

## 'Blitz' sends message: Perth no longer ours

WA Police have arrested five times as many people in 2011 – and charged them with six times as many offences – as in the same period in 2010, proving that Perth is no longer a city run for its inhabitants but for the benefit of Commonwealth Heads of Government who will meet in the city in late-October 2011, says Civil Liberties Australia's WA State Director Rex Widerstrom.

"Between April and June 2010, police charged 468 people with 677 offences. In the same period in 2011, 2134 people have been detained for an alleged 3973 offences," Mr Widerstrom said.

"This isn't the result of a crime wave; Perth people are not five times more lawless than they were last year. They haven't woken up one morning and decided to go out and commit almost six times the number of offences they did last year.

"Instead this is a message from the Barnett government, delivered by Police Commissioner O'Callaghan: if you're homeless, poor, are mentally ill, have a problem with alcohol or drugs; if you're scruffy and smelly and simply looking as if you might upset the head of a Commonwealth country, then stay out of Perth or you'll be arrested and harassed.

"The WA Government finds you an embarrassment in front of their new friends, a mix of nonentities and despots otherwise known as the Commonwealth.

"Some of the people with whom Mr Barnett will be shaking hands, at his carefully orchestrated photo ops, head some of the most oppressive and violent regimes in the world, so they'll feel right at home as WA Police detain and harass their own citizens.

"As Human Rights Watch so aptly said in 2009, the Commonwealth is a 'jamboree of repression' whose 21st century role seems to be to 'act as a haven for serial human rights abusers'.

"What's happening here is that a Liberal state government is doing the dirty work of a Labor federal government against citizens of Australia of behalf of questionable characters from outside Australia.

"Let's take a close look at some of the countries whose leaders are considered too delicate to look upon Perth's poor, homeless, unemployed and ill. And these are just the current human rights abuses they're perpetrating; most of these countries have a long history of repression...a history the Barnett government seems keen to emulate."

**Bangladesh:** Mass trials of the alleged mutineers of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), many of the accused with no legal counsel. Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) does not comply with international standards. And the Bangladeshi government has yet to stop illegal punishments such as whipping, lashing, or public humiliations, usually of women.

**Cameroon:** As recently as August 2010 three men were detained by police because they "appeared feminine". One has since been released, the other two charged with "homosexuality", which is illegal under Section 347 of Cameroon's penal code. One of the men claims he was tortured to force him to confess to being homosexual.

**Dominica:** Women who become pregnant are routinely fired from their jobs. Female workers in that country are subjected to involuntary HIV testing, and those who test positive are fired and denied adequate healthcare. Public health professionals routinely reveal HIV test results to women's families without the tested individuals knowledge or consent, exposing them to violence and abuse.

**India:** Unmarked graves have just been discovered in Jammu and Kashmir state, and at least 8,000 people have 'disappeared' since the insurgency in that region began. The officials responsible have enjoyed impunity and there has been near total failure of India's judicial and state institutions to provide justice for victims' families.

**Jamaica:** Last year reports emerged of more than 70 extrajudicial executions of civilians by members of the Jamaican security forces in a joint police and military operation: witnesses reported seeing soldiers shoot unarmed men at point-blank range. Children – often as young as 12 or 13 – are routinely detained for six months or more in filthy and overcrowded police lockups, and there is widespread violence and discrimination against people living with and at high risk of HIV/AIDS.

**Kenya:** Police use violence, arbitrary arrest, unlawful detention in inhuman and degrading conditions, threats of deportation, and wrongful prosecution for "unlawful presence" to extort money from asylum seekers – men, women, and children alike. In some cases, police also rape women. In May 2011 Kenya expelled a human rights activist, the Immigration Minister telling Parliament that she was "involved in subversive activities which were a threat to national security," and falsely claimed she was traveling on two passports.

**Malaysia:** Six leaders of the opposition political party PSM are being held without charge under Malaysia's draconian preventive detention laws. There was widespread use of excessive force and unwarranted arrests by the security forces during a march for electoral reform in Kuala Lumpur on 9 July 2011. The government has cracked down on the Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (Bersih) and arbitrarily several people detained for involvement in its activities.

**Nigeria:** Post-election violence in April 2011 resulted in more than 800 deaths. Both the police and the military were implicated in the excessive use of force and other serious abuses while responding to the rioting and sectarian violence. Endemic government corruption has undermined the basic rights of millions of Nigerians, and there are myriad forms of police corruption.

**Pakistan:** Currently there are widespread 'disappearances' of suspected militants and activists by the military and intelligence agencies in the south-western province of Balochistan, and attacks on teachers and schools. Methods of torture used on detainees include beatings, often with sticks or leather belts,

hanging them upside down, and prolonged food and sleep deprivation. This has been going on since 2005, and dozens of new enforced disappearances have occurred since Pakistan returned to civilian rule in 2008.

**Papua New Guinea:** Police violence against children remains rampant. Police routinely lock children up with adults, even when separate space is available, placing them at risk of rape and other forms of violence. Documented abuses include police officers opening fire on unarmed schoolboys in October 2005; police beating and gang-raping girls and women during a well-documented raid on an alleged brothel in March 2004; and corrections officers at Buimo prison beating and sexually abusing boy detainees by forcing them to have anal sex with each other in January 2006.

**Rwanda:** The opposition party leader was arrested just weeks before the 2010 elections and is now serving a prison sentence for opposing the government; a priest has spent six months in detention after criticising state policies on housing and family planning in his Christmas sermon; workers for various human rights groups have been detained, harassed and repeatedly threatened over the past 10 years.

**Singapore:** Despite multiple calls at the UN Human Rights Council for Singapore to repeal the Internal Security Act and other preventive detention laws, to impose a moratorium on capital punishment, and to eliminate caning as a form of punishment, the government has shown little inclination to reform. It has refused to adopt human rights treaties or change abusive laws.

**South Africa:** Workers in Western Cape province are denied adequate housing, proper safety equipment, and basic labour rights. Asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants face harassment and the credible fear of deportation, preventing many newcomers from seeking medical treatment even though South African law and policy state that they have a right to care. Those who do seek treatment are often mistreated and verbally abused by health care workers and denied care or charged unlawful fees.

**Sri Lanka:** A May 2010 UN report concluded that government forces and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) conducted military operations "with flagrant disregard for the protection, rights, welfare and lives of civilians and failed to respect the norms of international law." The report also said that tens of thousands of civilians might have been killed during the last five months of the war, the majority by government shelling. The government has also failed to bring to justice those responsible for the execution-style slaying of 17 aid workers five years ago.

**Uganda:** Allows trials of civilians before military courts, which violate international legal principles. Since 2002, military courts in Uganda have prosecuted over 1,000 civilians on charges under the criminal code, such as murder and armed robbery. Cases before the military courts fail to respect fundamental fair trial rights including prohibition on the use of evidence procured by torture. In Ugandan prisons there is routine physical abuse and prisoners at rural prisons, including the elderly, individuals with disabilities, and pregnant

women, are frequently caned, or are even stoned, handcuffed to a tree, or burned, when they refuse to perform hard labor.

"This is by no means a comprehensive list of human rights abuse perpetrated by the 'leaders' for whom Perth people are being cleared away," Mr Widerstrom said.

"There are many issues, such as marital rape, that affect an entire region – southern Africa in that instance – and thus several Commonwealth member states. There are other, longstanding and endemic abuses we haven't listed at all.

"Are Messrs Barnett and O'Callaghan intent on demonstrating to Commonwealth leaders that Western Australia is up there with the best of them when it comes to human rights abuses and over-zealous policing?

"If not, Civil Liberties Australia calls on the Premier to demonstrate that Western Australia is in fact a tolerant, inclusive modern democracy by reining in the WA Police."

ENDS

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*For a comprehensive list of abuses of human rights by Commonwealth member countries (and others) see Human Rights Watch: <http://www.hrw.org/>*

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