

PRESS RELEASE

# World Wide Outcry To Make Amnesty International See Reason and Make Amends

Tuesday 23 March 2010, by [Collective / Multiple signers](#) (Date first published: 22 March 2010).

**International: world human rights activists demand accountability from A.I.**

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## World Wide Outcry To Make Amnesty International See Reason and Make Amends

**Monday 22 March 2010**

*People from across the world, including key human rights activists, public intellectuals and citizens groups have supported a global petition demanding public clarification and accountability from Amnesty International.*

Among the prominent signatories figure: Salman Rushdie, Michael Walzer; Amitav Ghosh; Malalai Joya, (MP Afghan Parliament, suspended for criticizing warlords).; Dr. Nawal El Sadaawi (Writer and former political prisoner) Egypt.; Martha Nussbaum (Professor of Law and Ethics, University of Chicago; co-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); Farida Shaheed (UN Independent Expert on Cultural Rights and Director of Research at Shirkat Gah) Pakistan; Jodie Evans (Environmental activist and founder member of CODEPINK, Women for Peace) US; Nayantara Sahgal (Celebrated writer, and former Indian Ambassador to Italy) India; Romila Thapar (Eminent Historian of Ancient India) India; Madanjeet Singh (UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador and founder of South Asia Foundation) Ramachandra Guha (historian, and a regular columnist with The Telegraph of Calcutta.) [See below wider list of notable signatories]

- On February 7, 2010 Amnesty International's controversial alliance with Moazzem Begg and his organization, Cageprisoners, who have an ambiguous position on the Taliban, was publicly questioned by Gita Sahgal, Head of the Gender Unit at the International Secretariat of Amnesty International, London.
- Sahgal raised a fundamental point of principle, which is "about the importance of the human rights movement maintaining an objective distance from groups and ideas that are committed to systematic discrimination."
- This principle in no way contradicts or negates the Amnesty International campaign against the fundamental human rights abuses that have occurred at Guantanamo and elsewhere.

- Rather than responding to the seriousness of her concerns with an investigation of the issues and/or having a democratic debate both internally and in the public domain, Amnesty International suspended Gita Sahgal and publicly reiterated its alliance with Begg. This is a compromise of its own core values.
- In response to the petition, as well as in a recent public statement, Amnesty has quoted the concept of defensive jihad as justification for its support of Begg.

**Full text of the *The Global petition to Amnesty International*:** [Statement by the International Coalition of Women Human Rights Defenders: Respect Universality in Principle and Practice: Defend Women's Human Rights](#)

The above petition is open for public signatures at: <http://www.human-rights-for-all.org...>

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### **Selected list of the notable signatories includes :**

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; co-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 Chakravorty 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 organization) 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](http://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 familles of victimes 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 (WLUM), International

*and 1500 more signatories...*

*Released to the media by Human Rights For All Campaign*

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## **Global Petition to Amnesty International: Restoring the Integrity of Human Rights**

**Saturday 13 February 2010**

As organisations and individuals who stand for and support the universality of human rights, we have noted with concern the suspension of Gita Sahgal, Head of the Gender Unit at the International Secretariat of Amnesty International in London, for questioning Amnesty International's partnership with individuals whose politics towards the Taliban are ambiguous.

We come from communities that recognize and appreciate the work of Amnesty International in defending human rights and women's rights around the world. Many of us work closely with Amnesty International in their campaigns at various levels.

We believe that Gita Sahgal has raised a fundamental point of principle which is "about the importance of the human rights movement maintaining an objective distance from groups and ideas that are committed to systematic discrimination".

This issue of principle is critical at the present moment, with the United States led "War on Terror" leading to the suspension of human rights and increased surveillance over individuals and the body politic. Ironically, the language of human rights and human rights defenders is being taken over by the US/NATO alliance in its efforts to legitimise a re-born imperialism. Equally disturbingly, this language is also being hijacked by organizations that espouse extremist and violent forms of identity-based politics. The space for a position that challenges both these is shrinking, and human rights are becoming hostage to broader authoritarian political agendas, whether from states or communities.

In this context, it is crucial for human rights defenders and organisations to clearly define principles and core values that are non-negotiable. Our commitment to countering, among others, Islamophobia, racism, misogyny and xenophobia should at no time blur our recognition of the authoritarian, often fascist, social and political agendas of some of the groups that suffer human rights abuse at the hands of the big powers.

The broader issue of principle which we raise here, is one which concerns all of us as human rights defenders from different parts of the world. Many of us who work to defend human rights in the context of conflict and terrorism know the importance of maintaining a clear and visible distance from potential partners and allies when there is any doubt about their commitment to human rights. Given the circumstances in which questions regarding the partnership with Cageprisoners appear to have been raised, we feel that Amnesty International should have refrained from providing them with a platform. It should have been possible for Amnesty International to campaign against the fundamental human rights abuses that have occurred at Guantanamo and elsewhere without making alliances that compromise Amnesty International's core values, just as other human rights organisations have done.

History has repeatedly shown us that anti-democratic organisations can and do manipulate information and their own self-representation for narrow political advantage. In any situation of ambiguity, we feel that the benefit of doubt should have been given to the expert staff members of Amnesty International. We feel that in this instance there has been a lack of respect for the opinions expressed by Gita Sahgal, who is a senior member of staff, and a critical failure of internal democratic functioning at Amnesty's International Secretariat.

What is needed is democratic debate, internally as well as in the public sphere, on the human rights principles that should guide Amnesty International and all of us in determining our alliances. We have to ensure that the partnerships we form are true to the core human rights values of equality and universality. Our accountability in this area, internally as well as externally, to all our diverse constituencies, cannot be put at risk. We need a rigorous examination of potential partners. Given the complex situations we work in, what is needed is open debate, not a censoring and closure of discussion on these important issues. Shifting the debate and turning this into a discussion about 'Othering' and 'demonisation of Guantanamo prisoners' is merely obscuring the real issues at stake. It puts at risk the work that Amnesty International is attempting to do in Afghanistan and other areas. Unfortunately, it also fails to answer the very serious questions that have been posed to which we are also seeking answers.

In the present context of 'constructive engagement' with the Taliban, as proposed at the recent Conference on Afghanistan in London, it is our obligation to ensure that we do not barter away the human rights of minorities and of women for 'peace'. There are enough recent examples of such attempts which show that these deals are a chimera and do not result in either peace or security. Whatever the nature of 'engagement' with authoritarian groups, and whatever partnerships and alliances we enter into with individuals or organisations involved in such 'engagement', the positive conditionalities and checks based on human rights, which are universal and indivisible, must remain central and non-negotiable for human rights organizations and defenders.

We call on Amnesty International to clearly and publicly affirm its commitment to the above in all areas of its work; and to demonstrate its obligation to make itself publicly accountable, as it has so often demanded of others.

We extend our solidarity and support to Gita Sahgal, who is well known and widely respected for her principled activism on human rights internationally, for her courageous stand in raising this issue within and outside Amnesty International.



*Drafted and initiated by:*

Dr. Amrita Chhachhi, Women, Gender and Development Program, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, member Kartini Asia Network of Women/Gender Studies

Sara Hossain, Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh

Sunila Abeysekera, INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre, Sri Lanka

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**P.S.**

\* Source : Human Rights For All (<http://www.human-rights-for-all.org>)