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## GOOD NEWS!

### Cecillia Chimbiri and Joanah Mamombe have been acquitted Zimbabwean authorities falsely accused the two activists of faking their own abduction

In July 2023, Cecillia Chimbiri and Joanah Mamombe were acquitted at a court in Harare, Zimbabwe, of “faking” their own abduction. Coming after a three-year ordeal, this wonderful news was long overdue.

It all began in May 2020 when Cecillia, Joanah and a third woman, Netsai Marova, led a peaceful anti-government protest. Following the protest, the three women were brutally attacked. Police forced them into an unmarked car, and then, with hoods over their heads, they were driven out of the city. Fearing for their lives, the women were thrown into a pit and beaten. They were found two days later—miles from Harare, covered in cuts and bruises, and with their clothes torn.

While still hospitalized, Cecillia, Joanah and Netsai were charged with criminal offences. Prison guards and police officers were at the hospital to prevent them from talking to journalists. After stating that they recognized some of their attackers, the women were re-arrested in June 2020 and charged with faking their ordeal. (Netsai later managed to leave Zimbabwe.)

**WRITE A LETTER.  
CHANGE A LIFE.**  
See back page to learn about taking part in this year's Write for Rights event.

#### A Write for Rights success story

Cecillia and Joanah’s case was part of last year’s Write for Rights campaign in support of brave individuals from around the world who paid a price for speaking truth to power. Over 500,000 Amnesty supporters globally took action in support of Cecillia and Joanah. Amnesty International Zimbabwe further supported Cecillia and Joanah through trial observation and by mobilizing local and international solidarity for them.

A P.S. to this story is that, in August, just a few weeks after her acquittal, Joanah Mamombe was re-elected as an MP to Zimbabwe’s Parliament.

# GOOD NEWS

## Tunisia: Opposition figure Chaima Issa freed

On July 13, Chaima Issa was released from prison in Tunis. Chaima is a prominent Tunisian activist and leading political opposition figure.

Chaima was arrested in February while driving in Tunis with her sister. She was detained along with other opposition figures on unfounded conspiracy accusations. In a separate case, a military court also investigated Chaima under draconian cybercrime laws—just for remarks about the authorities she made during a radio interview. Under international human rights law, civilians should never be tried before military courts. If tried and convicted, Chaima could have faced up to 10 years in prison. The authorities also barred her from travelling abroad.



Chaima Issa greets her family and supporters after her release from prison.

Chaima should never have set foot in prison at all. The Tunisian authorities must stop persecuting people for peacefully exercising their human rights.

## Egypt: Mohamed el-Baqer reunited with his family

It was a huge relief when human rights lawyer Mohamed el-Baqer was freed from prison in July and reunited with his loved ones.

Mohamed el-Baqer is director of the Adalah Center for Rights and Freedoms, which he founded in 2014. His organization focuses on criminal justice, the right to education and students' rights. In September 2019 he was detained in cruel conditions and falsely accused of joining and financing a terrorist group—all because of his peaceful human rights work.

Amnesty International supporters around the world called for Mohamed to be immediately released and for all charges to be dropped. The campaign to free him was long—almost four years—but Mohamed's family, friends, and supporters never gave up.



Human rights lawyer Mohamed el-Baqer hugs a relative following his release.

## Angola: Activist Tanaice Neutro released

On June 23, Angolan activist and musician Tanaice Neutro was released from detention after 18 months. Tanaice was arrested in 2022 in connection with his peaceful activism—posting videos on social media expressing frustration with the situation in Angola.

In October 2022, Tanaice was tried and handed a suspended sentence of 15 months. The judge, however, ordered his immediate release on health grounds. But the penitentiary services refused to release him. On May 18, 2023, a court yet again ordered the authorities to release him. And again, the penitentiary services, even after the court order, still refused to release him!

Angola's Minister of Interior paid a visit to Tanaice Neutro on June 22 while he was still in detention, assuring him that he would be freed. Tanaice was finally released the next day.



Tanaice Neutro was finally freed eight months after a judge ordered his release.

## Myanmar: 2,153 political prisoners pardoned

On May 3, Myanmar's military authorities announced they would pardon and release 2,153 prisoners jailed under a law that makes it illegal to encourage dissent against the military. The law has been widely enforced since a military coup in February 2021.

The release of the prisoners is long overdue. Anyone imprisoned for peacefully opposing the military coup should never have been put in jail in the first place. Amnesty International remains deeply concerned about the thousands of others who are still languishing in prisons where they face torture and other ill-treatment.

Since the coup in 2021, Amnesty has documented widespread human rights violations, including war crimes and possible crimes against humanity, as part of the military's crackdown on opposition in Myanmar.



Relatives gather around a bus carrying prisoners being released in Myanmar.

## Iran: Aid worker Olivier Vandecasteele released

In May 2023, Belgian aid worker Olivier Vandecasteele was freed in Iran. He had been unjustly sentenced to 40 years in prison and 74 lashes. Olivier was convicted of espionage after a closed-door trial, and during his time in detention he was tortured, isolated, and denied healthcare.

Amnesty International challenged the injustice of Olivier's case, and Amnesty supporters called on Iran's Head of Judiciary to reveal Olivier's whereabouts and release him from prison.

While Olivier's release was very welcome, it was also part of a prisoner swap. The Iranian authorities are known for taking foreigners hostage as leverage over other governments. Amnesty continues to campaign to ensure the Iranian authorities are held accountable for their human rights abuses, including their repeated hostage-taking



Olivier Vandecasteele embraces family members as he arrives in Belgium after almost 15 months of captivity in Iran.

## Egypt: Patrick Zaki freed, returns to Italy

Egypt's President el-Sisi pardoned human rights defender Patrick Zaki on July 19, a day after Patrick was unjustly sentenced to three years in prison. A few days later, Patrick returned to Italy where he had been a graduate student.

Patrick's ordeal began when he was arrested in Cairo in February 2020. At the time, Patrick was visiting Egypt to see his family. He was accused of spreading "false news" and "incitement to protest" because he wrote an article describing the discrimination faced by Coptic Christians in Egypt.

Patrick was being punished solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression, and Amnesty International declared him a prisoner of conscience and called for his immediate release. While Patrick's freedom is good news, it is time for Egypt's authorities to release the thousands of others jailed for exercising their human rights.



Human rights defender Patrick Zaki returned to Italy after his release from prison in Egypt.



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Demonstrators hold a candlelight vigil to protest against sexual assault taking place during ethnic clashes in Manipur, India.

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Your generous support helps to save lives. Without you, Amnesty’s researchers, campaigners, and lawyers would not be able to carry out their critical work. By funding Amnesty’s work worldwide, you are ensuring that Amnesty teams are exposing human rights violations wherever they happen and holding those responsible for abuses to account. On these pages we feature just a few of the countries that Amnesty’s experts have been focused on in recent months.

**INDIA**

Violence between ethnic groups in the North-Eastern state of Manipur has left more than 100 people dead and scores of others injured. Since the violence began in May, entire communities have been terrorized, their houses and property burned, looted, and vandalized. More than 50,000 people have been forced to flee. Amnesty has been urging the authorities to work with civil society groups and community members of all ethnic groups to ensure that peace and security is restored and human rights are respected.



© AFP/Getty Images

Police officers detain a protester in Saint Petersburg. Russians who speak out against the war in Ukraine face severe reprisals from the authorities.

**RUSSIA**

A recent Amnesty report has exposed how the Russian authorities are suppressing the anti-war movement in Russia. Since their full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the authorities have been using increasingly vicious tactics to crack down on anti-war activists and silence criticism of the war inside Russia. Over 20,000 activists have been subjected to heavy reprisals including imprisonment.



Amnesty activists protest outside the Chinese embassy in the Netherlands against the mass detention of Uyghur people.

**CHINA**

China’s human rights record is being reviewed at the UN’s Human Rights Council. As part of this periodic process, Amnesty has submitted a report documenting a long list of concerns including the Chinese authorities’ crimes against humanity against Uyghurs in Xinjiang, their ongoing crackdown on human rights in Hong Kong, and their attacks against human rights defenders throughout the country. Amnesty’s submission also raises concerns about freedom of expression, arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment, and unfair trials.

**ECUADOR**

Amnesty is demanding that the authorities end the crisis in Ecuador’s prisons. On July 22, in Guayaquil, a massacre broke out in the country’s largest prison. Two days later, the president declared a state of emergency in all prisons after 137 prison guards were taken hostage simultaneously in several prisons. Prisons in Ecuador are severely overcrowded and an estimated 600 people have died in them since 2019.

# the light for human rights around the world



The wreckage of a ship in southern Italy. Dozens of migrants died after the ship smashed onto rocks in February.

## ITALY

In the space of two weeks in February and March, two major shipwrecks claimed well over 100 lives in the Mediterranean including dozens of children. Many of those affected by the shipwrecks were from Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Palestine, Syria, and Somalia. Amnesty is deeply concerned that both these tragic events were the foreseeable outcome of successive Italian governments undermining the integrity of Italy's search and rescue system.



## CAMEROON

In recent years, the inhabitants of Cameroon's Anglophone regions have been caught between armed separatist groups, the army, and militias. Civilians have been subjected to unlawful killings, rapes, abductions and destruction of property. The authorities have responded with further human rights violations. Amnesty investigators have been conducting research in Cameroon and in July they issued a report exposing atrocities by armed separatists, militias, and members of the defence and security forces.



A destroyed car and buildings in a town in Cameroon. Many thousands of civilians have been caught up in fighting between armed groups and government forces.



Smoke plumes billow from fires in Khartoum, Sudan, during ongoing fighting between warring parties.

## SUDAN

Since April, warring parties have been fighting for control of Sudan. Thousands of civilians have been killed or injured. People have been killed inside their homes or while searching for food, water, and medicine. About half a million people have already fled the country. A recent Amnesty report, "Death Came to Our Home", documents mass civilian casualties caused by the warring parties' attacks. Amnesty has been calling on the international community to support the humanitarian response and prioritize the protection of civilians.



Police confront protesters at a demonstration in Lima, Peru, in January.

## PERU

After the removal from office and arrest of former President Pedro Castillo in December 2022, thousands of people took to the streets to protest, and the authorities responded with lethal force. Amnesty research teams have been in Peru meeting with survivors of human rights violations, relatives of victims, witnesses, human rights organizations, and officials. A recent Amnesty report, "Lethal Racism", analyzes dozens of cases of people killed or wounded, and exposes the racial bias of the Peruvian authorities in their response to the protests.

# GOOD NEWS

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Amnesty activists in Coquitlam calling for an end to immigration detention in Canada.

## Ontario will end immigration detention in provincial jails

In June, the campaign to end immigration detention in Canada passed a significant milestone when Ontario announced that its provincial jails will stop holding migrants and refugees who have been detained by the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA).

Ontario became the eighth province to opt out of holding people detained by CBSA. Ontario's decision came shortly after Quebec and New Brunswick announced that they would also end immigration detention in provincial jails. These three provinces joined British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia, which had already announced ending their contracts with CBSA.

However, there was discouraging news when it was learned that BC and Alberta had extended their contracts with CBSA by a further three months—even though the federal government and CBSA had had a full year to prepare for the withdrawal of immigration detention from BC and Alberta jails.

Immigration detention is a system that harms people seeking safety or a better life. According to a 2021 report by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, the system is unfairly punitive, breaches international human rights standards, and imposes severe harms on people's mental health. The practice is also discriminatory. Compared to other people in immigration detention, racialized individuals, especially Black men, are held in more restrictive conditions and for longer periods of time.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have called on the federal government to invest in community-based organizations that provide compassionate support, including detention alternatives that respect human rights. Ultimately, the federal government must end immigration detention across Canada.



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Thank you for your generous support!

## Leaving a gift in your will is a way to support brave rights defenders today, tomorrow and always



Hala Al-Madi is Amnesty International's legacy gift planner.

As I read the articles in this publication, I am moved deeply by stories of successes that have been achieved over time by brave human rights defenders. I feel a sense of pride in being a part of a global movement of people who put humanity first and strive to

do everything they can to ensure that injustices everywhere are unearthed and rectified.

I also know that changing laws and the pursuit of justice is a work of collaboration, solidarity, and partnership. If we are to rebuild the world into a truly just and equitable one, we need to ensure that we continue to strengthen movements that work to protect human rights.

Amnesty International does just that.

I want to play a part in ensuring that Amnesty continues to be there wherever and whenever injustices occur. This is why I have remembered Amnesty in my will because I want to be a part of this work beyond my lifetime.

I invite you to consider making human rights work a part of your legacy to the world. The process is simple. Whether you are creating your first will or revising it, all you need are Amnesty's legal name, address, and registration number, and to add a short paragraph that states your intention. You can find these details in the insert inside this newsletter—the insert is for you to keep for when the time is right.

If you would like to contact me directly, please email [halmadi@amnesty.ca](mailto:halmadi@amnesty.ca) or phone 613-744-7667 ext 223.

I'd love to hear from you! You can also visit [amnesty.ca/legacy](https://www.amnesty.ca/legacy) for more information

—Hala Al-Madi, Legacy Gift Planner at Amnesty International

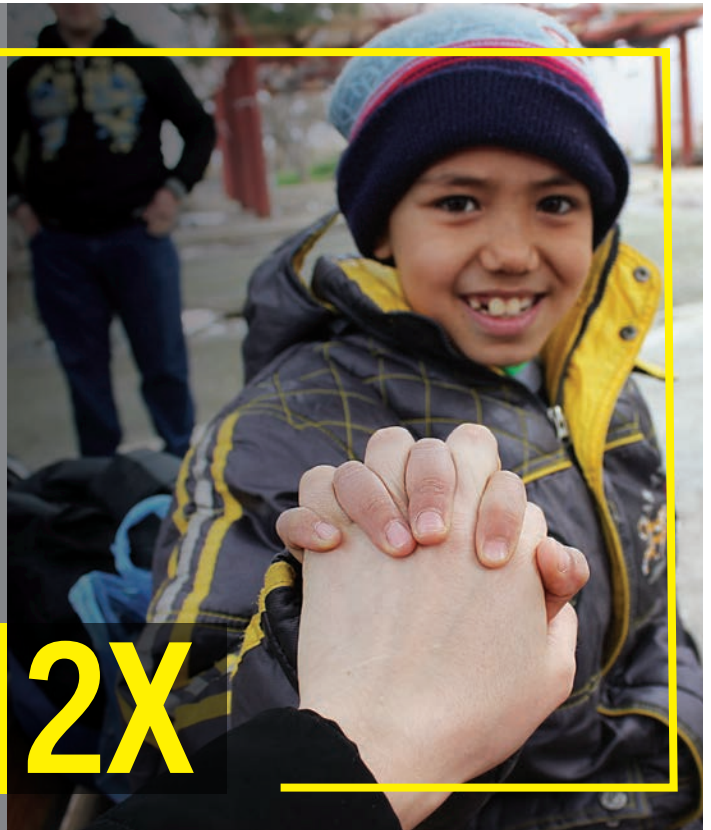
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