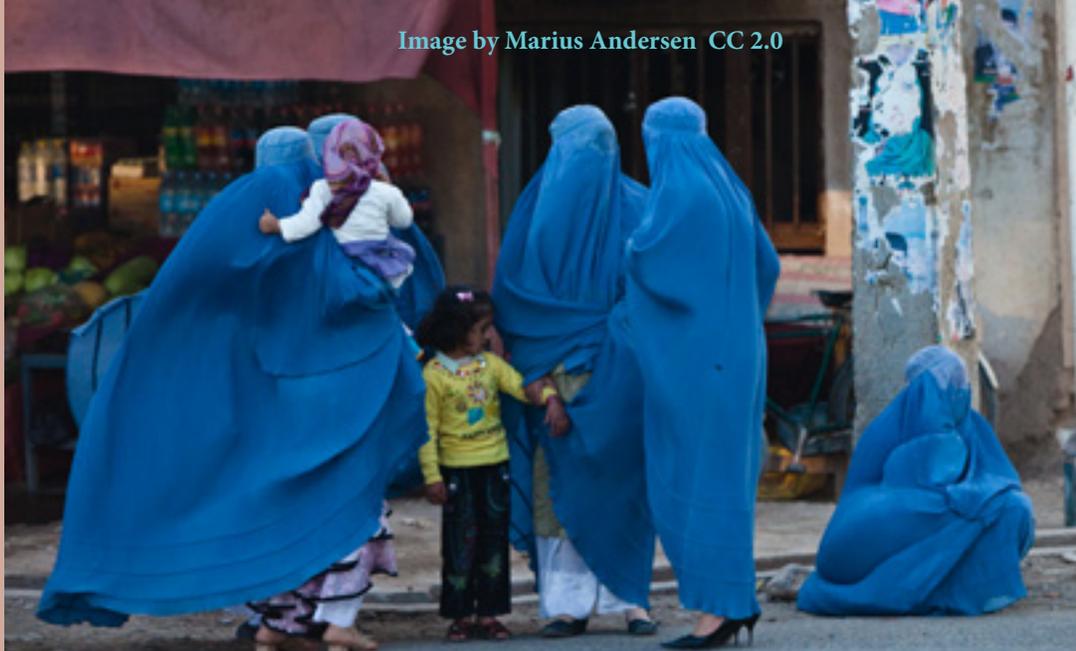




December 2021

Our Next Meeting:  
December 9th on Zoom



### Survivors of gender-based violence abandoned following Taliban takeover

December 5, 2021 -- Essential services for women and girl survivors of gender-based violence in Afghanistan have been decimated following the Taliban's takeover of the country, Amnesty International said today.

In 26 new interviews, survivors and service providers told Amnesty International that the Taliban closed shelters and released detainees from prison, including many convicted of gender-based violence offenses.

Many survivors – as well as shelter staff, lawyers, judges, government officials, and others involved in protective services – are now at risk of violence and death.

“Women and girl survivors of gender-based violence have essentially been abandoned in Afghanistan. Their network of support has been dismantled, and their places of refuge have all but disappeared,” said Agnès Callamard, Amnesty International’s Secretary General.

“It defies belief that the Taliban threw open prison doors across the country, with no thought of the risks that convicted perpetrators pose to the women and girls they victimized, and to those who worked on survivors’ behalf.

“To protect women and girls from further violence, the Taliban must allow and support the reopening of shelters and the restoration of other protective services for survivors, reinstate the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, and ensure that service providers can work freely and without fear of retaliation.”

Amnesty International is calling on the international community to provide immediate and long-term funding for such protective services, evacuate survivors and service providers facing imminent danger, and urge the Taliban to uphold their obligations to women and girls, particularly those who survive or are at risk of gender-based violence.

On November 26 and 29, Taliban spokesperson Suhail Shaheen told Amnesty International via telephone: “There is no place for vio-



Please Join  
Amnesty International  
activists from over 100  
countries this December as  
we write on behalf of ten  
unjustly-imprisoned  
individuals who urgently  
need our help.

<https://write.amnestyusa.org>



## AIUSA Group 48

<https://aipdx.org>  
[www.facebook.com/  
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### Group Coordinator

**Ron Noble**

ronald65536@gmail.com

### Treasurer

**Tena Hoke**

tena.hoke@gmail.com

### Newsletter

**Daniel Webb**

pdx.videozine@gmail.com

### OR Area Coordinator

**Marty Fromer**

martyfromer@gmail.com

### Indonesia

**Max White**

maxw33@comcast.net

### Prisoners' Cases

**Jane Kristof**

kristofj@pdx.edu

### Concert Tabling

**Will Ware**

ww\_ware@yahoo.com

### Central Africa/ OR State Death Penalty Abolition

**Terrie Rodello**

tarodello@igc.org

[www.amnestyusa.org](http://www.amnestyusa.org)

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who had escaped the prison. After I received a call from the Taliban as well, I switched to a new number.”

These women were devastated to see the system they had painstakingly built collapse. A former judge told Amnesty International: “For 20 years, I was working to build everything from scratch – pushing, running, from this office to that office. I was trying to convince everyone, so that we have a framework in place to protect women... It takes a lot of courage, a lot of sacrifice and energy to build something from nothing – and then it becomes nothing again.”

There is nowhere to turn for women and girls who have faced violence since the Taliban’s takeover. One psychologist who worked with gender-based violence survivors in Kabul told Amnesty International: “The Taliban doesn’t have any procedure of how to deal with these cases.”

A prosecutor for cases involving gender-based violence explained: “In the past, women could go to the Ministry of Women’s Affairs. They could go alone and report their case. But now that women are not allowed to go anywhere without a mahram [male guardian], this will make it really complicated.”

Fariha\* was regularly beaten by her husband and his relatives. She said: “[My husband] would pick up whatever he could find, and he would hit me with it... Whenever he beat me, his family would get together and watch... It happened almost every day... The first time he beat me with a wire... I had bruises all over my body. My hands and my nails were scratched, all of them. After that, he beat me from my waist down only. He’d tell me, ‘I will hit you in these places [your genitals and buttocks] that won’t be seen.’”

Fariha was nine months pregnant when she spoke to Amnesty International, and desperately seeking a safe place to live. She added: “Before, there was a shelter, and I went to that place. I requested that they take me in. They said it’s not running now, and we can’t accept any new cases... There are no options for me.”

Adilia\* was forced to marry an 80-year-old man at age seven. She said: “I spent a year living with him, and he beat me every single day, saying, ‘Why are you not getting pregnant?’”

Adilia fled, but was remarried and regularly subjected to beating and other forms of violence and abuse by her second husband and his relatives. When she spoke with Amnesty International, she had recently been transferred to one of the few shelters still in operation in Afghanistan.

She said: “We are very scared now... For how long are we going to stay? The Taliban came to the shelter at 12am, at 1am, and many times during the day. We told [them] this is a safe place for us, but they wouldn’t believe us... We are not safe anywhere anymore.”

From October 26 to November 24, 2021, Amnesty International conducted telephone interviews with six survivors and 20 individuals involved in the system of protective services, including shelter directors and staff, prosecutors, judges, psychologists, doctors, and representatives of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs.

Amnesty International also interviewed 18 local activists, journalists, representatives of NGOs and the United Nations, and other experts on gender-based violence in Afghanistan.



## **URGENT ACTION: IRAN** Unjustly-detained students harshly beaten

**NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN:** Ali Younesi (Him/his) and Amirhossein Moradi (Him/his)

Ali Younesi and Amir Hossein Moradi are award-winning students at Sharif University of Technology in Tehran. Ali Younesi is a silver and gold medal recipient in Iran's National Astronomy Olympiad and the 2018 gold medal winner in the International Astronomy and Astrophysics Olympiad held in China. Amirhossein Moradi is the silver medal recipient in Iran's National Astronomy Olympiad.

On April 10, 2020, ministry of intelligence agents arrested Ali Younesi on the street after leaving university. Later that day, 12 agents brought him, handcuffed, to his family home – his forehead was split open with a gash and he had blood all over his face and wounds on his body. The agents searched it without showing a warrant and then took him away.

During a weekly press conference on May 6, 2020, Iran's then judiciary spokesperson Gholamhossein Esmaili stated that two university students had been

arrested for being in contact with “counterrevolutionary” groups, in apparent reference to Ali Younesi and Amirhossein Moradi. He used a pejorative term to refer to one such group – the PMOI), and failed to provide any evidence for the accusations.

In a video response posted on social media later the same day, Ali Younesi's sister, Aida Younesi, that “after 26 days of detention where it is not even clear what disaster you have inflicted on my brother [Ali], you come and make these ridiculous charges.” In response to the spokesperson's allegation that “explosive devices” were found in the homes of the university students, Aida Younesi also added that security officials told them that that they had found nothing suspicious after searching Ali Younesi's home. Moreover, in the days following Ali Younesi's arrest, his family was told every few days he would be soon released.

On July 13, 2020, without prior notice and without

any lawyers present, Ministry of Intelligence agents took Ali Younesi and Amirhossein Moradi to the Tehran prosecution and judicial offices for interrogations to make forced “confessions”, which they refused to do. The interrogations took place in the presence of the deputy chancellor, two professors, and student representatives of Sharif University of Technology. On November 20, 2020, Iran’s High Council for Human Rights, which is supervised by the judiciary, wrote to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights that “the abovenamed [Ali Younesi] has – under no circumstances whatsoever – been under duress to make confessions. He was being temporarily held in Section 209 of the Evin Detention Centre; however, taking into consideration the aforesaid’s age and his noncooperation with other inmates, he was transferred to a general population prison”; however, Amnesty International’s investigations found that intelligence agents repeatedly attempted to obtain forced “confessions” from Ali Younesi, including as reported in state media in July 2020, and that he remains arbitrarily held in section 209 despite requests from his lawyer and family to transfer him to the public ward.

The Iranian authorities have a history of targeting family members of those who have real or perceived ties with the PMOI. Following the post-June 2009 election unrest in Iran, the authorities arrested, amongst many others, individuals who had relatives with a past or current association with opposition groups, including the PMOI. S

Those arrested in 2009 include prisoner of conscience Maryam Akbari Monfared, who is serving a 15-year prison sentence following the arbitrary interference with her privacy, family and correspondence in relation to having made phone calls to and visiting once family members who were members of the PMOI (Click here for more information).

From January 11, 2020 protests began across Iran after the authorities admitted that the Revolutionary Guards fired missiles at a Ukrainian passenger plane in Iranian air space, killing all 176 people on board, with protests quickly expanding to include anti-establishment slogans and demands for transformation of the country’s political system, including a constitutional referendum and an end to the Islamic Republic system.

## TAKE ACTION:

Please take action as-soon-as possible. This Urgent Action expires on January 17, 2022.

Write a letter in your own words to one or both government officials listed. You can also email, fax, call or Tweet them.

Click [here](#) to let us know the actions you took on Urgent Action 76.20. It’s important to report because we share the total number with the officials we are trying to persuade and the people we are trying to help.

**Head of judiciary, Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei**  
c/o Embassy of Iran to the European Union  
Avenue Franklin Roosevelt No. 15,  
1050 Bruxelles, Belgium

**H.E. Majid Takht Ravanchi**  
Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran  
622 Third Avenue, 34th Floor  
New York, NY 10017  
Phone: 212 687-2020 Fax: 212 867 7086  
Email: [iran@un.int](mailto:iran@un.int), [Majidravanchi@mfa.gov.ir](mailto:Majidravanchi@mfa.gov.ir)  
Twitter: @Iran\_UN , @TakhtRavanchi  
Salutation: Dear Ambassador

Amnesty International documented that in response to these protests, security forces fired point-ed pellets from airguns, usually used for hunting, at peaceful protesters causing bleeding and painful injuries, and that security forces also used rubber bullets, tear gas and pepper spray to disperse protesters as well as kicking and punching them, beating them with batons and carrying out arbitrary arrests. See <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/01/iran-scores-injured-as-security-forces-use-unlawful-force-to-crush-protests/> for more information.



## **URGENT ACTION: BANGLADESH**

### **Teenage Girl Detained for Facebook Post**

Name and Pronoun: Dipti Rani Das (she/her)

Dipti Rani Das, a 17-year-old girl from the Hindu minority community in Bangladesh, was arrested by the police for a Facebook post and has been held at a correction facility for more than a year, since October 28, 2020. Booked under the country's draconian Digital Security Act on vague charges of "hurting religious sentiment" and "advancing to deteriorate law and order", she could face up to seven years in jail. She should be released immediately.

Dipti Rani Das, a 17-year-old girl, was arrested in Dinajpur, Bangladesh, on October 28, 2020 under the country's draconian Digital Security Act (2018) for a Facebook post which contained a photograph of a woman keeping the Islamic holy book Quran in between her thighs.

Concerned over the impact that the Facebook post may have had on Dipti Rani Das, her father went to the police station with his family to seek a resolution upfront on the afternoon of October 28, 2020. There, they saw a gathering of about 100 religious clerics who came to file a case against her. They apologized verbally to the people present at the police station and to the Muslim community for the Facebook post, which some people at the police station livestreamed on Facebook. The family also submitted a written apology to the local police chief. The livestreamed apology further agitated some people in the neighborhood, who then attacked the home of Dipti Rani Das and her family later that evening.

Afraid of further attacks, Dipti Rani Das's father tried to send her daughter away for some days to a relative's home by train. However, she was stopped at the train and taken to the police station by several individuals who demanded that she be punished for posting the photograph.

Arrested on October 28, 2020, she has since been in detention at a correction facility in Rajshahi, a northern district in Bangladesh, and could face up to seven years in jail if convicted. After being denied bail three times at a lower court, a High Court granted her bail on May 11, 2021. However, the bail order was stayed through an appeal by the deputy commissioner of Dinajpur, her home district.

The UN Human Rights Committee, which monitors the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, stated that "prohibitions of displays of lack of respect for a religion or other belief system, including blasphemy laws, are incompatible with the Covenant", except in the specific circumstances when it amounts to advocacy of hatred that incites violence, hostility, or discrimination.

An aficionado of Humayun Ahmed's novels, Dipti Rani Das loves painting and writing stories. She wanted to study science, but her family couldn't afford paying for it. She had enrolled in arts for her first year at the Parbatipur Government College in August 2020. Since her detention, Dipti Rani Das has lost her ability to pursue her education and faces further risk of harassment and discrimination. "I wish that my daughter has the opportunity to freely move in the society, complete her education and build a future. I

request the government to relieve her from this case in consideration of her future,” her father told Amnesty International.

In a July 2021 report, Amnesty International documented a wide range of human rights violations committed by the Bangladeshi security agencies in the pretext of containing false, offensive, defamatory or derogatory information online. The human rights organization called on Bangladesh’s government to urgently repeal or substantially amend the 2018 Digital Security Act and end the crackdown on people’s right to freedom of expression online.

### Sample Letter

Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina,

I am deeply concerned by the detention for over a year of Dipti Rani Das, a 17-year-old girl from the Hindu minority community in Bangladesh, over a Facebook post. She faces up to seven years in jail if convicted.

Last year, a photograph of a woman with a Quran between her legs was posted from Dipti Rani Das’s account. She publicly apologized for the post by going to the police station. Locals subsequently attacked her home and demanded that she leave the house. The police on October 28, 2020 arrested her and accused her under the country’s draconian Digital Security Act on vague charges of “hurting religious sentiment” and “advancing to deteriorate law and order”. She has been in detention ever since.

Restrictions to the right to freedom of expression must be clearly provided by law and be strictly necessary and proportionate to a legitimate aim. Protection of religious beliefs is not a permissible ground to restrict the right to freedom of expression, and prohibitions of displays of lack of respect for a religion are incompatible with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Bangladesh is a party.

Dipti Rani Das enrolled for her first year at college when she was arrested and, since then, her education has come to a halt. She faces further risk of being harassed and discriminated against due to the charges pressed against her. Dipti Rani Das should be in school, not in detention.

I urge your government to:

- Immediately release Dipti Rani Das and all those detained solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression;

### TAKE ACTION:

1. Write a letter in your own words or using the sample below as a guide to one or both government officials listed. You can also email, fax, call or Tweet them.
2. Click [here](#) to let us know the actions you took on Urgent Action 120.21. It’s important to report because we share the total number with the officials we are trying to persuade and the people we are trying to help.

#### Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina

Prime Minister’s Office  
Old Sangsad Bhaban  
Tejgaon, Dhaka-1215  
Bangladesh  
Email: ps1topm@pmo.gov.bd  
Cc: psecy@pmo.gov.bd

#### Ambassador M Shahidul Islam

Embassy of Bangladesh  
3510 International Drive NW,  
Washington DC 20008  
Phone: 202 244 0183  
Fax: 202 244 2771 | 7830  
Email: mission.washington@mofa.gov.bd  
Contact form: <http://www.bdembassyusa.org/?page=contact>  
Facebook: @BangladeshEmbassyUSA

Please take action as soon as possible until January 19, 2022. Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

- Ensure the protection of Dipti Rani Das, her family and other members of minority groups in Bangladesh from communal or politically motivated attacks;
- Repeal the Digital Security Act or amend it in line with international human rights law, including the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights to which Bangladesh is a party.

Sincerely,

## URGENT ACTION: CHINA

### COVID-19 JOURNALIST MUST BE GRANTED MEDICAL BAIL

**Name and Pronoun: Zhang Zhan (she/her)**

Citizen journalist Zhang Zhan, who has been on partial hunger strike in protest of her incarceration, is at grave risk of death and her family does not expect her to live through the winter if she is not released on medical grounds. Shanghai Women's Prison has not responded to an application for her bail on medical grounds filed by her family on 15 November. Meanwhile, Zhang Zhan's lawyer and family members continue to file applications to visit her in person, but to no avail. Pending her release, the Chinese authorities must accept the application of medical bail before she dies in the prison.

Zhang Zhan, a former lawyer, is a citizen journalist who has actively spoken out about politics and human rights issues in China. In February 2020, she travelled to Wuhan, then the centre of the COVID-19 outbreak in China. She used online platforms (including WeChat, Twitter and YouTube) to report on the detention of other independent reporters as well as the harassment of victims' families. Zhang Zhan went missing on May 14th, 2020 in Wuhan and was subsequently revealed to have been detained by police in Shanghai, more than 640 km away.

Zhang Zhan was able to have a video call with her family on October 14th for four minutes and nine seconds. The mandated duration of the call is supposed to be five minutes. Looking incredibly thin and determined to continue her partial hunger strike, her family do not expect her to live through the winter if she is not released on medical grounds. Zhang Zhan was again able to speak to her family through another video call on October 29th. They shared that her condition had further weakened, and she has no energy to walk nor raise her head. Of further concern is the yellow colour of her skin, a sign of a potential life-threatening condition.

Since the news that Zhang Zhan's health is in the critical condition, many organisations and states have spoken up and called on the Chinese authorities to release Zhang Zhan. This includes the EU and the US.

Amnesty International also joined Reporters Without Borders (RSF) in a statement to urge China to release Zhang Zhan in September 2021.

Zhang Zhan started a hunger strike in June 2020 to protest her detention and assert her innocence. Despite her intention to continue with her protest, detention center authorities reportedly began forcibly feeding her through a feeding tube, and it is reported that her cellmates were also involved in the act of forcibly feeding her. Zhang Zhan's defence lawyer said she is physically very weak and suffering from stomach pain, dizziness and weakness while walking. It is also reported that Zhang Zhan was forced to wear shackles and that her hands were restrained 24 hours a day for more than three months as punishment for her hunger strike.

The Pudong New District People's Court sentenced Zhang Zhan to four years in prison on December 28th, 2020. The charge against her of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" stemmed from her COVID-19 reports. In April 2021, Zhang Zhan's family received notification that Zhang Zhan was transferred to Shanghai Women's Prison. Zhang Zhan has continued to carry out a partial hunger strike since being transferred to prison, eating only light snack such as biscuits or mantou (small, steamed buns).

There is an alarming pattern of deaths of imprisoned Chinese activists, either in detention or after being belatedly released on medical parole. In July 2017, human rights activist and Nobel Laureate Liu Xiaobo died in custody after the authorities refused his and his family's requests to receive treatment abroad for his cancer. The same year, Chinese writer and government critic Yang Tongyan (pen name Yang Tianshui) died three months after being released on medical parole and undergoing an operation to remove a brain tumour. Beijing activist and prominent campaigner Cao Shunli died from organ failure after months in custody in March 2014. She was denied appropriate medical treatment while in jail.

Citizen journalists were the primary, if not the



only, source of uncensored and first-hand information about the COVID-19 outbreak in China. There are not many citizen journalists in China, as they are not able to obtain official accreditation to report news. Citizen journalists in China face consistent harassment and repression for reporting news and disseminating information that is censored by the government.

There have been many reports of independent journalists and activists harassed by authorities for sharing information about COVID-19 on social media. These include outspoken lawyer and citizen journalist Chen Qiushi, who reported being harassed by the authorities after posting footage from hospitals in Wuhan, and Wuhan resident Fang Bin, who was briefly taken away by the authorities after posting a video purporting to show corpses of COVID-19 victims.

The crime of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” under Article 293 of the Chinese Criminal Law is a broadly defined and vaguely worded offense that has been widely used to target activists and human rights defenders. Although the crime originally applied to acts that disrupted order in public places, the scope has expanded since 2013 to include online space as well. Anyone convicted could face a maximum of five years in prison.

### Sample Letter

Dear Chief Procurator Zhang,

I am writing to express grave concern for the life of citizen journalist Zhang Zhan, who has been on partial hunger strike to protest her incarceration. A prisoner of conscience imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising her right to freedom of expression when she reported about COVID-19, Zhang Zhan should be released immediately and unconditionally.

It is extremely alarming to learn that, due to her dire health condition, Zhang Zhan’s family do not expect her to live through the winter and have been calling the authorities to release her on medical grounds. Recently it is reported that she is feeling incredibly weak, has no energy to walk nor raise her head and, with yellowed skin, looks to be suffering from a life-threatening condition.

For your information, her family submitted a medical bail application on November 15th to Shanghai’s Women’s Prison and have not received a response yet. The application was submitted pursuant to the criteria listed in the “Notice of the Supreme People’s

Court, the Supreme People’s Procuratorate, the Ministry of Public Security, and Other Ministries on Issuing the Provisions on Temporary Service of Sentences Outside Prisons” where a prisoner can apply for medical bail when he/she is facing critical health condition.

It is further worrying that Zhang Zhan still does not have regular access to her family members and lawyers and there is no way for them to further verify her health and wellbeing.

There is an alarming pattern of deaths of imprisoned Chinese activists, either in detention or after being belatedly released on medical parole. To ensure that no one else dies while in your detention facilities, I urge you to:

- Pending her release, accept the medical bail application for Zhang Zhan;
- Pending her release, ensure that Shanghai Women’s Prison immediately accepts and processes the medical bail application for Zhang Zhan and she receives urgent, regular, and adequate medical care, including a full body / medical check-up.

Yours sincerely,

### TAKE ACTION:

Please write an appeal in your own words or use the sample letter.

#### **Chief Procurator of Shanghai People’s Procuratorate Zhang Bencai**

No 648, Jianguo West Road,  
Xuhui Qu,  
Shanghai City, 200030,  
People’s Republic of China

Please take action as soon as possible until January 20th, 2022.

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.