



Amnesty International

Orange County

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

October 2004

<http://www.aiusaoc.org>

World Day Against the Death Penalty “War on Terror” Is no Justification for Executions

This article is taken from an October 7 AI press release.

The “War on Terror” must not be used to justify reversing progress on the abolition of the death penalty, Amnesty International said as more than 90 countries prepared to mark the World Day against the Death Penalty this Sunday.

The warning came from the Secretary General of Amnesty International Irene Khan in a speech to the Second World Congress against the Death Penalty in Montreal this week, organized by the World Coalition against the Death Penalty.

“The death penalty is the ultimate, irreversible denial of human rights, because it contravenes the essence of human values. It is often applied in a discriminatory manner, follows unfair trials, or is applied for political reasons. It is not a unique deterrent against crime, and is an irreversible error when there is miscarriage of justice,” said Irene Khan.

Over half the countries of the world, 118, have now abolished the death penalty in law or practice, Turkey being the latest. In Europe and Central Asia, only Belarus and Uzbekistan are known to carry out executions while all but five states (China, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iran, Pakistan and USA) have banned the execution of children. However, there have also been setbacks.

In April this year, Afghanistan carried out its first execution since the establishment of the interim government in December 2001 and in Iraq, one of the first acts of the interim government was to reinstate the death penalty for murder.

“A heightened concern for security and crime control continue to be drivers for the death penalty in many countries of the world,” said Irene Khan. “Public opinion in many parts of the world still feels that the death penalty is needed to deter crime or ‘terrorism’. We must build greater public support for abolition. But we must also ask governments to show leadership on this issue.”

“These are tough times for human rights and we must be determined in our response to hold up the values in which we believe. Human rights are for the best of us and the worst of us. Human rights are for the guilty as much as the innocent. That is why the death penalty must be abolished world-wide,” said Irene Khan.

Background

A Lawyers Declaration Against the Implementation of the Death Penalty on Child Offenders in the USA is being presented to the Second World Congress by Amnesty International. The Declaration has been signed by 798 lawyers, including almost

100 from the USA. It calls on the legislatures of US states whose laws still allow the execution of child offenders to raise the minimum age to 18.

During this World Day against the Death Penalty on October 10, Amnesty International sections around the world will promote two of the organisations current campaigns: Stop Child Executions! and Towards a Central Asia free from executions. Amnesty International members will hold public events, distribute information packs and leaflets as well as collect signatures from the public on specific appeals.

In 1977, when Amnesty International organised its first International Conference on the Death Penalty in Stockholm, only 16 countries had abolished the death penalty for all crimes. Today, five times that figure, 80 countries have now abolished the death penalty for all crimes, 15 countries have abolished it for all but exceptional crimes, and another 23 have retain the death penalty in law but have not carried out executions for the past ten years or have made an international commitment not to use the death penalty.

International standards prohibit the execution of child offenders—people who were under 18 years old at the time of the crime. These standards include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the American Convention on Human Rights and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. This prohibition is now so widely accepted as to constitute a principle of customary international law. The relevant standards are respected by the overwhelming majority of the 80 countries which still retain and use the death penalty.

The World Coalition Against the Death Penalty was founded in 2002 and is composed of human rights and legal organizations in the field of human rights, and local authorities who have joined forces to abolish the death penalty around the world. The Coalition’s objectives are to stimulate public debate and strengthen opposition to the death penalty; apply pressure on retentionist states to cease executions and abolish the death penalty; establish contacts with other local organizations and affiliate them to the World Coalition; and to promote events at the global level, such as the World Day.

For a copy of Amnesty International Secretary General Irene Khan’s speech to the Second World Congress against the Death Penalty see: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engact500172004>.

September Meeting Minutes

Group #175 Long Beach

Attendees

Arlene Rieux, Norma Edwards, Mike Farris, Kevin Gaffney, Deidre Jackson, Bobbi Kendig, Jim Roberts, Naomi Steinfeld.

Group News

Bobbi put us on notice that she will need to step back from her leadership duties by December, preferably sooner. A volunteer to lead or, maybe better yet, volunteers to colead the group are needed. Meanwhile, the group has settled on a new room and a new day to meet: the **third** Wednesday of the month, in Rooms 1 and 2. This month's meeting will be Wednesday, October 20.

Hosting Play

Kevin told us the one-act play *A Prison of the Mind* (about the death penalty) costs \$500 to host. The Ventura group will present the play October 26 (a Tuesday, unfortunately), and Kevin volunteered to find out more; possibly one of us can attend to scope it out.

Tabling

The group raised the issue of tabling again. Some felt that tabling at the farmers' market was interesting and somewhat productive, but others felt it was a bit of a zoo and not conducive to getting the message out (as people are in a rush to shop on their lunch hour). The group agreed that a goal of monthly weekend tabling was doable, but a new location, such as a bookstore or another high-traffic/interested area might be better. We will approach some bookstores using Amnesty's banned-books week actions as an entrée.

GLAD Update

Jim and Norma both attended the GLAD (Greater Los Angeles Area Development) meeting at the regional office, and Kevin and Deidre participated by phone. We talked about the changes at the national and regional level: the need for more membership to help finance the gap in funds (London is now asking for more money from the U.S. Section), the change in staff in our region (and re-delegation of duties for the remaining staff), what the students need, and upcoming events that are planned in Southern California. A pitch was also put in for the upcoming regional conference in Salt Lake City in November.

Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib

Deidre gave a very interesting and well-received presentation on the situation for prisoners, aka "enemy combatants," in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. She talked about what the U.S. government is doing and attempting to do, as well as what the international community and treaties we have signed say we should do. Jim also jumped in with some historical comparisons to Vietnam. Deidre then gave us an overview of the events at Abu Ghraib prison and directed us to Amnesty's "12-Point Program for the Prevention of Torture by Agents of the State" (which can be found at <http://www.amnestyusa.org/stoptorture>; there are also talking points at the website). As Deidre pointed out, though we are not world leaders, we are not powerless in these events. As addressed in the first point,

at a minimum we can condemn torture and name it as such (and not "abuse") rather than stand by as a public dialog about "when torture is ok" takes place around us.

For some more wartime issues insights, Jim recommended the book *Facing the Phoenix: The CIA and the Political Defeat of the United States in Vietnam*, by Zalin Grant.

September Meeting Minutes

Group #178 Irvine

Featured Speaker

Our featured speaker was Benson Deng, one of the "Lost Boys of Sudan", who visited our group accompanied by two representatives of the International Rescue Committee, in conjunction with the showing of the documentary *Lost Boys of Sudan*. Mr. Deng currently lives in San Diego and is hoping to make a life for himself in the United States. The documentary shows the difficulties that refugees face when trying to adapt to a new country and new customs. Along with the documentary, Amnesty International supplied photographs of the area and an information packet on the human rights crisis in the Darfur region of Sudan.

New Meeting Location

This was our first meeting at the Irvine Ranch Water District and the facilities are excellent. Congratulations to Kristina Elali for securing this meeting room for us. We want to thank St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal and Parish Church in Corona del Mar for hosting our meeting in the past, and Rhonda Seiter for being our liaison with the church.

Peace Wants You

Our group will have a table at the Peace Wants You Peace-building Festival on Saturday, 9 October 2004, from 9:00 AM–5:00 PM. This one-day festival encouraging communities to act for peace will be on the University of California, Irvine, campus, in the Physical Sciences Plaza, Southwest of Aldrich Park. For directions and more information see the calendar of events at the website.

Next Month's Meeting

At our October meeting we will be discussing our current campaigns and actions files, and discussing possible actions for Human Rights Day in December 2004.

October Meeting Announcement

Group #596 Huntington Beach

Group #596 Huntington Beach's Meeting this month is Monday, October 25, at 7:00 PM at Saints Simon and Jude Church Adult Center, 20444 Magnolia Street in Huntington Beach. We will be watching the Independent Spirit Award winning documentary *Lost Boys of Sudan*. This powerful documentary will take you on a journey with two Sudanese refugees as they travel from Sudan to the United States. We will also have the pleasure of listening to Adelpho Deng, one of the lost boys, as he shares with us his experiences in Sudan as well as the United States. For further information about the group, contact Mahsa Abassi at (951) 818-1389.

Oppose the Outsourcing of Torture

September 11, 2001, caused many to reflect upon the fundamental values on which this country was founded: freedom of speech, respect for human dignity, freedom of religion, justice for all, tolerance. It is imperative that the United States stand for the principles of unalienable, universal rights. Otherwise, those who wage war on human rights will have won the battle against freedom. Amnesty International is concerned the "war on terror" not become an excuse to deny human rights.

Amnesty International urges the United States House of Representatives to reject provisions of "The 9/11 Recommendations Implementation Act," (HR 10) that would legalize the outsourcing of torture and curtail civil liberties and human rights. Congress should not use the cover of the 9/11 Commission recommendations to further an agenda that legitimizes torture, punishes asylum seekers and broadens secret government surveillance powers.

Many of the extraneous provisions included in the bill would directly contradict recommendations made by the 9/11 Commission. For example, the Commission recommends that the US government comply with the rule of law, while the HR 10 attempts to abrogate US obligations under the Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment. The Commission also puts the burden on the executive branch to prove why they need the expanded powers granted to them under legislation like the USA PATRIOT Act. Instead, HR 10 would expand the government's power to secret surveillance, in direct contravention of the Commission's recommendation.

Specifically, HR 10 would:

Legalize the outsourcing of torture. Currently, there is no exception in US law or the torture convention that would allow the US to transfer any individual to a country where it is more likely than not that they will be tortured. Sections 3032 of the House bill would create exceptions to this absolute rule and also raise the burden of proof to "clear and convincing evidence," an almost impossible standard to meet. This provision would apply retroactively so that people who were previously granted protection under the torture convention would be forced to meet this higher burden of proof with evidence that may no longer be available. White House Counsel Albert Gonzales has sent a letter to the Washington Post stating that such a provision would violate US obligations under the torture convention and that the administration does not support it. Members on both sides of the aisle understand that undermining the absolute ban on torture puts US civilian and military personnel at greater risk around the world, giving cover

to human rights abusing regimes that would seek to torture American citizens.

Expand provisions of the USA PATRIOT Act. Section 2001 would expand the government's ability to monitor individuals based on unchallengeable warrants issued by a secret intelligence court. Section 2043 would expand the definition of "material support" to a terrorist organization to include mere association with the group even if no money or other resources were supplied, making it a crime punishable by up to 15 years in prison.

Require asylum seekers to "corroborate" their claim of persecution. The bill would significantly raise the hurdle for asylum seekers, who often lack any ability to prove their claim through anything save their own testimony. Not surprisingly, asylum seekers have difficulty obtaining corroborating documents from the very government that is persecuting them. It would also limit the right to appeal decisions and even allow immigration judges to deny asylum based on a person's "demeanor", further creating barriers to legitimate asylum claims.

Amnesty International USA's Recommendations

- Congress should oppose the Hostettler amendment.
- Congress should support for the Smith amendments and the Menendez substitute amendment.
- If the Menendez substitute amendment fails, Congress should vote no on final passage of HR 10.

AIUSA Student Group at UCI

The UCI student group meets every Wednesday evening at 7:00 PM, in the Emerald Bay E room in the UCI Student Center.

The group's focus for the Fall Quarter is the death penalty, so all meetings and events will be planned around that theme. The group's first major event was a Teach-in on the Death Penalty coupled with a letter-writing regarding the latest issue in China on October 6. The group is also planning to have a panel of speakers some time during the week of November 10 on the death penalty. Consult <http://www.aiusaoc.org/uci/index.html> for a calendar and more details. For more information, call (707) 235-9789 or e-mail amnesty@uci.edu.

Summer Postcard Action Update

Isidro Baldenegro and Hermenegildo Rivas were released from prison in Mexico on June 23. The two members of the Raramuri indigenous group were detained for 15 months in Chihuahua on fabricated criminal charges. In truth, authorities detained the men on account of their efforts to defend the Sierra Tarahumara forests. All charges against them were dropped after prosecutors agreed they were groundless.

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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 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

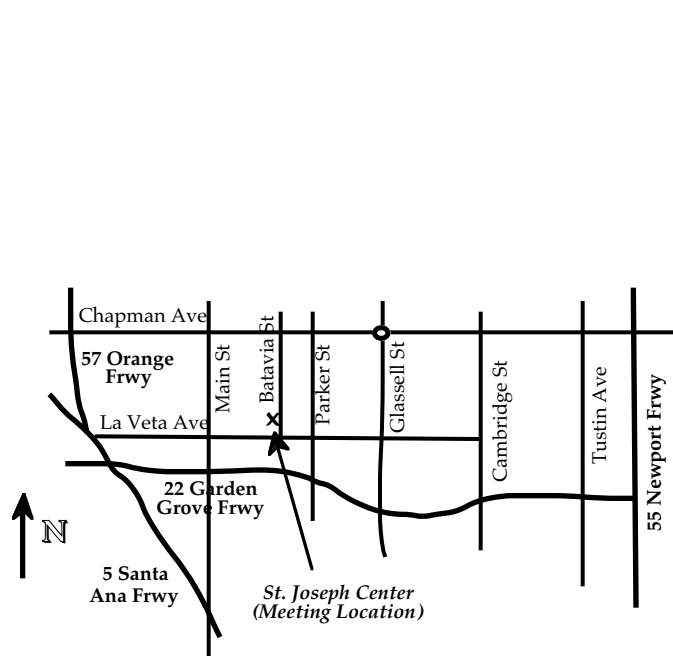
October

19 Tuesday 7:00 PM

Group #141 Orange Monthly Meeting in Classroom 3 at the Sisters of St. Joseph Special Events Center, 480 S. Batavia Street, in Orange. **Note the new location!** Look for the signs. Group #141 meets the third Tuesday of each month. For further information about the group, contact Deidre Jackson at (562) 430-7381.

20 Wednesday 7:00 PM

Group #175 Long Beach Monthly Meeting at the Unitarian Universalist Church, Rooms 1 and 2, 5450 Atherton Street, Long Beach. Letter-writing from 7:00–7:30. For further information about the group, contact Bobbi Kendig at (562) 420-1155.



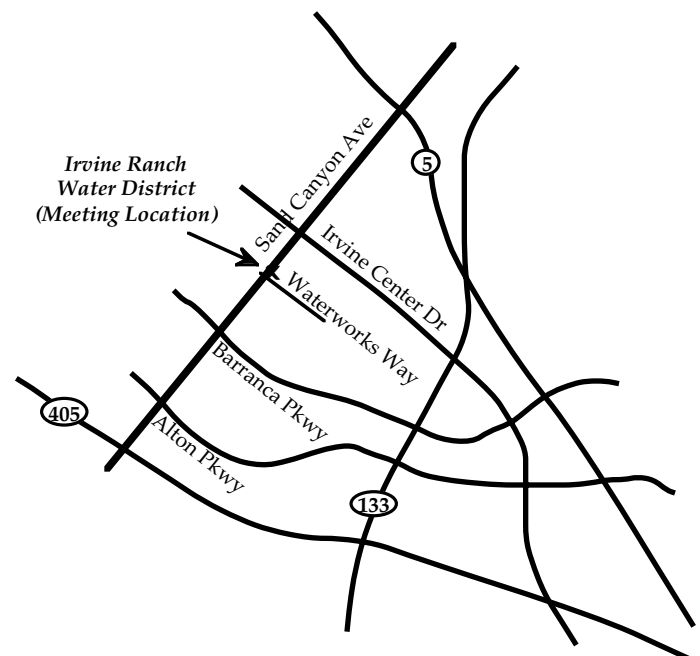
Group #141 Orange Meeting Location

25 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.

26 Tuesday 7:00 PM

Group #178 Irvine Monthly Meeting at the Irvine Ranch Water District, 15600 Sand Canyon Avenue, Irvine, between the 5 and 405 freeways. **Note the new location!** See details on the web page <http://www.aiusaoc.org>. For more information about the group, contact Jacques Kilchoer at (714) 557-8427.



Group #178 Irvine Meeting Location

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