



Amnesty International

Orange County

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

May 2004

<http://www.aiusaoc.org>

USA: Pattern of Brutality and Cruelty—War Crimes at Abu Ghraib

This article is taken from a May 7 AI press release.

In an open letter to US President George W. Bush today, Amnesty International said that abuses allegedly committed by US agents in the Abu Ghraib facility in Baghdad were war crimes and called on the administration to fully investigate them to ensure that there is no impunity for anyone found responsible regardless of position or rank.

Amnesty International said that it has documented a pattern of abuse by US agents against detainees, including in Iraq and Afghanistan, stretching back over the past two years.

Despite claims this week by Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld to be “stunned” by abuses in Abu Ghraib, and that these were an “exception” and “not a pattern or practice”, Amnesty International has presented consistent allegations of brutality and cruelty by US agents against detainees at the highest levels of the US Government, including the White House, the Department of Defense, and the State Department for the past two years.

Last July, the organization raised allegations of torture and ill-treatment of Iraqi detainees by US and Coalition forces in a memorandum to the US Government and Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in Iraq. The allegations included beatings, electric shocks, sleep deprivation, hooding, and prolonged forced standing and kneeling. It received no response nor any indication from the administration or the CPA that an investigation took place.

Despite repeated requests, Amnesty International has been denied access to all US detention facilities.

“If the administration has nothing to hide, it should immediately end incommunicado detention and grant access to independent human rights monitors, including Amnesty International and the United Nations, to all detention facilities,” said Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International.

“The US administration has shown a consistent disregard for the Geneva Conventions and basic principles of law, human rights and decency. This has created a climate in which US soldiers feel they can dehumanize and degrade prisoners with impunity.”

“What we now see in Iraq is the logical consequence of the relentless pursuit of the ‘war on terror’ regardless of the costs to human rights and the rules of war.”

Amnesty International has expressed concern about the mixed messages which the US government has sent regarding its commitment to international human rights standards.

Abuses have not been restricted to Abu Ghraib. Numerous people held in the US Air Bases in Bagram and Kandahar in Afghanistan say they were subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in US custody, and the administration has failed to comply with the Geneva Conventions with regard to the Guantánamo detainees.

Former Guantánamo detainee Wazir Mohammad told Amnesty International of excessive and cruel use of shackles and handcuffs, sleep deprivation, and of being forced to crawl on his knees from his cell to the interrogation room during his detention in Afghanistan.

At Bagram and Kandahar, he was held incommunicado, with no opportunity to challenge the lawfulness of his detention, no lawyer, and no access to his family. He never met a delegate from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). In over a year in Guantánamo he says he met an ICRC delegate once, on the first day.

Former Guantánamo prisoner, Walid al-Qadasi, was held in a secret detention facility in Kabul. He said prisoners termed the first night of interrogation by US agents “the black night”. He said that: “They cut our clothes with scissors, left us naked and took photos of us . . . handcuffed our hands behind our backs, blindfolded us and started interrogating us . . . threatened me with death, accusing me of belonging to al-Qa’ida.” He alleged that detainees were subjected to sleep deprivation, including through use of loud music.

An individual who worked in Guantánamo told Amnesty International that most if not all detainees he had contact with there claimed to have been physically abused in Kandahar or Bagram. This person expressed no surprise at the evidence from Iraq, and stated that abuse in Afghanistan appeared to be part of softening up detainees for interrogation and detention.

Amnesty International is concerned that the investigation headed by Major General Antonio Taguba, which found “systematic and illegal abuse of detainees” in Abu Ghraib, was not intended for public release, and that the administration’s current response only came once the report and photographic evidence became public.

Apparently attempting to downplay the seriousness of the allegations at a news briefing on May 4, Secretary Rumsfeld suggested that: “what has been charged so far is abuse . . . technically different from torture”. In fact the “numerous incidents of sadistic, blatant, and wanton criminal abuse” found

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April Meeting Minutes

Group #596 Huntington Beach

Letter-Writing

In April we had 13 attendees and signed 44 letters, 22 Urgent Actions for the missing men in Colombia and 2 petitions.

Upcoming Meetings and Events

In May we hope to have an Iranian couple speak who immigrated from Iran and currently write short stories.

In June we hope to cover the topic of Gay/Lesbian and Transgender issues and perhaps show the documentary **Jim in Bold**. We will coordinate this effort with Beth McFarland of the AI OCC chapter and Mahsa Abassi at Cal State Fullerton.

Bea and Martha will be coordinating ideas for another event on Latin America. (We are so glad to have them.)

September we plan to join with the other local Amnesty groups to present the film *Osama* and a panel of speakers on Afghanistan.

Lastly, we are coordinating with Kris Elali to help develop a section of the mini-conference for early 2005 to cover the topic of AIDS.

Group News

Sarah Keller took over officially as the group's treasurer. Our afternoon at the Improv was a great success!

May Meeting

Due to the Memorial Day holiday, we will be having our monthly meeting on Monday, May 24, at 7:00 PM.

Our meeting will feature a discussion on Iran and Iraq/Afghanistan. Our main speaker will be Ahmad Ebrahimi. Ahmad left Iran in 1974 to pursue post graduate studies in England and then returned to Iran until the early 1980s. Ahmad writes poetry and has worked with PEN international to ensure safety of writers inside of Iran. Ahmad and his wife Soudeh live here in Orange County.

In addition, due to the enormous importance of events in Iraq we will be discussing the current human rights situation there, the past system of abuse in both Afghanistan and Iraq and we will have letters, petitions and other actions for the group to take part in. We also hope to show a 17-minute documentary from Amnesty International on the history of human rights violations under Sadaam Hussein and the alleged abuses under the US-led forces.

This will be a powerful and informative meeting. Please join us!

April Meeting Minutes

Group #175 Long Beach

Attendees

Mary Kay Dunn, Mike Farris, Kevin Gaffney, Bobbi Kendig, Omar Ramos, Jim Roberts, and Naomi Steinfeld.

We were happy to welcome Omar Ramos, who is new to Group #175 but not to AI.

Actions

We wrote 37 letters!

Mary Kay agreed to be Death Penalty Coordinator for the group.

Discussion Items

The following matters were discussed:

- Call for support for San Francisco District Attorney Kamela Harris in her refusal to request the death penalty in the prosecution of a case of murder of a law officer Espinoza. Call (415) 553-9530.
- Talked about having Marion Scherer perform her one-woman play *A Prison of the Mind* on the death penalty this fall.
- Shared information on the 3rd Annual AI Film Festival, May 12–17, in West Hollywood.
- Discussed current issues including the Patriot Act and Supreme Court cases.

Southeast Asia Issues

Jim reported on Southeast Asia issues.

A Montagnard peoples' demonstration in a remote mountain area of Vietnam was reportedly shut down by the government, with demonstrators beaten and jailed. AI is following up.

There is no new information on our prisoner of conscience Nguyen Dinh Huy. We will send a letter of support to his daughter. There is an on-line petition for him started by the overseas representatives of The Movement to Unite the People and Build Democracy, which he founded. This petition is addressed to the United Nations. <http://www.ptndt.org/freenguyendinhuy/freenguyendinhuy.htm>

Aung San Suu Kyi remains under house arrest in Burma (Myanmar). Government officials have talked about releasing her but this seems doubtful. On April 17, the government re-opened the National League for Democracy (NLD) office. A few AI groups are working on organizing an International Day of Action on Myanmar for August 8. This will commemorate the massacre of peaceful demonstrators in Rangoon and Mandalay on August 8, 1988.

May Meeting

Our next meeting will be Tuesday, May 25. Be here for a report on the Amnesty Annual General Meeting, a Death Penalty Workshop, and taking a group photo to send with our letter to our prisoner's daughter.

Amnesty International Film Festival

The 3rd annual Amnesty International Film Festival is scheduled for May 12–17 in West Hollywood. The festival features 37 films shot in 27 languages and on five continents that offer powerful testimony to the interconnectedness of our struggles for freedom and for universally guaranteed human rights.

When silence is used as a weapon, a voice is the only defense. With this in mind, Amnesty International has brought together the voices of those heard least often in the mainstream media—political dissidents in Cuba, thoughtful youth in Palestine, free-thinking women in Iran, internally displaced people in Burma—to tell their own stories.

For complete information about the festival, including the schedules and screening locations, see the website www.amnestyusa.org/filmfest/weho/2004/index.html.

From the Executive Director Recapping Our Victories

This column, by AIUSA Executive Director William Schulz, is taken from the May 2004 AIUSA Monthly Mailing.

We have just completed our Annual General Meeting and I want to share with you, as I do every year, a portion of my remarks to the gathering, noting a few of our many achievements this past year.

Last May 4 Dr. Salai Tun Than, a 73-year old agronomist in Burma, was released. He had been arrested in 2001 for standing in his academic gown outside a government building in Yangon, inviting people to sign a petition calling for multi-party elections. Group 139 in Madison and the University of Wisconsin at Madison student group adopted him, as did Group 144 in Oakland and the student group at the University of Georgia, and today Dr. Salai Tun Than is free. Congratulations, Amnesty activists, for making the world a kinder place.

On January 6, Udaya Raj Gautam, a 38-year old teacher in Nepal, was released. He had been arrested last fall for his non-violent political activities and was one of more than 150 Urgent Action cases on Nepal that have been issued in the past eight months. Thousands of people wrote messages on his behalf and, when he was delivered to his home, Nepalese security officials were so concerned to prove that he had been delivered safely, they required his wife to sign a "return receipt" form for her husband, as if he had been a package in the mail! But, package or not, today Udaya Raj Gautam is free. Congratulations, Amnesty activists, for making the world a safer place.

On February 24, Phuntsog Nyidron, the longest-serving Tibetan female prisoner, was released. You may recall Phuntsog's case because, after being imprisoned 15 years ago for peacefully advocating independence for Tibet, her sentence was increased by eight years when she and 13 other nuns secretly recorded Tibetan songs in prison. For the past seven years Group 127 of Des Moines worked on her case; Group 274 of Santa Cruz and Group 133 of Somerville, MA, joined them and today Phuntsog Nyidron, the last of the "singing Tibetan nuns," is free. Congratulations, Amnesty activists, for making the world a better place!

But these three people are far from the only ones whose lives you have changed. Thanks to you, the U.S. Congress passed the Torture Victims Relief and Reauthorization Act authorizing \$81 million for support of victims of torture—thanks to you.

Thanks to you, the Mexican Government, after resisting the move for months, has appointed a new prosecutor to examine the deaths of more than 300 women in Juarez—thanks to you. Thanks to your response to our Guatemala flash piece, the Guatemalan Congress abolished the Presidential Guard, the EMP, notorious for their human rights crimes—thanks to you.

And, by the way, that flash piece has been voted the year's best flash animation by the American Association of Political Consultants. And thanks to you, two more states, South Dakota and Wyoming, two of the most conservative states in the nation, have just abolished the death penalty for juvenile offenders. We're going to win that battle—we're going to put an end to the state killing children in this country—thanks to you.

And over the next five years we're going to take all of your power and mix it with Amnesty's credibility and global reach and we're going to stop violence against women, wherever it is found, and we're not going to end this new campaign until we do. Is it any wonder that a major public relations firm has just found that Amnesty International USA is the most trusted nongovernmental organizational of all those they surveyed?

War Crimes at Abu Ghrai

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by Taguba constitute acts of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and are war crimes.

Those responsible for what Taguba concluded are "proven abuse . . . inflicted on detainees" should be brought to justice in accordance with the USA's obligations under international and US law. Investigations should cover the higher chain of command responsibility as well as direct perpetrators.

Comments this week by Major General Geoffrey Miller, in charge of detainee operations in Iraq, that sleep deprivation and stress positions could be used against detainees show that the US administration still has not learnt that ill-treatment and abuse are a slippery slope to torture and should be totally prohibited.

Restraining detainees in very painful positions, hooding, threats, and prolonged sleep deprivation violate the prohibition on torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

Amnesty International calls on President Bush to ensure impartial and transparent investigations into torture and deaths in US custody and that anyone found responsible be brought to justice.

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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P.O. Box 14485
Irvine, CA 92623-4485

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

May

18 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.

24 Monday 7:00 PM

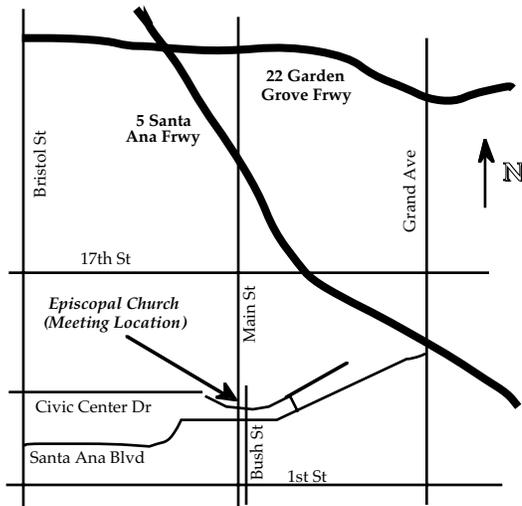
Group #596 Huntington Beach Meeting at Saints Simon and Jude Church, Room 7A, 20444 Magnolia Street in Huntington Beach. Group #596 meets the last Monday of each month. For further information about the group, contact Darcie Olson at (949) 650-5375.

25 Tuesday 7:00 PM

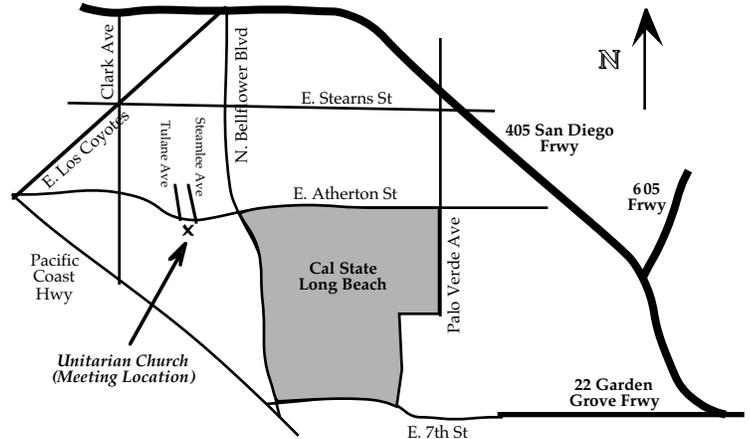
Group #175 Long Beach Monthly Meeting at the Unitarian Universalist Church, 5450 Atherton Street, Long Beach. Letter-writing from 7:00–7:30. Group #175 meets on the fourth Tuesday of each month. For further information about the group, contact Bobbi Kendig at (562) 420-1155.

25 Tuesday 7:00 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 Kilchoer at (714) 557-8427.



Group #141 Orange Meeting Location



Group #175 Long Beach Meeting Location

Amnesty Internationa Group 178
Post Office Box 14485
Irvine, California 92623-4485