



Amnesty International

Orange County

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

July 2005

<http://www.aiusaoc.org>

Myanmar: Freedom for 355 but Many More Still in Prison

This article is taken from a July 6, 2005 AIUSA press release.

Amnesty International welcomes the release from prison today of more than 355 political prisoners, including more than 100 from Insein Prison in Yangon.

"We are happy to hear of the release of prisoners of conscience, many of whom have been imprisoned for more than a decade," said Catherine Baber, Deputy Asia Program Director of Amnesty International.

"However there remains an urgent need to immediately and unconditionally release all prisoners of conscience among over 1100 political prisoners. We urge the authorities to use the momentum of this decision and release unconditionally—regardless of their political or religious allegiance—all prisoners of conscience, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi."

"The release of prisoners of conscience should be a first step towards putting an end to abuse of the justice system to detain peaceful dissenters. The authorities must ensure however, that no conditions are attached that may be used to return people to prison should they resume peaceful political activities. They must guarantee that all people, including recently released prisoners, are able to peacefully exercise their right to freedom of expression, association and assembly without fear of repression," said Catherine Baber.

More than 1100 journalists, student leaders, nuns, teachers, lawyers, students, monks and farmers are serving long sentences after unfair trials for acts of peaceful dissent. Many of them are in a poor state of health and have suffered torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

On this occasion, Amnesty International reiterates calls to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) to protect against future wrongful imprisonment by repealing laws that allow the prosecution of people on the basis of their peaceful political and religious activities. The SPDC must also ensure that future trials accord with international fair trial standards.

Background

A proportion of prisoners released today were eligible to be released with time off for good behaviour deducted from their sentences. A number of political prisoners, including NLD MPs elect, who were freed in a mass release of prisoners between November 2004 and January 2005, have been re-arrested after resuming political activities, and given lengthy prison terms. They are not known to have been included in today's release of political prisoners. Arrests for political reasons continue to be reported.

Among the prisoners released today for whose release

Amnesty International has been campaigning are:

U Sein Hla Oo, a former news editor, film critic and NLD Member of Parliament elect, who was imprisoned in Myitkyina Prison. He had been conditionally released in an amnesty in 1993, and rearrested in 1994 for communicating "fabricated news" to foreign journalists and diplomats, and distributing political materials. He was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment, and made to serve the outstanding part of his earlier sentence as the authorities stated that he had "breached his promise and secretly carried out anti-government activities."

U Khin Zaw Win, a dentist and overseas student connected with the National League for Democracy. He was arrested at Yangon airport on his way to Singapore and sentenced in connection with papers, computer disks and letters he was carrying with him which allegedly included "anti-government sentiments". He was among a group of prisoners who were penalized in 1996 for allegedly attempting to send information regarding poor conditions in Insein to the United Nations, and for circulating news in the prison. Prisoners had been placed in military dog cells, forced to sleep on concrete floors with no bedding, and forbidden any visits from their families.

Kyaw Min Yu, a student, was arrested in connection with his political activities in 1989, and was serving a sentence of 17 years' imprisonment. He was originally held without charge or trial and then sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment on charges of trying to incite unrest, and has completed this sentence. He received a second sentence of seven years' imprisonment, while still imprisoned in connection with his alleged involvement in plans to distribute news from overseas broadcasts within Insein Prison, and to contact the United Nations Human Rights Commission about conditions in the prison.

However, Myanmar's longest-serving political prisoner, the prominent journalist U Win Tin, was not among those freed. It had been expected that Win Tin would be released after he was summoned to meet the Home Minister in Insein prison on Wednesday. Nine other political prisoners who also met the Home Minister were freed, prompting speculation that Win Tin might have insisted on the release of all prisoners and detainees, including democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Win Tin, a 75-year-old NLD veteran, has served 16 years of a 20 year jail sentence imposed in 1989 on account of his political opposition to the authorities. A close friend of Win Tin who visited him in Insein prison last Saturday said he remained devoted to his political beliefs and principles. Last week, Amnesty International and Reporters without Borders delivered petitions for his release to Myanmar embassies in Paris and London.

June Meeting Minutes

Group #175 Long Beach

Attendees

Matthew Danielczyk, Mary Kay Dunn, Norma Edwards, Jim Roberts, Naomi Steinfeld, Steve Wicke

Controversy

Any publicity is good publicity? Group members spent some time talking about the heat generated by Amnesty International's Secretary General Irene Khan's comments comparing Guantánamo to a gulag. Some felt that it was good that a discussion was even raised in the tepid media, while others felt it may not have helped our cause and was outside of the usual diplomatic Amnesty way. A couple of us expressed surprise that Amnesty USA's Executive Director Bill Schultz's comments suggesting that Bush and some cabinet members be arrested internationally did not garner the same outrage.

Campaign Against Torture

Steve talked about the hearings on renewing the Patriot Act and how the Republicans walked out when Guantánamo came up. An Amnesty staff member did have a chance to make a statement before that happened though. Steve told us about breaking with tradition at his Toastmasters meeting and giving a somewhat heated talk on "Gitmo." He netted two new members to Amnesty International! Way to go, Steve.

Also, on June 14, Senator Dick Durbin (D-Illinois) made a statement from the floor about torture, Guantánamo, and the future of the prisoners (see <http://www.senate.gov/~durbin/gitmo.cfm>). Among other things, he stated that the FBI is reporting torture incidents, but no one seems to care. This led to a discussion among group members about just what can be done to change the status quo. What can the U.S. do with "enemy combatants"? Is there an alternative to holding them indefinitely (forever) that would make citizens comfortable? Group members did not agree on all the issues, but we did agree that the American public needs more information about Guantánamo and the War on Terror. (Postscript: Senator Durbin has now apologized for some of his comments . . .)

View Amnesty's new flash video calling for an independent commission and the appointment of a special counsel to investigate abuses in Guantánamo, Afghanistan, other detention camps around the world and to hold perpetrators responsible. <http://www.amnestyusa.org/investigate.html>

Prisoner Case: Ye Htut, Myanmar

Jim fleshed out the case for us a bit. Ye Htut (pronounced Yay Tut), who belonged to the Burma Information Institute, was sent to prison for sending material to exiled Burmese in Thailand. (No detail on what that material was.) He was sentenced to seven years and should have been released in 2002, but remains imprisoned. This could be because he has refused to sign the customary declaration promising to "be good."

We talked about the difficulty in coming up with strategies to influence the military junta in Myanmar. Countries with relationships with Myanmar include Thailand, Japan, Singapore, and China. None of these countries is willing to put pressure on Myanmar, for various reasons. In fact, contrary to original thought that the generals of Myanmar were idiots, the country

has done surprisingly well and made some tactically brilliant moves in the region. For example, much to the embarrassment of that area of the world, Myanmar is due to take over the chairmanship of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) in 2006.

PEN has taken up Ye Htut's cause (because of his charge—sending reading material), and Amnesty groups in Germany, Belgium, and North Hampton, Massachusetts, are also working for his release.

Group News/Miscellaneous

- The International Council Meeting (ICM) will be taking place in August this year. The U.S. delegation has asked for input from members. Lots of important issues, including the direction of Amnesty's mission, will be discussed and voted on. We did not have time to go over the hand-out about this that went out with the monthly mailing, so Norma will endeavor to e-mail the questions in pieces so people will have leisure to read, think about, and electronically discuss. Norma will then forward a digest of comments to the delegation.
- A new documentary by photographer Jane Evelyn Atwood is now available online at www.amnestyusa.org/stopviolence/tmt.html. The documentary is entitled *Too Much Time—Women in Prison* and is an adaptation of Atwood's book of the same name. The documentary recounts Atwood's travels around the world photographing women in prison.
- The group sent four cards of support to Democratic Republic of Congo human rights workers in Uganda (thanks, Matthew, for writing them in English, French, Swahili, and Lingala for us!), six letters to Myanmar, two petitions to our senators, six letters to the ambassador of Colombia, and 13 summer action postcards.

Next Month's Meeting

Please join us at our next meeting, Wednesday, July 20, to watch the new Amnesty film *Human Needs, Human Rights: Amnesty International and the Movement for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*.

June Meeting Minutes

Group #141 Orange

Next Month's Meeting

The group will be working on the Summer Postcard Action at its July 19 meeting. Please bring postcards for the action.

Artists Village Tabling

We will have a table at the Saturday, August 6, Santa Ana Artists Village Open House. The Artists Village Open House is held on the first Saturday of each month, 7:00–10:00 PM, rain or shine. Anyone wanting to help table is welcome. We will be near the Gypsy Den on the Plaza of the Arts. It is an evening when the galleries stay open late and there are lots of people out walking. The following link shows a map of the area: <http://www.grandcentralartcenter.com/gcacPages/Maps.html>

Park in the Artists Village Parking Structure at 3rd Street and Broadway. Walk through the galleries and studios, see a live performance, or hang out and enjoy the music, all for free.

June Meeting Minutes

Group #596 Huntington Beach

Letter-Writing

We had about 15 people in attendance and generated 38 letters and 5 petitions.

Next Month's Meeting

We decided to do a "Potluck" Going Away Celebration for our meeting in July for the graduating and transferring students. All are welcome! Our next meeting will be July 27th in the Adult Center at Sts. Simon and Jude. We will also be bringing postcards to do our Summer Postcard Writing Action to prisoners of conscience. The sign up list is below. If you would like to attend, just shoot Darcie Olson a quick email at c_olson@onebox.com with what you would like to bring!

Joan Singleton: Soft drinks

Gail Judkins: Fruit

Cheri Hierbaum: Antipasto salad and postcards

Darcie Olson: Postcards and chocolate chip cookies

Gabriella Miotto: Postcards and vegetarian hot dish

Mahsa Abassi: Postcards and vegetarian dish

Gloria Tran: Some type of food item

Beth McFarland: Postcards and refreshments

Raquel S-Saboor: Strawberry pretzel salad

We could use some paper plates, cups and utensils if anyone would like to sign up for that (Hopeful smile :).

Group Business

Several people have shown some interest in co-leading the group. If you are interested, please let Darcie or Mahsa know right away so we can discuss more in July!

We currently have around \$1,700 in our account.

Ideas for Upcoming Events

Women of Juarez: Raquel might be putting together a caravan to Texas and a day trip to Juarez for August. If you are interested in helping or supporting this event, please contact her at rcssaboor@gmail.com. Dominique also suggested doing a follow-up event from our spring event on the Women of Juarez or some outlet to update the group on progress made on that issue. There are several documentary shorts available on this topic from the Amnesty Film Festival.

December 10 Event: Perhaps focus on the Patriot Act and the sunset provisions which are set to expire 12/30/05 and possibly coordinate with student groups. Perhaps invite Japanese groups to share their comments on the Patriot Act (victims of internment camps). Perhaps make it an intercultural event and invite religious groups, refugees, etc., and again outreach to high school groups.

Israel/Palestine Event: Women in Black or focus on children's viewpoint. We could contact AFSC, Cousin's Club, or the Museum of Tolerance.

Other ideas include an Introduction to Amnesty reception,

a Museum of Tolerance field trip, an outreach to college students, a focus on service industry jobs, and an event dealing with North Korea. Gabriella is looking at networking opportunities with high school groups for her RESULTS Organization, a lobbying group focusing on ending poverty and hunger.

We are also looking into setting up a separate HB website. If you have more ideas on events or other suggestions for improvements, please do not hesitate to contact us!

From the Executive Director

But We Did Get Their Attention

This article is taken from the July-August 2005 Connect.

Amnesty International has been "in the news" a lot lately over Secretary General Irene Khan's comparison of the Guantanamo Bay detention camp to the Soviet gulags. The "gulag of our times," she called it. President Bush, Vice President Cheney, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and General Richard Myers have all denounced us in language about as strong as public figures can use in public statements. (One can only imagine what they are saying privately!)

A number of traditional Amnesty allies and some Amnesty members themselves have questioned the comparison and expressed concern that what they see as hyperbole has given the Administration a vehicle to divert attention from the substance of our concerns. Ironically, the very opposite seems to have happened, however. National news programs that never would have invited us on to discuss Guantánamo alone are now clamoring for our appearance. On most shows, we've been able to deal with the "gulag" controversy in the first thirty seconds of the interview and then spend the rest of the time addressing U.S. human rights violations. Bush and company's attacks on us have also been our best membership recruitment tool.

But there's no question that the analogy is an imperfect one. The numbers in U.S. detention (estimated at about 70,000) come nowhere close to the numbers in the gulag and they are not being starved or forced to do labor. But there are similarities as well: the U.S. is maintaining an archipelago of prisons across the world, many of them secret, in which prisoners are being disappeared, held in indefinite incommunicado detention without access to lawyers, courts or families and some of those detainees are being abused, tortured and even killed—just like in the gulags. Moreover, whether we Americans like it or not, for much of the world- and Amnesty is after all an international organization—"gulag" is not too strong a word for what America is doing.

I probably wouldn't have used that word myself in the first place but so far we've managed to do pretty well at turning a crisis into an opportunity. But I wouldn't want a week like that every month of my life!

William Schulz, Executive Director

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 shown with annual dues of \$10.00. Dues cover the costs of this newsletter and of stamps used for saving lives. Your address label contains your membership expiration date. Join us!

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Group 178

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

Calendar

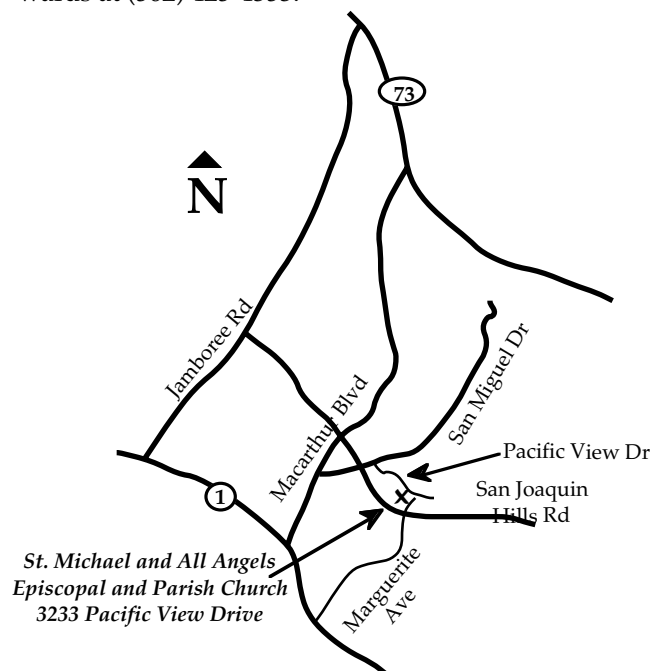
July

19 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.

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 Norma Edwards at (562) 425-4353.



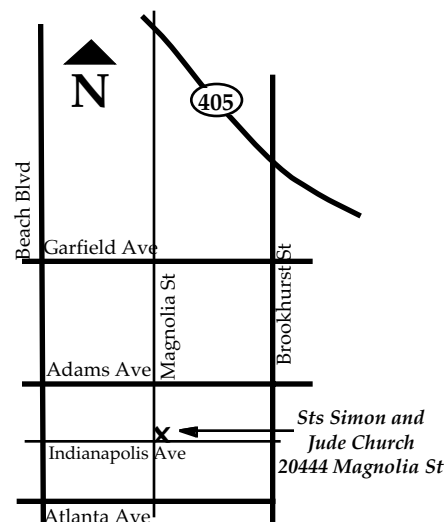
Group #178 Irvine Meeting Location

25 Monday 7:00 PM

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

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



Group #596 Huntington Beach Meeting Location

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