

The next Olympic Games are proving to be a missed opportunity for China to show more respect for human rights. In Myanmar the number of people persecuted by the regime keeps growing, notwithstanding the international echo raised by the pacific protest of the Buddhist monks. But it's violence on minors which confirms to be a global emergence

THE FRONTIER OF RIGHTS

edited by Alessandra Cipolla

CHINA GAMES

It's only a few months to the start of the Olympic Games but the Chinese authorities already seem to have lost the most important contest of all: showing the world that they are truly committed to improving their human rights situation – the undertaking China made when it won the right to host the Games.

As Amnesty International has reported, in recent months police in Beijing have used the preparations for the Games as an excuse for “cleaning up the city” and have increased the use of various illegal forms of detention, such as “enforced drug rehabilitation” and even “re-education through labour”, forms of detention for up to four years, without charges, trial or judicial review, which Amnesty International says have been imposed on hundreds of thousands of people. According to official sources, by the end of this month the standing committee of the National People's Congress is due to examine new legislation known as the “Law to correct unlawful behaviour” which is supposed to replace the system of “re-education through labour”.

On the other hand, as Freedom House has pointed out, the International Olympic Committee seems more concerned by environmental repercussions, such as air quality, than by the repressive policies of the Chinese. In February 2001, during an IOC visit to Beijing, the Chinese authorities introduced measures to restrict the use of coal for domestic heating: the result was a temporary improvement in air quality, but the move left millions of inhabitants in the cold in the middle of winter. And that was just a foretaste of the Beijing regeneration plan, which includes mass demolition of the city's most ancient houses. Over a million citizens have been evicted and an unknown percentage has been made homeless.

The media have also been “instructed” accordingly: they are to play up the benefits expected from the Olympics and avoid any reference whatever to the price being paid by the Chinese people. **China's support for the brutal Sudanese regime and the Darfur massacre which prompted Mia Farrow to refer to the “Genocide Olympics” aren't helping Beijing put on a good face for the Games either.** Comparisons are already being drawn between these Olympics, the 1936 Berlin Olympics and those held in the Soviet Union in 1980.

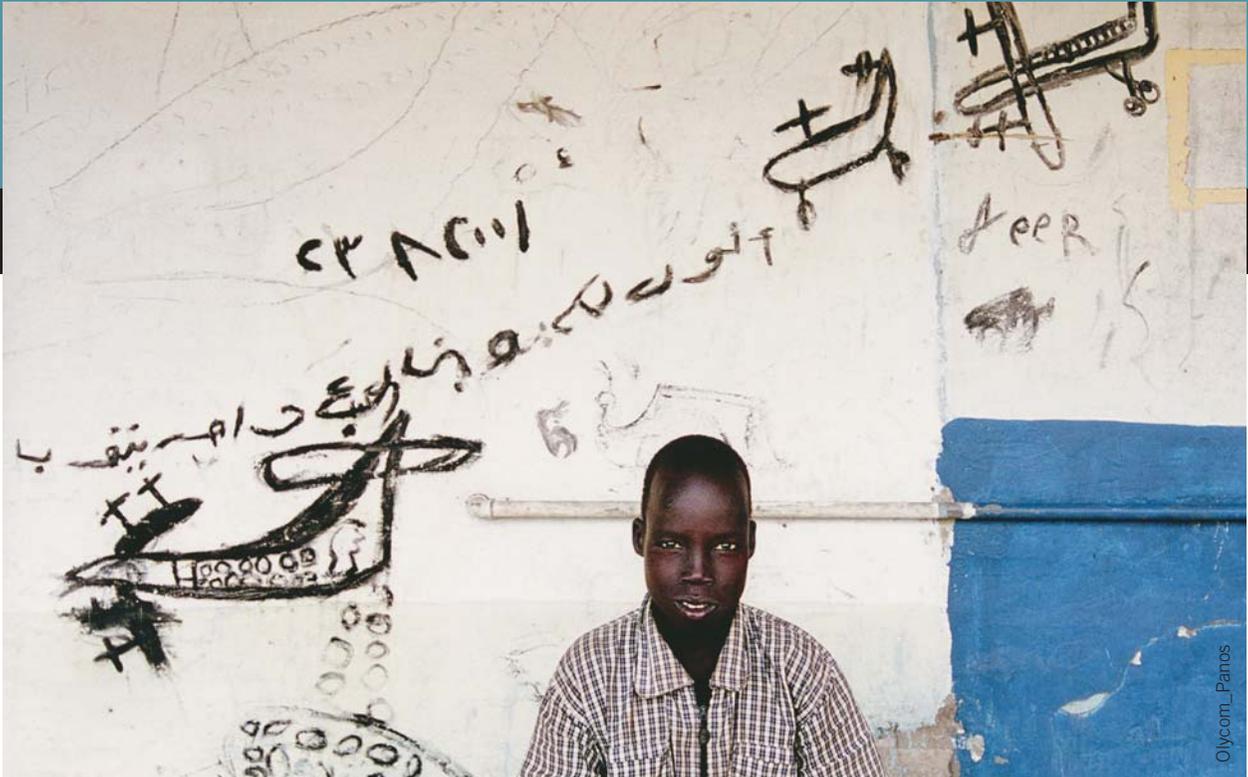
CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse is a real global emergency and it affects every social class and every country in the world without distinction. According to a UN report on child abuse, millions of children are the victims of violence and many lack adequate care or legal protection. The most notable forms of abuse are sexual abuse, torture, forced labour, sex exploitation, traditional practices prejudicial to health (e.g. sexual mutilation), child marriage, rape, murder, severe bullying, and physical punishment. Abuse is generally committed within the family, workplace or close community, by someone who is part of the child's daily life. The UN Report estimates that every year 275 million children are involved in acts of violence or ill-treated within the home, with devastating and possibly life-long psychological consequences.

CHILDREN AT WAR

Children make up a third of the victims of the collateral effects of war: 43 countries recruit minors as soldiers; children are often subjected to rape and serious sexual abuse, or they are abducted, only to end up in the army, the sex trade or working as forced labour; or else they are forced to migrate, suffering death through illness or malnutrition, or illegal detention and the denial of access to humanitarian aid. This is the appalling picture that emerges from the **new report *Children and Conflict in a Changing World*** issued jointly by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and UNICEF. The report highlights **the progress made in protecting children from war crimes such as unlawful recruitment by armed forces and groups and sexual violence.**

The report's key recommendations include a call to end impunity for those responsible for brutal crimes against children. That means ensuring that war crimes are prosecuted and respecting the major international norms applicable to these issues. There have been a few important successes in the first trials by international tribunals; their progress is monitored by the Security Council, which also has the job of monitoring the adoption of new legislation and international standards. The latter include the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed



conflict and the adoption of the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment and their use in war. The new report suggests practical recommendations for the next ten years, including an appeal to member States and society as a whole to safeguard the children who live in war zones (and there are more than 50 of these) all over the world, as well as those who are struggling to survive in countries where conflict has only recently ended.

FOUR SYMBOLS FOR ALL

As monks once more took to the streets, to mark the 18th anniversary of the Burmese persecution of Aung San Suu Kyi Amnesty International drew the world's attention to four people who stand as **symbols for all those suffering from persecution in Myanmar. If everyone is familiar with the story of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the other three – U Win Tin, U Khun Htun Oo, and Zaw Htet Ko Ko – have enjoyed less media attention.**

77-year old U Win Tin has spent the last 18 years in prison as a result of his peaceful opposition to the Burmese military authorities and his activities in defence of human rights and freedom of expression. A journalist and supporter of the NLD, Burma's main opposition party, he has been in prison since 1989, despite his very poor state of health – a consequence of the harsh prison conditions and isolation; he is due to be released in 2009.

U Khun Htun (64), is a member of parliament and leader of the opposition group, the Shan

Nationalities League for Democracy. Shan is the largest ethnic minority in Myanmar. U Khun Htun is serving a 93-year sentence in one of the harshest and most remote prisons in the country, accused of having expressed, during a meeting, opinions liable to undermine the stability of the State.

Zaw Htet Ko Ko is a young member of the 1988 Generation Students Group who was caught up in a police crackdown. Since then there has been no further news of him, a fact that arouses fears that he has been detained and tortured. His only possible "crime" is his enthusiasm for the internet and defence of the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of information.

THE EXECUTIONER'S PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

The last US execution by lethal injection took place on 25 September. Since then many states have adopted a *de facto* moratorium on execution. There have been postponements in Virginia, Arkansas and Texas, where three executions have been cancelled: at the end of August, the end of September and the beginning of October, when President Bush himself put a stop to the execution. **The trend in the USA seems to be to pause for thought, if not actually an official moratorium. The system of death by injection, based on a lethal cocktail of three substances, is used in 36 of the 37 US States that have the death penalty: the only exception is Nebraska, which still uses the electric chair. Since the beginning of this year 42 people have been executed in the USA, compared with 53 in 2006.**