ARTISTS FOR AMNESTY

ARTISTS FOR AMNESTY IS A GROUP OF ARTISTS COMMITTED TO PREVENTING HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES, SAVING LIVES AND PROMOTING A GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHTS.

MONTHLY BULLETIN

MARCH 2004

Welcome to the *Artists for Amnesty Monthly Bulletin*, which will keep you informed on critical human rights issues, cases of individuals at risk, and the life-saving work of Amnesty International. Our Monthly Bulletin will also highlight the efforts of artists on behalf of human rights.

STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

This month Amnesty International launches its campaign to Stop Violence Against Women. Whether it is the brutal rape and murder of the women of Juarez, the acceptance of domestic violence throughout the world, or the use of rape as a tool of war, women from all walks of life all over the world constantly face the threat of violence. Too often we see governments at the local, county, state and national level fail to respond to these threats, and in some cases, embrace them as a matter of cultural pride.

This attitude denies women's enjoyment of the full breadth of human rights, and relegates women to the status of second-class citizens. Despite the many gains that have been made in recognizing that women's rights are human rights, women continue to face horrific human rights abuses and tragic circumstances in which they find themselves labeled as "collateral damage" during armed conflicts and social unrest.

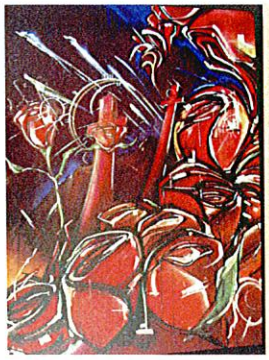
On March 9, Amnesty International will launch its Stop Violence Against Women Campaign at Creative Artists Agency in Los Angeles (*see attached flyer for details*). The evening's program will include remarks by artists, torture survivors, and activists. Video presentations on violence against women in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Juárez, Mexico will be shown. Amnesty's Stop Violence Against Women Campaign report will be available at the event. This is an important two-year campaign and we intend to save lives around the world through education and activism. On March 9, we will educate, motivate and inspire all those in attendance to take action to protect women and promote human rights.

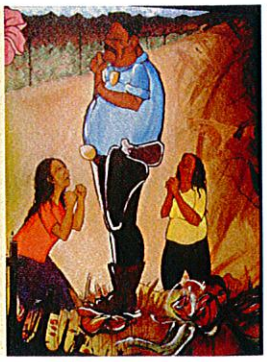
Amnesty International is addressing this issue around the globe:

COLOMBIA **ESPERANZA AMARIS MIRANDA** was a member of the Popular Women's Organization (OFP), which has campaigned for women's rights for more than 30 years. Three armed men reportedly abducted Esperanza Amaris Miranda from her home on October 16, 2003. The men – apparently members of the army-backed Central Bolivar Bloc paramilitary forces – forced her into a taxi and drove away. A few minutes later, Esperanza's body was abandoned in the road. She had been shot. In Colombia, women who speak out for their rights face intimidation, violence and even death from armed groups on both sides of the country's long-running internal conflict. Government security forces and their paramilitary allies have labeled women community leaders, activists and human rights defenders as guerrilla collaborators and legitimate targets in the counter-insurgency war. Armed opposition groups have killed women they accuse of siding with their enemies.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO Thousands of woman and girls have been raped and killed with complete impunity. For example, on May 16, 2003, a soldier broke into **KAVIRA MARAULU'S** home in Mangangu and raped her. She lodged a complaint the next day, and he and his friends came back and beat her. Undaunted, she continued to complain. When she complained to his commander, he ordered the soldier to pay her compensation. After he refused to comply, she took her complaint to the local district governor. He reassured her and sent her home. Her attacker and other soldiers then seized her in her fields, tied her up and beat her. They stopped when a woman threatened them with a gun. Kavira returned to the district official, who tried to persuade her to retract her accusation. She was attacked once again.

MEXICO The murders and abductions of young women in Chihuahua state are no longer limited to Ciudad Juárez, but now include several cases in the city of Chihuahua, including the case of 16 year-old **VIVIANA RAYAS**, whose body was found in an isolated area of Chihuahua on May 28th. Viviana was the eighth young woman to go missing in the city of Chihuahua since December 2002. **EVANGELINA ARCE**, the mother of **SILVIA ARCE**, who went missing in March 1998 in Ciudad Juárez, reported acts of intimidation and assault against her in 2003 following her statement to the Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos about the failure of authorities to effectively investigate the disappearance of her daughter. Likewise, Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of women's rights defender Marisela Ortiz Rivera and other members of "Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa" in Ciudad Juárez following recent threats against them. We call on the authorities to extend necessary protections to the families and human rights defenders involved in these cases, and to fully investigate all cases of intimidation or threats against them.





Images of the mural dedicated to the murdered and disappeared women of Juárez, Mexico.

GET UP, STAND UP

URGE ATTORNEY GENERAL ASHCROFT TO PROTECT RODI ALVARADO AND OTHER WOMEN FLEEING GENDER PERSECUTION

Women march against domestic violence in Guatemala. © AFP

Nearly a year ago, Attorney General John Ashcroft said that he would personally decide the asylum case of Rodi Alvarado, a Guatemalan woman whose government failed to protect her during ten years of horrific abuse by her husband. Ashcroft also said he would issue regulations that could bar many people, especially women fleeing gender-based persecution, from asylum in the United States. Fearing that the Attorney General would deny Ms. Alvarado asylum and issue restrictive regulations, Amnesty campaigned to prevent such a decision. Next week, the Attorney General will receive briefs in the case from Rodi Alvarado's lawyer, from a large group of organizations including Amnesty, and from the Department of Homeland Security (for the government). Please write immediately to Attorney General Ashcroft asking him not to revoke the granting of asylum to Rodi Alvarado.

In addition, new asylum regulations could severely limit women asylum-seekers fleeing "honor killing", sexual slavery, domestic violence, and other gross human rights violations. The regulations might also limit other types of asylum claims in which persecution is committed by non-state actors (such as a husband, in Alvarado's case) and where the government egregiously failed to protect the asylum-seeker against the abuse. Amnesty International believes that the immigration judge correctly granted asylum to Rodi Alvarado. Along with nearly 100 other human rights, women's rights, and faith-based organizations, Amnesty signed an amicus curiae ("friend of the court") brief that was submitted to the Department of Justice in February.

TAKE ACTION

Please send appeals in your own words as quickly as possible to U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft. Express concern about the protection of women refugees fleeing gender persecution, and urge him not to reinstate the Board of Immigration Appeal's Matter of R-A- decision and not to issue regulations which would provide for the same outcome.

Send letters to:

The Honorable John Ashcroft
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

TIBETAN PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE FREED

Amnesty International welcomes the release of **PHUNTSOG NYIDRON**, Tibet's longest serving female political prisoner. Phuntsog Nyidron was due for release in March 2005. The formal reason for her early release remains unclear, but the Chinese authorities have reportedly said that it is a "humanitarian gesture". China frequently releases high-profile prisoners in the run-up to important political and diplomatic occasions. It is thought that the timing of her release may be connected to the upcoming session of the UN Commission on Human Rights as well as the European Union-China human rights dialogue which is currently taking place in Dublin.

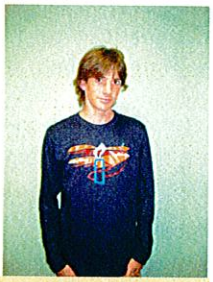
Phuntsog Nyidron was one of six nuns who staged a peaceful protest in central Lhasa in 1989 calling for Tibetan independence. She was initially sentenced to nine years at a secret trial, but in 1993 her sentence was increased by eight years on a charge of "spreading counter-revolutionary propaganda" from her cell, when she and 13 other nuns secretly recorded songs calling for Tibetan independence. Phuntsog Nyidron is last of these "singing nuns" to be released. An estimated 145 Tibetan political prisoners are currently held in Chinese prisons, with around 70 held in Drapchi.

"No matter how hard we are beaten,
Our linked arms cannot be separated...
The time will come when the sun
Will shine through the clouds."

- Lines from a song recorded by the nuns of Drapchi prison.

ARTISTS FOR AMNESTY GEAR

ZOE ZIMMER modeling the AFA scarves honoring the women of Juárez.



LARISSA PELTOLA and **BEN BJELAJAC** show off the AFA t-shirts designed by Tracy Wilkinson.

For information: 310.815.0450, afa@aiusa.org

SPECIAL EVENTS

MARCH 9, Launch of Amnesty International's Campaign to Stop Violence Against Women at Creative Artists Agency, 9830 Wilshire Blvd., Beverly Hills.

7:00pm **RSVP: 310.815.0450**

SAVE THE DATE
CUBAN ART EXHIBIT, A & D Museum, West Hollywood
APRIL 1-5

JOIN ARTISTS FOR AMNESTY

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AFA MONTHLY BULLETIN Edited by Bonnie Abaunza and Mario Tafur