

File On Torture

Women and Torture

"At one point, I realized that my daughter was in front of me. I even managed to touch her: I felt her hands. 'Mummy, say something, anything to make this stop,' she was saying. I tried to embrace her but they prevented me. They separated us violently. They took her to an adjacent room and there, there I listened in horror as they began to torture her with electricity—my own daughter! When I heard her moans, her terrible screams, I couldn't take any more. I thought I would go mad, that my head and my entire body were going to explode."

—Testimony of a Chilean torture victim

Torture is being inflicted on men and women alike in every region of the world in attempts by governments to suppress dissent. Victims are being tortured to extract information or "confessions" or simply to punish or intimidate them. The victims themselves come from almost all walks of life and include men, women and children.

In Afghanistan, Farida Ahmadi, a 22-year-old medical student, was continually interrogated, denied sleep for up to a week and subjected to electric shock torture when she was detained by the state information police for six months in 1981. She also alleged that she witnessed the torture of other political prisoners. Those tortured have included women as young as 16.

In Rwanda, Immaculée Mukamugema was confined in a completely unlit cell (*cachot noir*) in Ruhengeri prison. She was never let out for exercise, and became seriously ill. Her conditions improved only after she received a personal visit from the Minister of Health and was transferred to another prison. (see photograph on page 2)

Former women political prisoners in Pakistan are often very reluctant to make known publicly, or even to close relatives, the details of their treatment in detention. The rigorous interrogations, complete lack of privacy and constant supervision often by male guards is felt as a severe humiliation for women of Muslim faith (see also page 2).

Women victims are often sub-



Hilda Narcisco, a Roman Catholic lay community worker in the Philippines, says she was raped and sexually abused in other ways after being arrested without warrant on 24 March 1983. (see Appeal Cases)

jected to sexual abuse and insults. Rape is common. In El Salvador it is believed that many of the women who have been raped in prison will not admit it—either because they want to block out the memory or because they feel ashamed. In other countries, women who were pregnant at the time of their arrest have been beaten with rifle butts until they aborted. In some cases women raped by their interrogators have been refused abortions.

The close relationship between women and their families is often exploited. In Iran former male detainees have consistently reported that, in addition to being physically tortured, they have received threats that, unless they

confessed, their wives, mothers or sisters would be raped, tortured or even executed. One former detainee told Amnesty International how, while in prison, he was ordered to speak to his sister at home by telephone. She told him that Revolutionary Guards had come to her house and would arrest her unless he confessed and gave his interrogator the names of his political associates. Amnesty International has also received reports from Iran of mothers being tortured in front of their children.

In Turkey women have been tortured in front of their husbands, and their husbands in front of them:

"The next day I thought I heard my husband screaming . . . (and then) I was again taken blindfold to the torture room . . . they took off the blindfold, and, sure enough, it was my husband.

"He was lying naked beside a black tiled wall. His hands were tied behind his back and they were administering electricity to his genitals.

"After showing him to me, they retied the blindfold and, in a voice my husband could hear, threatened to strip and rape me.

"They wanted us to reveal our address. . . . They said I could save my husband if I gave them the address.

"On another occasion I was again suspended from the ceiling and electricity was being administered to my toes. I was semi-conscious when I heard them bring my husband in. They told him that he could save me if he

talked."

—testimony of Sema Ogur,
former prisoner in Turkey

There are many immediate and long-term effects of such intense physical and psychological abuse. In 1982 Amnesty International delegates medically examined Adriana Vargas Vásquez, a 31-year-old factory worker who was tortured in Chile in March 1980.

She said that she had completely lost all sense of time after one day's torture. After being tortured with electric shocks she had especially painful breasts, wrists and ankles. She had swelling and discolouration in places where she had received blows, and there were small black scabs where electrodes had been applied. She lost about 6kg while in detention for four days. She had almost no appetite initially after her release and suffered for about 20 days from nausea. She developed a urinary tract infection. Her genitals became inflamed two months, and again four months, after her release. Among other symptoms, she had abdominal pain and headaches when she menstruated (which she had not experienced before), persistent headaches in the back of the head and around the temples, impaired memory, difficulty in concentrating, dizziness, insomnia, nightmares, depression to the point of feeling suicidal, proneness to weeping, and anxiety attacks triggered especially by loud noises.

Women are sometimes detained and tortured not because of their own activities but because of the alleged activities of their relatives and friends who are sought by the police or for whose surrender the women are held as hostages. In Syria, tortured prisoners have been shown to their families so that the latter would persuade them to confess to avoid further torture.

Testimonies received by Amnesty International from women prisoners held in Punta de Rieles prison in Uruguay confirm that the majority of them live in a constant state of insecurity. They believe that intelligence information on the personal lives of prisoners and particularly on family relationships may be used as a means of pressure or emotional blackmail,



Prisoner of conscience Immaculée Mukamugema, Rwanda, was confined in a completely unlit cell in Ruhengeri prison for several months in the second half of 1982. She has been held since April 1980 and is now in Kigali central prison, serving a 10-year prison sentence imposed in late 1981 after her conviction on charges of distributing subversive documents. Amnesty International believes she is imprisoned for non-violently exercising her right to freedom of expression.

or to reinforce the prisoner's sense of dependency and consequent loss of self-esteem. This is particularly evident when prisoners are held for long periods in solitary confinement and deprived of contact with their families and fellow prisoners.

Women detained in Pakistan

Hundreds of women have been detained in Pakistan at different times since the imposition of martial law in July 1977 and the banning of political parties and peaceful political activities. Some were arrested as hostages to pressurize their husbands or other relatives being sought by the authorities and were held for relatively short periods. Other women political prisoners have been detained for several months or longer, generally without trial, often undergoing periods of rigorous interrogation.

Amnesty International has received reports of the torture and ill-treatment of women political prisoners in Lahore Fort, which is used as an interrogation centre mainly by military intelligence personnel.

Amnesty International believes that during the period 1982/83 at least a dozen female political prisoners were held there for periods of several weeks to one year. Some of them were held in solitary confinement, and many were denied access to their families or defence counsel. There are reported to be no beds, and prisoners sleep on the floor. The cells are dirty, generally lack any proper toilet facilities and are open on one side, thus affording no privacy.

Two women held there during the second half of 1983 and now released have described their experiences. The following is based on their accounts.

X, a political activist from Lahore, was picked up by police from her home in 1983 during a campaign of "civil disobedience" initiated by the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD), a banned coalition of opposition political parties.

She was first taken to the Superintendent of Police in Lahore who interrogated her himself during the first night. The following afternoon she was sent to Lahore Fort.

Her interrogation began at once and continued almost daily for a month. It was very cold in the Fort but she was not allowed more clothes—she had only the light garments she was wearing at the time of her arrest.

She was not allowed to see her ailing father, in spite of the representations of doctors at the hospital where he was that this might improve his condition. He died during her detention. She was allowed to attend his funeral, then had to return to the Fort, where her interrogation recommenced.

After two and a half months she was sent to Kot Lakhpat Jail, from where she was released after a further two months' detention.

X stated that the constant verbal abuse and humiliation to which she was subjected throughout her detention in Lahore Fort had been more difficult to bear than physical abuse.

Y, also from Lahore, was arrested on 7 August 1983 and taken directly to Lahore Fort. She was kept for two

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The Philippines: Hilda Narcisco
Hilda Narcisco, a Roman Catholic
lay community worker, says she
was raped and sexually abused in
other ways after being arrested
without warrant on 24 March 1983.

Some 30 military personnel raided the house of a German Lutheran pastor in Davao City, Mindanao. She was then forced into a car, blindfolded and apparently taken to a "safehouse"—a secret interrogation centre.

She was sexually molested during the journey and again the next day, when at one point her interrogation was interrupted and she was taken to another room and raped.

On 26 March she was moved to Camp Catitipan, Davao City. In August, a judge ordered charges of subversion against her to be dropped on grounds of lack of evidence but it was not until 6 September that she was released.

While still in detention, she took steps to initiate a case against the military personnel who had sexually abused and raped her. After her release she courageously tried to pursue the case with the help of local women's associations, in the belief that it would help to put an end to the reportedly widespread sexual abuse of women political detainees.

Forced to move home every month because of fear of her unknown assailants, she found it impossible to establish their identities because of non-cooperation by the military authorities. In December 1983 the Minister of National Defense informed her lawyers that there was insufficient evidence to bring the case to court.

Although she is no longer willing to pursue the case actively herself, she wishes it to remain open and hopes that international and domestic pressure will result in her assailants being prosecuted.

Please send courteous letters:

- *urging that the alleged ill-treatment of Hilda Narcisco be impartially investigated and that anyone found to have been responsible be brought to justice;*

- *urging the authorities to issue clear instructions to the Philippine security forces that torture and ill-treatment will not be tolerated under any circumstances.*

Send your letters to: President Ferdinand E. Marcos / Malacanang Palace / Metro Manila / Philippines; and to: Mr Juan Ponce Enrile / Minister of National Defense / Ministry of National Defense / Camp Emilio Aguinaldo / Quezon City / Metro Manila / Philippines.

APPEAL CASES

USSR: Anna Chertkova
Anna Chertkova, aged 57, has
been held in Tashkent Special
Psychiatric Hospital since 1973
because of her religious beliefs.
She has repeatedly been given
injections of Sulfazin, used in the
USSR as an antipsychotic drug.

She is a member of a breakaway wing of the Baptist Church which is not officially recognized by the authorities. She was denied living accommodation in Alma-Ata and persecuted for several years because of her religious convictions before being sent to the special psychiatric hospital in 1973. Such hospitals are officially designated only for people who "represent a special danger to society". There is no evidence to suggest that she has ever posed such a threat.



Over many years Amnesty International has continued to receive reports of prisoners of conscience being ill-treated in psychiatric hospitals with excessive quantities of painful and disorienting drugs administered without medical justification.

Although the Procuracy is legally charged with supervising such hospitals, in practice inmates are unable to submit complaints about ill-treatment. They may write letters only at the discretion of doctors. All letters are censored and many inmates have been punished for

describing their conditions in diaries or smuggled messages. They are vulnerable to arbitrary ill-treatment and are powerless to protest, being confined in conditions of secrecy in institutions which are often too remote for regular visits by relatives to be possible.

Please send courteous letters:

- *urging the immediate and unconditional release of Anna Chertkova as a prisoner of conscience;*
- *expressing concern about the forcible confinement of prisoners of conscience in psychiatric hospitals and urging the immediate and unconditional release of all such prisoners.*

Send your letters to: The Director of Tashkent Special Psychiatric Hospital/Ms I.L. Andryakova/SSSR/Uzbekskaya / SSR / 700058 g. Tashkent / uchr. UYa-64 / IZ-1 / Spetsialnaya psikhiatricheskaya bolnitsa / Nachalniku Andryakovoy I.L.; and to: The Procurator of the Uzbek republic/Mr Aleksei Buturlin/SSSR/Uzbekskaya SSR/g. Tashkent/Respublikanskaya prokuratura / Prokuroru / Burikhodzhayevu.

Brazil: Raquel Cândido e Silva
Raquel Cândido e Silva, an elected
town council official, was arrested
and tortured after attempts by
agents of the policia Militar
(Military Police) to remove some
2,000 peasants from land under
dispute in Eldorado, Porto Velho,
on 18 March 1984.

She was taken to the Central Police Station in Porto Velho, where she was allegedly assaulted by a doctor and four police agents. She was later charged, refused bail and taken to the Third Police Station. On 19 May she was threatened with rape, beaten and had her feet burned with lighted cigarettes, before being moved to the main barracks of the *Policia Militar* suffering from fever and blood in her urine.

On 20 May she appeared before the judge of the II Vara Criminal Court, was examined by a doctor and transferred to the Hospital de Base in Porto Velho, where tests showed that she had a displaced kidney as a result of severe blows to the side of her body.

At the beginning of June she received further treatment at the Hospital de Servidor Público Municipal, São Paulo.

On 14 June she publicly denounced her ill-treatment to the *Camara Municipal* (Municipal Council Chamber) in Rio de Janeiro.

Torture is widespread in Brazil and

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is often used in police stations in the large metropolitan areas of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro to extract signed confessions from suspects.

In the countryside the targets are often Indians and peasants who have resisted attempts by landowners and hired gunmen to force them off the land.

Despite persistent and well-documented allegations of torture, Amnesty International knows of only a few cases in which police officials have been convicted of the torture and ill-treatment of detainees.

Please send courteous letters:

• *urging that the alleged torture of Raquel Cândido e Silva be impartially investigated and that anyone found to be responsible be brought to justice;*

• *urging the authorities to issue clear instructions to all members of the security forces that torture will not be tolerated under any circumstances.*

Send your letters to: Presidente da República Federativa do Brasil / Presidente / General Joao Baptista Figueiredo/Gabinete do Presidente/ Palácio do Planalto / 70.000 Brasília D.F. / Brasil; and to: Sr. Ibrahim Abi-Ackel/Ministro da Justiça/Ministério da Justiça/Esplanada dos Ministérios/Bloco B/70.000 Brasília D.F./ Brasil.

Pakistan: *Continued from page 2*

months in a cell with another woman.

Her interrogation began after the first month. She told the interrogators she was not active in politics, but was nevertheless shown a list of names and asked about those persons' activities.

For the first 15 days she was interrogated by male police officers from the Crimes Branch. After that, female personnel took over.

She was not allowed to sleep for 48 hours. She was threatened with being stripped and with having her relatives similarly treated in front of her. She was also hit. Y suffers from high blood pressure and fainted on several occasions.

The interrogation lasted for approximately three months, after which she was transferred to Kot Lakhpat Jail. Three months later she was released.

Both women still have to appear before a military court once a fortnight—although no formal charges have been brought against them.

The family lives of both have suffered as a result of their imprisonment. X is now separated from her husband, while other family members—her disabled son and late father—were also arrested at different times and held as hostages. Y's daughter was due to be married at

WHAT YOU CAN DO . . .

1. Write the three letters you are asked to send on behalf of the three women victims cited in the Appeal Cases in this File on Torture. Address your letters as indicated or send them to the appropriate embassy in your country.

2. Please write a further letter to the addresses provided expressing general concern about reports of ill-treatment and torture in each of these countries.

• *Point out that the United Nations has banned torture in all cases.*

• *Urge the government to demonstrate its total opposition to torture and to make clear to all law enforcement personnel that torture will not be tolerated.*

• *Urge that procedures for detention and interrogation be kept under regular review and that there be regular independent visits of inspection in places of detention.*

• *Urge that all complaints and reports of torture be impartially and effectively investigated, and that the results of such investigations be made public.*

3. Give this File to women's organizations, trade unions, religious organizations and nurses' associations in your country and urge them to publicize the File and take appropriate action.

4. Send a copy of this File to women's journals, suggesting that the editor publish a summary of it for readers.

the time of her mother's arrest but the marriage was broken off once the family of the intended husband learned of Y's arrest for political reasons.

'You have been present all these years . . .'



Lilian Celiberti was sent to prison in 1981 by a military court in Uruguay. She had been abducted from her home in exile in Brazil and, after being brought across the border illegally by security agents, was falsely charged with trying to enter Uruguay surreptitiously with "subversive" literature.

In August 1980 Amnesty Interna-

tional interviewed a deserter from the Uruguayan army, Hugo Walter García Rivas, who testified to his participation in the kidnapping and subsequent torture of Lilian Celiberti.

Her two small children, Camilo, 8, and Francesca, 3, were abducted with her. She signed a false confession in order to secure their release and was subsequently imprisoned in a military barracks and tortured.

Amnesty International adopted her as a prisoner of conscience. Her case was allocated to an Amnesty International group in Italy which worked ceaselessly on her behalf until she was released on 17 November 1983 after completing her sentence. The Amnesty International group believes that its work contributed to a reduction in her sentence—at her trial the judges sentenced her to five years' imprisonment instead of the 10 years asked for by the Public Prosecutor.

A month later she wrote to the Amnesty International group in Italy:

"You have been present all these years with a constancy and dedication which has accompanied me in the worst moments, giving me strength and joy.

"I remember clearly the emotion I felt on returning to my cell after one of the fortnightly visits, the only time I talked to anyone, having learned about your letters. The solidarity that is expressed over oceans of distance gives strength and faith in one's solitude, and helps one confront the repressive apparatus by keeping one's human integrity and its essential values intact . . ."