

URGENT ACTION NEWSLETTER



"I will continue to walk in the mountains and advocating for human rights and a healthy environment. I will work very hard with my wife, caring for the forests and planting trees..."

-- Felipe Arreaga, an environmental activist and former prisoner of conscience in Mexico.

Environmental activist and prisoner of conscience Felipe Arreaga has been acquitted of murder, and was released on September 15. Amnesty International believes that the investigation and criminal charges brought against Felipe Arreaga were politically motivated, due to his leading role in peaceful protests against excessive and illegal logging of forests of Guerrero State. In a letter dated

September 21, 2005, he wrote to those who worked on obtaining his freedom: "... **I want to tell you that during the long time of my detention, I always felt accompanied because of the expressions of support that never ceased... I always said that I can die for the cause I believe and that I will not cease in a clean, legal and unselfish struggle that encourages me. I will continue to walk in the mountains and advocating for human rights**

and a healthy environment. I will work very hard with my wife, caring for the forests and planting trees..."

Although he has been released, Felipe Arreaga, his family, and other environmental activists in the region remain in grave danger. A portion of the Urgent Action Network continues to work on this action.
(UA 50/05: Mar. 2 & May 23, 2005)

More Releases!

CUBA: Néstor Rodríguez Lobaina.

Prisoner of conscience Néstor Rodríguez Lobaina was released on July 19, 2005, after five years and four months' imprisonment. He had been detained on March 2, 2000 and sentenced to six years' imprisonment for "disrespect," "public disorder," and "damage." On August 12, he thanked the UA Network for their campaigning efforts: *"I would like to give my deepest thanks to Amnesty International [members] for all the work that they have done to help in my release from prison, for having adopted me as a prisoner of conscience, for all that they are doing for all the other Cuban prisoners of conscience who are suffering unfairly the horror of the prisons of the Cuban Communist tyranny. I am deeply grateful for all of this, and want to tell this prestigious organization that it has here a volunteer, an activist always at its service as well as my modest efforts to work and cooperate alongside it in this altruistic and humanitarian work."*

(UA 39/05: Feb. 16, 2005; & EX 106/96: Jul. 11, 1996; UA 307/98: Dec. 9, 1998; UA 169/99: Jul. 19, 1999)

ERITREA: Binyam Gezay, Essey Stefanos, and over 200 members of Meseret Christos Evangelical Church.

Binyam Gezay and about 130 of the guests at his wedding have been released. A group of over 200 members of the minority Meseret Christos Evangelical Christian Church were arrested on May 28 at a church wedding party.

They were told they would not be released until they signed a document promising not to continue with their religious activities.
(UA 151/05: Jul. 21, 2005)

ETHIOPIA: Berhanu Tsegu, Yared Hailemariam, Cherinet Tadesse, Tesfaye Bekele, Seifu Degu, Chane Kebede.

Tesfaye Bekele, Seifu Degu and Chane Kebede were released on bail on June 23. They had been accused of inciting violence in demonstrations in Dessie town against alleged election fraud, which they denied, but they were not formally charged. Amnesty International considered them prisoners of conscience, imprisoned solely because of their role as leading members of the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO)

branch office in Dessie. Berhanu Tsegu, Yared Hailemariam and Cherinet Tadesse, human rights investigators in the EHRCO head office in Addis Ababa, were released on July 4, on bail. They had been taken from Addis Ababa to Ziway town prison, and accused of organizing opposition demonstrations in Addis Ababa, which they denied. They were not formally charged either. Amnesty International considered them prisoners of conscience, detained solely because of their peaceful and legitimate work of investigating human rights violations by the federal police and army during the demonstrations. Yared Hailemariam appears to have been arrested for taking photographs in hospital of demonstrators who had been killed or wounded.

(UA 165/05: Jun. 15, 2005)



Kevin Benderman (in the middle) with fellow conscientious objectors Aidan Delgado (left) and Camilo Mejia (right). © Maritza Mejia

Take Action!

Send cards and letters of support to US army sergeant and prisoner of conscience Kevin Benderman at Fort Lewis Correctional Facility in Washington.

page 4 ►

ETHIOPIA: Student demonstrators at Addis Ababa University and elsewhere, also: Andargachew Tsege, Gebrechristos Haileselassie, Azeb Amare, Endale Hailu, Haileyesus Ijiga, Bisrat Abbi, Getachew Mogesse, Kemirte Kamma, Gizaw Gebremedhin, Shemsu Sesekicho and scores of others.

All 190 Addis Ababa University students detained illegally since June 6 have now been released. As with other detainees arrested for demonstrating against the government, the students were taken to court and released on bail, although not formally charged with any criminal offence. It is not known if these or any other released detainees will eventually be brought to trial.

(UA 154/05: Jun. 7, 23 & Jul. 6, 2005)

GREECE: Boris Sotiriadis.

On September 20, the Military Court of Appeal in Athens granted the release of prisoner of conscience Boris Sotiriadis pending his appeal hearing. He had been sentenced to an unprecedented three and a half years' imprisonment on charges of disobedience, after he refused to serve in the army because it conflicts with his religious belief. The prosecutor at the Military Court of Appeal requested that Boris Sotiriadis be released on bail of 1,000 Euros, and be obliged to present himself every 15 days at the local police station. However, he was finally released only on condition that he is not allowed to leave Greece after his lawyer argued that his family could not afford to pay his bail costs. *Boris Sotiriadis's wife, who testified for the defense, expressed her deep gratitude to all members of Amnesty International who had contributed to the release of her husband.*

(UA 211/05: Aug. 23, 2005)

IRAN: Yousuf Azizi Bani Toruf.

Writer and journalist Yousuf Azizi Bani Toruf was reportedly released on June 28, on payment of bail of US\$25,000.

(UA 109/05: May 6 & Jul. 4, 2005)

KAZAKSTAN: Lutfullo Shamsuddinov.

Human rights defender Lutfullo Shamsuddinov was released on July 4, and handed over to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). *The massive response from the UA Network apparently made a significant contribution to securing his release.*

(UA 181/05: Jul. 5, 2005)

MOLDOVA: Vasilii Kodrian and Vyacheslav Pleshko.

Vasilii Kodrian and Vyacheslav Pleshko have now been released.

(UA 207/05: Aug. 9 & Sep. 12, 2005)

NEPAL: Lok Prasad Panta.

After more than seven months in detention, Lok Prasad Panta, a social worker, was released from Surkhet Jail on September 17. Lok Prasad Panta is a member of Amnesty International Nepal and well-known locally as a community activist. *His relatives thanked Amnesty International and local human rights defenders for working to secure his release.*

(UA 60/05: Mar. 11, 2005)

NEPAL: Raj Kumar Pariyar.

Raj Kumar Pariyar was freed on August 24 following a second Supreme Court ruling that his detention was illegal and that he should be released immediately. However, lawyers and human rights defenders recognized members of the security forces dressed in plain clothes waiting outside the Supreme Court building and feared that he could be re-arrested once again. Raj Kumar Pariyar remained inside the court until representatives of Nepal's National Human Rights Commission arrived on the scene and escorted him to safety.

(UA 213/05: Aug. 19, 2005)

NEPAL: Karna Bahadur Thapa Magar.

Karna Bahadur Thapa Magar was released on July 4 on the order of the Supreme Court, but narrowly avoided being rearrested outside the court house in Kathmandu. He had been rearrested previously, on June 8, following an earlier Supreme Court order for his release.

(UA 159/05: Jun. 9 & Jul. 11, 2005)

NEPAL: Govinda Ghimire.

Govinda Ghimire, student, was freed on August 24 following a second Supreme Court ruling that his detention was illegal and that he should be released immediately. Again, as in the case of Raj Kumar Pariyar, above, lawyers and human rights defenders escorted him to safety.

(UA 122/04: Mar. 3 & Dec. 23, 2004; Jun. 24, 2005)

NEPAL: Gagan Thapa.

Gagan Thapa appeared before the Special Court in Kathmandu on August 14, where he was charged with sedition before being released pending trial. *He told trial observers then that such international attention had been instrumental in ensuring his safety. "If the international community had not been present at the right moment, the action taken against me would have been even more serious;" he added "As soon as the international pressure started, the police changed their tone."*

(UA 199/05: Jul. 29, 2005)

OMAN: Muhammad Bin Rashid Al-Gharbi, Dr Ali Bin Hilal al-Arbi, Dr Jabir al-Sa'di, Said al-Harhi, and 27 others.

All those named above were granted a royal amnesty by the Sultan of Oman on June 9

and released. In a letter dated July 13, the Grand Mufti of the Sultanate of Oman confirmed that all the detainees had been released.

(UA 26/05: Jan. 28 & May 10, 2005)

OMAN: Abdullah Al Riyami and Taiba al Mawali.

Prisoner of conscience and writer Abdullah Al Riyami was released without charge on July 19. On August 7, the Court of Appeal reportedly reduced Taiba al Mawali's prison sentence from 18 months to six months. She had been sentenced on July 13 in connection with her criticisms of the government. It is thought that she may be detained in the Women's Prison in Muscat.

(UA 187/05: Jul. 15, 21 & Aug. 9, 2005)

RUSSIAN FEDERATION: Airat Vakhitov and Rustam Akhmiarov.

Airat Vakhitov and Rustam Akhmiarov were released on September 2. They are now at liberty in the Republic of Tatarstan. They told Amnesty International that they had not been ill-treated while they were in custody. They are convinced that their release is due to the attention of Amnesty International and other media and human rights organizations. Airat Vakhitov told Amnesty International: *"I can't express enough thanks to your members, we're simply in shock, thank you for your understanding of our situation."* Rustam Akhmiarov told Amnesty International: *"A very big thank you, thank you for caring and not being indifferent."*

(UA 225/05: Aug. 30, 2005)

SAUDI ARABIA: Dr. Matrouk al Falih, Dr. Abdullah al-Hamid, Ali al Deminy and Abdel Rahman al-Lahem.

These prisoners of conscience were granted a royal pardon by the new King Abdullah on August 8 and released the next day.

(UA 112/04: Mar. 17, Apr. 30, Jul. 2, 2004; May 17, 2005)

SAUDI ARABIA: Dr Sa'id Bin Zu'air.

King Abdullah granted university professor Dr Sa'id Bin Zu'air a royal pardon on August 8. Dr Sa'id Bin Zu'air had been detained in al-Ha'ir prison, Riyadh, since April 2004, after he criticized the government in a televised debate. He had been released in March 2003 after eight years detained without charge or trial over previous criticisms of the government. During this earlier period of imprisonment two of his sons, Sa'ad Bin Sa'id Bin Zu'air and Mubarak Bin Sa'id Bin Zu'air, were detained after they campaigned for his release. Sa'ad Bin Sa'id Bin Zu'air was released in July 2005 after almost three years held incommunicado. His brother was released at the beginning of this year.

(UA 52/05: Mar. 3, 2005)

SUDAN: Salah Mohamed Abdelrahman.

On August 11, Salah Mohamed Abdelrahman was released from Kober prison in Khartoum North after more than eight months in detention without charge. He had been arrested on January 24 along with Dr. Mudawi Ibrahim Adam, who was officially released on March 3. Salah Mohamed Abdelrahman said to Amnesty International members, "Thank you for your solidarity and humanity in ending my suffering. I am very grateful for all you efforts."

(UA 47/05: Feb. 24 & 28, 2005)

SUDAN: Abdallah Musa Abdallah, Dr. Mahmoud Osman Ibrahim, Hashim Ali Dura, Abdel Rahim Ali Bur'I, Aderob Bakkash, Khalifa Omar Ohajj, Ali Hussein Ali, Mohamed Samra, Hussein Adam.

All nine men have been released. Dr. Mahmoud Osman Ibrahim was freed in April, and all the others were released on June 30 after almost six months detained without charge or trial. On June 30 the President promised to release all political detainees and lift the nationwide state of emergency, except in Darfur and eastern Sudan.

(UA 27/05: Feb. 2 & Mar. 8, 2005)

SYRIA: Aktham Nu'aysa.

The Supreme State Security Court acquitted lawyer and human rights defender Aktham Nu'aysa of all charges on June 26. He was released on bail on August 16, 2004 pending his trial, which was attended by several representatives of foreign embassies in Syria. The charges against Aktham Nu'aysa appear to have arisen solely from his legitimate work in defense of human rights. He is due to receive the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders in Geneva on October 12, 2005.

(UA 142/04: Apr. 14, Apr. 23, Aug. 20, 2004)

SYRIA: 'Abdel Rahman al-Shaghouri.

'Abdel Rahman al-Shaghouri was released on August 31.

(UA 185/03: Jun. 24, Jul. 23 & Nov. 5, 2003; Mar. 18 & Jun. 21, 2004)

SYRIA: Yassin al-Hamwi and Muhammad 'Ali al-'Abdullah.

On August 16, prisoners of conscience Yassin al-Hamwi and Muhammad 'Ali al-'Abdullah, both founding members of the Committee of the Families of Prisoners of Opinion and Conscience, were released on bail, pending their trial before a military court in Damascus on September 6. The two men are said to be in good health and have thanked Amnesty International for its continuing efforts on their case.

(UA 203/05: Aug. 3 & 9, 2005)

SYRIA: Muhammad Mustafa, Khaled Ahmed 'Ali, Sherif Ramadhan.

Muhammad Mustafa, Khaled Ahmed 'Ali and Sherif Ramadhan were released at the end of June, when they completed their sentences. Mas'oud Hamid remains in 'Adra Prison, just outside the capital, Damascus. He has reportedly been suffering severe after-effects from being tortured during interrogation. All were arrested in June and July 2003, during and after a peaceful demonstration to mark World Children's Day outside the Damascus headquarters of UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund. The demonstrators were calling for civil and political rights for Syria's Kurdish population, including the right to be taught in the Kurdish language.

(UA 188/03: Jun. 26, Sep. 18, Oct. 15, 2003 & Jun. 29, 2004)

United Arab Emirates: Salem Abdul Rahman Nawab al-Baloushi.

Salem al-Baloushi was released on July 3.

(UA 57/05: Mar. 11, 2005, Jun. 7 & 16, 2005)

UZBEKISTAN: Erkin Yakubzhanov.

Prisoner of conscience and journalism student, Erkin Yakubzhanov, was released on July 29, by Uzbekistani border guards. He reportedly does not face any criminal charges and has been sent back to his village in Kyrgyzstan. Erkin Yakubzhanov was arrested when he tried to interview border guards whilst investigating repression in Andizhan since the May 13 uprising.

(UA 200/05: Jul. 29, 2005)

Executions / Stays / Commutations

IRAN: Esmail Mohammadi.

Esmail Mohammadi was executed on September 3, in Oroumiye Prison. His family apparently went to the prison to visit him shortly afterwards, but was told that he had been executed.

(UA 236/03: Aug. 8, 2003; Aug. 24, 2004)

IRAQ: Ahmad al-Jaf, 'Uday Dawud al-Dulaimi and Jasim 'Abbas.

Ahmad al-Jaf, Jasim 'Abbas and 'Uday Dawud al-Dulaimi were executed on September 1.

(UA 137/05: May 25, Aug. 16, 2005)

PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY: Ra'ei Khalil al-Mughrabi.

On July 27, Ra'ei Khalil al-Mughrabi from Jabalya refugee camp in the Gaza Strip was executed by hanging at Gaza central prison.

(UA 160/05: Jun. 13 & 24, 2005)

USA/Indiana: Arthur P Baird II.

On August 29, just two days before Arthur Baird was due to be executed, Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels commuted his death

sentence and imposed a sentence of life without parole.

(UA 210/05: Aug. 15, 2005)

USA/OHIO: John Spirko.

Governor Bob Taft has issued a warrant of reprieve for John Spirko, delaying his execution date until November 15. He had been due to be executed on September 20. The reprieve was issued on September 8 following a recommendation from the Ohio Parole Board to allow it time to hold a rehearing of John Spirko's clemency petition.

(UA 221/05: Aug. 24, 2005)

USA/TEXAS: Frances Elaine Newton.

Frances Newton was executed September 14.

(UA 217/05: Aug. 23, 2005)

USA/TEXAS: David Martinez.

David Martinez was executed July 28.

(UA 192/05: Jul. 22, 2005)

Other News

BRAZIL: Members of Guarani indigenous communities in Mato Grosso do Sul state.

On September 14, the Federal Appeals Court (Superior Tribunal de Justiça), turned down a challenge by landowners which disputed the Brazilian government's identification of the 9000 hectare Yvy Katu indigenous territory, home to some 3000 Guarani Indians, as an indigenous area. As a result the community is no longer facing any imminent threat of violent eviction. However the process for demarcation of indigenous land is slow and it is possible that further judicial challenges might be raised in an attempt to block the Indians from becoming rightful occupants of their ancestral land.

(UA 178/05: Jun. 28, Aug. 16 & 19, Sep. 19, 2005)

IRAN: Manuchehr Mohammadi.

Political prisoner Manuchehr Mohammadi has been granted temporary medical leave from prison in order to receive hospital treatment for his gingivitis, and problems with his kidneys and digestive system. It is not known how long his temporary leave is for.

(UA 181/03: Jun. 30 & Jul. 15, 2003)

IRAN: Nasser Zarafshan.

Lawyer and human rights defender Nasser Zarafshan has reportedly been granted medical leave from prison for treatment of his kidney stones. A spokesman for the Iranian Judiciary has reportedly stated that the length of Nasser Zarafshan's medical leave would depend on the decision of his doctors, and on them sending the relevant medical information to the Judiciary.

(UA 113/05: May 6 & Jun. 15, 2005)

TURKEY: Eren Keskin, Saban Dayanan and Dogan Genç.

The three members of the İnsan Hakları Derneği (IHD), Human Rights Association have not received any further death threats following threatening letters sent to their home and work addresses on April 19 by the ultra-nationalist group Türk Intikam Tugayı (Turkish Revenge Brigade). The Turkish authorities have informed Amnesty International that the Ministry of the Interior is investigating the threats against the three and that they have warned all the provincial governors in Turkey to take "the necessary security precautions" to protect the branches of IHD and other non-governmental organizations in case of possible attacks. (UA 94/05: Apr. 20, 2005)

"We are indebted to all those who thought of us and sent Urgent Action appeals. We need such solidarity. The reactions to these appeals will prevent these attacks. We believe this from our hearts. We send warm greetings to all those who showed concern for our security."

-- Saban Dayanan, in a message to members of the UA Network



Dogan Genç, Eren Keskin and Saban Dayanan (front row l-r) with other IHD members at a press conference about the threats they received.
© Private

Urgent Action Newsletter Appeal: October 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 November 10, 2005. Thanks! (This appeal is based on UA 208/05 issued Aug. 9, 2005 & re-issued Sep. 5, 2005).

Prisoner of conscience

USA: Kevin Benderman, US army sergeant

Prisoner of conscience Kevin Benderman, jailed for his objection to the war in Iraq, has been moved to a military prison 3,000 miles from his family, who are reportedly the only people who will be allowed to visit him. He was moved to Fort Lewis, in Washington State, on August 1.

His wife told Amnesty International on September 3, "I spoke with Kevin today and he said to please express his sincere thank you to... all the people of Amnesty International who continue to help him." She was not officially informed that he had been moved to Fort Lewis, and found out only because his supervisor called her unofficially. He intends to appeal against the verdict of his court martial, but is unable to begin the process because the sentence and conviction have not yet been formally confirmed, over one month after he was sentenced. On about August 20 he asked permission for a telephone conversation with a military lawyer, but has reportedly not so far received approval.

Kevin Benderman had served as an army mechanic for 10 years when he developed moral and religious objections to the war in Iraq, after serving there in 2003, and refused to deploy there again. After seeing scenes of devastation in Iraq, and through his readings of both the Bible and the Qu'ran, Kevin Benderman filed an application for conscientious objector status on December 28, 2004.

His application was turned down on April 27, and he was sentenced to 15 months' imprisonment at the subsequent court

martial. Amnesty International considers his objection to the war to be genuine and credible, and also that he took reasonable steps to secure release from his military obligations, and therefore considers him a prisoner of conscience.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals:

- reiterating that Amnesty International considers Kevin Benderman to be a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for his conscientious objection to the war in Iraq, and calling for him to be released immediately and unconditionally;
- reminding the US authorities that international human rights standards require that any detained person be able to communicate and consult with a lawyer of their choice; that their family be informed of any transfer without delay, and that they have an effective opportunity to communicate with the outside world and in particular to be visited by members of their family.

APPEALS TO:

Secretary of the Army Dr. Francis J. Harvey
101 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-0101
Fax: 1 703 693 5735

Salutation: Dear Secretary

Lt Gen James Dubik
Fort Lewis Garrison Commander
525 Replacement
Ft. Lewis, Washington, 98433-9500
Fax: 1 253 967 0061



Kevin Benderman with his wife, Monica.
© Lewis M. Levine

Send Cards to Kevin!

In addition to the appeals on the Urgent Action regarding prisoner of conscience Kevin Benderman, we are suggesting sending cards and letters of support to him in prison. Amnesty International members did the same for released US prisoner of conscientious Camilo Mejia and Abdullah Webster, and both really appreciated receiving these messages.

Send your cards and letters of support to:

Kevin Mitchell Benderman
PO Box 339536
Fort Lewis WA 98433-9536

To help ensure that your card or letter is given to Kevin at the Ft. Lewis Correctional Facility, we suggest that you list **Amnesty International Member** beneath your name on the return address.

If your card or letter gets returned, please resend it via his wife, to:
Kevin and Monica Benderman
PO Box 2322
Hinesville GA 31310