

LAWYERS

Advocates in trouble

An international network tries to keep track of, and lobby on behalf of, human rights lawyers. STUART RUSSELL reports.

The United States Lawyers Committee for Human Rights has set up a Network designed to get politically-engaged lawyers out of detention, and to raise public awareness about these poorly publicised cases.

Based in New York City, the Lawyer-to-Lawyer Network sends out monthly bulletins on individual lawyers detained around the world. Recent bulletins have included news of lawyers incarcerated in South Africa, Cameroon and Indonesia.

The Network provides a summary of the facts of the particular victimisation, and urges lawyers to send appeals usually to the country's Head of State and Justice Minister.

The Network is now in the process of compiling cases for *In Defense of Rights: Attacks on Lawyers and Judges in 1992*. This annual report describes cases of persecution and harassment of legal professionals for performing their professional duties and/or for promoting human rights. In order to compile a comprehensive report, the Network requests your co-operation in keeping them informed and updated about any cases you may be aware of involving lawyers and judges who are threatened, harassed or persecuted.

The Lawyer-to-Lawyer Network has now grown to include more than 8000 participants from more than 120 countries around the world. In addition, in November it began to offer Network appeals in Arabic. As a result, it is now able to reach lawyers who were not able to participate in English. It is working hard to further expand translation of the Network appeals. As the Network continues to grow it will become more and more effective.

By way of examples of cases highlighted by the Network, the following are quoted from its January 1993 Newsletter.

Cameroon

'The Lawyers Committee has received information that Francis Sama and Ophelia Senze have been released from detention (November 1992 Lawyer-to-Lawyer Network appeal). These two lawyers, along with three other lawyers, all representing the Social Democratic Front (SDF), had been taken into custody by the *Brigades Mixtes Mobile* on 26 October 1992. We are awaiting further information as to the circumstances surrounding their release as well as information as to the status of the other lawyers with whom they were taken into custody.'

Haiti

'In December 1992 lawyer Paul Yves Joseph (July and September 1992 Lawyer-to-Lawyer Network appeals) met with representatives from the Lawyers Committee in our New York office. Mr Joseph was a participant in a United States Information Agency (USIA) Project which arranged with him to meet with various legal and human rights groups throughout the United States. He has since returned to Haiti where he anticipated a continuation of harassment as a result of his human rights work.'

Malawi

'On 24 January Dr H. Kamazu Banda, President of Malawi, pardoned Mrs Vera Chirwa (October 1987, May 1992 and October 1992 Lawyer-to-Lawyer Network appeals). She has been released from Zomba Central Prison and has been reunited with her children. Mrs Chirwa was the first Malawian woman to become a lawyer. Orton Chirwa was the first African barrister in Malawi. Mr and Mrs Chirwa were arrested in January 1982 and were tried and convicted of treason and sentenced to death in 1983. The Lawyers Committee believes their trial did not meet international fair trial standards as set forth in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Their death sentences were commuted to life imprisonment in 1984 after an international campaign was launched on their behalf. Orton Chirwa died in Zomba Central Prison on 20 October 1992. He was 73 years old.'

To join the Network contact:

Lawyer-to-Lawyer Network,
330 Seventh Avenue, 10th Floor,
New York, NY 10001 United States.
tel (212) 629 6170
fax (212) 967 0916

Local information from:

Stuart Russell, School of Law, Macquarie University.
tel 02 805 7861.

Free Speech Committee

The Free Speech Committee was formed at a public meeting in Sydney in 1984 to promote freedom of expression, defend freedom of the communications media, promote the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas, work towards the liberalisation of defamation laws, work towards a society free of the laws of censorship and promote more democratic access to ownership and control of the communications media.

Contact:

PO Box 55-s, Bexley South NSW 2207

The Committee is hosting a seminar on *Sex and Censorship* in Melbourne, Friday 21 May, 2-7 p.m. at the State Film Centre, 1 Macarthur Street, East Melbourne. Registrations essential. For information contact:

tel (03) 694 6119 or (02) 389 4009
fax (02) 399 8564