

URGENT ACTION

NEWSLETTER



• Urgent Action Program Office • PO Box 1270 Nederland CO 80466-1270 USA • ph 303 258 1170 • uan@aiusa.org • amnestyusa.org/urgent/ •



Conscientious objector Abdullah Webster with his baby daughter. © AI 2004

“... I would like to thank you all for your support. I received your card at the end of the day. Your card tilts the scales from a good day to a wonderful day. To me the end of a day means one less day in confinement and one day closer to returning to my family. So once again thank you all for making my day a wonderful one.”

— Abdullah Webster, responding to an Amnesty group that sent him letters of support.

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Urgent Action Appeal for US Prisoner of Conscience Abdullah Webster on page 4 ▶

Releases!

ALGERIA: Ali Drif.

Ali Drif, Algerian national, was released without charge at around 7pm on March 9 when security officers took him to the home of his wife's family, who live in Algeria. Ali Drif had been taken from Saint-Paul prison, in Lyon, France, by five police officers in the early morning of February 26. He reported that he was kept in a straitjacket for the whole of the trip to Marseille, where he was put on a boat to Algiers and locked into a cabin. The cabin was opened only once the boat was already at sea. Once the boat arrived in Algiers, Ali Drif had been taken to an undisclosed location where plain clothes security officers interrogated him. He was kept in secret detention for 10 days. (UA 53/05 issued Mar. 7, 2005)

IRAN: Azizullah Shenwari.

Azizullah Shenwari, a 17-year-old Pakistani national, was reportedly released from Yazd prison, in Central Iran in February 2005. He is reportedly in the custody of Afghan officials in the Helmand province of Afghanistan, where he is said to be under routine questioning. According to his uncle, he should be

reunited with his family in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, prior to returning home to Pakistan.

Amnesty International learned in June 2001 that Azizullah Shenwari, then 13-years-old, had been sentenced to death in Iran on charges of drug trafficking; an appeal court in Yazd commuted his death sentence to life imprisonment by November 2001. A gang that promised Azizullah Shenwari a job in

Iran reportedly kidnapped him from his home in Pakistan in November 1999. (UA 157/01 issued Jun. 22, 2001 & re-issued Aug. 2, Sep. 28, & Nov. 12, 2001)

JAPAN: Two Turkish Kurds.

One of the two Kurdish men who were seeking asylum in Japan was released on February 18. The other man remains in

Releases continued on page 2

♪ Summertime... ♪

As finals and last minute papers start to approach, we know students are under a time-crunch. But take a few minutes to think ahead to this summer: relaxing at the beach, playing with young kids at a summer camp, hanging with your friends. Wouldn't it be great to have fun, and still be doing something meaningful?

Contact the UA office at the address above and let us know if you or any of your group members would like to continue **receiving UAs** throughout the summer. If you're off to work at a **summer camp**, consider bringing the AIKids' Urgent Action along – a simply-written action in large typeface, for children, about children. We'll supply you with the tools to teach young children about human rights and how they can make a difference in the world. In June, we'll also have our **AIKids' Summer Postcard Action**, another great way to get young children involved in writing and decorating cards of hope to human rights defenders and prisoners of conscience. For more ideas, you can also check out AIKids at amnestyusa.org/aikids and the Youth-for-Youth project (linked on that page).

'Conscientious Objector discharge is difficult to apply for and obtain'

This story is excerpted from an article of "Urgent Action Network," an international newsletter of UA coordinators produced by the UA Team at AI's headquarters in London, UK.

Abdullah Webster enlisted in the US Army in 1985. He fought in the first Gulf war of 1990-91, and later served as a peacekeeper in Bosnia, Kosovo and Korea. He converted to Islam in 1994: believing that his religion prohibited him from taking part in any war of aggression, he applied to be treated as a conscientious objector when he was ordered to deploy to Iraq in 2003. Instead he was imprisoned for his beliefs.

In December that year the Pentagon announced that 5,500 soldiers had deserted since the start of the war in Iraq. This is the easy way to escape military service: according to a lawyer representing conscientious objector Camilo Mejia, "I have found that Conscientious Objector discharge is the most difficult discharge in the military to apply for and obtain."

After a series of unsuccessful applications to be treated as a conscientious objector, or transferred to non-combat duties, in June 2004 Abdullah Webster was imprisoned for 14 months, on charges of failing to obey commands and missing his brigade's deployment to Iraq (see this month's featured action on the backpage). He was also given a bad conduct discharge; his salary was suspended, and despite his 20 years of service (he had been due to retire in 2005) he is to lose his pension and other benefits. The Army justified its final rejection of his

application for conscientious objector status on the grounds that his objection was not to war in general but to the Iraq war in particular. According to US Army Regulations, requests for qualification as a conscientious objector will not be favorably considered when such requests are based on objection to a specific war.

Prisoner of conscience Camilo Mejia had been imprisoned by the US military just two weeks before Abdullah Webster, also on account of his conscientious objection to the war in Iraq. When Sue Webster, his wife, saw the UA issued on Camilo Mejia's behalf, she contacted Amnesty International. The USA research team moved swiftly to investigate the case, and Abdullah Webster was adopted as a prisoner of conscience. We issued an Urgent Action on his behalf, while Sue Webster was fighting an increasingly lonely battle, and felt that no-one else was listening to her pleas on behalf of her husband.

"Amnesty International came to our aid at a time when a lot of doors were closing. It certainly encouraged me to pursue this and it certainly encouraged him to realize that there are people out there who do appreciate and see the dilemma that he was in and who are also willing to help him."

Since the UA was issued on his behalf, members of the UA Network have sent thousands of appeals to those with the authority to release Abdullah Webster, and he

Urgent Action In Focus

An insight into the stories behind UAs

has received letters sent by Amnesty supporters from around the world. This is one of his replies, to an Amnesty group in the UK:

"I would like to thank you all for your support. I received your card at the end of the day. Your card tilts the scales from a good day to a wonderful day. To me the end of a day means one less day in confinement and one day closer to returning to my family. So once again thank you all for making my day a wonderful one"

Sue Webster believes that the UA Network's appeals are having an effect. When he was transferred from the US Army base at Mannheim in Germany to detention in the USA, in October 2004, she received a letter from the army advising her that Abdullah had been moved. The letter also explained the procedures required for her to visit him. Previously she felt that she had been kept in the dark about developments.

"It does seem as though they are taking extra care now to 'dot the i's and cross the t's' in terms of keeping me informed even though it was a bit late... Let's hope and pray that our petitioning may change his sentencing..The timing of this last minute move [the transfer to the USA] seems to also tie in with the Urgent Appeal which started approx 17 Sept so I guess we are ruffling a few feathers." 🌐

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custody. Both men are still at risk of being forcibly returned to Turkey, where they would be at risk of unfair trial or torture.

(UA 33/05 issued Feb. 11, 2005 & re-issued Feb. 22)

MAURITANIA: Jamil Ould Mansour, Cheikh Mohamed El Hacem Ould Dedew (religious leader), El Moctar Ould Mohamed Moussa (former ambassador), Cheikh Ould Abdallahi, and Amar Ould Amar Jowda.

These prisoners of conscience were released on February 13. Three had been held since November 16 at the Nouakchott Central Prison on charges of "complicity in fabrication and forgery of documents (photographs) that might cause a disturbance of public order and prejudice internal and external security." Cheikh Ould Abdallahi was reportedly released in November.

(UA 284/04 & re-issued Oct. 14, 19, 27, & Nov. 22, 2004)

NEPAL: Sindhunath Pyakurel and Bishnu Nisthuri.

The Nepal Bar Association has confirmed that Sindhunath Pyakurel, former chairman of the Nepal Bar Association, was released on the morning of February 14, after spending two weeks in detention. "I am happy they released me," Pyakurel said, according to the Kathmandu Post newspaper. "[But] they should not have arrested me since I am a non-political professional lawyer." ***His family has thanked Amnesty International members for campaigning on his behalf.***

Bishnu Nisthuri, a prominent press freedom activist and Secretary General of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ), was released on February 25. ***Bishnu Nisthuri thanked members of Amnesty International (AI) for all their support. In addition to the appeals on his behalf from members of the Urgent Action Network, an AI delegation visited him in detention,***

and raised his case directly with senior Nepalese government officials.

(UA 29/05 issued Feb. 8, 2005 & re-issued Feb. 16, 2005)

NEPAL: Gauri Pradhan.

Gauri Pradhan, founder and President of the Child Workers in Nepal Concern Center (CWIN), was released from police custody on February 28 on the order of the Supreme Court, only to be promptly rearrested outside the court house by security forces in plain clothes. "They dragged me out of my car... and whisked me off to Singha Durbar Ward Police Office [in Kathmandu]," he told the Kathmandu Post newspaper. "But they were soon ordered over a walkie-talkie to release me. Then only did they take me home, to my utter relief."

Gauri Pradhan, one of Nepal's leading advocates for children's rights, is now at home with family and friends. ***He has expressed his deep appreciation for all those who***



Prisoner of conscience Dr. Nguyen Dan Que was released in February as part of an amnesty for over 8000 prisoners to mark Tet, the Lunar New Year.

supported him and fought for his release.

Police had arrested him initially at Kathmandu Airport on the afternoon of February 17 following his return from meetings in Europe.

(UA 40/05 issued Feb. 17, 2005)

SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIET NAM: Dr. Nguyen Dan Que.

Prisoner of conscience Dr. Nguyen Dan Que, aged 62, was released on February 2 as part of an amnesty for over 8,000 prisoners to mark Tet, the Lunar New Year. Three other men, Nguyen Dinh Huy, Buddhist monk Thich Thien Minh and Catholic priest Father Thadeus Nguyen Van Ly, who were also adopted as prisoners of conscience by AI were released at the same time.

(UA 1/04 issued Jan. 2, 2004 & re-issued Jul. 29 & Aug. 6, 2004)

USA: Camilo Mejia Castillo.

Staff Sergeant Camilo Mejia Castillo was released from prison on February 15, three months before the end of his one-year sentence, on grounds of good conduct. He is now back at home with his family. He had been imprisoned in May 2004 for desertion, after he refused to return to his unit in Iraq, where he had first been deployed in April 2003. He cited his moral objections to the conduct of US troops towards Iraqi civilians and prisoners, questioned the legality of the war, and applied for conscientious objector status. **In a telephone conversation with Amnesty International, Camilo Mejia expressed his profound gratitude to all at AI for taking up his case. He received thousands of letters of support from Amnesty members while he was in prison. His lawyer said, "I want to thank Amnesty International for its campaign on Camilo's behalf. I believe the campaign was very important in protecting Camilo in the prison environment, and in securing his release on the minimum date rather than the maximum date."**

(UA 190/04 issued Jun. 3, 2004 & re-issued Jul. 21, 2004)

Executions / Stays / Commutations

BARBADOS: Fredrick Atkins.

Fredrick Atkins, 36, who was scheduled to be executed on February 14, received a stay of execution. The Barbados High Court ruled that he could not be executed until the Court of Appeals resolves the case of Lennox Boyce and Jeffrey Joseph.

(UA 34/05 issued Feb. 11, 2005)

USA/Indiana: Donald Ray Wallace.

Donald Wallace, 47, was executed in Indiana on March 10. He had been sentenced to death in 1982 after being convicted of killing four members of the same family in 1980. In his final statement before being killed, Donald Wallace said, "I hope everyone can find peace with this."

(UA 43/05 issued Feb. 22, 2005)

USA/North Carolina: William Powell.

William Powell was executed on March 11.

(UA 46/05 issued Feb. 24, 2005)

USA/Ohio: William Henry Smith.

William Smith was executed on March 8.

(UA 45/05 issued Feb. 23, 2005)

Other News

BRAZIL: 400 members of the Guarani-Kaiowa Indigenous Community in Cerro Marangatu.

AI has learned that an eviction order against the Guarani-Kaiowa families living on the Cerro Marangatu indigenous territory was suspended on March 2, the day before it was due to take effect. The families are now safe until at least March 31, when the suspension order runs out. If the Brazilian federal government ratifies the territory as Guarani-Kaiowa land, in accordance with its constitutional and international obligations, the families can be saved from almost certain destitution.

(UA 13/05 issued Mar. 7, 2005)

BURUNDI: James Gakuru.

AI has been informed that James Gakuru, who was sentenced to death in March 2004, was reportedly killed as he attempted to flee Rumonge prison in the capital Bujumbura. An investigation into the circumstances of James Gakuru's death has not yet been conducted.

(UA 81/04 issued Feb. 24, 2004 & re-issued Apr. 23, May 14, 2004, & Feb. 16, 2005)

GUATEMALA: Eloida Mejia Samayoa.

Eloida Mejia Samayoa, President and Legal Representative of *Friends of Izabal's Lake*

Association, has sent the following message: **"After the Urgent Action Amnesty issued on my behalf I received protection from Peace Brigades International and this really saved my life."** She is no longer

receiving death threats as a result of her work opposing the reactivation of mining activities in the Izabal Department. The authorities have begun investigations into the threats but those responsible have yet to be brought to justice.

(UA 89/04 issued Mar. 1, 2004)

RUSSIAN FED./CHECHEN REPUBLIC: Ruslan Susaev.

Amnesty International is saddened by the news that human rights defender Ruslan Susaev died in a traffic accident in Chechnya on February 16. He was the head of the non-governmental organization "Civilians' protest" and cooperated with the Society of Russian-Chechen Friendship. Amnesty International has sent condolences to his wife and family.

(UA 317/04 issued Nov. 22, 2004)

SUDAN: Dr. Mudawi Ibrahim Adam and Salah Mohamed Abdelrahman.

Human rights defender Dr. Mudawi Ibrahim Adam has ended his hunger strike after the Sudanese authorities gave him access to his family and to medical treatment. He is in a hospital in the capital Khartoum. He is apparently not being guarded in the hospital, and has been permitted to have visitors, including leading UN personnel based in Khartoum. Dr. Mudawi Ibrahim Adam began his hunger strike on February 19. Before being transferred to the hospital on February 26, he was brought before the Attorney General and charged with "attempting to commit suicide" which carries a penalty of one year's imprisonment under the Sudan Penal Code. Such a charge suggests that the Sudanese authorities have failed to find any other offence to charge him with. A representative of the Attorney General's Office has also interrogated him in the hospital in relation to this charge.



US conscientious objector Camilo Mejia Castillo was released from prison in February, three months before the end of his sentence.

There is still no news about the whereabouts or condition of Salah Mohamed Abdelrahman, who was arrested with Dr. Mudawi Ibrahim Adam on January 24, 2005, and work continues on his behalf. Dr. Mudawi Ibrahim Adam told AI by telephone from his hospital bed that since his detention, he had been kept in a small room in a "ghost house", with no access to the outside world apart from guards coming three times a day to take him to the toilet and to bring food. He said that he did not see the sun during his detention. **Dr. Mudawi Ibrahim Adam thanked Amnesty International members for their efforts on his behalf and urged them to continue to campaign for human rights changes in Sudan.**

(UA 47/05 issued Feb. 24, 2005)

SYRIA: 'Ammar 'Umar, Kahdar Khaled, Mas'ud Khaled, Hasan'Umar, Murad Aslan, Daglash Khalil, Shenidar Muhammad Yusuf, Shiyar Muhammad Yusuf, Zerdeshta Muhammad Yusuf, Zibar Muhammad Yusuf, Tawfiq Husayn,

Manal 'Abdi, Diyar'Ali, Juwan Khaled, and Jivara Shukri.

The 15 Syrian Kurds named above were sentenced to prison terms on February 15 after a grossly unfair trial before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC). Kahdar Khaled, Mas'ud Khaled, Shenidar Muhammad Yusuf and Shiyar Muhammad Yusuf were sentenced to three years' imprisonment, while the 11 others were sentenced to two years' imprisonment. After the trial, one of the defense lawyers repeated the allegation that the convictions were based on statements obtained through torture. To AI's knowledge, the SSSC has never investigated any of the hundreds of allegations over the years that "confessions" used as evidence in court had been extracted under torture.

(UA 15/05 issued Jan. 19, 2005 & re-issued Feb. 18)

SYRIA: Muhannad al-Dabas and Muhammad 'Arab.

On March 6, the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) sentenced university students Muhannad al-Dabas and Muhammad 'Arab to three years' imprisonment. AI considers them to be prisoners of conscience, imprisoned

solely for their peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression and association. The two men were arrested in April 2004 after a sit-down protest organized by students at the University of Damascus. Nine others arrested in connection with the protest were released on May 9, 2004. At least seven of these reported that they had been tortured in detention. Muhannad al-Dabas and Muhammad 'Arab reportedly refused to sign a commitment not to take part in any activities except for those organized by the pro-government student organization. They were convicted of "opposing the objectives of the revolution."

(UA 155/04 issued Apr. 26, 2004 & re-issued May 17, Sep. 1, & Oct. 5, 2004)

USA/SAUDI ARABIA: Ahmed Abu 'Ali. US national Ahmed Abu Ali, 23, was released from detention in Saudi Arabia and returned to the USA on February 22 to face charges that include conspiring to assassinate President George W. Bush. If convicted, he faces a maximum sentence of 80 years in prison.

(UA 340/04 issued Dec. 22, 2004 & re-issued Feb. 4)

UA Newsletter Appeal for April 2005

Each month we include one case that may benefit from appeals sent by those in the UA Network who wish to work on an additional appeal. You are encouraged to write on behalf of this individual until May 10, 2005. Thanks! (This appeal is based on Urgent Action 267/04 issued Sep. 17, 2004 & re-issued Mar. 10, 2005).

Prisoner of Conscience / Health Concern

USA: Abdullah William Webster

Abdullah Webster has spent over nine months in US military custody as a prisoner of conscience. He has been jailed for his conscientious objection to participating in the war in Iraq. He is apparently not receiving appropriate medical care.

Abdullah Webster is on medication for high cholesterol and requires monthly blood tests to check for the side-effects of the drug, which can include liver damage. However, these tests were reportedly not carried out between October and December 2004. In mid-January 2005, Abdullah Webster developed severe stomach cramps and blood tests found abnormal readings related to the liver.

Abdullah Webster was sentenced by a US court martial to 14 months' imprisonment on June 3, 2004, for refusing to participate in the war in Iraq on the basis of his religious beliefs. His application for conscientious objector status had been rejected and his request to be transferred to non-combat duties turned down. When he refused to deploy to Iraq in February 2004, he was charged with failing to obey commands from his superior and missing his brigade's movements.

Originally held at the US military base in Bamberg, Germany where his unit was stationed, Abdullah Webster was transferred to Fort Lewis, Washington in October 2004. For the first two months of his detention at Fort Lewis, he was not able to contact his family by telephone. Islamic services are also believed to have been banned and during the Islamic fasting period of Ramadan (fasting from dawn until sunset), he spent at least one 24-hour period without any food or water.

Abdullah Webster is a US citizen who has served in the US army since 1985. He had been due to retire this year. At the court martial hearing he also received a bad conduct discharge and loss of pensions and other benefits.

Please send appeals:

- calling for Abdullah Webster to be released immediately and unconditionally, with restoration of his pension and other benefits, and pointing out that Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience;
- expressing serious concern at reports that he has not been receiving adequate medical attention;
- seeking assurances that he is now being

given proper medical care;
- asking for assurances that he is being granted the right to perform religious duties in detention.

Send your appeals to:

Raymond F. Dubois
Acting Secretary of the Army
102 Army Pentagon
Room 3E588
Washington DC 20310-0102
Fax: 1 703 697 0720

Salutation: Dear Secretary

Lieutenant Commander Anthony Cruz
Commanding Officer
Fort Lewis Corrections Facility
Fort Lewis, Bldg. # 1450
Fort Lewis, Washington 98433
Fax: 1 253 967-6579

Email: RCF@Lewis.Army.MIL

Salutation: Dear Lieutenant Commander

Send copies of your appeals to:

Donald Rumsfeld
Secretary of Defense
The Pentagon
Washington DC 20301
Fax: 1 703 697 8339