



# URGENT ACTION

## NEWSLETTER



**"The candle burns not for us, but for all those whom we failed to rescue from prison, who were shot on the way to prison, who were tortured, who were kidnapped, who 'disappeared'. That is what the candle is for."**

-- Peter Benenson, the founder of Amnesty International, who died February 25, 2005. © AI

### A Legacy of Lunacy: AI's Global Writeathon

The story of Amnesty International's origin has achieved near-mythic heights: after reading an article about two Portuguese students sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for raising their glasses in a toast to freedom, Peter Benenson decided to mobilize world opinion and within a few months, he launched his *Appeal for Amnesty* with a front page article in a London newspaper.

Nothing quite like the *Appeal for Amnesty* had ever been attempted on such a scale before. The response was overwhelming,

as if people worldwide were waiting for exactly such a call. Newspapers in over a dozen countries picked up the appeal. Over a thousand letters poured in within the first six months. And the mailbags of the world's heads of state changed forever.

Benenson's idea was simple. Termed "one of the larger lunacies of our time" by one of its critics, a network of letter writers was set up to bombard governments with individual appeals on behalf of prisoners jailed and ill-treated in violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

On December 10-11, 2005, join thousands of Amnesty groups and individuals in over thirty countries as they gather for AI's annual Global Writeathon in honor and celebration of Benenson's legacy by writing letters on behalf of individuals who are being unjustly imprisoned, tortured, "disappeared," and threatened for their human rights work. Start planning your school or community writeathon now. Resources are available at [amnestyusa.org/writeathon](http://amnestyusa.org/writeathon) and through the Urgent Action office.

## Releases!

**ETHIOPIA: Birkayehu Mekecha, Dache Molla, Emkulu Yiheyis, Endrias Ero, Hailemichael Zijita, Solomon Tenaye, Tefera Mengeste, Tesfaye Tarekegne, Wendwossen Shiferraw, Yohannes Abate, and hundreds of other members of opposition parties.**

All the opposition party officials and members named above were released in early October. However, the opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), claims that over 800 of its members are still detained in different

regions, and says that it will call for peaceful strikes and demonstrations if they are not released quickly. The United Ethiopian Democratic Front (UEDF) opposition coalition has said some of its members in the Oromia and southern regions are still detained. The opposition

party members detained may be prisoners of conscience, arrested solely for the non-violent expression of their political opinions. This Urgent Action has been re-issued to a portion of the UA Network.

*(UA 261/05 issued Sep. 30, 2005 & reissued Oct. 28, 2005)*



### Take Action!

Send appeals to Colombian authorities urging them to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with United Nations recommendations.

Orlando Valencia, left, was found dead on October 24, nine days after he was last seen abducted by army-backed paramilitaries.

page 4 ►

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

Yassin al-Hamwi and Muhammad 'Ali al-'Abdullah were found not guilty of "establishing and belonging to a secret society" by the Military Court on September 27, but guilty of "defamation of the public administration". They were sentenced to 10 days' imprisonment, which they had already spent in custody, and released immediately. They had been free on bail since August 16. One member of Finland's Urgent Action Network received a response from the Syrian Embassy in Sweden, saying that Yassin al-Hamwi and Muhammad 'Ali al-'Abdullah had been arrested for promoting an "illegal" organization, namely the Muslim Brotherhood, which is banned in Syria. This does not accord with Amnesty International's information: the two men were arrested after the first meeting of a support group they had been involved in setting up, the Committee of the Families of Prisoners of Opinion and Conscience. However, Muhammad 'Ali al-'Abdullah is the son of prisoner of conscience 'Ali al-'Abdullah, who was detained on May 15, 2005, one week after he read a statement on behalf of the exiled leader of the Muslim Brotherhood at a meeting of the Jamal al-Atassi Forum, a political discussion group which was itself then closed down by the authorities. He is now in solitary confinement awaiting trial before the Supreme State Security Court on charges of "promoting an illegal organization."

(UA 203/05 issued Aug. 3, 2005 & reissued Aug. 9 & 22, & Oct. 6, 2005)

### **TUNISIA: Hussein Sumaida.**

Hussein Sumaida, an Iraqi/Tunisian national, was released on September 16 after 10 days in detention at the headquarters of the Ministry of the Interior's State Security Department in the capital, Tunis. He is still in Tunisia, but has been able to speak to his wife in Canada by telephone. On September 6, Hussein Sumaida was forcibly returned to Tunisia from Canada. Canadian immigration authorities handed him over to the Tunisian authorities upon arrival at Tunis airport. Amnesty International feared for Hussein Sumaida's safety after his father

was told by security officers at the airport that nobody had seen him. It is not known whether he was tortured or ill-treated in detention.

(UA 241/05 issued Sep. 15, 2005)

### **USA/EGYPT: Sami al-Laithi.**

Sami al-Laithi, who was returned to Egypt by the US authorities during the weekend of October 1-2, 2005, is now known to have been hospitalized on arrival. He returned to his family on October 7. When he arrived at Cairo airport, he was reportedly taken immediately in an ambulance to Cairo's Qasr al-Aini hospital. It is not clear what kind of treatment he received there. He is now with his family in al-Gharbiyah Governorate.

(UA 231/05 issued Sep. 7, 2005, & reissued Oct. 3, 2005)

## **Executions / Stays / Commutations**

### **USA/ALABAMA: John W Peoples, Jr.**

John W. Peoples, Jr. was executed as scheduled on September 22. According to press reports, in his last words he thanked his family and friends for their support during his 22 years on death row. He said, "I hope I've handled everything ever since I've been here with dignity. I'd just like to thank everybody for helping me and working with me and giving me support."

(UA 242/05 issued Sep. 16, 2005)

### **USA/INDIANA: Alan Lehman Matheney.**

Alan Lehman Matheney, was executed as scheduled on September 28. He had been sentenced to death in 1990 for the murder of his ex-wife, Lisa Bianco, the previous year. Matheney had argued that his death sentence was unconstitutional as he was mentally ill when he committed the murder.

(UA 243/05 issued Sep. 16, 2005)

### **USA/MISSOURI: Marlin Gray.**

Marlin Gray was executed as scheduled in Missouri on October 26. He had been sentenced to death in December 1992 for his role in the 1991 rape and murder of sisters Julie and Robin Kerry. The

state conceded at trial that he had not been present at the time the murders took place, but maintained that Gray had been the ringleader: three other men were also tried and convicted for their involvement in the crime. Gray maintained that a confession he made to police during interrogation that he raped the women (but not to killing them) was extracted as a result of ill-treatment. He also maintained that he was given access to a lawyer only after he had confessed. In his final statement, Gray reportedly said, "I go forward now on wings built by the love and support of my family and friends. I go with a peace of mind that comes from never having taken a human life. I forgive those who have hardened their hearts to the truth and I pray they ask forgiveness for they know not what they do. This is not a death, it is a lynching." Local newspapers described how, in the days leading up to the execution, Governor Blunt received letters, e-mails, faxes and phone calls opposing the execution from campaigns run by Amnesty International and Missourians to Abolish the Death Penalty. They also said that a bus full of Gray's supporters had driven to Blunt's office two days before the execution.

(UA 269/05 issued Oct. 12, 2005)

## **Other News**

### **PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA: Mao Hengfeng and Wu Xuewei, her husband.**

Mao Hengfeng was released on September 12, on completion of her 18-month term of "Re-education Through Labor". However, she defied orders to stop protesting about this and other violations of her rights, and so the security forces have harassed and beaten both her and her husband, Wu Xuewei. Both are at risk of arbitrary detention and torture. Since her release, Mao Hengfeng has given further details of the treatment she endured while she was in custody. On August 9, 2004, she was kneed repeatedly in the groin, causing her to lose control temporarily of her bladder and bowels. From August 9 to 16 and November 9 to 11, 2004, she says she was forced to lie

on her back on a metal “bed” with both wrists and ankles bound tightly to the four corners with leather straps. She was prevented from going to the toilet and forced to drink a liquid that made her feel dizzy. She claims that her back broke out into ulcers as a result of this treatment. On the day of her release, “Re-education Through Labor” officials reportedly threatened Mao with “serious consequences” if she continued her protests. When she refused to stop protesting, the officials reportedly forced twelve other inmates to bind her hands, arms and legs. She was then bundled into a van and driven out of the RTL facility. Following her release, Mao Hengfeng has continued her protests, together with her husband. At around 9am on September 13, they joined over 100 other petitioners who had gathered at Putuo district court in Shanghai to support Xu Zhengqing, who was facing trial in connection with his attempts to attend a memorial service for former Chinese leader Zhao Ziyang in Beijing. Wu Xuewei claims to have been severely beaten by police standing guard outside the court: one of them apparently put him in a headlock, while several others kicked and punched him all over his body. After this they were detained by the police and taken to a nearby sports center together with dozens of other petitioners. Mao Hengfeng managed to escape and tried to continue her protest on behalf of Xu Zhengqing. However, she was apprehended and escorted back to the district where she lives. The local police and government officials reportedly threatened to imprison her if she continued her protests and presented her with a formal police summons for investigation on suspicion of “disturbing the normal lives of others”. This Urgent Action has been reissued to a portion of the Urgent Action Network.

*(UA 280/04 issued Oct. 6, 2004 & reissued Nov. 24, 2004, Jan. 6, 2005 & Sep. 29, 2005)*

**EQUATORIAL GUINEA/  
NIGERIA: Florencio Ela  
Bibang, Felipe Esono Ntumu,  
Antimo Edú, and Juan Ondo  
Abaga.**

Florencio Ela Bibang, Felipe Esono Ntumu and Juan Ondo Abaga were tried

in absentia by a military court in the city of Bata in Equatorial Guinea between September 6 and 19, 2005. They were sentenced to 30 years in prison for their alleged involvement in an attempted coup on October 8, 2004. It appears that Antimo Edú was not tried. The whereabouts of the four men are unconfirmed, and this Urgent Action has been reissued to a portion of the UA Network.

*(UA 134/05 issued May 20, 2005 & reissued Aug. 26 & Sep. 23, 2005)*

**NEPAL: Maheshwar Pahari.**

Journalist Maheshwar Pahari died in custody on October 4, after 21 months in prison without trial. He was reportedly seriously ill, but the prison authorities had reportedly refused him proper medical treatment. Before his arrest, Maheshwar Pahari had been a journalist working for a Pokhara local newspaper, the *Rastriya Swabhiman Weekly*. It has been reported that prison authorities had repeatedly refused requests for him to be moved to Kathmandu for treatment, and had refused to let his friends and colleagues see him. A local human rights organization has also expressed fears that he was tortured. Maheshwar Pahari was reportedly moved to the western regional hospital in Pokhara a week before he died.

*(UA 61/04 issued Feb. 13, 2004 & reissued Oct. 10, 2005)*

**NEPAL: Maina Sunuwar.**

Maina Sunuwar, aged 15, school student, who had been arrested by plainclothes security forces personnel in February 2004, is now known to have died in custody shortly after her arrest, allegedly as a result of torture. A court martial which looked into the circumstances around her arrest and death in custody ruled on September 27, 2005 that three army officers, Colonel Bobby Khatri, Captain Sunil Adhikari and Captain Amit Pun, had not followed the “right procedure”. The three were sentenced to six months’ imprisonment and a fine. They were released immediately, on the grounds that the time they had spent consigned to barracks while awaiting trial should count towards their sentence. Maina Sunuwar’s family announced on October 3 that they would be challenging the military court decision in a civilian

court, claiming that their daughter died as a result of torture and that those responsible should be punished accordingly. Amnesty International considers the investigation and court martial process to be grossly inadequate to deal with the death in custody of a young girl after credible allegations that she was tortured. This Urgent Action has been reissued to a portion of the UA Network for more action.

*(UA 72/04 issued Feb. 20, 2004 & Oct. 11, 2005)*

**NEPAL: Raju Sharma Dhakal  
and Bal Krishna Dhakal.**

Bal Krishna Dhakal, a teacher, was released on September 13, and has returned home. He had been held at Bharatpur prison, in Chitwan district, central Nepal. He now has to report every two weeks to Chitwan district police headquarters. Relatives saw him two weeks after his release and reported that he was in need of medical treatment. His son, 17-year-old student Raju Sharma Dhakal, was transferred from Bharatpur prison to Nakkhu prison in Kathmandu on September 3. His family have been allowed to visit him there. He is held on suspicion of “terrorist” activities. This Urgent Action was reissued to a portion of the UA Network for more action on behalf of Raju Sharma Dhakal.

*(UA 275/04 issued Sep. 29, 2004, Nov. 9, 2004 & reissued Oct. 18, 2005)*



Raju Sharma Dhakal, a 17-year-old student in Nepal, was transferred to Nakkhu prison in Kathmandu.

## Urgent Action Newsletter Appeal: November 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 these individuals until December 10, 2005. Thanks! (*This appeal is based on UA 272/05 issued Oct. 17, 2005 & reissued Oct. 27, 2005*).

### Fear for Safety / Possible "Disappearance"

#### COLOMBIA: Orlando Valencia and Other members of the Afro-descendant communities of the Jiguamiandó and Curvaradó River Basins

The body of Orlando Valencia was found on October 24. He had been shot in the head. He had reportedly been abducted by army-backed paramilitaries on October 15. Other members of the Afro-descendant communities of the Jiguamiandó and Curvaradó River Basins are now believed to be in even greater danger.

The body was found in the Leon River at a place known as Bocas de Zábalo, 30 minutes by road from the municipality of Chirigorodó, Antioquia Department. It was only identified two days later, after a finger-print test. Orlando Valencia had been shot in the forehead, and his wrists had marks from being tied. According to forensic investigations of the body, Orlando had probably been killed and thrown into the river by the paramilitaries who abducted him several days before his body was found.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

In recent years many Afro-descendant communities have sought to secure title over land on which their communities have lived for many years. Among these communities are those of the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó River Basins. Despite securing land titles the communities of Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó have faced repeated death threats from paramilitaries and the security forces. Paramilitaries have attempted to force the Afro-descendants to grow plantations of African Palm, a cash crop used in products ranging from cooking oil to soap, and have reportedly occupied some of their land. Orlando Valencia had publicly denounced the presence of African Palm plantations, and the presence of paramilitaries together with members of the security forces in the Curvaradó River Basin. Guerrilla forces have also repeatedly threatened Afro-

descendant communities in Chocó and killed members of the communities they accuse of siding with their enemies.

Soldiers from the army's XVII Brigade have reportedly warned communities in the Jiguamiandó river basin that they should expect a paramilitary raid. On 10 October, soldiers reportedly ransacked several homes in the community of Nueva Esperanza, and threatened the inhabitants: "*en tres días vienen los que van a cortar cabezas*", "in three days the ones that chop heads off are coming". The army has made similar threats elsewhere in the country to warn of possible paramilitary incursions. In late September army units had reportedly destroyed homes in another Jiguamiandó River Basin community, Bella Flor Remacho. On 15 March 2005, after being told of repeated death threats by paramilitaries operating with the support of the XVII Brigade, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) of the Organization of American States (OAS) issued a resolution calling on the Colombian authorities to guarantee the safety of the communities of Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó.

#### RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Please send appeals:

- urging the authorities to conduct a full and impartial investigation into the killing of Orlando Valencia;
- expressing concern for the safety of other inhabitants of the communities of the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó River Basins, who have recently been threatened with a paramilitary raid, and urging the authorities to take all measures deemed appropriate by the communities themselves to protect them, in line with repeated IACHR resolutions;
- urging that all those responsible for killings or "disappearances" in the area



Orlando Valencia, member of Afro-descendant communities Jiguamiandó and Curvaradó River Basins in the department of Chocó. Orlando Valencia, who stood for election to be a legal representative for one of the Afro-descendant communities in the department of Chocó, in the north-west of the country, was reportedly abducted by army-backed paramilitaries on October 15. His body was found on October 24.

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be brought to justice;

- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in Chocó, urging that the results are made public and those found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups are brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with United Nations recommendations.

#### APPEALS TO:

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