



Amnesty International UA NEWSLETTER

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Your letters helped ... AGAIN!!

The tense political situation in Nepal has sent many Urgent Actions your way. Here's what happened in one important case.

Gagan Thapa is a student leader. He is a former Secretary General of the Nepal Students Union. Police detained him in Kathmandu on July 27. Amnesty International issued UA 199/05 for his safety two days later.

"After I was arrested, I was held in a cell in Hanuman Dhoka police station along with sixteen others," reports Gagan. "We slept eight at a time, as the cell was so cramped. As soon as the Urgent Actions began to arrive, the authorities immediately offered to transfer me

to a cell where I would be held alone."

Gagan chose to stay with the other prisoners so as not to appear privileged. He was released less than three weeks later on August 14. According to last reports, Gagan was awaiting trial on charges of sedition.

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Are you in the Winnipeg area?

Amnesty Canada's Annual General Meeting is taking place at the University of Winnipeg from Friday afternoon May 26 to Sunday afternoon, May 28. It's well worth attending! You'll leave feeling inspired, connected and appreciative of the extensive work Amnesty is doing in Canada and around the world. Let us know if you'd like more information.



More good news from Nepal

Many of you will remember Raju Sharma Dhakal (UA 275/04) because you sent appeals for his safety several times. You may also have sent him a message

of joy and support after his release. The 17-year-old student was detained in June 2004 on his way home from classes. Raju was finally released 17 months later.

Children, youth and other activists also worked hard through the Lifesaver program to secure Raju's safety and freedom.

Raju made great efforts in English to relay this message to us:

"Lots of thanks for you and all of the students and my well wisher for your great approach for my release. And also thanks for your big hugs. I am absolutely fine and happy nowadays. But some remainings are still burdening. But I have not gave them chances to make any wrong. Now I am planning to go to Ramput to join my collage where I have to complete my BSc Agriculture program. After that it will be easy to live normally. Again lots of thanks for your great wishes. Please convay my rememberances to all of the students and my small brother and sisters who made their great approach for my release. -- Raju"



Got a government reply by FedEx lately?

Many of you have sent in to the Urgent Action or national office the responses you have received to your appeals. Thank you and keep them coming! Those responses are essential to research teams at our International Secretariat who measure both the content and the size of the response, and evaluate them to develop effective follow-up.

Sending us the responses you receive is vitally important if you are the only one chosen to receive a reply. Occasionally, government authorities will be unable to respond to everyone who sent them an appeal. Instead, they will choose to respond to just one letter writer from each country.

The Mexican government, in particular, continues to be fastidious about replying. Authorities there have even used FedEx express envelopes that require a signature from you. We wish they would take equal pains to improve the human rights situations that your appeals detail!

WANTED ... experienced volunteers with email & a fax



We're looking for some special volunteers to help respond within hours to the most urgent and sensitive actions, called WARNs. When our researchers learn of an emergency on a weekend or during a holiday, they may activate a WARN.

Have you participated in the UA Network for more than one year? Do you have an email address that you check often on weekends as well as weekdays? Do you have access to a fax machine at all times? Would your schedule allow you write one or more letters to a government abroad within hours?

If you answered "Yes" and would like to help out, please send your phone number and a recent UA message you have written to urgentaction@amnesty.ca. Put "Signing up for WARNs" in the subject line.

UAs shine a spotlight on house demolitions in Israel and the Occupied Territories

Now that Amnesty has committed to take action on economic, social and cultural rights, expect to see more UAs on issues like house demolitions.

Since a Palestinian uprising (*intifada*) began in 2000, the Israeli military has stepped up operations that destroy Palestinian houses and cultivated land in Israel and the Occupied Territories. These operations have left tens of thousands of Palestinians homeless and destitute. This violates their right to adequate housing and a decent standard of living.

In most cases, Israeli authorities say that houses and land in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are destroyed for “military/security needs”. For example, the Israeli army often blows up houses belonging to the families of Palestinians suspected of involvement in attacks and suicide bombings. Frequently, neighbouring houses are also destroyed by the blast. Israeli authorities call it a “deterrent” to dissuade others from carrying out attacks.

Israel has the right to take measures to protect its security. However, the measures taken must respect international human rights and humanitarian law. Amnesty International believes demolitions violate the Fourth Geneva Convention and punish entire communities for the actions of a number of individuals. For example, UA 176/04 called for a halt to demolitions in the Rafah refugee camp that left over 1,000 people homeless.

“No building permit” is another reason given for destroying homes. UA 259/05 was issued when the unlicensed homes of some 250 Palestinians in the West Bank village of



A boy finds what's left of his bike in the rubble left by demolitions in Rafah

Sawia were targeted for destruction. In most of the West Bank, Palestinians must obtain a building permit from the Israeli army if they want to build on their own land. However, it is almost impossible to obtain these permits. In contrast, Israeli authorities have built tens of thousands of houses for Israeli settlers on confiscated Palestinian land throughout the West Bank. This violates international law.

Land seizures are supposed to be temporary. However, in practice, land is never returned. It may be used to build and expand Israeli settlements, or to prevent the growth of Palestinian towns. Land seizures are also used to create buffer zones around illegal Israeli settlements. During seizures, bulldozers have uprooted hundreds of thousands of olive, citrus, almond and date trees. This deprives Palestinians of their livelihood.

When advance notice is received, international action can make a difference. In January, a court order halted the threat of imminent demolition from the home of Zarifa and Mohammad Abbasi, aged 76 and 78 (UA 305/05). “It is thought that international concern expressed by the UA network and others for the fate of the Abbasi family home may have contributed to this positive outcome,” stated AI researchers. Last year there was more good news when authorities revoked an order to demolish 88 homes in East Jerusalem.

To learn more about this issue, read AI’s report *Under the rubble: House demolition and destruction of land and property* at www.amnesty.ca/amnestynews/upload/mde1503304.pdf

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

Salem al-Baloushi has asked us to pass on his “kindest thanks” to you for sending appeals a year ago in response to UA 57/05. Authorities released him from a United Arab Emirates detention centre in July. They laid no charges against him. Salem was not tortured during his confinement.

Authorities in Kazakhstan freed human rights defender Lutfullo Shamsuddinov (UA 181/05) last July, and handed him over to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees.

“Massive response from the Urgent Action Network made a significant contribution to securing his release,” writes the UA Team at Amnesty’s international headquarters in London. He is now safe in the U.S.



Iraqi businesswoman Huda Hafez Ahmad was detained most of last year for “financing the insurgency” (UA 42/05). She phoned Amnesty to thank you for taking action on her behalf – action which she believes led to her release.

The Baloch Students’ Organization has spoken out about the killing of civilians in Pakistan. They allege that members of the armed forces are responsible and that the killings are unlawful. Seventeen BSO members were arrested for their criticisms

(UA 111/05). Most have now been released. They too wish to pass on their thanks to all who campaigned on their behalf.



Imagine yourself in a Syrian prison one afternoon. You’re listening to “Talk of the Hour” on BBC radio. It goes something like this:

“What is the status of prisoners of conscience? Are you working on their release?” asks an AI press officer.

“We don’t have prisoners of conscience in Syria,” replies a government spokesperson.

“What about ‘Abdel Rahman al-Shaghouri?” continues AI’s press officer.

That’s how ‘Abdel Rahman al-Shaghouri (UA 185/03) tells the story of how he became a supporter of Amnesty International. After his release, he wrote: “It’s a duty to appreciate all the efforts from all the people everywhere, for casting some light on the cases in general, and mine in particular...All this makes me more committed to continue with them, not just for me but for all those who are ‘lost’. I would like to thank again all of those who participated and supported the cause in which I lost my freedom for a while.”

“Using your own words, please send appeals...”

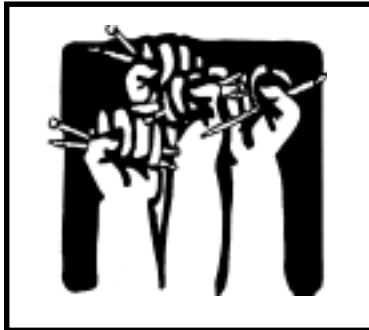
An effective appeal is a personal one through which the target of your letter will hear your own voice. That is why Amnesty International is hesitant to use click-and-send online appeals.

Your choice of words contributes to the personal nature of your message and therefore to its effectiveness. Some find it difficult to stay away from the language in the UA and use their own words. If you're one of those people, do contact us. We can share ideas, different wording and a collection of sample letters with you.

UA participants Michael Brown and Lex Kinast wrote the two samples below. Note the gentle, persuasive tone of the first message and the power of questions. The second message exudes heartfelt sincerity. Neither message makes the recipient defensive. Both encourage action.

“I am sure that it is not the intention of you or your government to mistreat any of your citizens, even if they have contravened your laws. Is there anything you can do to get

Ms. Lien removed to a hospital where she can receive the medical attention and assessment she needs? Is there also a way of impressing on the prison custodians that mistreatment of prisoners reflects badly on the reputation of VietNam as a modern, responsible member of the world community of nations?”



“I am writing you about Mr. Robin Lovitt, who is scheduled

to be executed on the thirtieth of this month. While my personal beliefs are that all killing is wrong, in this case I believe Mr Lovitt's case is worth even further consideration. Most of the DNA evidence was illegally destroyed by a court clerk to free up space in storage rooms. Upon further research, I found other factors (such as the speed at which the evidence was processed) to be disconcertingly ambiguous. I believe you do the work that you do because you believe in justice. I in no way wish to diminish the pain of the victim's family but I urge you to reconsider this case. If there is even a one in a thousand chance that Robin Lovitt is innocent, can society afford to move ahead with his execution? Thank you for your time.”



More Letter Writing Tips

Think about what your email message looks like at its destination. “Cute” addresses such as

ilovefuzzythedog@hotmail.com may not look serious enough to show your human rights concern. Set up an alternate address, or send the message by mail instead.

How valuable is an email message compared to a letter that is mailed or faxed?

How do you copy a letter? Why do you copy it?

Ask us! We're more than happy to send you tip sheets on these questions, and any others you may have about Urgent Actions. Just drop us a note. Our mail, fax and email contacts are on the front page.

Need a break? Ask us to put your Urgent Actions on hold for a while. We can also decrease the number of actions you receive. That's much better than losing you entirely!



Reactions from the receiving end of our appeals

Have you wondered how many appeals government authorities receive? The answer is usually guesswork at our end because governments are loath to divulge the answer. Or perhaps the appeals are too numerous to count!

Feedback from our neighbour to the south

Last year, a professor in Texas used a Public Information request to ask Governor Perry's office how many appeals were received for and against the execution of Frances Newton (UA 313/04). Frances was executed on September 14, 2005 for the 1987 murder of her husband and two children. The Governor received 12,211 appeals. Only 10 supported the execution. Over half the appeals were from Texas. About 4,600 were from other parts of the United States and 1,000 were from elsewhere. A good number of those were likely from some of you.

In a happier outcome for a Death Penalty case, Governor Warner in Virginia commuted a case for the first time and spared the life of Robin Lovitt (UA 285/05). A spokesman for the Governor's office reportedly told Reuters that he had received roughly 1,500 phone calls, letters and e-mails from around the world. Nearly all urged clemency.

The post bag weighed 50 kilograms

AI issued UA 292/05 after police in Moldova purportedly beat Sergei Gugurov into confessing to stealing a cell phone. The UA attracted much attention. Three TV stations, two radio stations and print media gathered at a press conference organized by AI Moldova. Soon after, Sergei was released on bail. The Deputy General Prosecutor complained to AI Moldova about receiving up to 150 letters a day, adding that campaigning on the case was damaging the country's international image.

Persistence pays

For 3 months, AI Malaysia tried to arrange a meeting with the Ambassador for Sudan. Meanwhile Malaysian activists continued to send letters and faxes about the human rights situation, particularly in Darfur. Sudan's Embassy finally granted an appointment and asked AI Malaysia to stop all the faxes. The Embassy's fax machine was constantly running out of ink!



Making Connections

Do you write letters on a specific country or topic? We can connect you with Amnesty

Canada campaigners to find out about other ways of taking action on the countries or issues that interest you.

Do you live in Ottawa, Toronto or Vancouver? We can connect you with an

electronic calendar of human rights events in those cities, such as film screenings, special speakers, rallies, and much more. Let us know if you want to receive these email notices.

Do you use Urgent Actions at meetings of your school, faith or community group? We can send you a UA the day before your meeting, whether that meeting is weekly, monthly or less frequent. Drop us a line and let us know when you'd like us to send you a timely case.



Your letters save lives, stop torture and so much more ...

"I don't believe that I would be alive today without the support of AI," says prisoner of conscience Rebiya Kadeer, photographed at left with UA 305/99 which Amnesty issued on her behalf. Chinese authorities freed Rebiya on medical parole a year ago after she had served over five years in prison in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous

Region. Rebiya was held on charges of "providing state secrets outside the country" for sending copies of regional newspapers to her husband in the US. "Before AI became active on my case, I spent two years incommunicado and was allowed to leave my cell for 10 minutes in 45 days," Rebiya told members of AI Switzerland during a recent visit. "Thanks to the many thousands of letters written by AI members, my detention conditions changed. I could see my children once a month and I received medical treatment. The support of AI gave me back my inner strength."



Imran Ezhiev visited AI Switzerland at the same time. The regional coordinator of the Moscow Helsinki human rights group has been detained a dozen times in the last five years (UA 46/04).

"They tortured me with electric shocks, they pulled out my teeth and fingernails, but they did not dare to kill me," says Imran. "Without AI's Urgent Actions I would not be alive today."

Your messages prevent harm

"UAs have been a flickering candle in the darkness and secrecy which surround the death penalty system in Japan," says the UA team at Amnesty's international headquarters. "None of the prisoners for whom we

have issued UAs has been executed." UAs have also been effective in protecting asylum-seekers who face deportation from Japan. In 2003, UAs were issued on behalf of Afghan asylum-seekers who had been detained. All were released to continue their applications for asylum. "The UA Network has made a real difference in Japan," concludes the UA team. "It puts pressure on the government by showing that the world is watching. Everyone contributing to the Network deserves our heartfelt thanks and congratulations. So keep writing appeals, keep the flame alive and keep spreading the message of hope."

Your letters also improve quality of life

The Ethiopian government held members of the Human Rights Council isolated and in poor conditions for several weeks last year (UA 284/05). After six days of sleeping on a concrete floor, prison officials brought them blankets. Under pressure from the international community, authorities allowed the prisoners to see their families and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Your letters give activists the courage to carry on

"Your support helps to strengthen the work of human rights defenders and makes us even more committed to continue defending human rights," wrote members of the Association for Life and Human Dignity in Peru (UA 07/06). Peru's Minister of the Interior said that "at the request of Amnesty Interna-

tional” he had instructed police to investigate threats made against the human rights defenders. Amnesty now believes their lives are no longer in danger.

Albertano Peñalosa Domínguez is a founder of the environmental group Organización Campesina Ecologista de la Sierra de Petatlán. OCESP leaders have campaigned peacefully against excessive and illegal logging of forests in Mexico’s Guerrero State. Gunmen attacked the family last May, killing two sons. Amnesty International issued UA 50/05 to try to prevent further attacks against the family. Soon after, we received this letter from Albertano: “I am writing on behalf of my family to thank you for your support and continuous attention ... With deep sadness in our hearts, we inform you that we are away from home and overwhelmed by the fear that something else could happen to us. We know that you have addressed the state authorities to request an effective investigation that leads to the murderers of our sons Abatuel (aged 9) and Armando (aged 20). I would like to share with you that our desire for environmental protection do not finish here. Together with my family, we shall go on working for the upholding of this right that belongs to all of us. Finally, I would like to thank you again for your support. I cannot find the proper words to describe what our hearts feel when we get your sincere words and solidarity.”



Albertano Peñalosa Domínguez and his wife Reyna Mojica Pérez

Your letters can bring enormous comfort and dignity, even when their primary goal is not met

Clarence Ray Allen was executed in California on January 17 but not before a member of his legal team let him know about your appeals for his life (UA 01/06). “He was moved and astonished that complete strangers would speak up on his behalf,” said the lawyer.

Prison authorities allowed Clarence Ray to hug his granddaughter before his execution. They also allowed him to wear his Native American regalia.

At 76, Clarence Ray Allen was the second oldest inmate to be put to death since the US reinstated the death penalty in 1976.

We need new letter writers!

If you’re not yet a member of the Urgent Action Network and would like to help bring about the positive results you’ve read about in these pages, we’d like to hear from you. Send us this coupon to try us out! We will send you one UA each month for the next three months. After that, we’ll check back with you to see if you would like to continue receiving UAs, to receive less, more or to stop.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email Address: _____

Send this back to: Urgent Action Office, 14 Dundonald St., Toronto, ON. M4Y 1K2



**“It’s not easy to look on the dark side
of life every day ...”**

... a personal testimony

**Berna Wang translates Urgent Actions and human rights reports
into Spanish in AI’s office in Madrid. Here are her thoughts:**

“It was an Urgent Action about the death penalty in the United States that got me started. The man had raped and then killed two girls. Amnesty was asking for the death penalty to be commuted.

I took a deep breath. I re-read the text. I thought about the two girls. I was filled with rage ... pain. How could anyone do such a thing? I lit up a cigarette, got another coffee and sipped it slowly, looking out the window and trying not to think. Then I sat down and did the translation.

That was the first time I really became aware of what it meant to be committed to Amnesty International, the first time I had to accept the inherent dignity of every human being, and their right to life ... and my obligation to defend it.

Since then, there have been many cases where the brutality of a case has moved me to such an extent that, like my colleagues, I have had to get up from my desk, get a cup of coffee from the kitchen, and even take a walk around the block to clear my head. Or just break down and cry. And then, assuming my commitment to the organisation once again, I get back to the keyboard and translate.

It’s not easy to look on the dark side of life every day. Those who know this best are the activists, but we translators know it too. Every day we run the risk of believing that the world is like that. Sometimes we try to

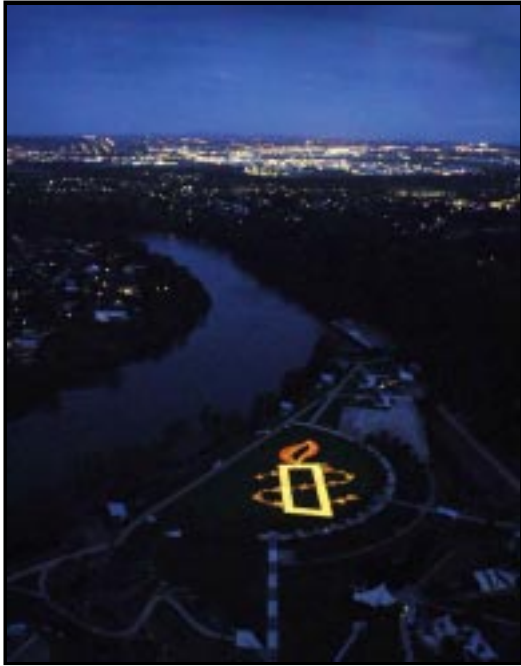
harden our hearts in the belief that it is the only way to withstand the shock; other times, we give way to rage and pain. It’s easy to lose one’s sense of proportion amid all the horror.

Some years ago, a friend taught me that you have to see things from many angles. Step back to see the big picture.

I try to apply what he taught me. For example, I try not to forget that, when I started working for Amnesty International, Nelson Mandela was still in prison, and how much South Africa, and the whole world, has changed since then. Or, as a friend in the administrative side of AI Spain told me recently, the fact that membership has grown from 3,000 to 30,000 since we joined.

When I begin to feel that the world is a dark and terrible place, I remember what and who I’m working for.

It is also necessary to remember that there is a whole army of people willing to fight together for justice and dignity, for human rights for all, and that my translations of Urgent Actions and the other texts produced by the organisation are a vital tool to help those people work for change. I take a look at the big picture, as I’ve been taught. I realise that I am one of those people and that together we are the stars in the sky in the top right-hand corner, or maybe the flowers in the background.”



Lighting 30,000 candles

A huge symbol of hope formed by 30,000 candles glowed in Brisbane for Australian citizen Van Tuong Nguyen last December. Regrettably, the masses of appeals from around the world did not stop his execution for smuggling heroin into Singapore (UA 279/05). But the spotlight on Van Tuong did rally unprecedented public protest against this inhuman and degrading punishment. When his friends learned that Van Tuong would not be able to receive a last hug from his mother, they put out a call for tracings of hands. They received hundreds of thousands of them! AI Australia's website received 50,000 hits every day. The Anti-Death Penalty Network gained 2,000 new members. The threat to Van Tuong's life brought new members to our Network in Canada as well.

UA members help raise funds for new Amnesty International Action Centre

In March 2005, we told you about our move to 14 Dundonald, when the building we had occupied was slated to be torn down. Since then, we've continued fundraising for a permanent home. Our current lease expires in 2007.

The Action & Resource Centre Campaign has taken off with the generosity of individuals and groups from across the country. "Urgent Action Network members have given tremendous support," says Cheryl Rooney, one of Amnesty's energetic fundraising team. "We want to thank you all for your important contributions to the success of this campaign."

To receive the latest campaign update, email Action&ResourceCentre@amnesty.ca

Donations are still warmly welcomed. Please send them to the UA office and write "BT6" in the "note" line of your cheque.



Imagine what we could achieve with twice as many UA letter writers!!

The effectiveness of the Urgent Action Network depends on the volume of individual letters we can generate to apply mass pressure on human rights violators.

We need you to help us increase that pressure by making our network bigger.

Here's what we'd like you to do. Detach pages 1-2 and 7-8 of this newsletter. Share the good news stories they contain with someone you think might be interested. You may even want to share the entire newsletter. If your contact is interested, we can sign him or her up for the following trial offer. We will send one UA a month for 3 months. Then we'll be in touch to find out whether your contact would like to continue. A sign-up form is found at the bottom of page 8.

Many thanks for your help!