



Human Rights Update

for the Sixteenth Congressional District of Pennsylvania

WINTER 2005

Congressman Joe Pitts

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Online: <http://www.house.gov/pitts/rights.htm>

A personal note...

You will find a recurring theme in this Human Rights Update: *the unwillingness of those in power to help those in need.*

Sometimes the international community refuses to act to stop injustice. Sometimes cultural attitudes form the basis for terrible acts. More often than not, I find that it is those closest to the abuse - public officials and community leaders - who turn a blind eye to the cry of those in need.

These updates are as much a means to inform you of these situations, as they are a call to action.

Hebrews 13:3 tells us to "remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering."

This call to action, regardless of your faith background, is a call to solidarity with those in need.

I hope that you will use this day as an opportunity to remember those in need as though you yourself were suffering and get involved in the many organizations listed in this newsletter to make a difference.



These children and their families (400 people total) are in hiding from Burma Army patrols. The Burma Army attacked their village on December 26, 2004, capturing and reportedly killing two men. The Burma Army looted the village and continues to patrol the area. The villagers have lost their homes and possessions. Many sleep on the ground in the jungle with few blankets, no shelter and temperatures dropping down to forty degrees Fahrenheit. Photo credit: Christians Concerned for Burma

CRISIS IN BURMA DETERIORATES

As you may have heard in recent news reports, the situation facing the people of Burma continues to deteriorate. Since mid-January, I have received reports almost daily detailing attacks by the Burmese military dictatorship on villagers.

These attacks force villagers to flee into the jungle where an uncertain future awaits them. One report and photo I received showed 400 IDPs (internally displaced persons) in hiding.

As of January 15, 2005, in one District of Northern Karen State,

there are over 20,000 IDPs. Sadly, the Burmese dictatorship refuses to heed international calls to allow democratically elected leaders of the country to take power.

Christians Concerned for Burma holds an annual day of prayer for the people of Burma. This year's Global Day of Prayer for Burma is on Sunday, March 13, 2005. I urge you and your faith community to be involved in praying for the many suffering people in Burma.

Further information on the Day of Prayer can be found at www.prayforburma.org.

TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

Last fall, I held our District's annual Human Rights Conference on trafficking in persons. We heard powerful stories and learned a great deal from Rev. K.K. Deveraj of India, Ms. Michele Clark of the Protection Project at Johns Hopkins University, Mr. Emmett McGroarty, Deputy Director of the Trafficking in Persons Program and the US Department of Health and Human Services, and Mr. Brad Schlozman, Deputy Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights at the United States Department of Justice.

Each speaker shared valuable information about the scope of the trafficking problem, various solutions, and work by the U.S. government to fight this terrible scourge. Trafficking in persons occurs not only between countries but within countries. The Department of Justice has prosecuted cases of victims trafficked into the US from other nations.

However, the scope of the domestic trafficking of our own children has yet to be determined.

In an event held last year in Washington, D.C., five young women who

had lived through years of abuse from pimps, police officers, foster care, and other places shared stories of deep pain and suffering. These were not foreign women brought to the United States. They were born in places like New York and Ohio.

One of the key points shared at this event was that when they told people in authority what was happening to them, those people didn't believe them, told the girls it was simply their imagination, or ignored the fact that it was happening.

Once the girls finally received assistance (or were told assistance was available to them), they were able to make changes in their lives. Like many other abused women, they were afraid to testify against their abusers for fear of retribution. The lenient prison sentences often handed down in these cases, means that these criminals are back on the streets in six months or less.

These were tragic stories. All the girls said that if they had known there was help available to them, they would have sought that assistance much sooner – most of them only learned about assistance after being arrested and charged with a crime. These women endured years of suffering while help was available to them. If only they had known relief was within reach. But no one bothered to help.

In addition to the moral and legal issues involved in trafficking in persons, the crime carries tremendous public health ramifications. Trafficking in persons accelerates the spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted and infectious diseases.

In some areas of the world, there is a myth that having sex with a virgin will cure

HIV/AIDS. Sadly, this means younger and younger girls, and sometimes boys, are trafficked into the sex industry to feed this warped hope of deliverance.

It is vital that communities in the U.S. become involved in combating trafficking in persons. If you are interested in more information on trafficking in persons, please feel free to click on the links on my website.

[Congressman Pitts' Trafficking Website](http://www.house.gov/pitts/trafficking.htm)

<http://www.house.gov/pitts/trafficking.htm>

[The Protection Project Website](http://www.protectionproject.org/)

<http://www.protectionproject.org/>



In India, Dalits are forced to buy these clay cups when they purchase a drink. They can be used only once, and only by Dalits.

The rest of the population use normal plastic or glass cups and bottles that are not purchased separately. You can learn more at: www.caedmonscall.com/ns/about.htm and www.dalitnetwork.org.

INDIA'S DALITS

The name Dalit describes the people of India who were once known as "untouchables." They are so low on the social spectrum that they are outside of the caste system. Often, they are treated worse than animals.

According to various experts, there are 250-300 million Dalits. Sadly, they lack many of the basic services and legal protections available to the rest of Indian society. When their rights are violated there is little recourse.

Discrimination against Dalits is widespread, even to the extent of Dalits being refused water out of community wells. The Dalit Freedom Network says, "A Dalit is not considered to be part of the human society, but something, which is beyond that."

The men and women are seen primarily as pollution. If someone in a higher caste (this means everyone) is touched by a

See "Dalits" on Page Four...

SAHRAWIS STILL WAITING FOR CHANCE TO VOTE

The conflict over the Western Sahara remains unresolved. I recently addressed a group of parliamentarians and interested citizens from the European Union, and other countries, on current issues and the need for the international community to press the Moroccan government to adhere to its commitments.

The signed agreements between the governments of the Western Sahara and Morocco provide for a free, fair and transparent referendum for self-determination.

Tragically, the Sahrawi people continue to be denied the right to vote on their own future. While many pay lip service to the need for a vote, very few in a position to make it happen appear



The Sahrawis were driven into the desert by the war with Morocco. Settling in southwestern Algeria around the town of Tindouf, they set up a democratically-ruled society. The Oasis, shown here, was made by drilling underground to find water. Signifying their indomitable spirit, the Sahrawis created an oasis where there was none before.

promised them in several signed agreements. You can write to the Moroccan Ambassador to the United States:

*His Excellency Aziz Mekouar,
Ambassador,
1601 21st Street, NW,
Washington, D.C. 20009.*

Visit my Western Sahara website at:

www.house.gov/pitts/initiatives/humanrights/countries/westernsahara.htm

"I have always said that, in this country, the rights of man stopped at the question of the Sahara. Anyone who said that the Sahara was not Moroccan could not benefit from the rights of man."

**King Hassan II, 1993, Paris.
King of Morocco, 1961-1999.**

willing to stand up to the United Nations.

If you are interested in raising this issue, please write a polite but firm letter expressing your concern that the people of Western Sahara have not been allowed to vote, as was

BIPARTISAN PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE CAUCUS LAUNCHED

In the past, many of you have helped me with projects intended to assist people in other nations. Together we have shipped mobile health dispensaries, farm equipment, wheelchairs, dialysis machines, school supplies, and medicine to regions where people could use these items.

In October, I joined with Congressmen Mike McIntyre (D, NC-07), Donald Payne (D, NJ-10), and John Shimkus (R, IL-19) to found the "Adopt-a-Country Caucus." The Caucus will work for positive change through relationships between the people of the United States and the people of other nations.

Commenting on this idea, Secretary of State Colin Powell said,

"The State Department encourages on-going partnerships and strong relationships between the United States and countries around the world. We will be watching these efforts to increase people-to-people interaction with great interest and encouragement."

Similar to "Sister City" programs on a local level, this Caucus enables Members of Congress and their constituents to partner with a country and engage in such things as academic, cultural and business exchanges; humanitarian aid shipments; and other relationship-building activities.

9/11 reminded us all of the need to build relationships with the rest of the world. People-to-people

connections must play a vital role in this strategy. If Members of Congress would build these connections with just one country, the positive results on both the individual and national level are endless. And if enough people join in this cause we could change the world.

Members of Congress can partner with local organizations and leaders in other nations, and make a positive impact on needs in other countries, thereby reflecting the American people's goodwill and generosity towards other nations. These kinds of humanitarian partnerships can occur in the medical, educational, economic, and other arenas of interest to both nations and the communities.

UNTOUCHABLES

"Dalits" from Page Two...

Dalit, they consider themselves polluted, according to the Dalit Freedom Network. In protest of their treatment under the caste system, thousands and thousands of Dalits have converted from Hinduism to Buddhism, Islam and Christianity.

The Dalit Freedom Network and the Dalit Monitor track violations against Dalits and advocate on their behalf. The Monitor gave one account of 30 Dalit homes being burned to the ground by a mob that was angry that the government had given them land.

In another example, twenty-two Dalits, many of them children, were badly wounded during an attack on eighty Dalit homes. The rationale for the attack was that they lived independently from the upper castes.

In November 2004, a dispute over a cricket match between school children ended up as a battle between castes with upper caste landlords forcing three Dalit boys, at gunpoint, to drink their own urine.

Abuse of Dalits goes far beyond physical attacks. It is not uncommon for various community members, sometimes even the police to try to prevent Dalits from building water or sanitation devices or from carrying out basic human customs such as marriage or religious worship.

There are organizations and individuals in India, including Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus who are working to end this age-old discrimination against the Dalits, but there is much to be done.

[Learn more about the Dalits](http://www.dalitnetwork.org/)

<http://www.dalitnetwork.org/>

TSUNAMI RELIEF
www.usafreedomcorps.gov

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ON THE WEB:

<http://www.house.gov/pitts>

E-MAIL UPDATES:

Send a message to:
humanrights-pa16@ls1.house.gov.

Include the word "subscribe" in the subject line.

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