



# Amnesty International

Orange County

GROUP 141 ORANGE • GROUP 175 LONG BEACH  
GROUP 178 IRVINE • GROUP 596 HUNTINGTON BEACH

September 2003

## United States of America: The Threat of a Bad Example

*This article is taken from an August 18 news release issued by the International Secretariat of Amnesty International.*

"The very core of American history, law and culture condemns the ideas of punishment before trial, denial of due process and secret government by fiat . . . Who is an enemy combatant? Today, it can be anyone the president wants. And that is terrifying." A former judge on the Superior Court of New Jersey.

The US has displayed a troubling tendency to seek unchallengeable executive power for itself in the context of its "war on terror". It has created a parallel justice system in which the executive has the power to detain, interrogate, charge or try suspects under the "laws of war," Amnesty International said as it published a new report today.

"All too often where the US leads others follow, increasingly by using the language of "war," governments have disregarded human rights obligations; by using the term "terror" they have endeavoured to avoid international human rights law; and by using the phrase "war on terror," they have challenged the very framework of human rights and international humanitarian law."

In the report, *The Threat Of A Bad Example: Undermining International Standards As "War On Terror" Continues*, Amnesty International calls on governments everywhere to ensure that a strict respect for human rights principles remains at the heart of their search for justice and security. The report highlights issues relating to foreign detainees in US custody outside the USA, such as those at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, and the US air base at Bagram, Afghanistan, who have been denied access to their families and legal counsel for over a year now.

"Allegations of abuses such as arbitrary arrests, prolonged incommunicado detention, ill-treatment, interrogations without legal counsel and threats of unfair trials by military bodies are raised each year in the US State Department's reports on human rights practices in other countries," said Amnesty International. "Now they are being made against the US government in the context of its 'war on terror'."

Recent interviews conducted by Amnesty International with some of the few dozen people who have been released from Guantánamo confirm what Amnesty International has feared from the outset—that the totality of the conditions, including the prolonged indefinite and isolating nature of the detention regime, amounts to an abuse of human rights.

"The USA has variously used hooding, blindfolding, handcuffing, and shackling of detainees in Afghanistan, Iraq and Guantánamo."

The persistence of ill-treatment allegations, the lack of access to independent human rights organisations and lawyers who can make their findings public, coupled with the possibility that the USA's understanding of what constitutes cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment may not meet international definitions, have left Amnesty International seriously concerned about the treatment of those in US custody.

Ill-treatment also reported to Amnesty International include prolonged sleep deprivation, inadequate exercise provision, prolonged restraint in painful positions, sometimes combined with exposure to loud music, and exposure to 24-hour lighting. The conditions may also be coercive in the context of the repeated interrogations to which the detainees have been subjected, interrogations which could be used for prosecutorial as well as intelligence-gathering purposes, or for coercing plea bargains.

One released prisoner told Amnesty International that his hours-long interrogations at Guantánamo were "like torture." Another, a taxi driver, Sayed Abassin, told the organization that he had been arrested en route from Kabul to Khost in April 2002, despite explaining that he was just a driver and did not know his passengers. An apparent victim of circumstance, he spent more than a year in US custody, first in Afghanistan and then in Guantánamo. He says that at Bagram Air Base he was held in handcuffs and shackles, kept in 24-hour lighting, deprived of sleep, not given enough food, not allowed to talk or look at other detainees, and forced to stand or kneel for hours. He was finally released from Guantánamo in April 2003, having never had access to a lawyer, court of law or other legal process. He has received no compensation for his ordeal.

"There were no human rights for me in that year," Abassin told Amnesty International. Other released prisoners claimed there were more innocent people held at Guantánamo, arbitrarily arrested and held without evidence of wrongdoing.

Currently, the US plans to try selected detainees in front of military commissions, at which the defendant's right to counsel of choice and to an effective defence will be severely restricted. The commissions, applicable only to non-US nationals, will also allow a lower standard of evidence than would be admissible in the ordinary courts, and will have the power to hand down death sentences. On 3 July President Bush named six foreign nationals who would be the first to appear before the commissions. They include Feroz Ali Abbasi and Moazzam Begg, British nationals and David Hicks, an Australian national.

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## August Meeting Minutes

### Group #175 Long Beach

#### Attendees

Mary Kay Dunn, Mike Farris, Kevin Gaffney, Bobbi Kendig, Shean McMahan, Jim Roberts, Jamie Skaluba, Naomi Steinfeld.

#### Letter-Writing

We generated a total of 15 letters on behalf of our POC in Viet Nam and in response to an Urgent Action in Mexico. In addition, we wrote six cards for the Summer Postcard Action.

#### Guest Speaker in September

Beverly Anderson, who served as an impartial witness with a fact-finding mission in the Occupied Territories, will speak about her experiences at our meeting on Tuesday, September 23. She has much to say on her topic, "Israel and Palestine: Human Rights Under Fire." You will not want to miss this one!

#### Upcoming Mission

We discussed where our group wants to focus our energies, given AI's shift from the original Mandate to the current "Mission." All agreed that we will continue to work on behalf of POCs and that we will sustain our interest in Burma. Some expressed deep concern regarding the Patriot Act and the total lack of rights among the prisoners in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. We decided to review upcoming AI campaigns, seek out more information at the Annual General Meeting, and then decide where to concentrate our efforts.

#### Burma

Jim reported that Khin Nyunt is no longer Secretary 1 in Burma but has been named Prime Minister. It remains to be seen how the situation plays out, but at present many see the Prime Minister position as largely ceremonial. Khin Nyunt is considered somewhat more moderate than Senior General Than Shwe, the Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council.

#### Report on China

Naomi returned in May from Baoji, China, where she had spent several months working with street children. She still misses the children. She reported that she saw some changes happening in China, citing as an example a focus on better treatment of "floating people" who are not in their home areas.

#### Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be Tuesday, September 23 in the lounge of the Unitarian Universalist Church, 5450 Atherton Street, Long Beach. We will gather at 7:00 PM to sign letters and petitions, and our guest speaker, Beverly Anderson, will begin her talk at 7:30 PM. Refreshments will be served. All are welcome!

## August Meeting Minutes

### Group #596 Huntington Beach

We viewed the video *We Are Guatemala*, followed by Gabriella Miotto's incredible presentation.

This was followed by announcements:

- Sukh introduced Be the Cause, the Walk for Hope, and the Portal for Progress.
- Richard discussed Proposition 53.
- Richard (AI member) spoke about the Faith in Action meeting.
- Joan from the church discussed the beginning of the church library.
- Donna Rustvold spoke about the Domestic Abuse workshop.

A question that came to mind was integrating the Hispanic community as we have very little representation from them. *La Opinion*, a Spanish-language newspaper seems to be a good opportunity for future announcements.

Also, after such meetings, we need to come up with a way to offer both short-term and long-term ways an individual can assist for the issue at hand.

## Nigeria: Update on Amina Lawal

Amina Lawal, a 30-year-old Muslim woman who received a death sentence as a punishment for bearing a child out of wedlock, is currently awaiting the outcome of an appeal against the verdict.

On August 27, 2003, the verdict of Amina Lawal's hearing of her appeal in Katsina state, northern Nigeria was postponed to September 25, 2003. Amina Lawal and her team of lawyers were present at the hearing and the grounds on which this latest adjournment was made is yet to be known.

On March 25, 2003, the appeal of Amina Lawal's hearing was postponed until June 3, 2003 due to the unavailability of one of the judges and later to August 27, 2003 because of the lack of quorum of members of the tribunal. Amina Lawal was found guilty by a court in March 2002 after bearing a child outside marriage. Under Sharia Penal Legislation in place in several northern Nigerian states, this was sufficient for her to be convicted of the crime of adultery and summoned to appear before a Sharia tribunal to respond to a crime which now carries a punishment of death by stoning according to new Sharia penal legislations introduced in Nigeria in 1999.

## Myanmar: Aung San Suu Kyi Must Be Freed Immediately

Amnesty International is gravely concerned by a US State Department report that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the National League for Democracy is on a hunger strike in protest at her three month detention. The organization calls on the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC, the ruling military government) to release her immediately and unconditionally.

While the organization cannot confirm these reports, it remains deeply concerned for her safety, as she is being held in incommunicado detention in an unknown location. On July 29, the International Committee for the Red Cross visited her, and it is believed to be the last contact she had with the outside world.

Take action at <http://amnesty-news.c.tclnk.net/maabo5haa0cnsbb0g55b/>.

## Upcoming Events

### Bill Schulz in Orange County

On Saturday, September 13, Amnesty International USA Executive Director Bill Schulz will speak on the topic "Tainted Legacy: 9/11 and the Ruin of Human Rights" at the Orange Coast Unitarian Universalist Church in Costa Mesa. The talk will begin at 5:00 PM and will be followed by a reception.

This event is a fundraiser for Amnesty International. Tickets, which cost \$20 or \$15, can be purchased from the church office at (949) 646-4652.

Details about the event can be found at [http://www.occuuc.org/news/promo/Schulz\\_flyer.pdf](http://www.occuuc.org/news/promo/Schulz_flyer.pdf)

### imagine: a night of poetry, song and inspiration

Hosted by Greg Germann (*Ally McBeal*) and featuring Golden Globe winner Camryn Manheim (*The Practice*), poet and former Amnesty International prisoner of conscience Alicia Partnoy, and Executive Director, Amnesty International USA, Dr. William Schulz. Musical performances by Keb'Mo', Vonda Shepard, and Christine Mourad

**Date and Time:** Sunday, September 14, at 7:00 PM.

**Place:** Unitarian Universalist Church of Santa Monica, 1206 18th Street, Santa Monica.

Tickets are \$25 benefiting Amnesty International. For tickets call (310) 815-0450 ext. 107.

Join us in imagining a world without human rights violations.

### Special Speaker at Long Beach Group Meeting Israel & Palestine: Human Rights Under Fire

Is U.S. political, economic, and military support for the government of Israel really in America's and Israel's best interest? Beverly Anderson, who served as an impartial witness with a fact-finding mission in the Occupied Territories, will speak about her experiences at the Long Beach group's meeting on Tuesday, September 23. The following statement by Ms. Anderson describes her experiences:

I traveled to The West Bank, Gaza and Israel with a delegation from Global Exchange, a San Francisco based human rights organization. During the tour I observed continuing build up of Israeli settlements within the occupied territories in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention and "Jewish only" bypass roads funded by American taxpayer dollars. Successive U.S. administrations have condemned Israeli settlement building and have characterized the settlements as "an obstacle to peace." I witnessed numerous cases of "collective punishment," which is also a gross violation of International law. I observed and was informed of flagrant violations of the U.S. Arms Export Control Act, which prohibits the use

of U.S. supplied weapons against civilians. U.S. support for Israel has caused anger in the Arab world, and criticism from even our strongest allies.

Human rights are being violated on both sides. While Palestinians are locked in their homes, Israelis are not safe to move about freely. The simple acts of riding a bus, shopping in a market, or eating in a restaurant could be the last thing you ever do. Scores of Israeli and Palestinian children have lost their lives, or been permanently maimed by snipers or missiles while riding in the family car or walking to school.

Ask yourself, "Is America's uncritical support of Israeli Government policies really support at all?" Based on my observations, and what I was told by many of the Israelis I spoke to, the policies of the Israeli government and the actions of their military are provoking the attacks against Israeli civilians.

### Peace Walk & Jam

There will be a Peace Walk & Jam for the 10th Annual Celebration of the United Nations International Day of Peace on Saturday, September 20, 1:00–5:00 PM, at Chapman University in Orange at the Argyros Forum Patio, Glassell Street and Sycamore Avenue. The event will feature:

- Sponsors, Speakers & Organizational Faire (1:00–2:00 PM)
- Peace Walk to the Orange Circle (2:00–3:00 PM)
- Live Entertainment (3:00–5:00 PM)

The event is co-sponsored by: Peace Studies at Chapman, Bahai Communities of Orange County, United Nations Association, Orange County Chapter, Amnesty International, Orange Chapter.

## USA: The Threat of a Bad Example

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"It will be a case of second-class justice for foreign nationals in violation of the prohibition on the discriminatory application of fair trial rights," Amnesty International stated.

The report is part of Amnesty International's ongoing efforts to persuade the US authorities to comply with international standards in their response to the atrocities of September 11, 2001. Among recommendations outlined in the report, the organisation is calling on the US government to drop all plans for trials by military commissions, ensure that all detainees are either charged with recognizable criminal offences or released, provide legal counsel to detainees, and treat all detainees humanely, ensuring they are not subjected to any treatment which would violate international law and standards. It also calls on the US government to grant Amnesty International access to detainees and officials at Bagram Air Base and the Naval Base at Guantánamo Bay.

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.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State & Zip \_\_\_\_\_

#### Return to:

Amnesty International  
P.O. Box 864  
Orange, CA 92856

#### For (check one):

- ☐ Orange Group  
☐ Irvine Group  
☐ Huntington Beach  
☐ Long Beach

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

# Calendar

## September

16 Tuesday 7:00 PM

**Group #141 Orange Monthly Meeting** in the choir room at the Episcopal Church of the Messiah, on the corner of Main Street & Civic Center Drive in downtown Santa Ana. Park at the Hands Together Day Care center across the street. Group #141 meets the third Tuesday of each month. For further information about the group, contact Deidre Jackson at (562) 430-7381.

23 Tuesday 7:00 PM

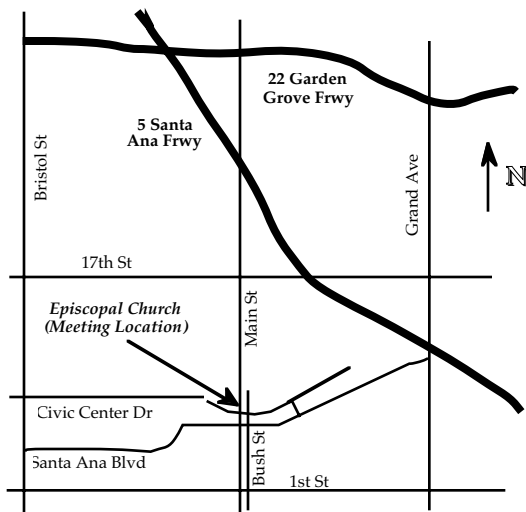
**Group #175 Long Beach Monthly Meeting** at the Unitarian Universalist Church, 5450 Atherton Street, Long Beach. Letter-writing from 7:00–7:30. Group #175 meets on the fourth Tuesday of each month. For further information about the group, contact Bobbi Kendig at (562) 420-1155.

29 Monday 7:00 PM

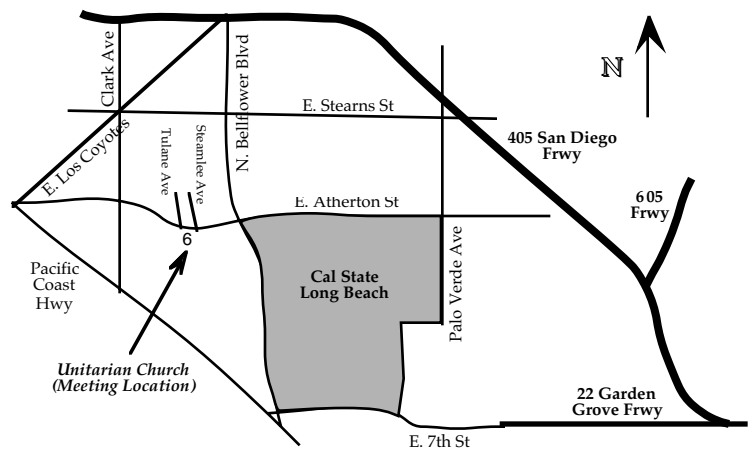
**Group #596 Huntington Beach Meeting** at Saints Simon and Jude Church, Room 7A, 20444 Magnolia Street in Huntington Beach. Group #596 meets the last Monday of each month. For further information about the group, contact Darcie Guy at (949) 650-5375.

30 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 Kilchoer at (714) 557-8427.



**Group #141 Orange Meeting Location**



**Group #175 Long Beach Meeting Location**

Amnesty International Local Group 178  
Post Office Box 16243  
Irvine, California 92623-6243