

ON November 30th, 1991, soldiers entered the village of Imamuddin Para, in Burma's Arakan province.

They burst open the door of the village grocery store, seized the shopkeeper, Imam Hussain, and marched him outside.

Placing a heavy box of ammunition on his shoulders, they informed him that he was now a porter for the Burmese Army.

The weight was crushing. After a few miles Hussain protested that he did not have the strength to carry it any further.

The soldiers responded by giving him a savage beating.

Then they took him and nailed him to a tree with his arms outstretched.

They cut off his penis and put it into his mouth. They severed his nose and ripped off his eyebrows.

At last, a soldier thrust a bayonet into his chest and, mercifully, Imam Hussain died.

"My sister's little heart could take no more."

Hussain's wife, Zohra Begum, was at home seven miles away when news of the tragedy reached her.

She ran all the way to the spot and found her husband's mutilated body still nailed to the tree.

In a daze of horror and grief - hardly knowing what she was doing - Zohra started back for help.

She had almost reached home when an evil chance brought her face to face with the soldiers who had killed her husband.

They showed their pity for the sobbing woman by gang-rape her.

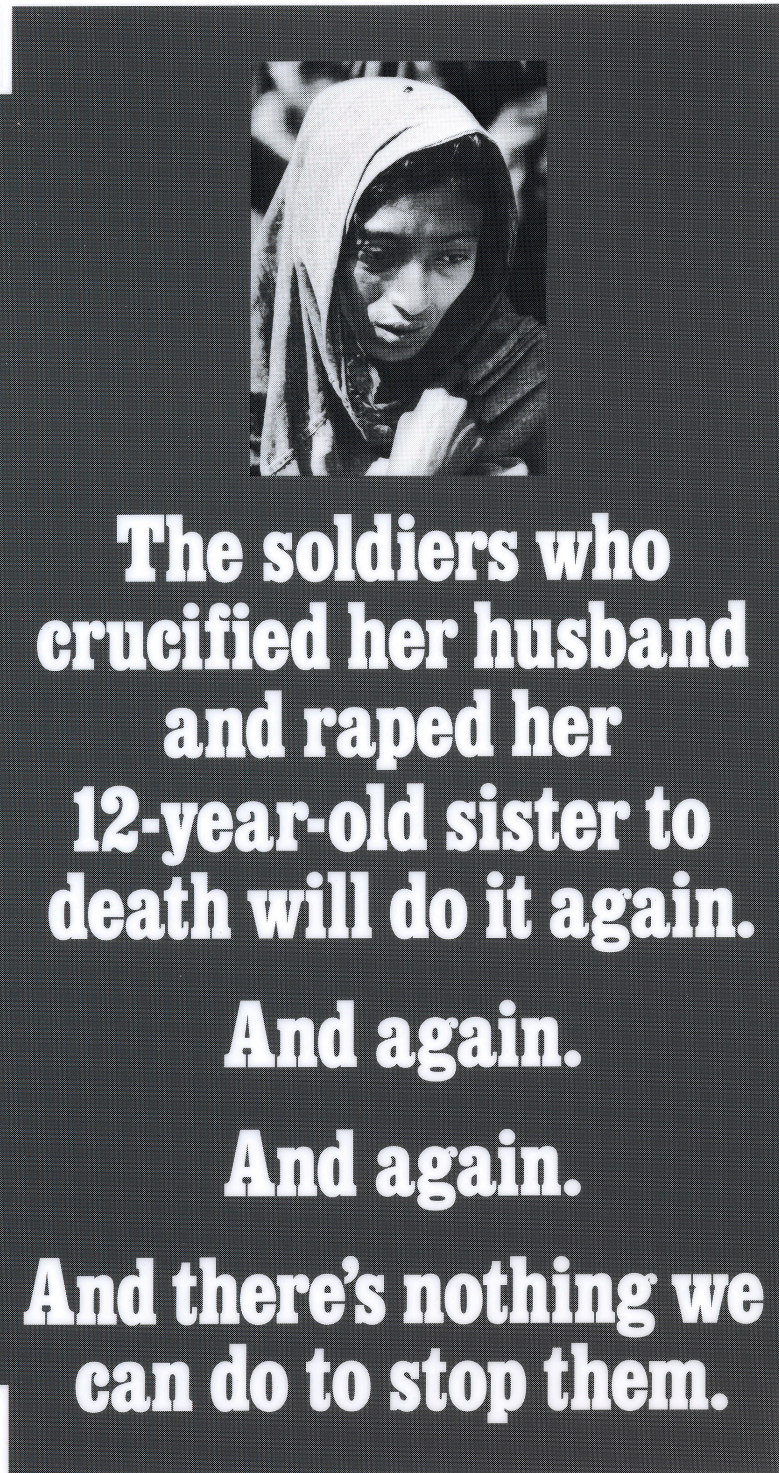
A week later, the same soldiers took Zohra and her twelve-year-old sister to the Lawadong army camp, where they were locked in a room with about forty other female captives.

Soldiers would enter the room, choose a woman, and repeatedly rape her in front of all the others.

Zohra said, "After five days my sister's little heart could take it no more. She went into convulsions and died. When the soldiers saw that I, too, could take no more, they freed me."

Zohra's story is not even unusual.

We'd probably never have heard Zohra's story had she not managed to escape to a refugee camp in Bangladesh, where she met Jon Swain of the Sunday Times. The savagery of what happened to her



The soldiers who crucified her husband and raped her 12-year-old sister to death will do it again. And again. And again. And there's nothing we can do to stop them.

and her family might tempt you to think that it's an extreme case - the work of madmen - but it isn't.

Zohra's was by no means the only horrible story in the Sunday Times article.

And over the last few weeks many more atrocities have been reported in the newspapers.

None of this is even new.

Amnesty reports published in November 1990 and January 1992 gave the world details of what was happening in Burma - or Myanmar, as it is now called by its military rulers.

We revealed that the Burmese army was conscripting villagers to serve as porters, sometimes

killing them when they became too weak or too ill to carry their loads.

We told how village women are living in fear of gang-rape.

We told the story of a muslim woman who was forced to be a porter in April 1991. She was beaten to death by soldiers after she suffered an epileptic seizure which made it impossible for her to carry her load.

Surely something can be done to help.

Reading this, there's probably just one thing you want to know. What can be done to help?

The answer is, nothing. Burma is a closed country.

Amnesty International has never been allowed in.

Apart from brief spells in 1989 and May 1990, journalists have been refused entry.

Dozens of governments, including Britain's have demanded

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that the terror stop - but to no avail. The military junta don't give a damn what you, or Amnesty, or anyone else, think of them and their butchery.

And although we will continue to do everything in our power to help people trapped in Burma, right now it seems as though nothing can end the nightmare.

Absolutely nothing.

What should we do when we can do nothing?

When our pity and anger can alter nothing; when we see pain we cannot heal, grief we cannot comfort; when our generosity is as useless as indifference - what should we do then?

Should we despair and do nothing?

Thirty years ago, Peter Benenson founded Amnesty International with these words: "It is better to light one candle than curse the darkness."

In the instant that you are reading this, somewhere a man is crying under torture.

Somewhere, a terrified woman is about to be raped.

Thousands of families are in anguish because their loved ones have "disappeared."

Thousands are unjustly imprisoned with little hope of release.

What's the point of getting angry about not being able to help Zohra, if you're not willing to help these people?

You can do a lot to help them. Every day, Amnesty brings hope to prisoners of conscience all over the world. When we expose what governments are doing public anger often forces them to stop.

All it need cost you to support this work is about one minute of your time and a modest membership fee.

We've asked you many times before to join us. Perhaps you've meant to respond, but just never got around to it.

Do it now.

If only you realised how valuable your help is, you wouldn't let anything stop you.

Please - this time - today - this minute - light the candle.