

To,
Claudio Cordone
Secretary General (ad interim)
Amnesty International International Secretariat
Peter Benenson House, 1 Easton Street
London WC1X 0DW, United Kingdom

29 March 2010

Dear Claudio,

Initiators of “The Global Petition: Restoring The Integrity of Human Rights” Respond to Amnesty International

Thank you for your letter of February 28, responding to the Global Petition to Amnesty International launched by us on February 13, 2010.

Our response is on behalf of ourselves, as the three initiators of the Petition. Given the public debate that the Petition has generated, we will make this response, as well as your letter to us, public in the interests of clarifying our position further.

We appreciate the fact that you acknowledge the importance of our concerns. As you have seen, a significant number of individuals and organizations from around the world, well known for their commitment to human rights and to the principle of universality of rights, have signed in support of the petition (see list below). The list of signatories represents a wide range of geographic and sectoral identities, and continues to grow every day. Some of the signatories are also taking the debate forward in other arenas. This is an acknowledgement of how critical the issues raised in the petition are in the present juncture and how deeply this controversy has touched the core of our commitment to the universality of human rights.

Through the Global Petition, we placed on record our concerns regarding the alliance between Amnesty International and Cageprisoners, which seems to us to have the potential to seriously undermine AI’s commitment to the principles of equality, in particular gender equality, and to a genuinely intersectional analysis of discrimination. It is with some alarm, therefore, that we see that Amnesty International has, since the controversy that evoked our concerns first emerged, continued to respond to the issues raised by Gita Sahgal, by us and by other concerned actors, with no clarification on the questions of principle that we raised through the Petition.

The three of us who initiated the petition are South Asian women and human rights defenders who have for many years confronted a range of challenges posed to democratic institutions and human rights values, in our region and throughout the world, by religious extremists who deny the equality of women and minorities and espouse an overall anti-democratic authoritarian agenda. On many occasions we have partnered with Amnesty International and other national and international human rights organizations to work collectively to advance the principle of all

human rights for all. We respect the work of Amnesty International and have excellent relationships with colleagues working within AI at the international and local levels. All of us have at one moment or the other actively supported the various campaigns launched by AI to defend the rights of victims of torture, of women and other communities that face discrimination and violence because of their status or identity.

It is this experience and these relationships that form the basis on which we articulate our concerns.

You are correct in saying that the central point of the present controversy relates to the policies and frameworks used by AI to determine the nature and limits of its partnerships and alliances. In our Petition we have voiced concerns regarding the alliance between Moazzam Begg and CagePrisoners and AI, using this case as an example of the potentially treacherous waters that lie in wait for any human rights defender or organization that fails to clearly and publicly state the basis on which decisions are made regarding partnership. Unfortunately this and other issues raised in the Global Petition are far from resolved. In fact, we are concerned that in seeking to clarify its position, Amnesty International has continued to shy away from the fundamental questions of principle raised by us and by others who have been involved in the discussions on these issues. As women's rights and human rights defenders working in environments in which all forms of extremism and identity-based politics dominate our region, we are consistently called upon to define boundaries and draw lines of engagement that call for investigation and for stringent and rigorous criteria to be put in place that do not allow for the trade off of one set of rights for another. We welcome your recent call for an inquiry into allegations of the UK government's involvement in human rights abuses like renditions, unlawful detention and torture overseas. Victims of violations committed by states in abusive counter-terror operations need justice and accountability. So too do victims of terrorism, especially in circumstances where several states and non-state actors with transnational networks might be involved. As human rights defenders we consider it our obligation to monitor such situations with the utmost care and ensure that what is considered to be 'strategic' does not become 'opportunistic'.

What we call for in the Petition and what we wish to reiterate in this letter is the imperative today for the public accountability of an organization such as Amnesty International.

The South Asian region is in a vortex of conflict and we are affected by this as well as by positions taken by international human rights organisations in relation to such conflicts. It is hence very important that Amnesty International respond to all who have expressed their concerns regarding this controversy and clarify AI's position. We wish to reiterate here that this issue is relevant not only within but beyond the South Asian or even Asian region, as is borne out by the experiences of colleagues and fellow human rights defenders in Africa and other regions. We are hence extremely concerned and shocked by the double standard being applied by Amnesty International - in response to the objections raised by Sam Zarifi, director of Amnesty's Asia-Pacific program to associating with Begg, Widney Brown is quoted in the article in The

Nation, April 5, 2010 as saying, "Sam's view was that, no, he was not the right person for [our South Asia campaigns]. He raised the concern, and he was heard." On what basis can you justify an alliance on such an issue that is legitimate in Europe and not in South Asia?

We must also state here that this is NOT the first time that we and many others have raised our concerns regarding the partnerships established by international human rights groups, including Amnesty International, with groups that are considered to be misogynist and inimical to women's rights and minority rights. On previous occasions similar concerns were raised by other signatories to the petition, for example, with regard to alliances made by Amnesty International with those supporting fundamentalist armed groups from Algeria.

In the present climate, within the mainstream human rights world, a serious challenge is being posed to the principles of universality and equality by a host of concessions to 'traditional values' and 'cultural rights'. The most recent resolution on the 'defamation of religion' at the Human Rights Council is but one example that strengthens our concerns in this area. We believe that Amnesty International, as a leading opinion-maker in the human rights arena, has a particular responsibility at this point in time to clarify its rationale and criteria for partnership, in particular the principled reasons which formed the basis on which it decided to enter into a partnership with CagePrisoners and Mr. Begg.

Regretfully your response does not provide clear answers and in fact has raised even more critical and troubling questions elaborated below on which we request you to respond further:

1) The concept of 'defensive jihad':

We believe that the question you raise in your letter as to whether the concept of 'defensive jihad' is antithetical to human rights, and your categorical statement that the response of Amnesty International to this question is 'NO', raises very serious concerns.

We are dismayed by this statement. Our considered opinion is that this is a highly contentious issue and not one which can be answered as firmly as you have done. The call for 'defensive jihad' is a thread running through many fundamentalist and specifically 'salafi-jihadi' texts. It is mentioned by Abdullah Azzam, mentor of Osama bin Laden, and founder of Lashkar e Tayyaba. It is the argument of 'defensive jihad' that the Taleban uses to legitimise its anti human rights actions such as the beheading of dissidents, including members of minority communities, and the public lashing of women. It is a similar logic of 'defence of religion' that is used by Christian groups to justify the killing of doctors providing abortion services as well as by Hindutva organisations seeking to justify their actions to 'liquidate' Muslims and Christians in India.

In your own organization, research done by Gita Sahgal and others for the last two years into the complex intersection between the preservation of the universality of human rights, terrorism and counter-terrorism in general as well as in relation to this specific case provides enough evidence of doubt and hence the need to proceed with caution. This is essential in order to maintain the

integrity of human rights and indeed of the organisation in each and every campaign as well as in each region it works. It has been shown that ‘defensive jihad’ results in indiscriminate attacks on civilians, attacks which are disproportionate and attacks which are targeted for the purpose of discrimination such as those on schools, shrines and religious processions. As you know, international humanitarian law prohibits all such attacks under Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions. Given this it is shocking to us that in your letter you appear to endorse ‘defensive jihad’ as a public position of Amnesty International position. Any human rights defender or organisation, which pledges commitment to the universality of human rights cannot confuse resistance against oppression with espousal of a political ideology committed to indiscriminate use of violence. Endorsement of the concept of ‘defensive jihad’ by an organization such as Amnesty International would call into question its commitment to research the ideological underpinnings of acts of terrorism and its commitment to the eradication of discrimination on the basis of sex/gender and religion.

Clarification of Amnesty International’s position on the concept of ‘defensive jihad’ is extremely urgent. In particular, the following questions must be addressed:

1. On what grounds did you decide that ‘defensive jihad’ and its aims are not antithetical to human rights?
2. Can you elaborate your examination of both the ideology of ‘defensive jihad’ and acts committed in its name for compliance with international humanitarian law, human rights law and international criminal law?
3. On what opinions did you rely? Which experts were consulted?

2) Investigative research which informs decisions on partnerships and alliances

We also seek clarity regarding the manner in which Amnesty’s own investigation into the human rights credentials of CagePrisoners and Mr. Begg was carried out. Even if the process is confidential, it is important for Amnesty International to give a full account of its findings and of the evidence thrown up by the research. In your letter you refer to certain websites and to public statements by the concerned individuals themselves. We call upon Amnesty International, as an organization, to make public the following information:

1. What process of investigation was carried out to determine whether Moazzam Begg was a suitable partner for AI?
2. If the response is based simply on Begg’s public statements, please explain why you find these persuasive in themselves, and not needing any confirmation from any other source?
3. Which experts did you consult in order to make your judgement?

With reference to Mr. Begg, you put forward the argument of AI's reluctance to 'betray the basic principle of fairness'. We too would like to reiterate our own commitment to this principle and point out that in fact our appeal to AI is to act with fairness in this case.

It is also in the interests of 'fairness' that we call on Amnesty International to open up spaces for internal dialogue and debate within the organization both at the level of national sections, with other human rights organizations, and within the International Secretariat in London regarding the questions raised by Gita Sahgal.

3) Continued suspension of Gita Sahgal

As Gita's colleagues in the global movement of women human rights defenders, we also remain gravely concerned regarding her continued suspension. We cannot concur that making public her concerns undermines her work or indeed that of AI. In fact, Gita's speaking out has created a space to begin a critically important public debate on the issues she has raised.

We understand that Gita decided to go public only when she felt that her concerns were not being addressed adequately within the organization. Indeed, as you state in your letter, she and others have raised the issue within the organisation several times in the last two years. If you say that AI values her contribution to the work of AI in the area of gender, human rights and counter-terrorism, it would be only fair to respect the right to be heard, not only in respect of Gita, but also others within Amnesty International who have also raised their concerns in this regard, in respect of this particular case of CagePrisoners and Moazzam Begg, and throughout the debates on issues of counter-terrorism and human rights. It is unfortunate that now Amnesty International is making public statements discrediting her work. Although all this raises considerable concern, we still hope that you will be scrupulous in your internal processes to ensure that she has a fair hearing.

We call on you to allow real internal debate and give individuals within the organisation including at the level of National Sections, the right to act according to their conscience and to exercise their freedom to dissent. We call for the reinstatement of Gita Sahgal and an independent public inquiry into the concerns she has raised.

We are glad to note your affirmation that AI is committed to working in partnership and giving voice to victims while maintaining impartiality and distinguishing between defending people's rights and promoting their views. It is exactly the basis and reasoning used by AI to make the above distinction that we are calling on you to make known to us, and to the public, as supporters of Amnesty International and much of its work.

We hope that AI can respond to our concerns in a manner that establishes a principled and transparent framework for making decisions regarding partnerships and alliances, moving beyond a focus on any specific individual or organization. We hope and expect that Amnesty International will act in a manner that could reaffirm its commitment to universality of human rights and enable continuation of the important work it has done in many areas for so many years.

Amrita Chhachhi

Sara Hossain

Sunila Abeysekera

Global Petition: List of prominent signatories

Rhonda Copelon (Director of IWHR (International Women's Human Rights Law Clinic, City University of NY) US

Meredith Tax (Writer and feminist organizer; President of Women's WORLD). US.

Michael Walzer (Political scientist at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, NJ, and editor of Dissent magazine). US.

Salman Rushdie (Internationally known writer; winner of the Booker Prize).

Amitav Ghosh (Writer and Professor of Comparative Literature at Queens College, NY; awarded the Padma Sri prize awarded by the Indian government). US and India.

Malalai Joya, (MP Afghani Parliament, suspended for criticizing warlords), Afghanistan.

Dr. Nawal El Sadaawi (Physician, writer, and former political prisoner) Egypt.

Martha Nussbaum (Professor of Law and Ethics, University of Chicago; c-founder of the Human Development and Capabilities Association with Amartya Sen) US.

Dr. Yakin Erturk (Former UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and board Member of UNRISD). Turkey

I. A. Rehman and Iqbal Haidar (the most senior members of Pakistan's Human Rights Commission) Pakistan

Farida Shaheed (UN Independent Expert on Cultural Rights and Director of Research at Shirkat Gah). Pakistan

Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak (Literary theorist and University Professor at Columbia, visiting faculty at Center for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta) US and India.

Marieme Helie-Lucas (Algerian sociologist and founder of Women Living Under Muslim Laws and coordinator of Secularism is a Women's Issue, siawi.org). Algeria and France.

Charlotte Bunch (Founder of the Center for Women's Global Leadership at Rutgers University, NJ). US.

Rosalind Petchesky (Professor of Women's Studies and Political Science, Hunter College and the Graduate Center at the City University of New York and MacArthur Fellow) US.

Katha Pollitt (Poet and columnist for The Nation magazine) US

Judy Norsigian (Cofounder and Executive Director of the Boston Women's Health Collective which publishes Our Bodies Ourselves) US

Jodie Evans (Environmental activist and founder member of CODEPINK, Women for Peace) US

Kum-Kum Bhavnani (Filmmaker) US

Gila Svirsky (Feminist peace activist, cofounder of Women in Black and the Coalition of Women for a Just Peace) Israel

Sonia Correa (Research associate at ABIA - Brazilian Interdisciplinary Association for AIDS, and DAWN coordinator for Sexual and Reproductive Rights and Health Research) Brazil

Carole Vance (Associate Clinical Professor of Sociomedical Sciences, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University) US

Steven Lukes (Professor of Politics and Sociology, New York University) US

Tom Harrison (Co-Director, Campaign for Peace and Democracy) US

Patricia McFadden (Editor of SAFERE, Southern African Feminist Review) Zimbabwe

Cynthia Fuchs Epstein (Distinguished Professor of Sociology at the Graduate Center, City University of NY) US

Kristen Booth Glen (Surrogate Court judge in Manhattan; former Dean of the Law School of the City University of New York). US.

Mariella Sala (Writer and former director of RELAT, a Latin American network of women writers; the Latin American Press Agency; and Flora Tristan women's association) Peru

Virginia Vargas (Sociologist; founder of the Flora Tristan women's association, and former Latin American coordinator for the 1995 UN Conference on Women in Beijing). Peru.

Dubravka Ugresic (Internationally known writer, formerly from Croatia; winner of many European prizes). Netherlands.

Wanda Nowicka (Polish feminist organizer; co-founder and Director of the Federation for Women and Family Planning, and co-founder of ASTRA, the Central and Eastern European Women's Network for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights) Poland

Dan Connell (Distinguished Lecturer in Journalism and African Politics, Simmons College, Boston) US

Lynne Segal (Socialist feminist writer and activist; Anniversary Professor of Psychology and Women's Studies, Birkbeck College, London.) UK.

Doug Ireland (Well known investigative journalist and defender of gay rights). US

Nayantara Sahgal (Celebrated writer, and former Indian Ambassador to Italy) India

Romila Thapar (Eminent Historian of Ancient India) India

Lilian Halls-French, President, European Feminist Initiative (IFE-EFI) France

J. Sri Raman (Senior journalist and Peace campaigner) India

Jean-Marie Matagne (Former presidential candidate, President of Action des Citoyens pour le Désarmement Nucléaire –ACDN) France

Madanjeet Singh (UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador and Founder of the South Asia Foundation) India

Kamla Bhasin (Co-President, PeaceWomen Across the Globe) India

Hameeda Hossain (South Asians For Human Rights) and ASK (Ain O Salish Kendra) a women's rights organization, Bangladesh

Yvonne Deutsch (co founder of Women in Black Jerusalem and founder Feminist Center in Jerusalem) Israel

Shabnam Hashmi (founder of Act Now for Harmony and Democracy -Anhad) India

Kushi Kabir (Feminist and founder of Nijrera Kori, women's mass organistaion) Bangladesh

Harsh Mander (former state official and founder of Aman Biradari) India

Andrej Grubacic (Associated with Global Balkans Network) USA

Sunanda Sen (renowned economist) India

Kumudini Samuel (Women and Media Collective) Sri Lanka

Uma Chakravarti (Feminist Historian, and human rights activist, India)

Amit Bhaduri (Professor Emeritus at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi) India

Caroline Fourest (Writer and journalist, Editor of the Journal Prochoix) France

Anand Patwardhan (documentary filmmaker and peace activist) India

Sooni Taraporevala (widely acclaimed film scenarist) India

Bruce Portugal Amoroto (Diversity and Equality) Philippines

Sonia Jay Wright (Rede Mulher & Democracia) Brazil

Houzan Mahmoud (Kurdish women's rights and peace activist and co-founder of the Iraqi Women's Rights Coalition) Iraq

Martha Villanueva / www.gruposaf.org

Rina Nissim (Women's Health Activist, Publisher) Switzerland

Stasa Zajovic (founder of Women in Black-Belgrade) Serbia

Ramachandra Guha (historian, and a regular columnist with The Telegraph of Calcutta.) India

Lino Veljak, University of Zagreb, Croatia

Asghar Ali Engineer (Director, Centre for Study of Society and Secularism) India

Sultana Kamal (Director of Ain O Salish Kendra and former advisor the Bangladesh Govt.) Bangladesh

Tanvir Mokammel (film maker) Bangladesh

Mazher Hussain (Director, Confederation of Voluntary Agencies –COVA) India

Jameela Nishat (Hyderabad-based feminist and poet) India

Gautam Navlakha (Editorial Consultant, Economic and Political Weekly, Bombay and a senior member of People's Union for Democratic rights)

Ruth Vanita (Feminist and Writer, former co-editor of the journal Manushi)

Kavita Srivastava (General Secretary of the People's Union for Civil Liberties) India

Deniz Kandiyoti (Reader at the Department of Development Studies and Chair of the Centre of Contemporary Central Asia and the Caucasus at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.) UK

Pierre Pradervand (writer and founder of vivre autrement) Switzerland

Mohammad Tahseen (Executive Director, South Asia Partnership-Pakistan) Pakistan

Sheema Kermani (Dancer, and Feminist. Founder of the group Tehrik e Niswan) Pakistan

Sheba Chhachhi (artist, photographer, feminist activist, and writer) India

Zoya Hasan (Professor of Political Science at Jawaharlal Nehru University) India

Dr Abid Suleri (Executive Director Sustainable Development Policy Institute -SDPI Islamabad (Pakistan)

Sonia Jabbar (writer, journalist, photographer, filmmaker) India

NiraYuval-Davis (Director of the Research Centre on Migration, Refugees and Belonging, University of East London) UK

Babu Gogineni (International Director of the International Humanist and Ethical Union) India

Tarek Fatah (political activist, writer and broadcaster) Canada and Pakistan

Kumudini Samuel (Women and Media Collective) Sri Lanka

Sumit Sarkar, was Professor of History at the University of Delhi and founding member of the Subaltern Studies Collective (India)

Tanika Sarkar (Professor of History at Jawaharlal Nehru University) India

Dilip Simeon (Labour Historian and founder of Aman Trust) India

Githa Hariharan (writer, and editor) India

Urvashi Butalia (Feminist Activist and founder of Zubaan Books) India

Deepa Dhanraj (Feminist and documentary Film Maker) India

Pragna Patel, Southall Black Sisters, UK

Farooq Tariq / Labour Party Pakistan

Jessica Almy-Pagán, Universidad de Puerto Rico en Arecibo

Pamela Philipose (Journalist and Director of Women's Feature Service) India

Meghna Guhathakurta, Academic, Dhaka (Bangladesh)

Subhashini Ali, President, (All India Democratic Women's Association - AIDWA), India

Javed Anand (General Secretary, Muslims for Secular Democracy and Co-editor, Communalism Combat; Founding Trustee, Citizens for Justice and Peace , Mumbai) India

Karamat Ali (Co Director, Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research and founding Member of Pakistan Peace Coalition) Pakistan

Ruchir Joshi (writer and film maker) India

Prof. Kamal Chenoy (Chairperson, Centre for Comparative Politics & Political Theory, Jawaharlal Nehru University) India

Dr John Dayal (former journalist and is Secretary General of All India Christian Council) India

Nick Cohen (journalist, author, and political commentator) UK

Kalpana Kannabiran (Asmita Collective) India

Tahir Mahmood (Jurist and Member, Law Commission of India) India

Peter Waterman (writer, scholar, initiator of a Global Labour Charter) Netherlands

Cherifa Kheddar (President "Djazairouna" association of families of victims of islamist, terrorism) Algeria

Harsh Kapoor (Founder South Asia Citizens Web) France and India

Organisations:

[Association for Women's Rights in Development \(AWID\)](#), International

[Baobab for Women's Human Rights](#), Nigeria

[Center for Women's Global Leadership \(CWGL\)](#), US

[Fundacion Arcoiris por el respeto a la diversidad sexual](#), Mexico

I-NFORM, Sri Lanka

[MADRE](#), US

[Marea](#) (Feminist journal), Italy

[Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan \(RAWA\)](#), Afghanistan/Pakistan

[Secularism is A Women's Issue \(SIAWI\)](#), International

[Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights](#), US

[Women Against Fundamentalism](#), UK

[Women Living Under Muslim Laws \(WLUML\)](#), International

and 1500 more signatories