

Archiving Human Rights: The Records of Amnesty International USA

by **BRUCE P. MONTGOMERY**

Résumé

Au printemps 1994, Amnesty International USA (AIUSA), la plus grande section du groupe pour la protection des droits, a choisi de déposer officiellement ses documents aux Archives de l'Université du Colorado à Boulder. Le projet d'acquisition de ces documents, qui devrait s'échelonner sur plusieurs années, a déjà donné une extraordinaire variété de dossiers caractéristiques du mouvement des droits de la personne aussi bien que des infractions commises contre ces droits par plusieurs gouvernements à travers le monde. Les dossiers d'Amnistie révèlent le très grand nombre de crimes odieux perpétrés par les états-nations; les faussetés, les déceptions, et les déformations machinées par les gouvernements pour voiler leurs abus derrière une façade de respectabilité sans compter tout le mal qu'Amnistie s'est donné pour endiguer le flot de la violence à travers le monde. Ces archives révèlent également les opérations internes d'une organisation de droits de la personne de premier rang, la nature de son influence ainsi que l'urgent besoin de s'adapter aux circonstances toujours nouvelles et aux nouvelles conditions des droits de la personne. Ainsi, non seulement ces documents révèlent-ils le large éventail et l'influence globale de ce mouvement des droits de la personne, mais ils demeurent les témoins privilégiés de l'état de l'humanité en cette fin de siècle.

Abstract

In the spring of 1994, Amnesty International USA (AIUSA), the largest section of the global human rights group, designated the Archives at the University of Colorado at Boulder as the official repository for its records. The project to acquire these materials, which is anticipated to take several years, has already yielded an extraordinary assortment of records that typify the international human rights movement as well as the nature of human rights abuses perpetrated by many governments throughout the world. The Amnesty

files reveal the oft-time heinous crimes committed by nation states; the lies, deceptions, and distortions promoted by governments to conceal their abuses behind facades of respectability; and the lengths to which Amnesty International has gone to try to stem the tide of worldwide violence. They also reveal the inner operations of a preeminent human rights organization, the nature of its influence, and the pressing necessity for it to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances and human rights conditions. As such, the materials not only reflect the broad sweep and global influence of the international human rights movement, but stand as a testament on the state of humanity in the latter part of the twentieth century.

However this war may end, we have won the war against you; none of you will be left to bear witness, even if someone were to survive, the world will not believe him. There will perhaps be suspicions, discussions, research by historians, but there will be no certainties, because we will destroy the evidence together with you. And even if some proof should remain and some of you survive, people will say that the events are too monstrous to be believed; they will say that they are the exaggerations of Allied propaganda and will believe us, who will deny everything, and not you. We will be the ones to dictate the history of the Lagers.¹

SS Officers to Simon Wiesenthal

In *The Gulag Archipelago*, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's despaired that the full extent of the gulag's crimes would be forever buried. "Those who do not wish to recall have already had enough time—and will have more—to destroy all the documents, down to the very last one."² Solzhenitsyn's despair was justified then, but perhaps no longer. A macabre dance has since arisen between punitive police states, dictatorships, and military regimes, which ever work in great secrecy, and contemporary human rights organizations, which seek to expose their crimes to the world. The files of these organizations, perhaps none more so than Amnesty International's, exhibit the extraordinary lengths to which these groups have gone to reveal the oft-times horrific crimes perpetrated by nation states. In themselves, these materials represent powerful testimony on behalf of both the dark and better sides of humanity, the depths of state depravity and the heights of individual moral responsibility. These facts alone demand that these files be collected, preserved, and studied. They incorporate the memory of thousands of victims and survivors, the crimes perpetrated against them, the international efforts made on their behalf, and the interplay of competing interests in the forums of global politics. Viewed in this light, the loss of such documentation may be seen as particularly tragic and, ironically, as serving the interests of outlaw states, which seek always to conceal their activities behind facades of respectability. Consequently, in a sense, these circumstances present a moral imperative to preserve the recorded legacy of the international human rights movement. In so doing, we help to ensure that the forebodings of Wiesenthal and Solzhenitsyn will fail to come to pass.

The records of Amnesty International (AI) and its various country sections throughout the world illustrate both the type and scope of such information. The records of AI's US section, Amnesty International USA (AIUSA), now being collected by the Archives at the University of Colorado at Boulder (CU Archives), say as much about the nature of human rights abuses and those who commit them as they do about Amnesty. The records also typify the kind of information produced by the broad sweep of the international human rights movement, which comprises more than a thousand such organizations in North America alone, and thousands more worldwide in Asia, Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and Central and South America. Using Amnesty as an example within the context of the AIUSA-CU Archives project, this article will examine the nature of this information, the issues which they document, and their significance in revealing the truth behind the lies and deceptions perpetrated by many governments.

University of Colorado Archives-AIUSA Project

In 1992, the Archives at the University of Colorado at Boulder (CU Archives) launched an initiative to collect and preserve documentation on nongovernmental organizations and activists involved in the US-based international human rights movement. As the cornerstone collection, the Archives first sought to acquire the historical files of the US arm of Amnesty International, the worldwide human rights organization. With the support of many committed Amnesty members, the organization's executive board approved the project in March 1993; after overcoming security concerns at the international level, an agreement was signed in the spring of 1994. As a result of the agreement forged by the CU Archives and AIUSA, the files of Amnesty's various national chapters around the world are now available for acquisition. Because Amnesty International (AI) is primarily an information gathering and producing organization, there are vast caches of international section records stored in AI offices around the world. The opportunity now exists to acquire this material for preservation, subject to the terms and conditions imposed by each chapter and AI's headquarters office in London, which is now formulating comprehensive archival guidelines.

The Colorado-AIUSA project, albeit still in its infancy, already has yielded a rich harvest of materials on the internal operations of the US section and AI's London office. More important, perhaps, is what the files reveal about other political systems and societies, and the nature of human rights abuses which continue unabated in much of the world. In addition, the project has been pursued with some urgency given that the organization is more than thirty years old and already some of its vitally important files have been lost. This fact, however regrettable, is nothing new to the archival community, which is conversant with many stories about the inadvertent or wanton destruction or loss of historically significant materials. In this case, the loss of materials is particularly lamentable given Amnesty's extraordinary worldwide presence on behalf of the oppressed and its influence on global affairs. Indeed, the situation provides an interesting footnote concerning how private citizens who sometimes find themselves in the vanguard of major social and political movements often remain unaware of their own significance until years

later, when much material has already vanished. Nevertheless, mass quantities of Amnesty files still exist, and the records that have already been acquired provide an oft-times chilling portrait of the brutalities committed by totalitarian regimes and dictatorships. In many ways, these files reflect the ascendancy of concern for the individual vis-à-vis the state following World War II, a revolutionary change from former times when the community of nations regarded individual welfare largely as the exclusive domain of the nation state.³

It is worth noting briefly why the papers of Amnesty and other human rights organizations are now becoming available to archives. The reasons appear to stem primarily from the maturation of the international human rights movement in the past decade as well as a critical assessment by many organizations of their role in world affairs. This process of introspection has received considerable impetus from the vast changes in the international order that accompanied the implosion of the Soviet Empire. These permutations have caused many NGOs to better appreciate the historical and universal importance of human rights, as well as the need to preserve a documentary record of the scale of their achievements. In addition, the end of the Cold War and the decline of world communism have created significant shifts in the international human rights movement itself. A number of human rights nongovernmental organizations that arose specifically in response to rights violations in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union have disbanded now that these former communist nations have accepted, however imperfectly, the principles of democratic pluralism. Others have changed their human rights mandates, adopting new strategies to monitor the tentative transition to democratic governance or focusing their efforts on rights violations in other regions of the world. Thus, the records of these former groups are available if the effort is made to locate them and to negotiate for their acquisition. Another related cause stems from the waning of security concerns among many NGOs that once focused on the Soviet bloc. Indeed, these concerns have measurably dissipated with the end of the Cold War. Some human rights groups are now more amenable to the idea of depositing or donating materials to external institutions.⁴

In 1961, the British barrister Peter Benenson formed Amnesty International (AI) after reading in the newspapers of the imprisonment of two Portuguese students who publicly gave a toast to freedom during the repressive days of the Salazar regime. The idea was to mobilize a mass citizen's movement to pressure governments to release prisoners of conscience immediately and unconditionally. This movement proved so successful that by 1977 Amnesty earned an international reputation for being the "world's conscience."⁵ It was perhaps also a commentary on the grim state of humanity that Amnesty's work became so much in demand and remains so today.

AI's mandate calls for the immediate and unconditional release of prisoners of conscience who have been detained or incarcerated for their beliefs, color, ethnic origin, language, or religious creed, provided they have neither advocated nor used violence. AI also seeks fair trials for all political prisoners and works to curb use of the death penalty, extra-legal murder, torture, and other depredations. In 1991, the year of AI's thirtieth anniversary, the organization's worldwide membership approached more than one million in 150 countries, representing a mass interna-

tional volunteer movement that transcended geographic regions as well as ideological and political blocs.⁶ Within this mandate, AI's various country sections exercise considerable autonomy, have their own staffs, executive boards, and directors, and set their own agendas and campaigns in cooperation with the International Secretariat, Amnesty's headquarters office.

Worldwide, the organization is structured primarily around local groups in each country comprising of volunteers, which in turn are led by coordination groups consisting of human rights specialists. The local groups, each consisting of a small number of people, in many ways play the central role in combating political imprisonment, torture, disappearances, extra-legal killings, and capital punishment by urging a reconsideration of cases. Each case becomes the subject of a global campaign. Numerous but selected groups write letters to government ministers, embassies, newspapers, prison authorities, and international organizations. The tone of these appeals is polite and respectful—not condemnatory, but firm, factual, and direct. The goal is to persuade through reason and to hold governments accountable to their own laws and constitutions as well as to international human rights agreements. While most appeals go unanswered, they sometimes produce results that AI is not always able to substantiate.

To ensure impartiality, AI prohibits groups from working on cases and campaigns in their own countries with the exception of US death penalty cases and refugee work; nor do any sections, groups, or members bear any responsibility for statements made or actions taken by the International organization concerning their own countries. Thus, Amnesty's credibility stems from its nonpartisanship; it remains independent of any government, political persuasion, or religious creed, does not support, oppose, or denounce any political system, and does not support or oppose the views of victims whose rights it seeks to protect. Recognizing that human rights are indivisible and interdependent, AI "works to promote all the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international standards, through human rights education programmes and campaigning for ratification of human rights treaties." The success of this strategy and the effectiveness of its campaigns won AI the Nobel Peace Prize in 1977. AI's significant achievements and worldwide recognition continue to be reflected by its official status before the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the Organization of African Unity, and the Organization of American States.⁷

Within this global organization, AIUSA constitutes the largest national section, with fully one-third of AI's worldwide membership. With major offices in New York and Washington, AIUSA exercises a "leading role in the NGO community, promoting human rights through US foreign and domestic policy."⁸ The US section also has regional offices in San Francisco, Boston, Chicago, and Atlanta, and smaller satellite offices in Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Dallas, Los Angeles, and Somerville, Massachusetts. It further comprises 580 local groups that work on behalf of AI's general mandate, 578 local groups that focus on the abolition of the death penalty, 107 area coordinators or human rights specialists, more than 200 trainers, ninety-six Legal Support Groups (LSNs), numerous student groups, and steering committees governing issues concerning refugees, legal support, area coordinators, educators, and the activities of regional offices. The national office is located in New York, the campaign and refugee offices are in Washington and San

Francisco, and the Urgent Action office is in Nederland, Colorado. The Legal Support Network, consisting of judges and lawyers with expertise in the constitutions and judicial systems of other countries, provides legal aid and advice on cases. The Urgent Action Network acts as AIUSA's emergency system, sending out appeals to members and other organizations concerning cases that demand immediate attention. AIUSA also has specialized networks that work on behalf of women, children, educators, writers, and labour unions. The board of directors constitutes the section's highest policy-making body, meets quarterly, appoints the executive director, and creates and approves standing committees. The section also holds annual general meetings, which assist in setting policy and to which members from other national sections, the International Secretariat, the International Executive Committee, and others are invited. Thus, the US section alone constitutes a mass decentralized organization or movement comprising mostly thousands of volunteers in numerous capacities. AI's various other international sections in Canada, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America are organized in similar fashion.⁹

Amnesty's security concerns, its nature as a volunteer movement, and its decentralized organization have made the Colorado-AIUSA archives project a challenging enterprise. As might be expected, security has figured prominently in Amnesty's information policies. After being penetrated by British intelligence in the early 1970s, Amnesty instituted restrictive controls governing the disposition of all documentation. The organization established a bifurcated information system, designating all documents either as "external" (for public distribution) or "internal" (for AI and section staff only). In prohibiting the public dissemination of internal documentation, the International Secretariat also directed the national sections to burn or destroy case and internal operational files once they became inactive. Because of these sensitivities, the International Secretariat prevented an earlier attempt by Norway's section to archive documents at a Norwegian university. While AIUSA heeded the dictates concerning confidentiality, it seldom destroyed materials. In light of these facts, the security issue posed a difficult obstacle, given that information concerning selected cases, if released indiscriminately or prematurely, could jeopardize lives. Nevertheless, given the considerable support of many Amnesty members, by arranging a deposit agreement enabling AIUSA to retain ownership of the files—thus allowing the organization a controlling interest in setting up access policies within set time limits—the International Secretariat gave the project its approval.¹⁰

In addition, significant turnover at most organizational levels, due primarily to Amnesty's voluntary nature, has presented other challenges. The term for executive board positions, which are voluntary, is three years, after which members may again be elected to the board. Moreover, most board members have typically moved up through the organization from the local and coordination groups, which also comprise volunteers. In many cases, key coordination and local groups that played leading roles in various Amnesty campaigns have folded, while others have come into existence. In addition, the effectiveness of these numerous groups has fluctuated with the quality of the many volunteers who have dedicated themselves to Amnesty for varying periods of time. Thus, at the volunteer level, Amnesty has been a highly fluid yet still a remarkably effective organization.

These facts have presented problems in acquiring AIUSA materials documenting

its organizational structure and the activities of individual activists. Executive board members, local and coordination group leaders, key committee members, section, regional and national staff, as well as others have typically taken their papers with them on leaving AIUSA or moving to alternative positions within the organization. In many cases, these materials contain some of the most significant historical documentation on AIUSA's early development, activities, internal operations, strategies, and human rights campaigns throughout the world. As a result, many important records are widely dispersed and now in the private hands of numerous past and present members. A key difficulty, therefore, has involved identifying and locating these activists. In addition, Amnesty's intense focus on the immediate present, its ever-present sense of urgency, and the nearly exclusive preoccupation with its international campaigns, lobbying activities, fund raising, and other operations initially posed problems of clouding the project's significance next to more pressing concerns. It also became apparent that the project existed outside the purview of AIUSA's administrative units, and thus presented the possibility that it would receive minimal, if any, internal support.

To address these issues, a permanent information committee was formed to oversee the project, provide guidance, determine access policies, interact with the International Secretariat in London, identify key individuals with important papers, and, when needed, ensure that AIUSA materials would be preserved rather than lost or destroyed. The Committee, comprising AIUSA's Executive Board Chair, three Executive Board members, two prominent AIUSA activists, and the Curator of the CU Archives, has proved effective in mobilizing an otherwise decentralized organization behind the archival programme. With a direct line of communication with AIUSA's Executive Director and the participation of Executive Board members, the Committee has provided the project with important administrative support and credibility.

The Records

Although the AIUSA archives project has been underway only since the spring of 1994, enough material has been collected to lend insight into the significance of Amnesty's records. Materials have been acquired from AIUSA's Washington and San Francisco offices, the Urgent Action Office in Nederland, Colorado, various coordination groups, and individual activists. The bulk of the files from AIUSA's New York headquarters office, satellite offices, and other entities and individuals are only now being acquired, a process which altogether is anticipated to take several years. Nevertheless, discussions with national and regional office staff have revealed the nature of their materials. Collectively, the files now at the University of Colorado are remarkable not only in reflecting the internal workings of a mass international organization and movement, but also in revealing the ruthlessness with which many governments perpetrate human rights abuses throughout much of the world. The files reflect the extremes to which governments have gone to eradicate dissent and democratic pluralism as well as to subjugate or control indigenous populations and ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities, and the lengths to which Amnesty has gone to try to stem the tide of violence.

The files relating to AIUSA's national headquarters and regional offices, executive board, sections, urgent action network, local and coordination groups, and individual Amnesty activists contain an extraordinary assortment of materials. At the national and regional office level, the files document AIUSA's responsibilities for contributing and implementing international policy. The national section's purview also encompasses organization of membership; fund raising; developing and promoting relations with the national media, professional groups, trade unions, religious bodies, and other organizations; and initiating and implementing human rights campaigns. The national files contain materials sent from the International Secretariat, including campaign information relating to strategy, requests for specific action, situation reports, and general information on a myriad of issues. The materials regarding the various local and coordination groups also contain documentation on individual cases and country conditions, primarily prisoner dossiers, reports on political and human rights conditions in countries, newsletters, internal and external correspondence, files documenting interactions with the national section and London, and other records.

The most substantive files concern AIUSA's human rights campaigns, strategies, policy development and implementation, its human rights mandate, and dealings with the United Nations, governments, and other international intra-governmental and nongovernmental organizations. All these materials overlap topically in many important respects concerning Amnesty's work to curb the death penalty, extrajudicial murder, disappearances, torture, and other depredations, as well as its efforts on behalf of refugees and political prisoners. A salient theme running through these records is Amnesty's fluidity compelled by new and rapidly changing human rights conditions. In one sense, this adaptability represents a bleak commentary on the seemingly endless forms of inhumanity perpetrated by governments. Ironically, at a time when human rights have gained unprecedented attention internationally, rights violations have never been more common. Given these conditions, Amnesty must ever assess global political change and constantly reexamine and reshape its mandate to address new circumstances. As a result, the records concerning Amnesty's mandate, the fundamental set of rules governing its actions, contain particular significance and most reflect the organization's changing nature. At all levels and in one form or another, the records primarily concern AIUSA's efforts to stem human rights abuses as stipulated under the mandate and the techniques employed to accomplish this task. Thus, the files are best discussed according to the human rights issues or abuses to which they pertain and the techniques or actions which have been employed to combat them.

Human Rights Issues

Prisoners of Conscience

AI's work from the beginning has focused on prisoners of conscience or political prisoners, the number of which is nearly impossible to calculate. Nevertheless, Amnesty estimates that political prisoners number in the hundreds of thousands at any one time; many of them are held in secret or remote prison camps under harsh

and inhumane conditions. Information about these prisoners is often difficult to obtain and poses a perilous business for those attempting to smuggle information to the outside world. While a handful gain international attention by virtue of being leaders of political parties or trade unions or for forcefully dissenting from official views, the vast majority are less celebrated figures who find themselves under suspicion and detention for their political association, membership in a religious sect, having the wrong colour skin, speaking the wrong language, or having written the wrong things. "Guilt by association goes far in the eyes of the secret police in numerous countries: grandparents, cousins and small children are held hostage in prison—the innocent relatives of people who have been labelled political undersirables."¹¹

The case files and country reports demonstrate that in a sense outlaw governments through their crimes largely determine on whose behalf Amnesty works. This appears to be the case for political prisoners as much as for the victims of other abuses. Amnesty's painstaking investigative process means that it can focus on only a small proportion of the world's tens of thousands of political prisoners. Amnesty obtains information about each prisoner from numerous sources, including private contacts, prisoners and their families, refugees, religious bodies, national and international organizations, and its own investigative missions. Based on this mass of information, Amnesty verifies facts and sources, examines details, assembles biographical and legal data, and then assesses each case according to the changing political conditions in each country. The files concerning informants on these initial sources of information are maintained under tight security by the International Secretariat. Materials regarding subsequent private contacts, however, do appear in the files, providing information on particular cases or political conditions.¹²

AI also opposes the detention of individuals who have been denied due process, have been held for excessively long periods awaiting trial, or have been subjected to highly questionable trial procedures. The organization tries to ensure that political prisoners receive the right to defend themselves in court, as well as receive a fair trial based on internationally-accepted standards. Amnesty extends these criteria beyond political prisoners to those belonging to political parties and accused of criminal acts, such as murder, but denied trial for prolonged periods. Conversely, Amnesty acts on behalf of persons unaffiliated with political parties, who advocate or use violence, but have been denied *habeas corpus* and imprisoned. At first glance, this position appears contradictory to AI's mandate excluding work on behalf of those who advocate or use violent means. The key principle here, however, is not the defense of these acts, but the denial of due process according to internationally-recognized standards. Summary proceedings without recourse to counsel, show trials, or immediate imprisonment mostly victimize the innocent or political prisoners. Amnesty thus does not pass judgement on the guilt or innocence of individuals accused of violent acts; it simply works to ensure fair trials. Amnesty also sometimes assists political prisoners in securing legal aid, and will raise this issue with governments and other groups in the country if obtaining legal assistance poses major difficulties.¹³

In addition, Amnesty works to prevent the imprisonment of individuals under

cruel and inhumane conditions, which often serve as a deliberate means of further punishing or demoralizing prisoners. This work is based on the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, a set of ninety-four basic minimal requirements. These rules cover prolonged periods of solitary confinement, the denial of medical services, the use of restraining implements, arbitrary acts of discipline and punishment, and numerous other conditions. Under these guidelines, Amnesty requests that prisoners be allowed access to legal counsel, family members, and a doctor, and that they be permitted to read and write letters, or to take exercise. Amnesty often publishes reports on prison conditions in a particular country, makes appeals or private representations to governments, and at the international level issues submissions to the five-year UN Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, the responsible entity for reviewing the Standard Minimum Rules.¹⁴

Death Penalty

AI seeks to curb the use of the death penalty throughout the world, an issue which for several years caused considerable internal dissension. The controversy involved whether AI should focus on cases concerning persons convicted of murder according to due process, when valuable time and resources would be better spent on prisoners of conscience or innocent victims of torture and other depredations. Amnesty tabled the issue from 1965 until 1973, when the International Council Meeting in Vienna declared the death penalty to be a fundamental violation of the human right not to be subjected to torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.

In January 1978, the American conservative columnist William Buckley resigned from AIUSA's Executive Board in protest over AI's formal condemnation of the death penalty at its international conference in Stockholm.¹⁵ The Stockholm Conference on the Abolition of the Death Penalty comprised more than two hundred delegates and participants from Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, North and South America, and the Caribbean region. In condemning the death penalty, the Conference considered that it was frequently used as an instrument of repression against oppositions, as well as racial, ethnic, religious, and underprivileged groups; that it was increasingly taking the form of unexplained disappearances, extra-judicial executions, and political murders; and that it was irrevocable and sometimes inflicted on the innocent. Moreover, Amnesty considered the death penalty an inhumane punishment incompatible with international human rights standards adopted by the United Nations and by regional organizations prohibiting all forms of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. As a result, AI clarified and strengthened its position opposing executions under any and all circumstances, whether carried out in political or criminal cases, whether stemming from judicial proceedings, or whether taking the form of extra-judicial killings, unexplained disappearances, or political murders.¹⁶

Following the Stockholm Conference, Amnesty drafted and adopted guidelines governing AI section appeals in death penalty cases. Studies were also made of government use of the death penalty worldwide, noting the wide variance in the legal and social systems of Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Americas. What

the files reveal is the extensiveness of these country surveys, AI's careful deliberations on the subject, and the attention to detail with which it prepared the guidelines, clarified and expanded its mandate, and subsequently launched its global abolition campaigns. In the late 1980s, AIUSA waged its own campaign against the death penalty in the United States, lobbying key state and federal officials, the judiciary, the legal profession, law enforcement and prison officials, churches, the news media, and others. The United States remains today the only industrial nation that employs capital punishment. Between 1967 and 1977, no executions were carried out—primarily because of public opposition and legal challenges. It appeared for a time that no American would ever again face capital punishment—until 1976, when the US Supreme Court ruled on its constitutionality. Since then, executions have occurred with greater frequency. Thus, throughout these records are also case files of death row inmates and occasional correspondence from these individuals reflecting on the US judicial system and the prison conditions under which they live.¹⁷

Extra-Legal Executions and Disappearances

The term extra-legal killing refers to deliberate and unlawful murder perpetrated by the state or with its "complicity or compliance."¹⁸ While the issue is related to Amnesty's death penalty concerns, in the late 1970s AI also began to clarify its mandate on how to address the numerous cases of extra-legal killings carried out by governments and armed groups. The files reveal that in 1978 AI delegates to the International Council Meeting called for the establishment of an ad hoc committee to study Amnesty's mandate, including the issue of extra-judicial killings. In 1979, the Committee recommended new guidelines governing this issue, which were subsequently adopted at AI's International Council Meeting (ICM), Amnesty's highest policy making body. Although AI's fundamental mandate on extra-legal murder was clear, the ICM noted that the universal application of its guidelines faced numerous and varied situations, sometimes murky and complex in nature, and thus often confusing as to whether certain types of incidents were within the mandate. AI's work against extra-legal killings evolved in the 1970s in the absence of clear guidelines. In general, the policy covered only prisoners—those who had been taken into custody or abducted and then shot or killed after being apprehended. Amnesty made occasional exceptions in cases of government-sponsored assassination, but generally refrained from acting on cases concerning the killings of people who were at liberty.

In 1978, the issue of extra-legal executions rose to the forefront after Guatemala security forces deliberately and systematically massacred more than 100 demonstrators. After initial hesitation, AI entered the case, subsequently prompting a review of its mandate. Thus, after considering the ad hoc committee's recommendations, Amnesty concluded that the mandate should cover cases involving non-prisoners or the murder for political reasons of persons who have not been abducted, imprisoned, or detained. The new ICM guidelines, however, expressed concern that without careful definition the move into non-prisoner work could force a massive expansion of the mandate at the expense of AI losing its focus, diluting its standards, and inviting paralyzing uncertainty as to what cases rested within the mandate. This consideration alone was testament to the enormity of such crimes

and the necessity to set clear and specific criteria for determining its position on the killings of non-prisoners. Thus, Amnesty stipulated that it would act in cases where killings stemmed from deliberate government policy to murder opponents, explicitly excluding instances of self-defence, isolated cases of excessive force regarding riot control, violations of enforced government policy by government agents, or military actions aimed at military objectives in times of armed conflict. However, AI determined that killings stemming from political motivations to eliminate opponents and from deliberate policies “targeting” specific individuals, groups, or categories of individuals must be defined as extra-legal executions under its mandate.¹⁹

The records concerning AI’s mandate on this issue reveal the organization’s extensive deliberations, the necessity of adapting to changing human rights circumstances, and AI’s methodology in defining real and potential situations that demand action. Despite the nature of these crimes, the concern for careful wording and precise definition of terms gives these documents an almost antiseptic quality. The syntax is stilted, colourless, yet exact, posing an interesting contrast to AI publications produced for public dissemination, which, while accurate, are more dramatic in the presentation of facts. In the mid 1980s, Amnesty again reexamined its mandate on extra-legal executions and called for the inclusion of disappearances, killings perpetrated by police or security forces using excessive deadly force, politically motivated massacres, and cases entailing the inappropriate use of arms by agents of the public order. In 1983, AI launched an international campaign against extra-legal murder, targeting governments, the media, embassies, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations, and other important entities. As with its other campaigns, AI sought, by informing the public about the scope of the killings and the circumstances in which they occur, to raise international awareness and stem further politically motivated murder.²⁰

As with political murder, disappearances occur when governments conspire to break their own laws and pervert the course of justice. Guatemalan security forces originated this method in 1966 to dispose of political opponents in secret. The practice quickly spread to other Latin American countries, and then to virtually every continent in the world. For more than twenty years, the Guatemalan government continued the practice of mass disappearances carried out by clandestine death squads. This method was also used by Chile, Argentina, El Salvador, and other countries that have since adopted more pluralistic governments with greater respect for human rights. In 1983, disappearances began in Peru; over the next ten years, Amnesty compiled detailed records of more than 4,300 victims. Mass disappearances have also occurred outside Latin America in Lebanon, Syria, and in Iraq—where thousands have vanished under the regime of Saddam Hussein. Security forces in Sri Lanka have “disappeared” thousands of victims since the late 1980s, and the process is continuing. Since 1992, Amnesty has recorded disappearances in some twenty countries. Some of the files concerning these mass abuses, particularly pertaining to Latin America, contain lists of names and profiles of the disappeared, a haunting set of documentation when considering the ruined families and the fact that the bodies of many victims typically turned up mutilated by road sides, in rivers, or buried in shallow graves. The files also contain analytical reports, Urgent Action appeals, some correspondence from family members of the disappeared, and materials concerning AIUSA’s country campaigns to shine the

spotlight on the nature of these crimes. The CU Archives anticipates considerably more material on this issue as records arrive from the various local and coordination groups, the national office, section staff, and others who have worked on these cases.²¹

Torture

Amnesty has long campaigned for the abolition of torture, which it defines as “any severe physical or mental pain intentionally inflicted by or at the instigation of a public official to obtain confessions or information or to punish or intimidate.”²² AI documentation indicates that torture is usually part of the state-controlled machinery to suppress dissent; in some cases, it is also employed to establish control over whole population groups. In the early 1980s, the Guatemalan government terrorized thousands of rural peasants to dissuade them from supporting guerrillas. Security forces openly tortured villagers before relatives and neighbours, and published photographs of mutilated corpses in newspapers ostensibly to assist families in finding their missing relatives, but more for the purpose of warning all Guatemalans. Such cases have been reported countless times throughout the world. AIUSA’s 1984 report, “Torture in the Eighties,” cited allegations of torture and ill-treatment in ninety-eight countries, “from security headquarters in Spain to prison cells in Iran, from secret police centers in Chile to special psychiatric hospitals in the Soviet Union.”²³

AIUSA reports, case records, testimony, studies, and other materials note that victims are compelled to feel that the torturer “controls everything, even life itself.”²⁴ Victims may be subjected to sexual threats, rape, the forcible eating of excrement, or humiliation of their families. Other methods include harsh beatings, electric shock, mock executions, the burning of flesh, and the use of medical professionals to inflict unbearable pain. Physicians may also be used to ensure that the victims survive for further torture or do not pass into unconsciousness. Before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, prisoners of conscience, dissidents, or refuseniks were commonly detained in psychiatric hospitals, where they were “diagnosed” as schizophrenic and “treated” with pain-causing and disorienting drugs. AIUSA’s files on Soviet psychiatric wards provide some of the most detailed, if not Kafkaesque accounts of state torture, as well as the more brutal cases regarding Argentina, Chile, and other countries.

As AI has reported, and what the documents reveal, torture victims span all social classes, age groups, trades, professions, and religious beliefs; they may be criminal suspects, political detainees, or others under suspicion by the state. The files also include studies on how members of special military or police units, or prison employees, are recruited to become torturers, their training, and their methods of operation. AI has oft-times faced difficulty in verifying allegations of torture due to government secrecy and intimidation. Throughout the 1980s, however, Amnesty received persistent reports of torture from, among others, Afghanistan, Brazil, Chile, Columbia, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Guinea, Haiti, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Iran, Lybia, Mexico, Namibia, Pakistan, Paraguay, Philippines, Peru, Republic of Korea, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Syria, Taiwan, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Uruguay, USSR, Zaire, and Zimbabwe. While some of these

countries have since adopted more democratic governments, including greater respect for human rights, torture remains widespread throughout much of the world.²⁵

In the 1970s and 1980s, AI launched two global campaigns for the abolition of torture, apart from its unremitting work in documenting and seeking to curb abuses on an individual and governmental basis. The AIUSA records contain materials on both campaigns. The first, starting in 1972, gathered more than one million signatures on petitions in some thirty languages from countries around the world. The campaign generated the support of world public opinion and governments, resulting in United Nations passage in 1975 of the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from being Subjected to Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. As Amnesty later noted, however, “when the United Nations’ delegates gather to decry torture, one third of them must wrestle with the knowledge that their own governments condone in practice what they condemn in public.” Thus, AI has persistently tried to compel governments, not always successfully, to “give meaning to their hypocritical declarations against torture by taking specific actions towards its abolition.”²⁶

The second campaign, in 1984, involved among other things efforts to obtain passage of a US Congressional resolution against torture and legislation permitting victims of torture (or family/representatives) abroad to bring civil actions against perpetrators of such acts who are in the United States. While violators of human rights residing in the US had been subject to civil action for their crimes under the *Alien Tort Act* of 1789, appellate court decisions had so muddied the judicial waters that legislative action was considered imperative. As a result, AIUSA took the lead in the development and passage of the Congressional resolution in October 1984 and enlisted the aid of the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights to develop legislation on the *Torture Victim Protection Act*. The US campaign constituted only a part of the much larger international effort to bring renewed attention to the continuing practice of state torture that involved all of AI’s various national sections.²⁷

Refugees

The term “refugee” commonly refers to those uprooted by repression or political or economic turmoil, including people displaced by famine, drought, or war. From its founding in 1961, the plight of refugees represented one of Amnesty’s principle concerns, including the aim of expanding the right of asylum and assisting political refugees to find work. Nevertheless, Amnesty relegated this issue to secondary status as the focus on prisoners of conscience became paramount. As a result, since its inception AI has focused on prevention, arguing that no person should be forcibly repatriated when it can be reasonably assumed that the individual would face execution, torture, or imprisonment for reasons of conscience. AI’s International Secretariat permitted the national sections to develop their own programmes to protect refugees, effect national refugee legislation, and assist others in establishing refugee assistance programmes.

By 1976, however, AI felt compelled to develop a clear plan for refugee work

due to the varying programmes of the national sections. Thus, AI commenced a study of both the situation of political refugees and the governmental policies affecting them in countries with AI sections, as well as the extent to which national sections had worked on behalf of political refugees. The report, completed in 1978, indicated diverse practices among various European and North American governments concerning the treatment of refugees. It also revealed varying programmes in how AI national sections provided assistance to refugees in or seeking asylum into their countries. As a result, in 1979, AI clarified its policy during a meeting of its refugee coordinators. The recommendations, approved by the International Executive Committee, reaffirmed AI's long standing emphasis on prevention in AI's refugee work, endorsed the ongoing work of national sections with refugee programmes, and provided guidelines governing the assistance of large groups of refugees.²⁸

At the same time, AIUSA established a programme to improve the condition of refugees and to assist persons seeking political asylum in the US. AIUSA's earliest actions began in 1974 in response to the US State Department's Chile Parole Programme, an emergency measure established to resettle Chilean detainees forced into exile by the Pinochet regime. AIUSA subsequently pressed the US government to create similar programmes for the persecuted in other Latin American countries, prompting the Carter Administration to establish another Parole programme for Chile and a Hemispheric Parole Programme based in Argentina. AIUSA also lobbied aggressively for reforms in US immigration laws. In the process, AIUSA refugee specialists provided recommendations, testified before Congress, sent letters to federal legislators, and otherwise played a leading role in the passage of the *Refugee Act* of 1980, the most sweeping legislation ever enacted by the US concerning refugee admission and settlement. Since then, in addition to continuing to stress that humanitarian concerns should be paramount in evaluating asylum requests, AIUSA acts to persuade other governments to respect the human rights of foreigners.²⁹

Amnesty Techniques for Action

AIUSA employs numerous and specific methods to address the abuses perpetrated by governments, including letter-writing, appeals and petitions, delegations to embassies, urgent action responses, media attention, and country and global campaigns. Amnesty also meets with Congressional representatives, lobbies for national legislation, and solicits the support of numerous other organizations in the US, in the countries concerned, and in the international arena. Amnesty's fundamental course of action is to "adopt" political prisoners and other victims. While the national section largely operates in the forums of national and global politics, AIUSA's various groups conduct the persistent and unremitting grassroots campaign on behalf of individuals. At this level, the files concerning AIUSA's various methods of action reveal to a considerable extent its basic *modus operandi*.

Adoption

The adoption technique—carried out mostly by local groups with the assistance of area coordinators, the national office, the International Secretariat, and others—represents AIUSA's basic strategy to gain the release of political prisoners. The technique often involves several carefully planned strategies based on the details of a particular case. While Amnesty groups write letters, they also employ other imaginative pressure tactics, including attempts to telephone prisoners, cornering embassy officials at social events, taking out newspaper subscriptions for prisoners and then trying to ensure that they receive copies, and soliciting the assistance of other international organizations and groups in the US, abroad, and the country in question. The starting point for group action stems from the facts of each case, which are gathered and prepared by the International Secretariat's research department and the national sections. While the International Secretariat originally allocated prisoner dossiers to US groups, AIUSA's national office now performs this function.³⁰

Before taking action, AI seeks to verify the accuracy of information. The verification process holds considerable significance since AI's influence stems primarily from its credible and accurate reporting. Without careful documentation, Amnesty would risk losing access to the corridors of power and the media on which it relies to work on behalf of victims. As a result, AI considers each case on its own merits, taking into account the political conditions in the country concerned. The prisoner dossier explains the reasons for AI action and indicates the status of the case: whether it is under investigation, has been given adoption status, or qualifies for group action. AI investigates cases when evidence suggests that an individual is a political prisoner or victim of torture, has been sentenced to death, has received an unfair trial, or has been detained for long periods without trial—but where additional information is needed for verification. AI groups subsequently make inquiries to governments by correspondence to obtain additional facts. At this stage AI is only seeking further information, not appealing for the prisoner's release. If information cannot be obtained, the case may be upgraded to Adoption case status, depending on the available evidence as well as the political conditions in the country, which often can be compelling. In addition, AI denies the validity of any assertion by a government that a political prisoner has advocated or used violence until it has been proved in a fair and public trial. AI "adopts" individuals on determining that they have been detained for their beliefs, colour, language, ethnic origin, or religion—provided they have neither used nor advocated violence. The reasons for adoption are contained in the prisoner dossier. Since political prisoners are detained in violation of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, AI works for the prisoner's unconditional release. On occasion, AI may consider the cases of several prisoners as a single case, for tactical reasons, to secure the protection and release of all of them. This action may be pursued if AI believes it unsafe to adopt or investigate individual prisoners in the group. AI also might decide to adopt an entire prison, which is fully explained in each prisoner dossier—the core piece of documentation for AI case work.³¹

The dossier contains briefing materials, including case sheet, confidential information sheet, status case sheet, general instructions, recommended case action, relief action, list of government authorities, and background materials. The case sheet contains personal details on the prisoner, such as date of birth, age, profession, residence, family details, state of health, details of arrest, charges, trial, sentence, and the place and conditions of imprisonment. It also provides details on the immediate political circumstances or organization to which the individual belongs. The confidential information sheet provides information that guides the handling of the case, while the status case sheet indicates whether the case is considered investigative or a has full adoption status. The dossiers also contain general instructions on the various actions that can be pursued on behalf of prisoners, as well as advice on security, coordination, and reporting. The recommendation case action sheet provides more specific instructions for action on the particular case. These instructions, if included, take precedence over the general instructions. The dossier does not always include the relief action sheet, since the assistance needs of the prisoner and the family are usually unknown when the group begin its work. In addition, the prisoner dossier contains a summary account of the political situation in the country concerned, including the laws under which the prisoner is being detained.

In many cases, the International Secretariat will prepare a comprehensive background paper concerning the country or a particular group of prisoners. As might be expected, the amount of information gathered by the Secretariat and the groups regarding individual prisoners varies considerably. In some cases, where the prisoner is a well known writer, politician, or dissident, full biographical details can be provided. The vast majority of cases, however, involve less celebrated figures, ordinary people about which very little is known and about which information may be extraordinarily difficult to obtain. They may be held in secret detention camps or military prisons. Perhaps they were “disappeared” or alternatively, in Chilean parlance during the Pinochet regime, they may have already been “transferred,” the euphemism used by security forces for carrying out extra-legal murder. In these cases, AI groups must endeavour to make inquiries starting with the contacts listed on the case sheet. Throughout this process, the Secretariat and the groups will exchange information concerning any new developments about the case.³²

Letters

AIUSA's various groups produce considerable correspondence on behalf of cases to outside entities—governments, embassies, AI contacts, various organizations, the media, US representatives, family members of prisoners, and others. The lists of contacts provided in the prisoner dossiers enable groups to write to heads of state and responsible ministers, including the Minister of Justice or Minister of the Interior, the chief Public Prosecutor or Attorney General, or in a one-party authoritarian state, the Party Secretary. These letters tend to be brief, polite, factual, and deliberately written with the point of view that the authorities are reasonable and open to discussion. The tone of these letters often provides a striking contrast to the heinous nature of crimes committed by governments: it is AI's experience that even the most repressive regimes sometimes anxiously seek to maintain a reputa-

tion of fairness. Thus, whenever possible, members writing these letters stress a country's reputation for moderation and justice, respect for its constitution and judicial system, as well as an understanding of current political and economic difficulties. Amnesty groups send these letters at every opportunity—on being assigned a case, receiving news of a prisoner, when a partial amnesty has been announced, or to mark national holidays, religious festivals, a President's birthday, the anniversary of the formation of the government, and so on. Although in most cases the steady stream of correspondence is never acknowledged, these letter-writing campaigns have nevertheless proved to be highly effective. The correspondence sent to US Congressional representatives and the State Department primarily seeks to inform and sometimes request that they act on particular cases. Members of Congress, for example, might agree to raise human rights issues and individual cases with foreign governments when travelling abroad or when foreign representatives visit the United States.³³

While the correspondence to embassies is similar to that sent to governments, it sometimes emphasizes trade and cultural relations with the United States. In many instances, AIUSA's Washington Office organizes visits to embassies concerning certain campaigns and cases requiring urgent attention. In addition to the occasions already mentioned, AIUSA groups often send letters to correspond with visits from trade delegations, sporting teams, ministerial tours, and international cultural events. The purpose of these letters is often to obtain an interview with the Ambassador, Chargé d'affaires, or First Secretary. As a result, trade and cultural events sometimes provide openings for arranging an Amnesty deputation to a foreign Embassy, which can be most effective when several Amnesty groups working on behalf of prisoners in the same country are involved. On the whole, it appears that these letters elicit more replies from embassies than from foreign governments. Groups also correspond with private contacts who can provide important information about the prisoner as well as the individual's family. The extent to which types of letters appear in the files depends upon a particular group's aggressiveness, its sense of commitment, and the extent of its contacts. In some cases, sources may be a defending lawyer, a politician actively concerned about human rights, or other people associated with the prisoner or with the political circumstances in the country.

AI advises groups to be cautious in these approaches, since contacts may be under active surveillance and their mail may be opened by security police. As a result, the initial approach is often cautionary, the wording tactfully phrased, and the inquiry for limited information only. Any response is usually forwarded to the International Secretariat, as it may affect the lives of several prisoners. In addition, groups send letters to international trade or professional organizations soliciting assistance on behalf of their fellow unionists or professional colleagues. Many victims of rights abuses, for example, are employed in a trade or profession, whose interests are represented by national or international organizations—scientists, journalists, trade unionists, and others. AI often solicits the assistance of these organizations to protest the imprisonment of the individuals concerned.³⁴

Appeals

In many cases, after consulting with the national office, AIUSA groups make appeals as a strong supplement to individual letters. The files contain several variations on this method. The general petition tends to be a briefly worded statement addressed to the head of a foreign government, sometimes signed by thousands of people listing their name, address, and profession, and formally presented to the Ambassador for forwarding to the Head of State. AIUSA may send appeals signed only by those in the same profession, age group, or religion if the prisoner in question is identified with that group. Another approach, entailing appeals calling for the end to torture or for releases signed by prominent people from around the world, can also prove effective. Such appeals, when made by individuals who hold the respect of the government, may be especially influential. In addition, Amnesty sometimes solicit appeals from the governing bodies of universities, medical associations, or similar institutions both in the US and other countries, all of which may apply further pressure on foreign governments.³⁵

Delegations

While having less sustaining power, the measure of influence from personal contact carries greater weight than either letters or appeals. Although the AIUSA files so far contain few reports of groups visiting embassies, other AI groups conduct such visits on a regular basis, or arrange for others to do so on the prisoner's behalf. Following each embassy visit, the International Secretariat and the national section request that an official report be filed providing details on the discussion. Amnesty also advises that groups may arrange visits to foreign representatives when they travel abroad. During these visits, Amnesty often makes inquiries concerning the government's human rights policy, treatment of prisoners, or failure to respond to registered letters.³⁶

Urgent Action

Amnesty's "urgent action" method arose from its 1970s global Campaign for the Abolition of Torture. The technique entails an emergency response concerning any person under threat of death or torture. These individuals receive immediate worldwide attention through AI's international network, headquartered in London and with staff in more than sixty countries who are on call to "send immediate telegrams, telexes, telefaxes, and airmail letters on behalf of people in urgent situations."³⁷ Although originally employed in responses to cases of torture, Amnesty subsequently expanded it to cover persons about to be executed, prisoners suffering from declining health due to hunger strikes or lack of medical care, "disappeared" persons, and other individuals undergoing extreme physical or psychological abuse. Amnesty also employs this method for particular aspects of country campaigns, enabling clergy, lawyers, and other professionals to appeal for an accounting of the disappeared, or for an end to the repression of colleagues. In the United States, thousands receive urgent appeals monthly, either individually or through their churches, synagogues, unions, schools, or professional organizations.

In the US section, background information on urgent actions arrive from London via telefax to the Urgent Action office in Nederland, Colorado, where they are immediately edited into one-page appeals summarizing an individual's particular circumstances. The appeals include the principal details, recommendations on specific actions, and addresses of responsible government officials who have the authority to intervene; they are sent out within hours after the general information is received from London. As a result, within a day or two, network members send hundreds of letters, telegrams, and telefaxes to key officials. Participants in the UA network receive a different case each month on which to act, as well as monthly updates of past urgent action appeals. UA participants can also choose to receive appeals concerning women or individuals employed in specific occupations, such as the legal and medical professions, writers, artists, journalists, academics, or unionists.³⁸

Press and Publicity

AI's use of the news media represents an important vehicle for generating international public opinion against human rights crimes. AIUSA, both at the local and national level, has produced considerable media attention on specific rights violations, on patterns of abuses including disappearances and torture, on briefing papers, and other issues. Although the archives project has yet to receive the files of AIUSA's national office, which bears primary responsibility for press relations, the records of several local and coordination groups, as well as those of the Washington regional office contain materials relating to the organization's media work.

AI issues press releases to AIUSA, which then distributes them to daily newspapers, wire services, columnists, and radio and television networks. The US and other sections also prepare and issue their own press releases. When visiting heads of state arrive in the US, the media often ask AIUSA for information on the country. Amnesty also uses the media in the form of letters to the editor, articles, and other means to correct or defend itself against statements or articles that misrepresent its position. In addition, American foreign reporters usually contact AIUSA for information or external documents concerning a particular country. The files of local groups also contain materials concerning local press and publicity, which pertain mostly to their own cases and sometimes to country campaigns waged by AIUSA's national office. Amnesty considers good relations with the press as essential to strengthening its credibility, clarifying its concerns and positions, and thus as a means to bolster its other techniques.³⁹

Country Campaigns

Throughout the files of regional offices, coordination and local groups, and national staff exist materials concerning AIUSA country campaigns, waged as a strong supplementary measure to the adoption technique. No matter how effective Amnesty works on behalf of individual cases, it cannot possibly address all of the hundreds of thousands of victims throughout the world. Thus, Amnesty periodically launches these campaigns to focus world attention on specific mass patterns of

abuse in particular countries, including for example “disappearances” in Argentina and Chile, death in detention in South Africa, religious persecution in the former Soviet Union, torture in Syria, and other mass rights violations routinely committed by governments. This method seeks to generate a momentum of appeals targeted at various segments of a society not only by mobilizing its own members, groups, the urgent action network, and others, but also by soliciting the assistance of numerous other organizations and constituencies. The country campaign essentially involves the mobilization of the entire national section.

Amnesty’s country campaigns include press conferences, press releases, embassy visits, petitions, letters, films, radio and television appearances, articles, interactions with the US government, and indirect pressure on other institutions. Typically, the coordination group responsible for the country concerned handles most of the campaign details, and so materials concerning these activities appear in the files of coordination groups. Amnesty’s campaigns last mostly two to three months, some longer, depending on developments in a particular country. In addition, during these campaigns Amnesty suspends all prisoner casework within the country to protect individuals who otherwise might be further victimized as a cynical way to divert attention away from the campaign. Thus, the major aim of these campaigns is to maintain the spotlight on specific patterns of abuse. The national office handles the campaign if there exists no coordination group responsible for the country in question, in addition to conducting larger global campaigns in conjunction with the International Secretariat—which employ many of the same methods. As already mentioned, some of the more substantive documentation relating to AI’s global campaigns concern the issues of the death penalty, torture, extra-legal murder, and disappearances.⁴⁰

AIUSA also launches special campaigns concerning individual government decisions that may cause worsening human rights abuses. In the past, AIUSA has waged special campaigns against the crackdown on human rights activists in Czechoslovakia, the reign of “red terror” in Ethiopia, the Polish repression of the Solidarity movement, and others. Because of the concentrated nature of campaign work, materials relating to these activities appear throughout the files of the national and regional offices, coordination and local groups, section staff, and the Urgent Action Network. AIUSA also acts with regard to a particular country in instances concerning the kidnapping of doctors, the suppression of lawyers representing imprisoned clients, the suffering of imprisoned children, and other similar cases throughout the world. In all these campaigns, the basic initiative and direction stem from a coordinated effort between AIUSA and the International Secretariat.⁴¹

Conclusion

Altogether, the Amnesty files raise several unavoidable dichotomies worth noting: protector vs. victimizer, individual vs. nation state, international law vs. state sovereignty, and truth vs. political falsehood. Indeed, the distinction between truth and disinformation carries particular poignancy. While human rights issues have achieved unprecedented international attention, numerous governments continue to

perpetrate terror and to cloak their crimes in a fog of disinformation, lies, distortions, and covert methods. Murder is often carried out at night when victims are alone, their bodies mutilated and concealed to prevent identification and discovery, records altered or destroyed, and the truth distorted to blame others. Many governments try to divert attention from the killers, claiming that the crimes are carried out by civilian forces beyond their control. Armed conflict often serves as a pretext for mass political murder by security forces. Massacres are blamed on rebels and insurgency groups. In cases where these groups also use terror in their campaigns, the truth becomes difficult to discern.

Despite the new world order accompanied by dramatic political change and the establishment of democratic governments in many countries, the incidence of political killings, disappearances, torture, and other depredations continues throughout much of the world. Extra-legal murder and disappearances occur with alarming frequency in places such as Burundi, China, Indonesia, Iraq, Somalia, and Sudan. Since the beginning of 1992, AI has recorded these crimes in more than sixty countries. As AI noted in its 1992 annual report and observes today, "as long as the agents of repression believe they can kidnap, torture and murder without fear of discovery or punishment, the cycle of violence will never be broken." And indeed, as AI's very existence as well as its documents so tellingly show, the cycle of violence continues unabated.⁴²

The greatest significance of these files, therefore, may rest in the truth they reveal on the state of humanity or inhumanity at the dawn of the twenty-first century, the individual memory of thousands of victims, and the attempts of private human rights citizens' groups to curb the crimes of governments throughout the world. The very existence of a mass international human rights movement is historically unprecedented, largely a phenomenon of the latter twentieth century, and a direct challenge to the conventional notion of state sovereignty. These facts lend particular significance to the records of human rights nongovernmental organizations, many of which are now becoming available for acquisition. Amnesty is but one of innumerable such groups with vitally important materials. In a sense, the loss of such documents means in many instances the loss of historical truth and memory, the victory of disinformation, and in the end, the conquest of the political manipulation of history. The preservation of the records of Amnesty and other human rights organizations represent one powerful counterbalance to this prospect.

Notes

- 1 Quotation appears in Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York, 1988), pp. 11-12.
- 2 The full quotation reads as follows: "I would not be so bold as to try to write the history of the Archipelago. I have never had the chance to read the documents. And, in fact, will anyone ever have the chance to read them? Those who do not wish to recall have already had enough time—and will have more—to destroy all the documents, down to the very last one." See Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago* (London, 1973), x.
- 3 For further reading on this subject see: Richard Pierre Claude and Burns H. Weston, eds., *Human Rights in the World Community: Issues and Action* (Philadelphia, 1992); Roger Errera, "Democracies and Human Rights: the Heritage and the Challenge," *The Atlantic Community Quarterly* (Summer, 1987); and Frank N. Magill, ed., *Great Events From History II: Human Rights Series*, 5 vols. (Pasadena, CA, 1992).

- 4 These observations are based on discussions with Morey Schapira, past president of both the Union Councils of Soviet Jews and the Bay Area Council of Soviet Jews. It is Schapira's view that the Soviet Jewish question and the international human rights movement in general played a leading role in the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Moreover, according to Schapira, these events caused both himself and the various other autonomous and independent councils to assess their own historical role in these world events. These statements were echoed by human rights activists in the Scientists for Orlov, Sakharov, and Scharansky (SOS); the American Association for Ethiopian Jews; and the Committee of Concerned Scientists. The papers of Morey Schapira, the Union Councils of Soviet Jews, and the Bay Area Council of Soviet Jews are housed at the Archives at the University of Colorado at Boulder. In 1992, the American Association of Ethiopian Jews donated their records to the American Jewish Historical Society in Waltham, Massachusetts.
- 5 Jonathan Power, *Amnesty International: The Human Rights Story* (New York, 1981), p. 10.
- 6 Shaid Nadeem, "Outraged to be Doing So Well," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (6 June 1991), p. 30.
- 7 Amnesty International, "Getting Away With Murder: Political Killings and Disappearances in the 1990s," (New York, 1993), p. 1; Jonathan Power, *Amnesty International: The Human Rights Story*, pp. 21-22. Also see David Leonard Downie, "Amnesty International is Awarded the Nobel Peace Prize," in Frank N. Magill, ed. *Great Events From History II: Human Rights Series IV* (1971-1982) (Pasadena, CA, 1992), p. 1955.
- 8 Lowell W. Livzey, *Nongovernmental Organizations and the Ideas of Human Rights* (Princeton, 1988), p. 19.
- 9 Discussions with Ellen Moore, AIUSA Urgent Action Office; and Amnesty International USA Directory (New York, 1994).
- 10 Discussions with Amnesty members. The bifurcated information system is also noted in Amnesty's handbooks.
- 11 Archives, the University of Colorado (hereafter CU Archives), Barbara Sproul Papers, in *Amnesty International Handbook* (London, 1978), p. 9, Series I, Box I. Sproul served as AIUSA's Coordination Group Leader for Eastern Europe. The papers also include materials on South America.
- 12 Discussions with Amnesty staff and members. Also see CU Archives, Yadja Zeltman papers, Series II. The Zeltman papers contain numerous case files pertaining mostly to Soviet political prisoners. Case files and other documentation also appear widely in the papers of Barbara Sproul, Director of Coordination Group on Eastern Europe; Toni Gambino, Director of Coordination Group on Africa; J. Ruthven Ryan, Leader of Local Group on the Soviet Union; Helene Oppenheimer, Director of Coordination Group on Chile; and the papers of other AIUSA groups and activists.
- 13 CU Archives, Barbara Sproul Papers, *Amnesty International USA Handbook*, p. 10, Series I, Box 1. Also see AIUSA Washington, DC Office files.
- 14 Reports, case files, and other documentation on prison conditions appear in the AIUSA Papers of Yadja Zeltman, Barbara Sproul, Hilarly Naylor, and numerous others.
- 15 See Power, *Amnesty International: The Human Rights Story*, p. 32.
- 16 CU Archives, Barbara Sproul Papers, *Report of the Amnesty International Conference on the Death Penalty*, Stockholm, Sweden, 10-11 December 1977, and *Summary of the Amnesty International Report: The Death Penalty*, 26 December 1979, Series I, Box I.
- 17 CU Archives, see the AIUSA papers of Barbara Sproul, Rose Styron, Hilarly Naylor, and Rick Hays.
- 18 Amnesty International USA, *Getting Away With Murder: Political Killings and Disappearances in the 1990s* (New York, 1993), p. 10.
- 19 CU Archives, Barbara Sproul Papers, Series I and II; and Yadja Zeltman Papers, Series I. Both collections contain considerable material on extra-legal executions and disappearances.
- 20 CU Archives, Barbara Sproul Papers, Series I. Also see AIUSA *Getting Away With Murder*, pp. 16-22.
- 21 AIUSA, *Getting Away with Murder*, pp. 11-16. Also see Barbara Sproul Papers, Series I.
- 22 CU Archives, Barbara Sproul Papers, "Stop Torture," (AIUSA brochure), Series IV, box 6.
- 23 CU Archives, Barbara Sproul Papers, *Torture in the Eighties: Testimony Submitted by Amnesty International USA to the United States Congress* (May 1984), p. 1, Series IV, box 6.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 1. Also, the Yadja Zeltman papers contain a considerable amount of documentation on Soviet psychiatric abuses of political prisoners, dissidents, and refuseniks.

- 26 Ibid., p. 5.
- 27 Ibid., p. 1. Also see series II of the Yajja Zeltman Papers.
- 28 See CU Archives, Barbara Sproul Papers, Series IV, box 8 for AIUSA refugee documents.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 CU Archives, Barbara Sproul Papers, *AIUSA: Addendum to the Amnesty International Handbook* (New York, 1978), p. 3, Series I, Box 1.
- 31 Ibid., p. 16.
- 32 Discussions with Ellen Moore, AIUSA Urgent Action Office and Judy Patterson, AIUSA Executive Board member. Also see *Amnesty International Handbook*, pp. 13-14 and *AIUSA: Addendum to the Amnesty International Handbook*, p. 16.
- 33 These letters appear throughout the files of AIUSA local and coordination groups, national sections, regional offices, as well as those of individual Amnesty activists.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 See *AIUSA: Addendum to the Amnesty International Handbook*, p. 5.
- 37 CU Archives, AIUSA Urgent Action Office Files, *The Urgent Action Network* (Brochure), unprocessed collection.
- 38 Discussions with Ellen and Scott Harrison, AIUSA Urgent Action Office. Also see CU Archives, AIUSA Urgent Action Office Files.
- 39 Various types of documents reflect AIUSA's interactions with the news media, including materials relating to publicity strategies, clippings, correspondence, evaluations of effectiveness of publicity campaigns, and other records.
- 40 CU Archives, see the AIUSA papers of Barbara Sproul, Yajja Zeltman, Toni Gambino, and Hilarly Naylor which contain materials relating to various country campaigns.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Amnesty International USA, *Amnesty International Report, 1992* (New York, 1992), p. 1; AIUSA, *Getting Away With Murder*, pp. 6-8.