
BRIEF COMMUNITY NEWS

In an effort to broaden the communication among human rights groups around the world, the *Human Rights Brief* is proud to introduce "Brief Community News." It is our hope that various NGOs across the globe will use this space to inform others about their programs, successes, and challenges. "Brief Community News" will be published in every issue and invites submissions from all human rights groups. If you would like to contribute, please see the information at the end of the article.

The Mauritius Chapter of the Southern Africa Human Rights NGO Network (SAHRINGON)

SAHRINGON is currently seeking signatures on a petition protesting the presence of the U.S. military base on the island of Diego Garcia, which is part of the Chagos Island chain, and the treatment of Mauritians who claim the Chagos Islands as their place of origin. According to the petition, Britain illegally claimed the 65 Chagos Islands from the Mauritius Islands chain in 1965. Britain later sold the island of Diego Garcia to the United States to be used as a military base in exchange for Polaris missiles. As a condition of the sale, the island was "depopulated" of its 2000 residents, who were forcibly transferred to Mauritius and the Seychelles by U.S. and British authorities between 1965 and 1973.

The petition claims that the United States operates a base on Diego Garcia for U.S. B-52 bombers that have been used against Iraq and Afghanistan. In addition, the petition notes that displaced Mauritians of Chagosian origin have been peacefully seeking to return to the Chagos Islands since their removal from their homeland. Signatories to the petition are seeking:

1. The immediate closure of the U.S. military base on Diego Garcia;
2. The complete decolonization of Africa through the disbanding of the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) and the reunification of the Republic of Mauritius;
3. Support for an independent assessment of the ecological damage caused by thirty years of U.S. occupation;
4. Support for reparations, including the compensation and resettlement of Mauritians of Chagosian origin; and
5. Action by the Government of Mauritius to proclaim the Chagos Archipelago as the 22nd electoral constituency of the Republic of Mauritius.

For more information on the petition or to lend your support as a signatory please contact Lindsay Morvan, national program coordinator for SAHRINGON (Mauritius) at mprbsn@intnet.mu or lmorvan@intnet.mu.

The Indian Social Institute (ISI)

The Indian Social Institute, located in Bangalore, India, will hold a three-day seminar in March entitled "Seminar on Brahminism, Its Impact on Dalits, Backward Castes & Minorities, and a Search for an Alternative Ideology." According to the ISI, Brahminism is perhaps the oldest and most enduring ideology. This minority-led system, based on strict caste separation and subservience, has greatly influenced the majority and defined the life and destiny of Indian people for thousands of years. The impact of its enduring legacy is felt even today

in day-to-day life and in the general decay of the nation.

The ISI also claims that "the power and cunning of Brahminical ideology was most devastating in the life of Dalits and other backward classes. Thousands of years ago it paved the way for their enslavement and dehumanization from which they have not yet fully recovered. . . . What is more, if our country is still backward in every respect, it is because of the Brahminical ideology that was effectively used to keep the vast majority of our people ignorant, superstitious and poor."

The ISI has also commented that "[i]n the context of Dalit resurgence on the one hand and Dalit disunity and its ambivalent stand vis-à-vis Brahminism and Hindutva on the other, it is important to expose threadbare the true nature and character of Brahminism and how it has kept the country chronically poor, backward and seething with a multitude of problems." For more information please contact Devasahayam Albert, S.J., coordinator of the Human Rights and Legal Services Unit at the Indian Social Institute at office@isi-blr.org or devalbert@yahoo.co.in.

The Moldova Helsinki Committee for Human Rights

Last September Stefan Uritu, chairman of the Moldova Helsinki Committee for Human Rights (Committee) delivered a speech at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Human Dimension Implementation Meeting concerning the rule of law in Moldova. A synopsis of his remarks follows:

"In our opinion, the new reform of the judiciary system, initiated by the current authorities, leads to subordination of the judicial system to the political will of the ruling party. . . . In the Republic of Moldova, non-execution of court decisions has become a norm. More than 50 percent of court decisions issued on civil actions are not executed. . . . It is difficult to talk about the equity of the judge if his decision was not executed and, moreover, if the execution of such a decision is ignored by the representatives of high structure of the executive power. . . ."

According to the Committee, more than 300 court actions gained by the citizens against the Ministry of Finances and some dozens against the Ministry of Transport are still waiting to be executed. Uritu further remarked that the situation in the Transnistrian region, controlled by the separatist regime of Igor Smirnov, is even worse. In that region, there are hundreds of invented places for detention such as office basements and similar places that are filled with political prisoners, whose rights to a fair trial have been violated. As a rule, political prisoners do not recognize the self-proclaimed Transnistrian authorities. These authorities value only politics and what is beneficial for the established regime in that region and consign political prisoners to puppet constitutional courts.

For more information on these issues or for the full text of this speech, please contact Mr. Uritu at suritu@chdom.ngo.moldnet.md, or visit the Web site at <http://chdom.ngo.moldnet.md>.

The Inter-American Institute for Human Rights (IIDH)

The Inter-American Institute for Human Rights is an organization based in San José, Costa Rica, dedicated to human

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rights education and academic research. IIDH is currently engaged in over 50 local and regional projects focusing on human rights education for public institutions and other NGOs.

From November 7–8, 2002, members of the Working Group for the Fifth Section of the Declaration Project met in Washington, D.C. to discuss property, cultural survival, and the right to land and territories. The objective of the event was for experts to present their findings and create a forum for debate about the traditional forms of property in legislation and practice in the region, such as the concepts of land, territory, and natural resources.

From November 11–12, 2002, officials from the IIDH met with the National Union of Cuban Jurists in Havana, Cuba. The two organizations have had a four-year partnership during which they have examined, through seminars and publications, Cuba's participation in international treaties. During this visit the IIDH delegation addressed issues of human rights, gender, and the application of international human rights law in domestic law. For more information please contact Marisol Molestina, coordinator of the Information and Editorial Services Unit at mmolestina@iidh.ed.cr, or see IIDH's Web site at www.iidh.ed.cr.

The Human Rights Brief is accepting submissions for the next edition of "Brief Community News." If your organization has an event or situation it would like to publicize, please send a brief description

to hbrbrief@wcl.american.edu, and be sure to include "Brief Community News" in the subject heading of the message. Please limit your submissions to two paragraphs. The Human Rights Brief reserves the right to edit for content and space limitations.



CORRECTION

In "News from the International Criminal Tribunals" in Volume 10, Issue 1 of the *Human Rights Brief*, the author drafted the sixth sentence in the third paragraph on page 27 as: "The amnesty provisions contained in the Lomé Agreement are applicable to crimes that originate from Sierra Leonean law, as opposed to those crimes originating in international humanitarian law." The author's language was inadvertently changed in the editing process. We apologize to the author and our readers.



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