

Amnesty con't

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AI is not a broad-based human rights organization, but a very focused movement that concerns itself with just a few, very important rights and violations. In this respect, we are absolutely correct in insisting that the debate needs to focus on governmental accountability.

In the United States, it has been said that the concern is not human rights so much as terrorism. Well, that's what we are working on, isn't it?

Terrorism. Governmental terrorism, anybody's terrorism. AI opposes these violations perpetrated by whoever. But when private groups, or governments in exile or liberation movements take hostages or assassinate people with very few exceptions - and Iran was one such exception - the whole weight of national and international police power descends on the perpetrators. Whereas when governments practice terrorism, there tends to be silence.

While we say in AI that we can never claim success, we can be very satisfied of doing our work, and successful to the extent that if we can do no more than make sure that when these violations occur, never again should there be this monumental silence. And of course we do a great deal more.

All of you, I'm sure, have to grit your teeth on many occasions while writing sweet requesting letters to very nasty people. But the fact is when we do that it is an effort; to call to the attention of governments that they are in violation of their own commitments and undertakings.

Torture is to be proscribed and condemned

at all levels and under all circumstances and certainly we are not going to draw any lines of permissible limits.

Is there a difference between totalitarian and authoritarian forms of government? I often am asked this question.

If you look at the AI Annual Report you see that 110 countries are listed for violating human rights, from extreme left to extreme right and everything in between. The tragedy is that the words left and right, liberal and conservative, progressive and reactionary, don't

of impartiality never neutrality because we are passionate about these matters - is terribly important and justified. And not let us forget that people in 130 countries, of all kinds of political persuasions, become members of AI.

Minutes after John Spenkelink was executed in Florida, our phones began to ring. The first people to call us were the radio and television networks and the wire services, and all of them wanted to know from me, "Is this an indication that there is a political swing to the right?"

This made me very

(Random House).

Jacobo Timerman was a prisoner of conscience in Argentina. A journalist who became a publisher, who became a prisoner of conscience and was subjected to torture. After 30 months in captivity, he was finally thrown out of the country and now lives in Israel.

I thought it would be impossible for any person to write about pure horror and turn it into pure poetry. But the book is that way. It is very moving and extraordinarily detailed.

The final chapter of this book reads:

"Have you ever looked into the eyes of another person, on the floor of a cell, who knows that he's about to die, though no one has told him so? He knows that he's about to die, but he clings to his biological desire to live, as a single hope, since no one has told him that he's to be executed.

I have many such gazes imprinted upon me. Each time I write or utter words of hope, words of confidence in the definitive triumph of man, I'm fearful - fearful of losing sight of one of those gazes. At night, I recount them, recall them, re-seeing them, cleanse them, illumine them. These gazes, which I encountered in the clandestine prisons of Argentina, and which I have retained one by one, were the culminating point, the purest moment of my tragedy. They are here with me today. And although I might wish to do so, I would not know how to share them with you."

It is impossible for us to share these gazes, yet, nonetheless, we plod away with this difficult, frustrating, ongoing, pertinent and pernicious kind of work; because it is worthwhile.



seem to have much meaning in AI'S concerns. People of all kinds of political persuasions seem to be not only able, but willing to violate the rights which AI tries to defend. Their political orientation may cover their rhetoric, but it doesn't give any guarantees one way or the other, and surely, the prisoners themselves couldn't care less under which particular ideology they are being abused. And so our stance

angry, because it had nothing to do between left and right, liberal or conservative swings. A person can be of any political persuasion and be totally outraged by inhumanity. We must never forget that.

I always feel that the voices of the prisoners we work for need to be heard. Here is an excerpt from Jacobo Timerman's book "Prisoner without a name, Cell without a Number"