



ANNUAL REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF CONCERNED SCIENTISTS, INC. FOR THE YEAR 2007

This year the Committee of Concerned Scientists -- now 35 years old -- spoke out for scholars and scientists in sixteen countries who were the victims of human-rights abuse. We took action to help our academic colleagues around the world whose work was hindered by illegal or repressive measures. Many of these individuals were harassed for their support of human rights or for their critical attitudes towards their own governments. In many cases we were gratified to see that unjust imprisonment was ended or suffering relieved. The following is a summary of our activities in 2007.

BANGLADESH

Dr. Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, an economist and former cabinet member, was arrested in January 2007 and charged with treason and sedition. After the High Court dismissed those charges, another case was immediately brought against him based on an alleged inconsistency in a financial report which he had had to submit while he was in jail without access to his records or any legal assistance. Dr. Alamgir is kept mostly in solitary confinement and in complete darkness from dusk to dawn. He has not been granted due process, the right to bail, or the right to appeal. We expressed concern for his condition and called for his immediate release on bail.

Dr. Anwar Hossain and eleven of his academic colleagues at the University of Dhaka and Rajshahi University were arrested on August 23, 2007 and sentenced to two years' imprisonment. The arrests followed a soccer game at Dhaka University where a clash between soldiers and students led to a riot. There is strong evidence that these professors and their colleagues from Rajshahi University were tortured, and while in prison they had minimal access to family, attorneys, and medical care. We strongly protested the arrests and alleged torture. The sentence was overturned by Presidential pardon in 2008 (see Good News).

BELARUS

Dr. Kanstantsin Lukashou, a researcher with the Geochemistry and Geophysics Institute of the National Academy of Sciences, was arrested in Minsk in December 2006 and given a two years' suspended sentence. Dr. Lukashou was charged with having resisted arrest in March 2006 as he picked up his half-brother, the activist Vyachaslau Siuchy, from a hospital. Police had attempted to arrest Mr. Siuchy, who was returning from a protest, but he was able to escape. Dr. Lukashou himself participated in parliamentary elections in 2004 and worked for the election of pro-democracy candidates. It would appear that he was arrested in connection with his work on behalf of pro-democracy candidates for parliament. We wrote to urge that Dr. Lukashou be released. The sentence was overturned in April.

CHILE

We pressed for action in the case of Dr. Boris Weisfeiler, who has been missing in Chile since 1985. We have supported Dr. Olga Weisfeiler, Dr. Boris Weisfeiler's sister, for many years in her search for answers regarding her brother's disappearance. Although President Michelle Bachelet gave assurances in 2006 that the investigation would be pursued, no significant progress has been made. We called on President Bachelet both to ensure that the Chilean police force cooperates with the FBI and to allow the FBI more freedom to use its own methods in the investigation.

CHINA

We protested the detention of Dr. Gao Yaojie and Dr. Jiang Yangyong, who were both prevented from traveling to New York to receive the Heinz R. Pagels Human Rights Award from the New York Academy of Sciences and are under military custody. Dr. Jiang Yanyong received the award in recognition of his work to contain the infectious epidemic of SARS. He was the chief physician of the Military Hospital in Beijing when SARS began spreading in China in 2002 and early 2003. Dr. Gao Yaojie is well known for her work on behalf of AIDS patients. Dr. Yangyong and his wife were placed under military custody in 2004 after Dr. Yangyong wrote an open letter to the Chinese government asking for re-assessment of the events that took place in Tiananmen Square on June 4th 1989. Dr. Yaojie was detained on February 1 as she was leaving for Beijing to pick up a travel visa to the United States. She was planning to attend a banquet in her honor to be held in Washington, D.C. and was forced to give a false reason for not attending. She is currently under house arrest in Zhengzhou.

Zhang Zongai, a former lecturer at Xi'an's Northwest University and the Xi'an Institute of Statistics, was abducted by local officials and physically attacked while campaigning peacefully as an anti-corruption candidate. Zhang Zongai received substantial public support as an anti-corruption candidate in Xi'an's Yanta District. On September 16, while he was campaigning, Zhang was forced into a car, detained for seven hours, accused of attacking the government and the Communist Party, and told that if he continued with his campaign, he would be beaten to death. When the results of the election were announced on September 19, Zhang's name was not included on the list of candidates, and officials refused to disclose the number of votes each candidate had received. We deplored the assault and called for full disclosure of the voting results.

Guo Quan, Associate Professor at Nanjing Normal University, was demoted to the post of librarian by the school because of his open letter advocating democratic reform in China. Quan published an open letter to Chinese leaders Hu Jintao and Wu Bangguo on 14 November 2007, calling for a democratic government based on multi-party elections that would better serve the interests of the people. We requested that he be restored to his position.

CUBA

We wrote on behalf of Francisco Pastor Chaviano Gonzalez, a mathematician and teacher who has been imprisoned for more than 12 years and requires urgent medical treatment. Mr. Chaviano was arrested shortly after signing a joint letter to President Fidel Castro that called for the release of all political prisoners and the legal recognition of national human rights groups. The court refused to hear Mr. Chaviano's witnesses and evidence. He was convicted of "revealing state security secrets" and "falsifying public documents" and was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment. Mr. Chaviano has ischemic heart disease, and one of his coronary arteries is 70 percent blocked. He also requires surgery for a nodule on his right lung.

We appealed for the early release of Dr. Jose Luis Garcia Paneque, a doctor and journalist who was sentenced to 24 years in prison in April 2003. It appears that his arrest was linked to his pro-democracy activities in the 1990s and to his involvement in founding the independent Libertad news agency. He also supported an independent network of librarians providing access to books banned in Cuba. Dr. Garcia Paneque is malnourished and requires surgery for a cyst on his kidney. His family's request for medical parole has not been answered. We protested his excessively long sentence and the Government's failure to provide adequate medical care.

ETHIOPIA

Anteneh Getnet, Meqcha Mengistu, and Woldie Dana, members of the Ethiopian Teachers' Association (ETA), were arrested and tortured in December 2006 and then released in March 2007. They were re-arrested in late May and have been accused of being members of an illegal organization called the Ethiopian Patriotic Front. They have declared that they are not members of the Ethiopian Patriotic Front and have no connection whatsoever with that group. The ETA has been critical of government education policies and has been subject to numerous government attempts to close it. Hundreds of teachers and ETA members have been detained or arbitrarily dismissed, reportedly because they failed to support the ruling party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). In 2006 we wrote on behalf of Anteneh Getnet and others during their previous incarcerations. This year we again deplored the arrests and asked that all the teachers be immediately released.

GUATEMALA

Death threats are still being made against members of the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation (FAFG), in particular its Executive Director, the anthropologist Fredy Peccerelli, and his family. On May 25, Fredy Peccerelli, Jose Suasnavar (FAFG Deputy Director), Omar Bertoni (FAFG Laboratory Coordinator) and Bianka Peccerelli (Fredy's sister) received an e-mail threatening to kill them and all the members of Fredy's family. It is thought that military officers who were active during the civil war are afraid of the work FAFG has been doing, exhuming the mass graves of people massacred during the conflict and providing documentary evidence of massacres they carried out. As in previous years, we asked for a thorough investigation of these threats so that the perpetrators may be brought to justice. We also called for police protection for Fredy Peccerelli, his family, and the FAFG members involved in human rights investigations.

IRAN

Haleh Esfandiari, director of the Middle East Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC, was detained in Tehran in December 2006 during a visit to her mother. She placed under house arrest, repeatedly interrogated about the activities of the Wilson Center, and pressured to make a false confession or to falsely implicate the Wilson Center in activities in which it had no part. On May 7, 2007, she was summoned to the Ministry of Intelligence and taken to Evin prison. We wrote to protest her detention and called for her immediate release. Dr. Esfandiari was released in August and allowed to return to the United States.

Dr. Hesam Firouzi, a physician, was arrested and charged with "hiding an escaped prisoner," "acting against the security of the system" by giving interviews to foreign radio stations about the torture of prisoners, and "possessing a satellite dish." Dr. Firouzi had provided treatment to Ahmad Batebi, a student who was imprisoned and tortured in connection with the so-called "18 Tir" demonstration in July 1999. After Batebi was temporarily released in March 2005 to seek medical treatment, Dr. Firouzi treated Batebi in his office and allowed him to stay in his house. Upon Batebi's re-arrest in July 2006, Dr. Firouzi wrote an open letter to the prison authorities in which he stated that his patient's severe health problems put him at risk of death if he was not released. We deplored the detention of Dr. Firouzi, who was released on bail on January 24, 2007.

Baha'i students in Iran were denied access to their National Entrance Examination scores in 2007. The test results were made available electronically on July 31. When around 800 students of the Baha'i faith logged on to the website, they received an error message informing them that their files were "incomplete." Several students reported that the National Education Measurement and Evaluation Organization did not respond to phone calls and letters asking why their test results were inaccessible. When two students inquired in person to the Organization's office in Tehran, one official stated that he had "received orders from above not to score the tests of Baha'i students," while another official suggested that a student would receive his test scores only if the student's family renounced their faith. We called for the complete publication of all test scores without discrimination.

Mehnoushe Solouki, a Canadian resident of Iranian and French citizenship, was prevented from leaving Iran after a visit to prepare a documentary on burial rites of Iran's religious minorities. The documentary had been previously approved by the Iranian authorities. In February 2007, after she stumbled upon a mass grave of regime opponents summarily executed in 1988, Solouki was arrested and thrown into Tehran's Evin prison. In a closed trial, she was accused of harboring intentions to produce anti-establishment propaganda. Although she was released on bail, the authorities confiscated her French passport, barring her exit from the Islamic Republic. We appealed for the return of her passport and for her free movement out of Iran. Solouki was allowed to leave Iran in 2008 (see Good News.).

LIBYA

Dr. Idris Boufayed, a physician, was arrested in February and is on trial along with 11 other men for "planning to overthrow the government," "possession of arms," and "meeting with an official from a foreign government." His brother, Jum'a Boufayed, and 'Abd al-Rahman al-Qotaiwi, a fourth-year medical student, were also arrested and are being held in an unknown location. 'Abd al-Rahman al-Qotaiwi was arrested in connection with a peaceful demonstration that he was reportedly organizing to take place in Tripoli. Jum'a Boufayed was arrested after giving an interview about the arrest of his brother Dr. Idris Boufayed, another organizer of the demonstration. The charges against Dr. Idris Boufayed carry a possible death sentence. We called for his release and for an investigation into the whereabouts of Jum'a Boufayed and 'Abd al-Rahman al-Qotaiwi.

We appealed again on behalf of the five Bulgarian nurses, Valya Georgieva Cherveniyashka, Snezhanka Ivanova Dimitrova, Nasya Stojcheva Nenova, Valentina Manolova Siropulo, and Kristiana Malinova Valcheva, and a Palestinian doctor, Ashraf Ahmad Jum'a, who were arrested in 1999 and convicted of deliberately infecting Libyan children with HIV. They were released in July after being tried repeatedly and held in prison for eight years (see Good News).

SAUDI ARABIA

We expressed concern about Fouad al-Farhan, a blogger who was detained for questioning in early January. Farhan, who used his blog to criticize corruption and call for political reform, was detained "for violating rules not related to state security." Farhan told the Washington Post that an Interior Ministry official had warned him that he would be detained because of his online support for men who had been arrested and held without charge or trial. The detainees, Saleh Qassim and Walid al-Omari, are close associates of Saud Mukhtar al-Hashemi, a professor and doctor, who was arrested after he criticized the Saudi government for not doing enough to help Iraqi and Palestinian civilians. Saleh Qassim was Hasehmi's secretary and Walid al-Omari is a university student. In October, Farhan visited one of the jailed men and wrote about his visit on his blog.

SWEDEN

Dr. Oleg Viro and Dr. Burglind Joricke, tenured mathematics professors, resigned their positions at Uppsala University under duress after being threatened with disciplinary proceedings. On Thursday, February 8, 2007, Dr. Viro and Dr. Joricke were summoned to separate interviews. At these meetings they were presented with various accusations without access to the underlying evidence or opportunity to rebut. They were given an ultimatum: either resign voluntarily and receive compensation, or face a disciplinary procedure and risk firing without compensation. It appeared that they were targeted for opposing the appointment of a particular mathematician to the department. We protested this treatment of Professors Viro and Joricke, urging that they be reinstated and publicly cleared of all allegations of wrongdoing.

SYRIA

Two physicians, Fida' al-Hurani and Ahmad Tohme, as well as activists Jabr al-Shoufi, Akram al-Bunni and `Ali al-Abdallah, were detained following a meeting of opposition groups in Damascus in December. Fida' Al-Hurani is a medical doctor who was elected president of the National Council of the Damascus Declaration for Democratic Change. Al-Abdullah, a former political prisoner, was on the group's executive committee. Al-Bunni, a former political prisoner, is the brother of prominent lawyer and rights activist Anwar al-Bunni, who in April was sentenced to five years in jail for "spreading false news" when he made a statement that a man had died in a Syrian jail from the inhumane conditions under which he had been held. We urged the immediate release of all five activists, who have not been charged.

VENEZUELA

Dr. Claudio Mendoza, a physicist who was head of the laboratory of Fisica Computacional at the Instituto Venezolano de Investigaciones Cientificas, was accused of treason in connection with an article he published in El Nacional regarding the making of a nuclear bomb. The Consejo Directivo of IVIC demanded proof for Dr. Mendoza's statements, which he provided. Nevertheless, he has been stripped of his position at IVIC and accused of false testimony and treason. The latter charge carries a penalty of up to thirty years in prison. We asked that he be reinstated and publicly cleared of all charges.

VIETNAM

Nguyen Vu Binh, an economist and activist, had been imprisoned since 2003. He is the founder of Democracy and Freedom, an independent organization. In September 2001, after publicly endorsing a petition to form a citizens' watchdog group against corruption, Binh was detained and repeatedly interrogated. He sent written testimony to the U.S. Congress in 2002 about human rights violations in Vietnam but was prevented by Vietnamese authorities from testifying in person. In December 2003 he was convicted for writing and posting on the Internet articles of a "reactionary nature" and was sentenced to seven years in prison and three years of house arrest. We appealed on his behalf. In June he was granted amnesty and released.

UNITED KINGDOM

A motion to boycott all Israeli academic institutions was proposed at the University and College Union's first Congress. The UCU was formed by the merger of two unions, AUT and NATFHE, which had entertained similar boycott proposals in the past. We protested this boycott proposal, as with earlier ones. In September the UCU announced that, after seeking legal advice, they had determined that an academic boycott of Israel would be unlawful and could not be implemented.

UNITED STATES

Dr. Robert Ferrell, Professor of Human Genetics at the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health, has been charged with "mail fraud" and "wire fraud" for having ordered a sample of *S. marsescens*, a non-pathogenic bacterium, from ATCC, and for having sent it to Steven Kurtz, a Buffalo, NY artist. Dr. Ferrell was initially charged with bioterrorism. The charges were then changed to mail fraud. Because of his serious illness, Dr. Ferrell chose to plead guilty rather than face a prolonged trial. We appealed directly to the court, asking that the charges be dismissed. Dr. Ferrell received the lightest possible sentence under the law (see Good News, below).

Abdul Hamid al-Ghizzawi, a Libyan meteorologist who has been held at the Guantanamo detention facility since 2002, is in grave ill-health. Mr. al-Ghizzawi has been held in indefinite detention at Guantanamo under harsh conditions. According to his lawyer, Mr. al-Ghizzawi reportedly was diagnosed with hepatitis B shortly after he arrived at Guantanamo and, more recently, with tuberculosis, for which he has received no specialized medical treatment, despite repeated requests. We urged that he receive immediate lifesaving medical treatment.

GOOD NEWS

Dr. Robert Ferrell (see United States) was given the most lenient sentence which the law allowed: one year's unsupervised probation and a fine of \$500.

Dr. Berhanu Nega, a professor of economics and mayor-elect of Addis Ababa, was freed in August after having been held as a political prisoner in Ethiopia since 2005.

Nguyen Vu Binh (see Vietnam, above) was granted amnesty in June and released.

Dr. Haleh Esfandiari (see Iran, above) was released in August and allowed to leave Iran.

The five Bulgarian nurses and the Palestinian doctor (see Libya, above) on whose behalf we have written repeatedly were finally released after being imprisoned and repeatedly tried in Libya since 1999.

The sentence handed down to Dr. Kanstantsin Lukashou (see Belarus, above) has been vacated.

The UCU (see United Kingdom, above) was forced to abandon its latest boycott proposal against Israeli universities after determining that the boycott would be unlawful.

In January of 2008 Turkey was expected to pass an amendment that would weaken Article 301, the law that prohibits “insulting Turkishness,” under which a number of writers and intellectuals have been prosecuted and which we have repeatedly deplored.

On December 4, 2007, four of the professors arrested in Bangladesh after student protests (see Bangladesh, above) were sentenced to two years’ imprisonment, but this sentence was overturned on December 10 when President Iajuddin Ahmed pardoned them following protests by students and teachers. Similar presidential pardons followed for the other professors on January 22, 2008.

In January 2008, we wrote on behalf of a 23-year old journalism student in Afghanistan, Sayed Perviz Kambakhsh, who had been sentenced to death for downloading and circulating an Internet article that questioned why men, but not women, were allowed four spouses under Islam. A Senate ruling upholding the sentence was overturned, and Kambakhsh can now petition the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court of Afghanistan against his conviction before appealing for presidential pardon.

CONCLUSION

In 2007, as new threats to human rights emerged in such areas as China and Iran, and as harassment of academics came to light even in Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States, CCS continued to watch over beleaguered colleagues. Some of these face torture, harsh treatment and danger to their very lives in the prisons of the world. Many have risked their own safety in order to speak out against repressive conditions in their home countries, to continue their scholarly work in the face of obstacles, and to draw attention to the ongoing struggle for human rights.

As always, we offer our particular gratitude to our co-chairs, Joel Lebowitz, Paul Plotz and Walter Reich, whose vigorous initiative, kindness, and wise counsel make our continuing endeavors possible.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Penso

Executive Director