

Secretary General's Report¹ to the 2013 International Council Meeting (ICM)

Introduction

Since the last ICM 2 years ago, we have seen both highs and lows in terms of human rights victories and violations. This report focuses on AI's achievements in the last 2 years. The 12 themes below are based on the "critical pathways" which are used to guide the work of AI.

(i) Control Arms

The global Arms Trade Treaty, finally agreed at the UN in April 2013, is a historic achievement for AI. The only "no" votes were from **North Korea, Syria** and **Iran**. The impact of the AI movement was powerful. AI was responsible for 90% of the half million plus signatures collected during the collaborative ATT Global Appeal in 2012 and AI successfully pushed for gender-based violence to be factored into the treaty.

(ii) Death Penalty

The momentum remains positive. **Latvia**, and the states of Connecticut and Maryland in the **USA**, have all abolished the death penalty in the last 2 years. **Mongolia** and **Benin** have both made a legal commitment to abolish. Unfortunately there are also reversals, including in **Indonesia, India, Pakistan** and **Nigeria**. Entrenched opposition remains from several countries including the **US, Iran, China** and **Belarus**.

(iii) International Justice

A decade after the creation of the International Criminal Court (ICC), international justice is globally acknowledged. In 2012, thanks to the work of AI and others, Thomas Lubanga became the first person convicted by the court, for war crimes in the **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**. AI played an important role in the referrals to the ICC of the situations in **Ivory Coast** and **Mali** and is monitoring referrals from **Kenya**. AI's Centre for International Justice was launched in The Hague to strengthen work with the ICC.

(iv) Freedom of Expression

The 2012 Letter Writing Marathon was the most successful ever – 1.5m actions taken on behalf of 12 cases of Individuals at Risk. AI's campaigning on individual prisoners of conscience had a positive impact in many countries, e.g. **Russia**, where members of Pussy Riot acknowledged our impact on their cases, and in **Turkey** where AI played in key role in highlighting abuses and pressing for change.

(v) Armed conflict

AI's reporting of abuses in **Syria** has been important as the conflict has unfolded, and will also become important later when seeking accountability for crimes against humanity. AI's campaign for accountability in **Sri Lanka** was reflected in the UN Human Rights Council's call for an independent investigation into allegations of violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law during and after the conflict. AI has raised the profile of human rights and humanitarian law concerns in countries such as **DRC** and **Pakistan**. In **Mali** our pressure led to inquiries into allegations of extrajudicial executions.

(vi) Criminal justice

We continued to see important changes in **Myanmar** with many prisoners of conscience being released. Aung San Suu Kyi was allowed to travel to Europe and the US and to accept her Nobel Peace Prize. She joined AI supporters at different events and thanked us for our campaigning. AI's work on accountability in **Tunisia** culminated in the exhumation of the body of Faycal Barakat who died under torture in custody, 20 years ago, as documented by AI at the time. In **Egypt** AI highlighted impunity for military abuses and was the first organisation to document "virginity tests". Our work on gender-based violence has been used to press the case for reform. In **Libya** AI visited dozens of detention centres and raised concerns about abuses such as torture, helping to spur progress towards oversight by relevant ministries. In **Yemen** the

¹ This article summarises *2013 ICM Circular 17: Secretary General's report to the 2013 ICM* (ORG 50/011/2013). The report is in 3 parts: (1) Introduction (2) Thanks to your tireless efforts, **what did we achieve in the last two years?** (3) The Internal Change Agenda. This paper summarises topics drawn from the first two parts.

authorities took up AI's call for investigations into violations of human rights and humanitarian law. In **Rwanda** AI's research into unlawful detention and allegations of torture shaped the Committee Against Torture's conclusions and AI advocacy resulted in diplomatic pressure on the Rwandan government to accept responsibility for the unlawful detention of civilians. In **Russia** AI's work led to a new unit being established within the federal Investigative Committee to investigate crimes by law enforcement officials.

(vii) Security with Human Rights

The **European** Parliament adopted a report condemning Member States' lack of accountability for their involvement in the US-led renditions programme. AI had campaigned for this, including handing a petition with thousands of signatures to the Parliament's President. The campaign also led to: charges being brought in **Poland** against the Head of Intelligence concerning renditions and secret detentions; an investigation in **Finland** compelling authorities to produce information previously held as confidential, and the sentencing in **Italy** of officials involved in rendition. In **India** AI pressure led to the adoption by the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly of an amendment of the Public Safety Act which prevents the detention of children and campaigned for the release of 3 teenagers arrested under its terms.

(viii) Ending Discrimination

After a decade of campaigning by AI and others, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights found the state in **Ecuador** responsible for putting the lives and livelihoods of the Sarayaku people at risk. AI has campaigned for 2 indigenous communities in **Paraguay** where the government decided to grant them their land back. AI supported the organisers of the first ever LGBT Pride march in Kyiv, **Ukraine**. In **Cameroon** 2 men we had campaigned for, sentenced to imprisonment for homosexuality, were acquitted. The EU acknowledged AI as a key driver in progress in holding Member States accountable for failure to respect anti-discrimination laws where **Roma** are concerned. The EU is investigating **Italy**, the **Czech Republic**, **Slovakia**, **Greece** and **Romania** for discrimination against Roma regarding housing and education.

(ix) Make Corporates Accountable

AI research and legal expertise was used in a court case resulting in the historic outcome of the Economic Community of West African States directing the government of **Nigeria** to hold oil companies to account for abuses of human rights. AI collaborated with Greenpeace to produce the report *Toxic Truth* on the basis of which we secured a legal review at the UN agency dealing with toxic waste and human rights. The report also underpins work to have extra-territorial obligations more widely enforced, including for example the **Dutch** state's responsibility for human rights violations in **Ivory Coast**. AI played an important role in the campaign on behalf of local indigenous Adivasi communities affected by the UK company Vedanta Resources plans for a bauxite mine in **India** – the Indian Supreme Court ruled that the final decision lay with the Adivasi. AI and Friends of the Earth successfully brought a complaint against Shell, for breach of OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, regarding oil pollution in **Nigeria**.

(x) Maternal Health and Sexual and Reproductive Rights

AI campaigning and advocacy contributed to bringing about real change in countries such as **Sierra Leone** including increased access to health services. AI's intervention in **El Salvador** showed the power of international solidarity in saving the life of a young woman requiring an abortion in life-threatening circumstances, in a country where abortion is illegal in all circumstances.

(xi) Slums

Thanks to the section-led Rapid Response Forced Evictions Network, forced evictions were stopped in **Romania**, and **Italy** and are being discussed by government in **Haiti**.

(xii) Protect People on the Move

AI highlighted the risks facing migrants and refugees trying to reach **Europe**. In a key change, the European Court of Human Rights judgement against **Italy** put legal restrictions on interception operations which should improve protection for people travelling by boat to Europe. Following extensive advocacy work, Italy has declared that its policy on 'push back' at sea will no longer be applied.