

Global Write-a-thon 2008

Case Descriptions



Cambodia – Group 78

Since June 2006, the Phnom Penh city authorities have been threatening to forcibly evict nearly 150 families living on land known as Group 78. While the value of this land has increased enormously in recent years, most Group 78 residents are poor street vendors. Once evicted, the authorities intend to resettle them in a site that has no water supply or sewage, where thousands of people evicted from elsewhere in Phnom Penh are living in filth.

China – Shi Tao

In April 2004, the Chinese journalist Shi Tao used his Yahoo! email account to send a message to a U.S.-based pro-democracy website. In his email, he summarized a government order directing media organizations in China to downplay the upcoming 15th anniversary of the 1989 crackdown on pro-democracy activists. Police arrested him in November 2004, charging him with “illegally providing state secrets to foreign entities.” Authorities used email account holder information supplied by Yahoo! to convict Shi Tao in April 2005 and sentence him to 10 years in prison.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) – Justine Masika Bihamba

Justine Masika Bihamba and her family have been targeted by members of the DRC military for her work with the women’s human rights organization, Synergie des femmes contre les violences sexuelles (SFVS). On September 18, 2007, soldiers forced their way into Justine’s home while she was out and tied up her six children at gunpoint. One of the soldiers assaulted Justine’s eldest daughter, then sexually assaulted and attempted to rape another daughter. SFVS counselors have regularly been threatened and attacked because of their work in the DRC.

Eritrea – Patriarch Abune Antonios

Patriarch Abune Antonios is the 80-year-old leader of the Eritrean Orthodox Church. He was held under house arrest from January 2006 until May 2007. He was then taken into custody by security forces to a specially converted house in the capital, Asmara. There are grave concerns for his health as he has diabetes and is not receiving medication.

Indonesia – Filep Karma and Yusak Pakage

Former civil servant Filep Karma and student Yusak Pakage were among approximately 200 people who took part in a peaceful ceremony in Indonesia’s Papua Province on December 1, 2004. In commemoration of the declaration of Papuan independence in 1962, the Morning Star Flag was raised. Now, for peacefully raising a flag, they may spend the next decade or more in prison in Indonesia.

Iran – Campaign for Equality

Launched in 2006, the Campaign for Equality, an Iranian women’s rights initiative composed of a network of women and men, is committed to ending discrimination against women in Iranian law. The Campaign works on several women’s rights initiatives including the collection of one million signatures of Iranian nationals on a petition demanding an end to legal discrimination against women in Iran. While the members of the Campaign are careful to conduct their activities in full compliance with the law, the Iranian authorities continue to impede the Campaign’s work and repress its activists.

Iraq – Nathum Mohammad Isma’il al-‘Ani

Nathum Mohammad Isma’il al-‘Ani was one of 18 people arrested by Iraqi security forces in Baghdad in December 2005. The group was apparently arrested on suspicion of involvement with armed groups opposed to the Iraqi government. The men are said to have been tortured during interrogation. There has

been no news of the whereabouts of Nathum Mohammad Isma'il al-'Ani and 15 other men since January 2006. They are believed to be the victims of enforced disappearance, and Amnesty International fears for their lives.

Japan – Hakamada Iwao

Hakamada Iwao has been on death row since 1968. He was convicted after an unfair trial of the 1966 murder of the boss of the factory where he worked, and the man's wife and two children. Hakamada confessed after 20 days of interrogation by police without a lawyer present. He retracted his confession and testified during his trial that police had beaten and threatened him to force him to sign a confession.

Libya – Fathi el-Jahmi

Libyan authorities arrested Fathi el-Jahmi in 2002 after he called for free speech and political reforms during a conference in Tripoli. For that "crime," he was sentenced to five years in prison, but was released in March 2004 following international pressure. Fathi el-Jahmi's freedom proved short-lived, however, as authorities detained him again just weeks later after he repeated his call for democracy during a television interview. The 67-year-old former provincial governor is being held by authorities at the Tripoli Medical Center.

Mexico – Bárbara Italia Méndez and the women of Atenco

Bárbara Italia Méndez was among 45 women who were detained on May 4, 2006 in San Salvador Atenco, Mexico State during a public protest in support of local flower sellers. These women were arrested without explanation. Dozens of them, including Bárbara Italia Méndez, were subjected to physical, psychological and sexual violence by the police officers who arrested them. More than two years later, they are still waiting for justice.

Moldova – Sergei Gurgurov

Sergei Gurgurov has been left disabled by the reported torture and ill-treatment he was subjected to in police detention in late 2005. As a result of the head injuries he received, his speech is impaired, and he has spinal injuries which have left him unable to walk without a cane. Both of his eardrums are damaged, and he has total loss of hearing in one ear. Amnesty International is pressing Moldovan authorities to properly investigate the torture reportedly suffered by Mr. Gurgurov

Myanmar (Burma) – Aung San Suu Kyi and Ma Khin Khin Leh

The military rulers of Myanmar have jailed thousands of people in their continuing efforts to crush all dissenting views. Most prominent of those detained is Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate who has spent 13 of the past 19 years under some form of detention. Ma Khin Khin Leh, a school teacher and young mother, is another individual serving a life sentence simply for trying to organize a peaceful demonstration in support of the NLD.

United States – Mohammed Mohammed Hassan Odaini

Mohammed Mohammed Hassan Odaini was detained in March 2002 along with several other Yemeni nationals, and sent to the detention camp at the US Naval Base in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. In June 2005 he was deemed suitable for release from Guantánamo. Yemeni authorities have stated that they are prepared to take him back, yet he continues to be unjustly detained.

Zimbabwe – WOZA

The activists of the human rights organization Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) know the price of freedom. For organizing peaceful demonstrations to protest the worsening social, economic and human rights situation in Zimbabwe, WOZA members have been repeatedly harassed, intimidated, beaten and jailed by authorities. Despite this, WOZA activists remain passionate and undeterred in their fight for human rights in Zimbabwe.