

AMNESTY NEWS

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April 2006



AI's VISION

is of a world in which every person enjoys all of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international standards.

AI's MISSION

is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of its work to promote all human rights.

AI's CORE VALUES

remain those of : international solidarity, effective action for the individual victim, global coverage, the universality and indivisibility of human rights, impartiality and independence, and democracy and mutual respect.

ZIMBABWE

Franco Henwood, AI UK Zimbabwe co-ordinator spoke at the March Group meeting. Outlined below are extracts from his talk.

The wave of demolitions of informal settlements last Spring took a lot of observers by surprise, perhaps because many of them thought this was an issue about white farmers and land. What many have failed to understand is that the country, for the past six years, has undergone a human rights crisis. The talk covered three issues:

Firstly, an analysis of human rights violations; secondly, addressed the significance of the crisis; and finally, to explore the prospects for progress and why we are not wasting our time campaigning.

Race, land and the legacy of colonial minority rule are contributing historical causes, arguably the immediate cause of today's crisis dates from the late 1990's.

Corruption, economic difficulties and a costly involvement in the war in the DRC stimulated a growing challenge to the principle of one party rule. At the end of the 90's, a tension emerged between a vigorous, thriving civil society and an entrenched one party state. The African Commission of

**Group Meeting
Monday April 10th 2006**

Letter Writing

**Focussing on
"Administration of Justice"
(Death Penalty)
Avenue St Andrew's
United Reformed Church
The Avenue, Southampton
(Use main Church entrance)
7.30pm
ALL WELCOME**

Human and People's Rights put it: Zimbabwe is a divided society with deeply entrenched positions. The land question is not in itself the cause of division. It appears that at heart is a society in search of the means for change and divided about how best to achieve change after two decades of dominance by a political party that carried the hopes and aspirations of the people of Zimbabwe through the liberation struggle into independence. By 2000 over half the population had no direct recollection of the liberation war. ZANU-PF could still bank on its reputation as the party that had liberated the country, but many felt it was time to move on. (cont on page 3)

Worldwide Appeal: YEMEN: Executions imminent

Ismail Lutf Huraish, Ali Mussara'a Muhammad Huraish and Hafez Ibrahim are at risk of imminent execution.

Ismail Lutf Huraish and his cousin, Ali Mussara'a Muhammad Huraish, were sentenced to death in 2000 for a murder committed in 1998. Ismail Lutf Huraish is deaf but since his arrest the authorities have not provided sign-language interpretation for him. Therefore, at no point in the judicial process was he able to give his own account of his alleged involvement in the murder. His guilt was apparently decided solely on the basis of statements Ali Mussara'a Muhammad Huraish made during police interrogation and during their trial, which allegedly implicated both men in the murder.

The failure of the authorities to provide the means for Ismail Lutf Huraish to communicate is in violation of the Yemeni penal code, as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights



(ICCPR), to which Yemen is a state party.

Seventeen-year-old Hafez Ibrahim was sentenced to death for a murder which he allegedly committed when he was aged 16. The Yemeni penal code expressly prohibits the execution of anyone under 18 years old. The Minister of Human Rights in Yemen told AI that Hafez Ibrahim's age was disputed. However, lawyers representing Hafez Ibrahim maintain that he is under 18.

President 'Ali 'Abdullah Saleh is considering these sentences. The President may grant clemency, but if he chooses to ratify their sentences, they could be executed at any time. Death sentences are often passed in Yemen after proceedings which fall short of international standards for fair trial.

Please write, urging the President to commute the death sentences passed on Ismail Huraish, Ali Mussara'a Muhammad Huraish and Hafez Ibrahim.

Send appeals to,
General 'Ali 'Abdullah Saleh,
President of the Republic of
Yemen,
Sana'a,
Yemen.

Fax: +967 127 4147

Letter writing guide

- *Always be polite. This rule is essential and invariable. Your aim is to help, not to relieve your own feelings. Governments don't respond to abusive or condemnatory letters (however well deserved!)
- *Always write your letters on the basis that the Government concerned is open to reason and discussion.
- *It is important where possible to stress a country's reputation for moderation and justice, to show respect for its constitution and judicial procedures, and to demonstrate an understanding of current difficulties. This will give you more scope to point out ways in which the human rights situation can be improved.
- *Follow strictly the instructions given by AI.
- *Never use political jargon. Don't give the impression that you are writing because you are ideologically or politically opposed to the government in question. It is far more effective to stress that your concern for human rights is not politically based in any way, but in keeping with basic principles of international law.
- *If appropriate, explain who you are and what you do. It shows your letter is genuine, and that people from varying walks of life are following events in the country concerned.

Group News: March

Business Meeting:

1. **Jenny McConnell** took the chair and welcomed all to the meeting. She welcomed two new members, Paul and Liz.
2. **Giampaolo D'Alessandro** (treasurer) informed the meeting that our current bank balance was £1100; agreed we would send £400 to AIUK at the beginning of the next financial year. The Tin Rattle at Morrison's raised £394:49
3. **International Women's Day: Stop Violence Against Women** campaign, 54 cards at the

Body Shop

4. **Mary Brown** (secretary) outlined the **Monthly Action**: a letter to the Turkish ambassador regarding the Turkish penal code. Noted that the **Urgent Action Money** had been used to cable Donald Rumsfeld regarding Guantanamo. Letter received about two vacancies for Regional Representatives. Mary has information about the AGM.
5. Jilly will be representative at AGM.

(cont from page 1): The point is that the government chose to resolve this tension by repression and confrontation rather than negotiation and compromise. The assault by the government was conducted on three fronts. Firstly repressive legislation, the "Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, which allows the government to shut down any paper; "The Public Order and Security Act", an attack on freedom of assembly and the "Miscellaneous Offences Act", which as the name suggests is a catch all act, The second front operates at street level, the aim being to batter opponents into submission, physically and psychologically, rather than wholesale murder. The third front is food or more precisely the lack of food.

The South African Communist Party commented on the last October elections: "While pushing firmly for democratic elections in Zimbabwe, we must be sober in our expectations. There is very little to suggest that Zanu-PF, in particular, is seriously and confidently preparing to lay foundations for a democratic process. Almost all of the indicators are pointing in the opposite direction for the moment. Making the best of a bad deal in the hope that somehow, after a flawed election, a victorious Zanu-PF would be more magnanimous would not lay the basis for any sustainable resolution of the crisis."

There are three aspects to the crisis, firstly, the attempted demolition of one of Africa's most thriving and vigorous civil cultures by its own government; secondly, an extensive violation of human rights and thirdly, the sheer scale of the social economic collapse in the country. The point is that the government's contempt for the rule of law and human rights compounds existing socio-economic difficulties.

So what hope is there?

The crucial regional player is South Africa. There is no evidence that Mbeki intends to move any time soon. His deadline for silent diplomacy to have yielded concrete results came and went in 2004. The South African Communist party has spoken out, see above, and there is evidence that the Zimbabwe government does care what the rest of the world thinks. For instance it was stung by comments of Tanzanian, Anna Tibaijuka, UN Special Envoy on Human Settlement Issues in Zimbabwe, who said that the demolition programme was carried out in an indiscriminate and unjustified manner, with indifference to human suffering, and, in repeated cases, with disregard to several provisions of national and international frameworks. The Zimbabwe government is not immune to criticism, especially criticism from African peers. And despite everything, a civil society still does survive in the country. Mugabe is aging and it is unlikely that any successor would possess his charisma and status to preserve the current status quo.

There is evidence that AI's letters work, they keep people safe. For that reason alone, keep the letters and postcards coming. (I have a copy of the full text of the talk, ed)

