



Amnesty International

Orange County

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

June 2005

<http://www.aiusaoc.org>

Annual Report 2005: A Dangerous New Agenda

This article is taken from an AI press release issued May 25, 2005.

Governments are betraying their promise of a world order based on human rights and are pursuing a dangerous new agenda, said Amnesty International today as it launched its annual assessment of global human rights.

Speaking at the launch of the *Amnesty International Report 2005*, the organization's Secretary General Irene Khan said that governments had failed to show principled leadership and must be held to account.

"Governments are betraying their promises on human rights. A new agenda is in the making with the language of freedom and justice being used to pursue policies of fear and insecurity. This includes cynical attempts to redefine and sanitise torture," said Irene Khan.

This new agenda, combined with the indifference and paralysis of the international community, failed countless thousands of people in humanitarian crises and forgotten conflicts throughout 2004.

In Darfur, the Sudanese government generated a human rights catastrophe and the international community did too little too late to address the crisis, betraying hundreds of thousands of people.

In Haiti, individuals responsible for serious human rights violations were allowed to regain positions of power. In the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo there was no effective response to the systematic rape of tens of thousands of women, children and even babies. Despite the holding of elections, Afghanistan slipped into a downward spiral of lawlessness and instability. Violence was endemic in Iraq.

At a national level governments betrayed human rights at terrible cost to ordinary people. Russian soldiers reportedly tortured, raped and sexually abused Chechen women with impunity. Zimbabwe's government manipulated food shortages for political reasons.

The betrayal of human rights by governments was accompanied by increasingly horrific acts of terrorism as armed groups stooped to new levels of brutality.

"The televised beheading of captives in Iraq, the taking of over a thousand people hostage including hundreds of children in a school in Beslan and the massacre of hundreds of commuters in Madrid shocked the world. Yet governments are failing to confront their lack of success in addressing terrorism, persisting with failed but politically-convenient strategies. Four years after 9/11, the promise to make the world a safer place remains hollow," said Ms. Khan.

The U.S. administration's attempts to dilute the absolute ban on torture through new policies and quasi-management speak such as "environmental manipulation," "sensory manipulation," and "stress positions," was one of the most damaging assaults on global values.

Despite the U.S. administration's repeated use of the language of justice and freedom there was a huge gap between rhetoric and reality. This was starkly illustrated by the failure to conduct a full and independent investigation into the appalling torture and ill-treatment of detainees by US soldiers in Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison and the failure to hold senior individuals to account.

"The USA, as the unrivalled political, military and economic hyper-power, sets the tone for governmental behaviour worldwide. When the most powerful country in the world thumbs its nose at the rule of law and human rights, it grants a licence to others to commit abuse with impunity," said Irene Khan.

Many governments showed a shocking contempt for the rule of law. Nigeria granted Charles Taylor, former President of Liberia, refugee status despite his indictment for killings, mutilations and rape. Israel's construction of a barrier inside the occupied West Bank ignored the International Court of Justice opinion that this violated international human rights and humanitarian law. Arbitrary detentions and unfair trials took place under security legislation in a number of countries.

There were also signs of hope in 2004 said Ms. Khan.

Legal challenges to the new agenda included US Supreme Court judgements on Guantánamo detainees and the ruling by the UK Law Lords on indefinite detention without charge or trial of "terrorist suspects." Public pressure included the spontaneous turnout of millions of people in Spain protesting against the Madrid bombings, popular uprisings in Georgia and Ukraine and the growing debate on political change in the Middle East.

"Increasingly, the duplicity of governments and the brutality of armed groups are being challenged—by judicial decisions, popular resistance, public pressure and UN reform initiatives. The challenge for the human rights movement is to harness the power of civil society and push governments to deliver on their human rights promises," said Irene Khan.

For a full copy of the *Amnesty International Report 2005: the state of the world's human rights* please go to the website: <http://news.amnesty.org>.

USA: An Open Letter to President Bush

This letter was released on June 8, 2005.

Dear Mr President,

I write in response to the concerns you have expressed at a press conference on 31 May 2005 about Amnesty International's annual report published six days earlier. I regret that you did not take the opportunity to address the substance of our concerns expressed in that report and several earlier, detailed reports on US policies and practices in the context of the "war on terror".

Let me stress at the outset that Amnesty International, with its 1.8 million members worldwide, is dedicated to working on human rights abuses committed by governments and armed groups around the world. Our recently released annual report summarizes human rights concerns in 149 countries and territories. We strive to be objective and impartial. Our work is guided by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international standards, including the Geneva Conventions, which the United States championed and helped create over many decades.

Regrettably, United States policies and practices today are inconsistent with such standards. Evidence of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment by US military and other personnel in the context of "war on terror" detentions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Guantánamo, and in secret locations elsewhere, continues to mount. This evidence comes from many sources, including the outcome of US official investigations, statements by US military personnel, agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), as well as testimony by detainees. It is an extensive and compelling body of evidence which should not be dismissed as the product of any "anti-Americanism", as you suggested on 31 May.

For many people around the world the Guantánamo Bay detention camp has become a symbol of the abuse of power by the US Administration and the denial of fundamental human rights. But this detention facility is just the tip of an iceberg. Around the world, there are believed to be thousands of detainees held in secret, incommunicado or indefinite detention without trial in the "war on terror". Many of these detainees are held in US custody—in Iraq, Afghanistan and in secret locations—in incommunicado or virtually incommunicado detention. Some have died in circumstances suggesting they were tortured to death while in US custody. Others are alleged to be held by other governments with a poor human rights record at the behest of the United States or with its knowledge.

You have stated that allegations of abuses by US personnel are fully investigated in a transparent way. While there have been reviews by some US government agencies of detention and interrogation policies and practices since the Abu Ghraib torture scandal came to light, none of the investigations to date has been fully independent or of sufficient scope, and the findings have largely been kept classified. Certain practices remain shrouded in secrecy, including the alleged involvement of the Central Intelligence Agency in secret detentions and secret transfers of detainees to countries with records of torture.

Despite growing evidence that US policies and practices have violated the absolute prohibition of torture and ill-treatment and other rights—in some cases leading to the death of detainees—no senior official of your Administration has been held to account, and not a single US agent has been charged under the Anti Torture Act or War Crimes Act. Only a few, mainly low-ranking soldiers, have been brought before courts-martial or given non-judicial or administrative sanctions.

I ask you to intervene to end current abuses and prevent their recurrence by:

- Ending all US secret and incommunicado detentions;
- Ensuring full access for all detainees to lawyers, relatives, the ICRC and national and international human rights monitors;
- Giving clear instructions to US personnel that all detainees must be treated humanely in the real sense of the term, namely in full accordance with international law and standards;
- Ending indefinite detention, by ensuring that anyone suspected of a criminal offence is charged and receives a fair trial, and that anyone else is released;
- Preventing the transfer (rendition) of people from US custody to places where they would face torture or other serious human rights abuses.

I also ask you to deliver on your commitment, restated on 31 May, to full and transparent investigations. I urge you to support the establishment of a fully independent commission to investigate the actions of all relevant US agencies in all aspects of the US detention and interrogation policies and practices in the "war on terror". Anyone against whom there is credible evidence of committing, ordering, authorizing or condoning human rights violations, including "disappearances", torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, should be brought to account. In this regard, I urge you to support the appointment by the Attorney General of an independent Special Counsel to investigate the conduct of any official against whom there is evidence of involvement in crimes in the "war on terror".

The adoption of these measures of redress is important not only to ensure justice in the United States, but also because the United States can be a powerful force for ensuring respect for human rights worldwide. For this to happen, the US government cannot speak the language of human rights while at the same time violating human rights and disregarding international law. In these circumstances any criticism of the human rights records of others is drained of moral power. How can the United States, for example, expect to have credibility when raising concerns about the Khodorkovskii case in Russia, as you did on 31 May? Why should the government of Cuba heed US concerns on human rights and standards of justice in Cuba, when the United States continues to operate in the southeast corner of the island a military detention camp in which hundreds of detainees have been kept virtually incommunicado without charge, trial or judicial review for more than three years?

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May Meeting Minutes Group #175 Long Beach

Attendees

Matthew Danielczyk, Mary Kay Dunn, Norma Edwards, Mike Farris, Deidre Gaffney, Kevin Gaffney, Bobbi Kendig, Ellen Lewis, Shean McMahon, Naomi Steinfeld, Steve Wicke.

More New Faces

The group welcomed Matt Danielczyk and Ellen Lewis to the meeting. Matt has been a member since college and was getting back into some live time with fellow activists as opposed to online work. Drop by anytime! It's always fun (to Amnesty types anyway) to discuss current events too. Ellen came with Mike but is also Bobbi's sister-in-law. She told us she had a long history of letter writing as she fit right in and got straight to work!

Campaign Against Torture

Steve has not received any information yet from Amnesty. He did, however, share some information he retrieved from the Web about the war on terror: for example, 70,000 people are currently being held outside the U.S. as part of this "war."

Save the date! June 26 is the U.N. Day for the Victims of Torture. There will be an L.A. event. Steve will let us know when he gets information.

Group News

- Kevin reported that the group has \$330 in the treasury. Time for a fundraiser?
- Happy 60th birthday to Daw Aung Sun Suu Kyi on June 19.
- The group sent six birthday cards to Aung Sun Suu Kyi (care of the embassy of Myanmar), nine letters to Swaziland, 24 to Pakistan, nine to the Democratic Republic of Congo, and 45 to Washington, DC (21 to the Pakistani ambassador and the other 24 divided between Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and President George Bush).

May Meeting Minutes Group #178 Irvine

Letters Written: 81

AIDS and Human Rights Conference

Julie Ralls and Kristina Elali attended this conference, held on 14 May 2005. Julie reports that Soka University is a very nice setting and we should keep it in mind for future events.

Amnesty International Film Festival

Jacques reported on opening night of the Amnesty International Film Festival in Hollywood at the Director's Guild of America, where the movie *Strip Search* was shown.

Campaigns

Dr. Sa'adey Action File. Julie Ralls brought letters to write to families of prisoners in Guantánamo Bay, and a petition for Dr. Sa'adey.

Women's Campaign. Stephanie Jones brought letters on trafficking of women in Kosovo and on a human rights worker who received a death threat in Colombia.

Western Africa Regional Action Network. Jacques Kilchoër brought a letter asking for the prompt trial of 21 people in Mauritania accused of being members of al-Qaeda.

Corporate Action Network. Kristina Elali reported through Maung Nyeu that "green" activists spoke at a Chevron/Texaco shareholder's meeting asking to clean up environmental damage in Ecuador.

Campaign Against Torture. Steve Wicke has signed up for the Campaign Against Torture.

Campaign for Indigenous Rights. Maung Nyeu has signed up for the Campaign for Indigenous Rights.

Death Penalty. We discussed the annual report on worldwide death penalty issues.

China. Ting Huang spoke of the upcoming 60th anniversary of the end of World War II and the lack of Japanese reparations and/or apology to China and other countries.

Future Events

There is the possibility of Dan Noël speaking about the death penalty case of Kenneth Clair. Dan Noël is a long-time death penalty opponent who has visited death row inmate Kenneth Clair in San Quentin and could talk about the legal details of his death row appeal, and what it was like to visit an inmate on death row.

Ali Azizi, Yemen country specialist, would be willing to speak to our group about his two visits to Yemen in 2005 after he returns mid-July from his second visit.

Steve Wicke reported on a presentation he recently heard on the human rights situation in Darfur and volunteered to contact Darcie Olson to have Justin (last name unknown) speak on the subject at our local group meeting.

Video

Due to time constraints we deferred the watching of the AI Economic Social and Cultural Rights video until another date.

Open Letter to President Bush

Continued from page 2

Mr President, you have frequently stated that the United States will stand firm for the "non-negotiable demands of human dignity". A culture of human dignity demands that the United States breaks the wall of secrecy around the network of detention centres in which people are held without charge or trial. I believe this requires the US government to make a fundamental change in direction and embrace fully, in its policies and practices, the principles and rules of international human rights and humanitarian law. The US government must restore the rule of law in the Guantánamo Bay detention camp and all other detention facilities it is operating around the world, or close them down.

Mr President, I urge you to exercise your leadership to protect and promote human rights in the United States and worldwide. We stand ready to discuss our concerns with you face to face.

Yours sincerely,

Irene Khan
Secretary General

Calendar

June

15 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 Norma Edwards at (562) 425-4353.

21 Tuesday 7:00 PM

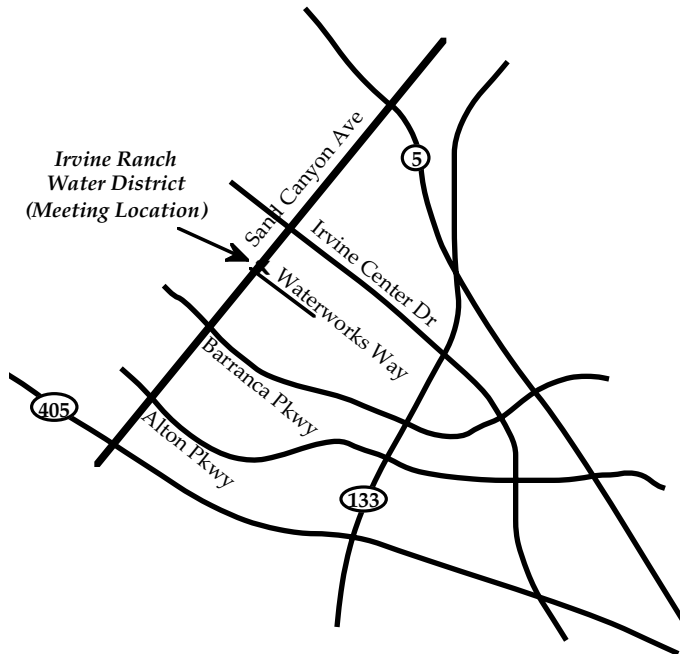
Group #141 Orange Monthly Meeting in Classroom 3 at the Sisters of St. Joseph, 480 S. Batavia Street, in Orange. Look for the classroom/auditorium building behind the main building. Drive around and to the back. Group #141 meets the third Tuesday of each month. For further information about the group, contact Deidre Jackson at (562) 430-7381.

27 Monday 7:00 PM

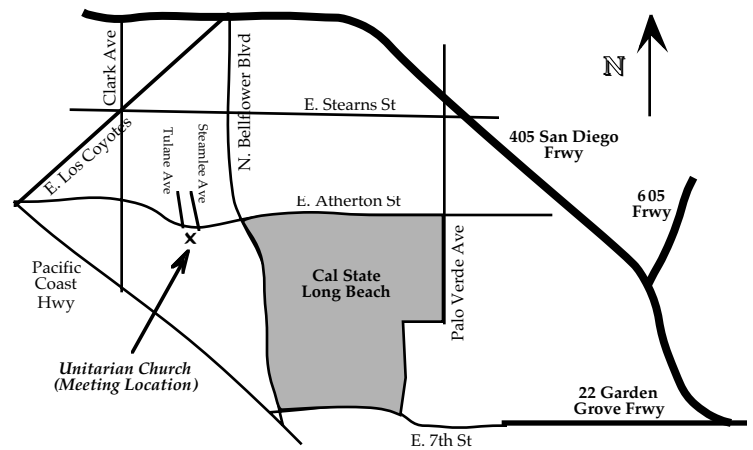
Group #596 Huntington Beach Meeting at Saints Simon and Jude Church, Room 7A, 20444 Magnolia Street in Huntington Beach. Group #596 meets the last Monday of each month.

28 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. See details on the web page <http://www.aiusaoc.org>. For more information about the group, contact Kris Elali at (714) 724-5811.



Group #178 Irvine Meeting Location



Group #175 Long Beach Meeting Location

Amnesty International
Group 178
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