



Asian Center for the Progress of Peoples

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HOTLINE ASIA

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The beginning and the end of March are marked by two events celebrating the symbols of source of life, which are the International Women's Day on 8 March and the World Water Day on 22 March. Let us remember that many people around the world are still struggling for clean water and women are always subjected disproportionately to consequences emerging from water crisis.

Christians celebrate Jesus' resurrection on Easter Sunday (4 April 2010). The victory of Justice over death is another reminder for us to celebrate new life and a renewed commitment to our mission for justice.

Other Justice and Peace events in the coming months are:

- the International Day for Mine Awareness (4 April)
- World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development (21 May)



Source of picture: Pax Christi Australia

UA090813(7) - PAKISTAN

Stop Attacks on Minorities for Alleged Blasphemy; Repeal the Blasphemy Laws

The brutal attacks on Christian communities in Gojra and Korian have raised outcry about the Blasphemy Laws. Responding to the civil society at the local and international levels, Pakistani government has promised to repeal the discriminatory laws (please refer to the *UA Updates* on November 2009). In September 2009, Shahbaz Bhatti, the Federal Minister of Minority Affairs, said that the government would plan to revise the Blasphemy Laws in 2010. Although no concrete actions were taken by the government so far, the possibility of amendment has stirred up vigorous response from Muslim groups. On 11 February 2010, at the All Parties Tahaffuz Namoos Risalat ("protect respect of Prophet") Conference, supported by the Jamiat Ulema Pakistan ("the assembly of Muslim clergy", a political party in Pakistan), some 30 Muslim leaders reiterated "the universal stance of Muslim world" that any behaviour of blasphemy was liable for death punishment and neither rulers nor legislatures have the authority to amend the Blasphemy Laws. They also added that pro-west ruling elites of Pakistan had been trying to amend the Blasphemy Laws.

Meanwhile, local community insists on repealing the whole set of blasphemy laws and for betterment of social participation of religious minorities. The delegation representing the National Commission for Justice and Peace of Pakistan, at the second United Nations Forum on Minorities Issues, on 12-13 November 2009, submitted a proposal to fight extremism in Pakistan and to strengthen minority representation in political participation.

ACPP has been concerned about the religious intolerance in the country since 1980's. UA090813(7) was issued in August 2009 to urge the authority to eliminate violence against religious minorities by establishing a comprehensive policy and strategy, including repeal of the Blasphemy Laws.

Sources:

National Commission for Justice and Peace – Pakistan, the News, www.pakistanchristianpost.com

UA090626(5) - CHINA

Release Dr. Liu Xiaobo and Stop Suppressing Freedom of Expression

The sentence of 11-year imprisonment for Liu Xiaobo was affirmed on 11 February 2010, after the Beijing Municipal High People's Court reviewed his appeal and upheld his conviction of "inciting subversion of state power".

Liu, 53, is one of the drafters of Charter 08 which calls for political reform and improvement of human rights in China. He has been detained, imprisoned, and put under house arrest many times for his criticism on government, including a 20-month detention for participation in the 1989 Democracy Movement, and a 3-year sentence of Re-education-Through-Labor (1996-1999) for criticizing corruption of Chinese government. Despite the suppression, Liu kept exposing the dissatisfying human rights conditions in China and advocating for political reform until his detention started on 8 December 2008. He was only formally arrested on suspicion of subversion on 23 June 2009.

The original statement of Liu's verdict can be found at:

<<http://www.hrichina.org/public/contents/press?revision%5fid=172717&item%5fid=172713>>

and the English translation is available at:

<<http://www.hrichina.org/public/PDFs/PressReleases/2009.12.30-LXB-verdict.pdf>>.

Four senior Communist Party officials, who have been supportive for political reforms, have signed a letter, addressed to "incumbent party and government leaders", to urge authorities to reconsider the verdict against Liu.

Celebrities around the world, such as the former President of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel, Nobel Prize laureates, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and Dalai Lama, have announced their nomination of Liu Xiao for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Meanwhile, the persecution on dissidents is still on-going. Zhao Dagong, the general secretary of the Independent Chinese Pen Society and one of the signatories to Charter 08, was taken away on 11 January 2010 after plain-clothes police officers searched his home.

ACPP issued UA081224(9) and UA090626(5) in December 2008 and June 2009, respectively, to call for the release of Liu and the halt of harassment of other signatories to Charter 08.

Sources:

Human Rights in China, saveliuxiaobo.wordpress.com, South China Morning Post

UA090330(1) - CHINA

Release Gao Zhisheng and Other Rights Defenders

British Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, raised the case of missing human rights lawyer, Gao Zhisheng, at a press conference in Beijing on 16 March 2010. Foreign Minister, Yang Jiechi, responded that Gao has been sentenced for "committing the crime of subverting state power." However, no other details of the charges, including the length of sentence, his present status and his whereabouts, were provided. It was not immediately clear if

Yang was referring to a new charge or a previously suspended sentence on Gao. Just one week before the press conference, the torture investigator from the United Nations (UN) has raised concern about his fate.

Subversion is a broadly defined charge and often used against criticism of the Communist Party, and can carry sentences of more than ten years.

Gao, who is known for taking on sensitive cases involving the banned Falun Gong spiritual movement and defending prominent government opponents and Christian groups, has been missing for more than one year since February 2009. The government has previously provided no solid information about his status or whereabouts, but he was widely thought to be in custody. His case has drawn international attention for the unusual length of his disappearance and for the reports of torture he has endured.

The China Human Rights Lawyers Concern Group, at its statement on 18 March 2010, condemned the Chinese authorities “frivolous and irresponsible in handling this case of disappearance of a citizen in their country.” They also called on everyone to continue demanding the Chinese government to immediately disclose Gao Zhisheng’s whereabouts and health condition, and clarify the grounds on which his sentence based.

An international legal team, formed with four overseas legal specialists, filed an urgent action petition with the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention on 10 March 2010 for Gao’s case. The Team hopes to obtain an opinion from the Working Group that the Chinese government’s detention of Gao is in violation of the “Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment” and thus calls for Gao’s release.

In response to worldwide concern for Gao's arbitrary detention and personal safety, *ACPP* issued *UA090330(1)* in March 2009 to urge the Chinese authorities to release Gao and to stop harassing human rights defenders and their families.

Sources:

China Human Rights Lawyers Concern Group, South China Morning Post, International Herald Tribune

UA080730(4) - INDIA

**Prevent Custodial Deaths & Torture,
Upgrade Prison Conditions**

To curb the overcrowding of prisons in India, the central government announced, in January 2010, to release about 135,000 under-trials in prisons across the country. The targets of the scheme are those who have been accused of petty crimes and have served half of the maximum imprisonment if their convictions are to be affirmed. The government has set time limit of six months for all states to release the qualified under-trials. The decision does not cover those accused of heinous crimes, like rape and murder, and those under preventive detention.

In India, there are about 200,000 under-trials who have been jailed for several years, primarily due to delay in justice delivery system. According to source, some under-trials have been denied of bail because police failed to produce charge sheets on time and to escort under-trials to courts.

On 4 February 2010, inmates of Arthur Road Jail started a hunger strike to protest against delayed trials of their cases and to request a day-to-day basis for their trials. They demanded to see Minister of Home Affairs, R R Patil, and Deputy Inspector, Rajnesh Seth, and complained of not having enough drinking water, decent food and medical care in the jail.

The incident on 28 June 2008, in which 37 inmates were brutally assaulted when they were being transferred from the overcrowded Arthur Road Jail, has exposed the problem of appalling conditions of jails all over the country. To date, 115 prisoners in Arthur Road Jail have been waiting for their trials for more than eight years. To urge the authorities to ensure adequate amenities and healthy environment for inmates, *ACPP* issued *UA080730(4)* in July 2008.

Sources:

Hindustan Times, Daily News & Analysis, Mumbai Mirror

UA060815(6) – INDIA

**Give Timely Relief to Suicide-driven
Farmers in Vidarbha**

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) Report, published on 10 February 2010, revealed the statistics related to farmer suicide in 2008. According to the report, the five states most seriously hit by farmer suicide, including Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, account for two-third of total rate of farmer suicides in the country. In India, an average of eight farmers committed suicide per day during 1997 to 2002, while the corresponding figure increased to 11 during 2003 to 2008.

Maharashtra, where Vidarbha is located, has recorded 3,802 farmer suicides in 2008, with a drop of 463, comparing to the figure in 2007 when the central government launched a massive loan waiver scheme to farmers and the additional relief packages to the 33 districts, including Vidarbha.

The NCRB Report also revealed that the total number of farmer suicides in the country in 2008 hit 16,196, with a decrease of 436 persons from 2007. However, economist Prof. K. Nagaraj commented that, due to the rapid decrease in population of farmers the apparent decrease in suicide rate did not show the alleviation of the hardship of farmers.

To urge the central government to take immediate action to alleviate the farmers' predicament, *ACPP* issued *UA041008(9)* in October 2004. In August 2006, *UA060815(6)* was issued in response to the situation in Vidarbha district of Maharashtra.

Sources:

Daily News & Analysis, the Hindu

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