, or join a local event. Members in France, Japan,

Burkina Faso and 30 other countries will be sending appeals on the same cases you are. This year, one action will highlight attacks on a Nepalese health adviser who defends women's rights. Another seeks justice for a migrant worker in Greece who is recovering from a sulphuric acid attack to her face. A third demands decent living conditions for Indigenous families in Paraguay who exist on the side of a highway.

Last year, our international membership sent 250,000 letters to authorities—35,000 of them from Canada! This year, we want to focus on the number of people who take action. We need you to participate. More than that, we need you to find someone else in your circle to participate. Let's work to make Human Rights Day as well known as Earth Day.

Get organized at www.amnesty.ca/writeathon. If you need support, email me at urgentaction@amnesty.ca or call (416) 363 9933 ext 325.

Guatemalan environmentalist wins international human rights prize

Front Line is a group based in Ireland that supports human rights defenders in dangerous situations. In May, actor Martin Sheen presented Dr Yuri Melini with Front Line's 2009 Award for Human Rights Defenders at Risk for his efforts to stop the rapid development of mines in Guatemala. Dr Melini had to use a walker to reach the podium. An assassination attempt in September 2008 destroyed his left knee and much of his small intestine, and prompted Amnesty International to issue UA 248/08 to protect him. In his acceptance speech, he said he was receiving the award "on behalf of the people of Guatemala, because the environment belongs to everyone."

"Urgent Actions are such an effective and relatively easy way of protecting human rights and creating change. They open people's eyes to what is really happening in the world."

Sasha, UA participant in Vancouver



Photo caption: The members of the Individuals Team at the International Secretariat dine together in London. These staff edit and send Amnesty International's Urgent Actions to Canada and to members around the world. © AI

Good news on recent Urgent Actions

Israel UA 183/09

Israeli authorities continue to stop critically ill Palestinians from getting treatment that is only available outside Gaza. Palestinian Ahmed Abu Mteer was one of them. He needed medical care last July for treatable cancer. At first, Israeli authorities would not give him permission to leave Gaza “for security reasons”. They finally let him travel to East Jerusalem for treatment.

Peru UA 143/09

Last April, there was news coverage about Indigenous protests in the Amazon over use of land and natural resources. Then tensions rose. In June, police used force to disperse protestors in Bagua. Twenty-four police officers and 10 demonstrators died. Within weeks, international pressure led the authorities to start talking with the Indigenous communities and announce that they would investigate the violence.

Belarus UA 121/08

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka pardoned Emanuel Zeltser at the end of June 2009. Emanuel left prison right away, even though he had only served part of a three-year prison sentence for “using forged documents” and “economic espionage”. Amnesty International had not called for his release, but we did campaign for medical care while he was detained. Emanuel needed urgent treatment for severe arthritis and Type 2 diabetes to avoid irreversible damage to several internal organs.

Colombia UA 154/09

The Afro-descendant community of Caracolí braced for an eviction notice last June. Their land is perfect for plantations of African palm trees. Paramilitary groups threatened them and called them “guerrillas”, a name which makes a group vulnerable to attack. However, international pressure, along with a ruling of the constitutional court, stopped the eviction. The court also called for the protection of the community.

USA

Governor Bill Richardson signed into law a bill to abolish the death penalty in New Mexico. The governor concluded that the death penalty is not acceptable because, in an imperfect justice system, it is an irreversible punishment. New Mexico is now the 15th abolitionist state in the country.

Iran UA 175/09

Lawyer Mohammad Mostafaei walked free on July 1. The human rights defender had been accused of “conspiring against state security”. He had campaigned against executions of people convicted of crimes committed when they were under 18. Amnesty International believed his arrest was intended to stop this campaign. Mohammad thanked everyone who called for his release and added, “My imprisonment made me more determined than ever to stand firmly for human rights.”

Bad news from Iran on UA 98/09



An Amnesty member in the UK mourns the death of a young Iranian woman
© Amnesty International

Amnesty activists in Austria, Burkina Faso, Canada, Turkey and 10 others countries demonstrated outrage at the execution of Delara Darabi on 1 May 2009. She was 17 when she and her boyfriend broke into a relative's home to steal belongings. He apparently killed the woman, but Delara confessed to protect him. She later withdrew the confession. Delara was the 43rd alleged juvenile offender to be executed in Iran since 1990, even though executions of such minors are prohibited under international law.

Meet the 2009 laureate of the Martin Ennals Award

The subject of UA 130/08, Emadeddin Baghi, received this year's Martin Ennals Award for being “an exceptionally brave man defending human rights despite imprisonment and poor health.” The Award for Human Rights Defenders was created in 1993 to recognize “an exceptional record of combating human rights violations by courageous and innovative means”. A jury from ten of the world's leading human rights organizations chose the winner. Emadeddin Baghi has campaigned on human rights issues in Iran for a long time. He focuses on prisoners' rights and the ongoing use of the death penalty.



Emadeddin Baghi wins award for tireless and courageous work
© Private

“It gives me great satisfaction to know I can help people so far away or at least let those in power know these people are not forgotten.”

Bobbie, UA writer in Mount Pearl, Newfoundland

What else is happening at Amnesty?

Amnesty International has joined the worldwide coalition on climate change. If governments do not act effectively and urgently, climate change could affect rights to life, health, water, food and housing. Governments must ensure that in the face of such threats, they protect human rights.

Amnesty will

- ask governments to share information about the measures they are taking and about environmental risks.
- urge governments to consult with their citizens about the policies that will shape the lives of their citizens.
- make sure that national climate change policies do not further discriminate against those most vulnerable to human rights abuses because of their poverty, age, gender, ethnicity or disability.
- encourage governments to let environmental activists freely seek and share information about climate change.
- help citizens seek justice when a government's actions or failure to act on climate change result in human rights violations.

Visit [Climate Change](http://climatechange.org) for a video and more information on this issue. And please ask our government to take effective action on climate change at the United Nations Copenhagen conference in December. Visit <http://tckctck.org>

Chance meeting prompts contributions for book club in Jamaica

Recently, Urgent Action writer Larry MacKillop took a break from sending messages to authorities to enjoy a holiday in Jamaica. He connected with Amnesty member George Young, who offered to tour him around Lower Kingston. George became a paraplegic at age 11 when a man shot him and escaped to the USA. Later, the man was convicted of murder, and George helped Amnesty's campaign to stop the execution. But I digress. Back to the tour of Kingston. “We learned that our taxi driver got in trouble with the law as a young man and now was trying to become a good father,” writes Larry. “This man belongs to a book club and what clicked for me was the rehabilitative power of reading.” Larry invites anyone who wishes to send books for the library and school that Amnesty International Jamaica is setting up at the Tower Street Prison. Mail them to

Amnesty International
131 Tower Street, Kingston, Jamaica

Should I handwrite, fax or email my appeals?

Use the way that is easiest for you. If letter-writing takes too much effort, you may do less of it, or even stop. More importantly, a greater variety of messages will make our efforts more effective.

- Mail is formal and highly personal, especially if you handwrite your letter, but it is slow.
- Email is immediate but highly informal, impersonal, and easy to delete. And in some countries, it is prone to bounce-backs.
- Fax is personal and fast—the best of both worlds. However, faxing can be very difficult. The country may lack phone lines. The equipment may be out for repair or turned off overnight (just when we in Canada are active). Or you may get a busy signal because other Amnesty members got there first. Limit your attempts to 3 times over 2 days in case your long distance provider charges you—legitimately—for unsuccessful attempts. Be prepared to mail your appeal if your fax does not get through.

Tips for sending letters to authorities by email

If you choose email, make it as personal and formal as possible.

- Craft a compelling subject line.
- Write into the text area. Attachments are rarely opened for security reasons.
- Put your address and the authority's address at the top as you would on a business letter.
- Make sure your first sentence says something about you.
- Keep your message short and your grammar simple, especially if you are writing to authorities in a language that is not their own.
- Bold, underline or capitalize the most important name or sentence in your message to make it stand out.
- Be sure to add your name.