



Amnesty International

Orange County

GROUP 141 **ORANGE** • GROUP 175 **LONG BEACH**
GROUP 178 **IRVINE** • GROUP 576 **HUNTINGTON BEACH**

March 2003

From the Executive Director: AS WAR CLOUDS GATHER

This column, by AIUSA Executive Director Bill Schulz, is taken from the March 2003 Monthly Mailing.

The impending war with Iraq is on all of our minds at the moment. I have written in this column before about some of the challenges that such a conflict presents to Amnesty International.

Having criticized Saddam Hussein's regime for years for its outrageous human rights violations, we can only feel considerable ambivalence when those violations are cited as one of the reasons to go to war. Nor can we help being suspicious that human rights may simply be a mask for other motives when the U.S. announces that, evil as Saddam Hussein has been, we would welcome his exile; we would, in other words, grant him absolute impunity for his terrible crimes.

How sad it is that the United States, having rarely paid much attention to Iraq's human rights record in the past, including when Hussein used chemical weapons against the Kurds, is now trumpeting the nature of that record as a reason to impose more suffering on the Iraqi people. We can only imagine that, had the Western powers done more to stop Iraq's atrocities years ago, we might not be in the situation we are now.

And let us not doubt for a moment that, whatever else it achieves, military action against Iraq will result in civilian casualties and massive refugee flows. The U.S. has indicated that it plans to inflict harsh bombing on Baghdad in order to bring the conflict to a swift conclusion. We know who will suffer most if that happens—the very Iraqis who have been the most persistent victims of both Saddam's vicious rule and the economic sanctions designed to end it.

At the same time and for good reason, Amnesty International takes no position on military action per se. This has long been Amnesty's policy and, though I personally believe that policy should be modified to allow Amnesty to call for military intervention in the case of genocide, I think that in large measure it is a good one.

It is our job, after all, to monitor the violations that may be committed by all sides in a conflict and, in order to maintain our credibility to do that, we need to not get swept up in political debates about whether or not to go to war in the first place. If we supported military action, for example, we could quite justifiably be accused of complicity in whatever human rights abuses resulted from it. If we opposed military action, any criticisms we might make of abuses committed during the course of war would fall under the cloud of suspicion that we were biased against that military from the get-go.

Because so many Amnesty staff and members oppose this war, it has sometimes been difficult to hold separate our per-

sonal views from AI policy but I think, on balance, we've done a good job in this respect. Our role is an important one: it is to insist that, before going to war, the international community weigh the impact of war on the human rights of the Iraqi people and others in the region who may be affected in order that those considerations be part of the calculus.

This is why our Secretary General, Irene Khan, has demanded that before authorizing military force, the U.N. Security Council hold a full and public debate on the human rights and humanitarian consequences of war—both to inform that calculus and to ensure that steps are taken in the event of war to prevent or mitigate abuses.

It is not an easy time but Amnesty International will remain faithful to its purpose and its principles. We expect soon to see an Amnesty mission on the ground in the region. We hope to have regular reports from future missions about exactly what is happening to those innocent people about whom we care so deeply.

Human rights by themselves cannot save the world from peril or conflagration. But they can make it just a bit less brutal, a shade more civilized. It's hard to see that in the face of armed conflict and terror and death, but our job is to keep showing it's true.

AI Says Security Council Scared to Face Up To Human Toll of Iraq War

Saying the issue is far too important to be discussed behind closed doors, Amnesty International Secretary General Irene Khan called in February for a full and open debate of the entire United Nations on the human rights consequences as it contemplates military action against Iraq.

"A formal, open and transparent debate is needed," Khan argued. "Is the Security Council scared to face up to the human toll of conflict in Iraq? The humanitarian and human rights consequences of war must be given high priority by the Security Council. When war is contemplated against a country whose people have been suffering from severe violations by their government and more than a decade of sanctions, the need for such an assessment is even more important."

"Such human rights and humanitarian consequences must be carefully considered and balanced against the threat that Iraq is said to constitute to peace and security, if the Council is to properly fulfill its responsibilities under the Charter," Khan said.

February Meeting Minutes

Group #141 Orange

Attendees

Jeannine Christensen, J. Kevin Gaffney, Deidre Jackson, Tami Jacoby, Valerie Orleans, Priscilla Rocco, and Ernie Solheid.

Letter-Writing

We sent 12 letters on behalf of our adopted prisoner of conscience, the Venerable Thich Huyen Quang, in Viet Nam, calling for his release from house arrest. [See the article below for new information about the group's prisoner.]

Upcoming Federal Execution

Deidre and Tami reported on the upcoming execution of Louis Jones, scheduled for early in the morning of March 18 by the federal government. There will be a candlelight vigil on the evening of March 17, from 5:00-10:00 PM at the Orange circle. There will also be a demonstration / vigil at the Westwood Federal Building, 11000 Wilshire Boulevard, that evening beginning at 6:00 PM.

Louis Jones, black, aged 52, a former soldier, was sentenced to death in October 1995 for the murder of a white woman, Tracie Joy McBride, eight months earlier.

Tracie McBride, a 19-year-old US Army private, was abducted from the Goodfellow Air Force Base in San Angelo, Texas. Louis Jones confessed to the crime, and took investigators to where Tracie McBride's body was located. She had been bludgeoned to death and there was evidence of sexual assault. Since the crime had begun on a US military facility, it was prosecuted as a federal rather than a Texas case.

Louis Jones's clemency petition, which is seeking commutation of his death sentence to life imprisonment without parole, raises the claim that he suffers from "Gulf War Syndrome". A leading expert on this issue has submitted that Louis Jones sustained brain cell damage in deep brain structures as a result of exposure to chemicals and toxins during his military service in the Gulf War in 1990/91. The expert has concluded that Louis Jones's brain damage could explain the marked changes in his behavior and personality on his return from the Gulf War, and may help to offer an explanation about how Louis Jones came to commit such a serious crime.

There is also evidence that the jurors who sentenced Louis Jones to death came to their decision under an erroneous instruction which four Supreme Court Justices believed tainted the jury's deliberations.

Design Project

Ernie showed the group the logo, brochure, and flyer designed for the Orange County groups by a group of students at California Institute of Art-Orange County. We discussed printing copies of the brochure for distribution when tabling.

February Meeting Minutes

Group #175 Long Beach

The Long Beach Group had a small turnout at its February 24 meeting. Tony Dorono, Jim Roberts and Jamie Skaluba. Three letters were written on behalf of Nguyen Dinh Huy of Viet Nam, the subject of our Action File.

There was discussion of AIUSA's handling of the situation of our Guatemalan Country Specialist Barbara Bocek who was briefly abducted last year as well as discussion about the AI's and AIUSA's organizational and governance structures.

February Meeting Minutes

Group #178 Irvine

Upcoming Events

Kristina Elali invited people to the March AIUSA Mini-Conference, held on March 1 in Fullerton, which was a resounding success.

Several members volunteered to table at the Great American Write-in on Saturday 8 March 2003 at the University club at UCI.

Norma Edwards announced that we should save the date of the last Saturday in March for an event related to the Woman's Human Rights Campaign, at the Cultural Diversity Center in Carson, California.

Fundraising

We are still exploring fund-raising opportunities.

Susan Halsted will be attempting to get a donation to cover costs of printing the new flyer designed by student volunteers.

Next Month's Meeting

Our March Speakers will be Christina Vargas (from the AIUSA Los Angeles Office) concerning her diversity project, and then Steve Spanier from Project Vote Smart, who will present effective ways of taking advantage of their useful website.

In the next few months we will be watching the new video available from AI concerning Human Rights in Russia.

Report on Orange Group's Prisoner

The International Buddhist Information Bureau released a press release on March 10 concerning the Venerable Thich Huyen Quang, the Orange group's adopted prisoner of conscience. According to the bureau, Thich Huyen Quang, Patriarch of the banned Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, is currently in Hanoi where he has undergone surgery to remove a painful growth near his right eye. In mid-February, doctors in Quang Ngai, where he is under house arrest, recommended that the 86-year-old Patriarch undergo surgery in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), because they feared the growth to be cancerous. But Security Police refused Thich Huyen Quang permission to travel to Saigon. As the growth became increasingly painful, doctors in Quang Ngai renewed their request in late February that he be allowed to receive surgery in Saigon. On March 4, the Quang Ngai authorities again refused permission, but said he could have the surgery in Hanoi on condition that he write a statement agreeing to return immediately after the operation to his hut near Quang Phuoc Pagoda in Nghia Hanh village (Quang Ngai) to continue his house arrest under the control of Security Police. Since the doctors insisted that surgery was vital, Thich Huyen Quang was obliged to accept this condition. The operation was successful and the growth has been removed.

Holiday Card Action Prisoner Freed

On January 26, N'sii Luanda Shandwe, President of the Committee of Human Rights Observers in the Democratic Republic of Congo, was freed, after serving nine months for his legitimate human rights work. N'sii is the second of this year's Holiday Card Action prisoners to be freed. The Turkish Government unconditionally released Sevil Dalkilic in late November.

Following his release, N'sii wrote to Amnesty International: "I am very grateful for all the assistance that Amnesty International has given me during my long detention. I have felt very close to all the sections of AI across the world through the New Year's greetings cards and the encouragement that I have received. It would be a great favor to me if you would transmit this message to all the sections who have supported me, notably Washington [USA], the Netherlands, France, Belgium, South Africa, U.K., etc. I am afraid that I have missed out some sections, perhaps particularly the USA, because there were so many cards. I thank the whole world. You could not imagine for one moment the courage, moral comfort, protection and good spirit that the cards have given me. . . . The director of the prison realized that he was dealing with a member of an international network of human rights defenders. He said it in front of several other detainees in my block. From this day the untimely searches in my cells ceased."

Iraq: Security Council Needs to Deploy Human Rights Monitors Now

"Whatever the outcome of the debate on the disarmament of Iraq, the protection of the human rights of the people of Iraq will remain a central concern. Concrete measures to address the human rights situation in Iraq must be considered as a matter of urgency," said Secretary General Irene Khan.

"It is essential that arrangements for the speedy deployment of sufficient numbers of qualified human rights monitors begins immediately. The Security Council has recognized the role of monitors in other country situations. It is time to do so with Iraq."

Amnesty International is calling on the United Nations (UN) Security Council to authorize the deployment of UN human rights monitors throughout Iraq and on the Iraqi government and the Kurdish authorities controlling parts of northern Iraq to provide the monitors with all the necessary access and cooperation.

Human rights monitors can make a difference. They are needed now to address the current grave human rights

concerns in Iraq. They would also play a crucial role in the immediate aftermath of any possible large-scale military action against Iraq, as the human rights situation in the country may deteriorate further. In the longer term a human rights field presence in the country would provide necessary expertise and advice for legislative and institutional reform and the establishment of the rule of law.

Human rights monitors would seek to provide protection by pro-actively addressing the authorities. They would work to ensure the establishment of durable human rights safeguards, including reformed legislation, practices and institutions, and promote the full range of human rights.

In addition, human rights monitors would provide the Security Council and other organs of the UN with much needed authoritative and timely information on human rights developments in Iraq.

The deployment of human rights monitors has been called for since 1993 by the General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights. Between 1994 and 1998 monitors gathered information on behalf of the Commission's Special Rapporteur on Iraq by visiting countries neighbouring Iraq. The Iraqi government has granted access to the Special Rapporteur, but has not allowed the stationing of human rights monitors in the count

New Membership Program Coordinator

Samer Rabadi is the new Membership Program Coordinator in the Western Region. Rabadi has been closely involved with AIUSA for 10 years as an office intern, a trainer, Chair of GLAD, and Culver City group coordinator. Recently he served as the Area Coordinator for Oregon and was the Chair of the Regional Standing Committee on Membership Development. Samer replaces Mario Tafur, who left the position to join the Artists for Amnesty program.

Samer can be reached at the Western Regional Office in Los Angeles at (310) 815-0450 ext. 105 or by email at srabadi@aiusa.org.

Rights Readers Book Discussion Group

Amnesty International Group #22 in Pasadena/Caltech sponsors book discussions the third Sunday of each month at the Vromans Bookstore at 695 E. Colorado Boulevard in Pasadena. This month's discussion, on Sunday, March 16, 6:30 PM, is on *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the UDHR* by Mary Ann Glendon. All are welcome—just show up.

For further information, email rightsreaders@yahoo.com.

If you would like to continue receiving this newsletter and supporting the work of the Orange County and Long Beach Amnesty International groups, please return this coupon to the address below with annual dues of \$10.00. Dues are used to cover the costs of this newsletter and of letters on behalf of prisoners. Your address label contains your membership expiration date.

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For (check one):

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☐ Long Beach

Please make your check payable to Amnesty International. Contributions to AI are tax-deductible. Thank you for your interest and support!

Calendar

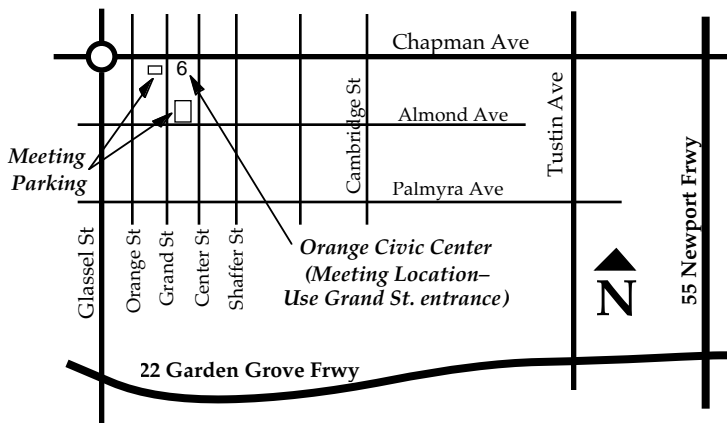
March

18 Tuesday 7:00 PM

Group #141 Orange Monthly Meeting at the Orange Civic Center, Conference Room C, at 300 E. Chapman Avenue, in Orange. Group #141 meets the third Tuesday of each month. For further information about the group, contact Deidre Jackson at (562) 430-7381.

24 Monday 7:00 PM

Group #596 Huntington Beach Meeting at Saints Simon and Jude Church, Room 7B, 20444 Magnolia Street in Huntington Beach. Group #596 meets the last Monday of each month. For further information about the group, contact Darcie Guy at (949) 650-5375.



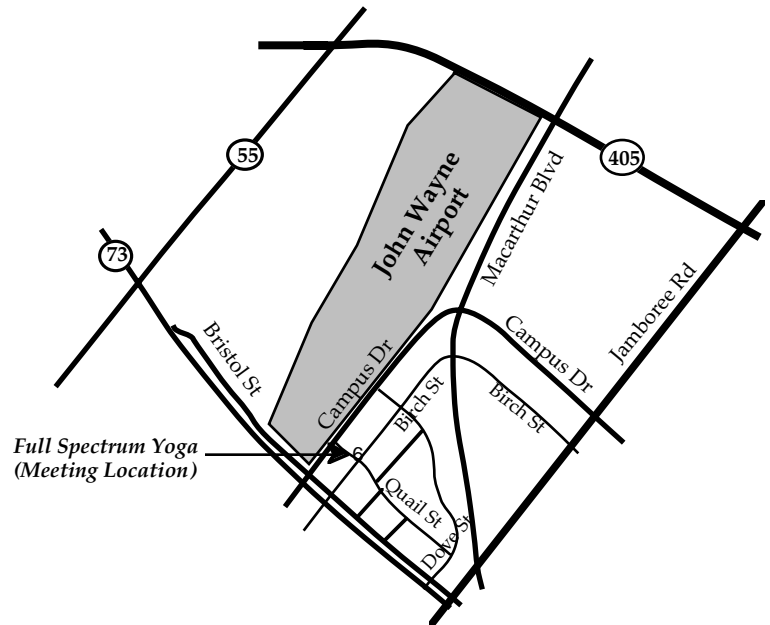
Group #141 Orange Meeting Location

25 Tuesday 7:00 PM

Group #175 Long Beach Monthly Meeting at the Unitarian Universalist Church, 5450 Atherton Street, Long Beach. Letter-writing from 7:00–7:30. Group #175 meets on the fourth Tuesday of each month. For further information about the group, contact Bobbi Kendig at (562) 420-1155.

25 Tuesday 7:30 PM

Group #178 Irvine Monthly Meeting at Full Spectrum Yoga, 2018 Quail Street, Newport Beach (across from John Wayne Airport). Group #178 meets the last Tuesday of each month. For more information about the group, contact Jacques Kilchoër at (714) 557-8427.



Group #178 Irvine Meeting Location

AIUSA Group 178
Post Office Box 16243
Irvine, California 92623