



Amnesty International

Orange County

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

February 2004

<http://www.aiusaoc.org>

Execution of Child Offenders: Time to End a Shameful Practice

This article is taken from a January 21 AI press release.

The execution of people for crimes committed when they were children must finally be consigned to history, Amnesty International said today as it launched a two-year action aimed at stopping such executions by the end of 2005.

"International human rights norms proscribe sentencing children to death," said Dr. William F. Schulz, Executive Director, AIUSA. "The United States is currently one of a handful of countries that still executes juvenile offenders. However, even in the United States, there is a discernible move away from this heinous practice due to a greater awareness that children constitute a 'protected' class."

Child offenders are people convicted of crimes committed when they were below the age of 18. In the report issued today, *Stop Child Executions! Ending the death penalty for child offenders*, Amnesty International documents the executions of child offenders in eight countries since 1990: China, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the United States of America, and Yemen. Most of these countries have now changed their laws to ban the use of the juvenile death penalty leaving the US as the only country that openly acknowledges executing juvenile offenders and which claims for itself the right to do so.

"The USA promotes itself as global human rights champion, yet it accounts for 13 of the 19 known executions of child offenders reported since 1998" Amnesty International continued, "As other violators drop away, the United States could be said to be the least progressive country in the world on this issue."

Georgia, Louisiana, Missouri, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia are the only states to have executed juvenile offenders since the death penalty was reinstated in the US in 1976. Combined, however, these states are responsible for 19 of the 34 juvenile executions to have occurred in the world since 1990. Since 1977, Texas has executed 13 juvenile offenders. Virginia trails Texas with 3 such executions.

Three more prisoners—Edward Capetillo, Raul Villarreal and Efrain Perez—are scheduled to be executed in the United States before the end of June for crimes committed when they were 17.

In a second report issued today, Amnesty International highlights the case of Nanon Williams, on death row in the USA for a crime committed when he was 17. His case also illustrates wider problems in US capital cases, including inadequate defence representation and the state's use of unreliable evidence. Amnesty International is calling for Nanon Williams

to be granted a new trial to answer the doubts about his guilt that have arisen since the trial. This time, in line with international law, the death penalty should not be an option.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has concluded that the prohibition on the execution of child offenders has become a norm of jus cogens, binding on all countries, and equivalent to the ban on torture and genocide. A recent meeting of Nobel Peace laureates described the execution of child offenders as "unconscionable". Four US Supreme Court Justices, one short of a majority, have said that the execution of people who were under 18 at the time of the crime is a "shameful practice" and a "relic of the past".

Characteristics of youth such as immaturity, impulsiveness, poor judgment, susceptibility to peer pressure, and a vulnerability to the domination or example of elders, together with a young person's capacity for rehabilitation and change, lie behind the global ban on the use of the death penalty for the crimes of children. Scientific evidence indicates that brain development continues into a person's 20s.

Killing child offenders is to kill hope for the future. Almost every country in the world has abandoned this counsel of despair. The minority must be persuaded that they are operating on the wrong side of history". Amnesty International concluded.

Background Information

A long-standing principle of international law prohibits the use of the death penalty against child offenders, those who were under 18 years old at the time of the crime. Today, 192 countries have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, one of the treaties which ban such executions.

Since 1990, there have been 34 executions of child offenders recorded worldwide in eight countries, 19 of them in the USA. Of the eight countries, Yemen, Pakistan and China have now abolished this use of the death penalty, although there are still some problems in enforcing the law in the latter two. A bill raising the minimum age for the imposition of the death penalty to 18 was approved by the Iranian parliament in December 2003 and is now awaiting approval by the country's Council of Guardians. The Democratic Republic of the Congo has abolished the special military courts that resulted in a child being executed in 2000. Amnesty International has not recorded any such executions in Saudi Arabia since 1992 or in Nigeria since 1997. Child offenders also remain under sentence of death in the Philippines and Sudan.

January Meeting Minutes

Group #596 Huntington Beach Meeting

Our last meeting was on January 26. We had about 16 in attendance.

Our guest speaker was Joanne Baker, who founded Tia's Arms two years ago. Tia's Arms raises funds for the care of abandoned or orphaned children affected by AIDS in South Africa. The goal of this organization is to provide hospice care to babies and children who are dying. Consult the group's website www.tiasarms.com for more information.

It was a wonderful discussion and I would highly recommend Joanne as a speaker at future Amnesty events. Joanne is currently looking for volunteers for a fund raising dinner in June. Please contact her at tias_arms@yahoo.com or (949) 650-6254.

February Meeting

For next month's meeting, scheduled for Monday, February 23, we will have a panel discussing Afghanistan. Our speakers are:

Dr. Nahid Aziz fled from Afghansitan at age 15 with her family after the invasion by the former Soviet Union. She sought political asylum in Germany where she finished high school and part of her undergraduate studies in psychology. She then moved to the US in 1991 where she earned her B.A., M.A., and Doctorate in Clinical Psychology degrees.

She is currently a faculty member at Argosy University in the Department of Psychology teaching graduate courses in psychology and counseling. She is involved in developing clinical guidelines, training manuals for mental health professionals, and treating Afghan immigrant/refugee women. Her specialties include cross-cultural psychology, multicultural issues and mental health, and womens studies.

She is intensively involved in increasing public's awareness of the condition of Afghan women and their basic human rights. She will also talk about the current conditions of Afghan women and the human rights of Afghan women and girls in postwar Afghanistan.

Bashir Ghazialam was born in 1971 in Kabul, Afghanistan. In 1985, he immigrated to the United States with his family. He attended UCSD, and graduated from law school in 2000. He currently practices law in Orange County and San Diego and does non-profit work as a member of the Board of Directors of Sister Schools Of San Diego, where he is Coordinator of the Afghan Education/Teacher Training Initiative, and as a volunteer and legal counsel for the Afghanistan Relief Organization.

From January to April, 2003, Bashir went to Afghanistan to take part in the reform of Afghanistan's judicial system. In Kabul, Bashir assisted in opening a Kabul office for IDLO, which is a law development organization with a background in providing legal technical support and training to post-conflict governments.

Also while in Kabul, Bashir assisted the Judicial Reform Commission, which consists of 11 members appointed by President Karzai in setting out a work plan of activities to reform and revive the justice system of Afghanistan. Bashir also served as an advisor to the Minister of Justice, and in November 2003, Bashir traveled to Geneva and Afghanistan working as a Rule

of Law and Justice Reform Advisor with the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. Bashir helped prepare a report entitled, *Practical Review of Rule of Law and Justice Sector Assistance to Afghanistan*.

Robbie Prepas is an attorney and a midwife. She lives in Laguna Beach with her husband Steve Prepas who is a pediatric ophthalmologist. They do a lot of international medical volunteer work, recently in South Africa and Vietnam. Robbie is currently working as a consultant for the CDC on maternity services in Afghanistan and has made several recent trips there.

For more information contact Shyamal Leonard at (310) 422-0166 or shyama1_1@hotmail.com or Darcie (Guy) Olson at (949) 742-5524 dolson@peakdata11c.com or consult our website at <http://www.amnestyusa.org/events/western/>.

January Meeting Minutes

Group #175 Long Beach

Attendees

Jeannie Allen, Mary Kay Dunn, Mike Farris, Kevin Gaffney, Deidre Jackson, Matt Johnson, Bobbi Kendig, Betsy Lambert, Shean McMahon, Jim Roberts, Jamie Skaluba, Naomi Steinfeld.

Letter-Writing

We generated 27 letters to Vietnam and Sudan plus 12 copies to the Sudanese Embassy and a Women's Center in Sudan, as well as 2 postcards, one to the Chinese Embassy and one to Thailand.

Member Updates

We happily welcomed first-time attendees Betsy Lambert, Jeannie Allen, and Matt Johnson. For their benefit, we discussed briefly the current transition from the AI mandate to the broader mission.

Jamie Skaluba informed us that she has volunteered to be one of two Student Area Coordinators in our region.

Barbara Bocek Case

Jim filled us in on the latest in regard to Barbara Bocek, a long-time AI activist who was attacked in Guatemala and again in Seattle. Her version of the events came under question, and the AIUSA Board has been divided on how to proceed. They have now received a report from the Lessons Learned Task Force, a panel they appointed to investigate the situation, but it is reported that the Board does not plan to share the information with the AIUSA membership. Our group expressed concern at the lack of transparency.

Prisoner Actions

We discussed possible avenues for our group to pursue on behalf of our Prisoner of Conscience, Nguyen Dinh Huy of Vietnam. If Deidre attends the Annual General Meeting in Brooklyn in April (not yet a certainty), she may try to contact the Vietnamese representative to the UN. We will also investigate whether there is a Vietnamese consulate in Los Angeles or San Francisco where we could try for a personal contact.

Burma Update

Jim reported that conditions in Burma have not improved and, if anything, are getting worse. At any given time there are some 1700-1800 political prisoners, for as some are released,

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Upcoming Events

UDHR Art Show

The recently-formed Amnesty International student group at Cal State Fullerton is co-sponsoring a student art show which will be on display through February 27 in the Chapman Atrium Gallery in the Titan Student Union on campus. Cal State Fullerton graphic design students have created poster art to illustrate the thirty articles of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

A reception for the show is planned for the evening of February 18, 6:00–7:00 PM. Two speakers from the Program for Torture Victims in Los Angeles will be present to speak about state-sponsored torture, its effects on victims, and the possibilities for prevention.

Journey of Hope

On Monday, February 23, Citizens United for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (CUADP) and California People of Faith Working Against the Death Penalty, Orange County Chapter, bring CUADP's national tour, "Journey of Hope . . . from Violence to Healing" to Orange County.

Abe Bonowitz, director of CUADP, prolific emailer and full time activist, is joined by Juan Melendez, a former prisoner exonerated from Florida's death row after facing execution for over 17 years, and Bill Pelke, who has been working to overturn the death sentence of his grandmother's murderer.

The program is being held at the St. Joseph Center, 480 S. Batavia in Orange and includes refreshments at 6:30 PM with the presentations from 7:00–9:00 PM.

Home For the Holidays

Two prisoners featured in this year's Holiday Card Action have been released from prison. Zouheir Yahiaoui of Tunisia was released on November 18. Ali Lmrabet of Morocco was freed on January 7. In December, Samira Trad, a human rights defender in Lebanon featured in the action, wrote to AIUSA Casework Director Mike O'Reilly, asking him to pass her thanks along to AIUSA members. She wrote:

"I have been receiving [cards] in mass, and I want you if possible to assure each one of these members that I am fine and free. The case is still pending before the court but I am confident that justice will be on my side."

We also heard from Raisa Michailovskaya of the Belarusian human rights organization Legal Assistance to the Population (LAP) in December. Raisa wrote: "Firstly we would like to express our great surprise about the dimension of the support to LAP, a huge amount of letters and post cards continue to arrive. Secondly: a huge thank you for this. We are people that

normally do not receive a lot of attention, and we are tremendously touched by this, and it gives us strength for our future work."

Former Child Soldier To Address AGM

When Akallo Grace Grall was 15, a paramilitary group abducted her from her elite boarding school dormitory in Northern Uganda. Forcibly "recruited" as a soldier, she endured six months of near starvation, forced labor and horrifying violence before escaping and freeing eight other young girls during her flight to safety. She will tell her story at the opening of AIUSA's 2004 Annual General Meeting (AGM), which will be held April 16–18, in Brooklyn, New York. Grall will join Executive Director Bill Schulz and Board Chair Kathy Bachman in the Friday evening Welcoming Plenary, which will focus on the upcoming international campaign to end Violence Against Women. Grall is currently pursuing a degree in journalism at Uganda Christian University.

Other prominent AGM speakers will include John Shattuck, author of *Freedom on Fire: Human Rights Wars of the 90s*, and Jessica Stern, author of *Terror in the Name of God*. They will be among several panelists in the AGM Focus Plenary "Vigilant Justice: Securing Human Rights in Today's World."

See the website www.amnestyusa/events/agm2004/ for more information.

Group #175 Long Beach Meeting Minutes

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others are arrested in their place. Aung San Suu Kyi is still under house arrest, and some of her followers are in prison. The U.S. has no leverage in the situation, given our government's current unpopularity on the international scene, as other nations in the region have begun to make deals with Burma's military government leaders.

Kevin Cooper Execution Scheduled

Kevin announced the date of the next scheduled execution in the state of California. Kevin Cooper is scheduled to be executed on February 10, despite questions regarding the evidence against him and possibly exculpatory evidence excluded from the trial. If no postponement occurs, there will be a vigil held February 9 at the Orange Circle (at the corner of Glassell and Chapman) from 5:00 PM–Midnight.

Group Priorities

We tentatively agreed to focus our efforts on the problems of violence against women and the death penalty, as well as continuing our work on behalf of our Prisoner of Conscience. At our next meeting we will consider possible speakers for the near future.

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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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

February

17 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 Monday 6:30–9:00 PM

Journey of Hope . . . From Violence to Healing at the St. Joseph Center, 480 S. Batavia, Orange. Refreshments at 6:30 with speakers beginning at 7:00. See the article on page 3 of this newsletter.

23 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 Olson at (949) 650-5375.



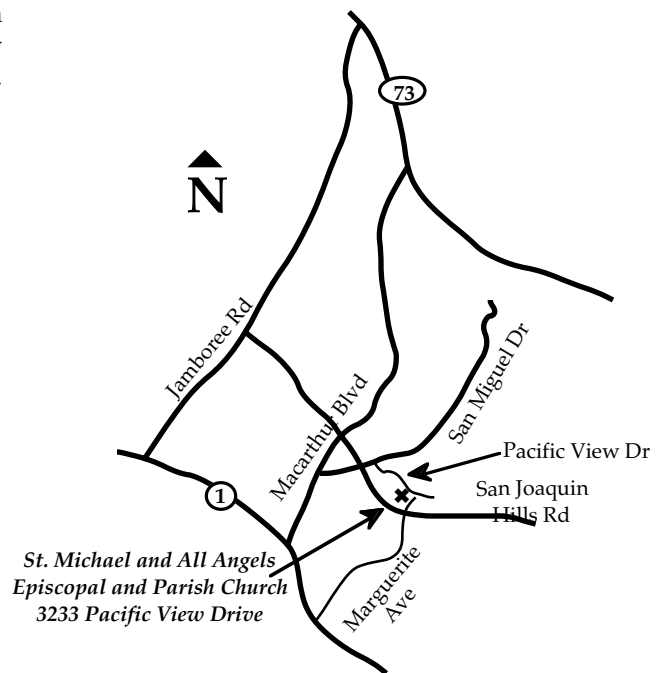
Group #141 Orange Meeting Location

24 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.

24 Tuesday 7:00 PM

Group #178 Irvine Monthly Meeting at St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal and Parish Church, 3233 Pacific View Drive, Corona del Mar. See full details on the web page <http://www.aiusaoc.org>. 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

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