



Amnesty International

Orange County

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

February 2006

<http://www.aiusaoc.org>

Nepal: A Decade of Suffering and Abuse

This article is taken from an February 10, 2006 AIUSA press release.

Ten years of war and political instability have turned the human rights situation in Nepal into one of the worst in the world—and the international community has a critical role to play in reversing the decline, said Amnesty International today.

“The people of Nepal have lived through far too much violence already. Without urgent action from the international community and all parties in Nepal, a new generation will grow up knowing nothing but bloodshed and conflict,” declared Irene Khan, Amnesty International’s Secretary General.

There has been a sharp escalation of violence in recent weeks with police using excessive force against those protesting against municipal elections held on 8 February, which were widely seen as an attempt by the King to legitimise his rule. There are fears of further violence as the tenth anniversary of the war, February 13, draws closer.

On top of widespread abuses of human rights related to the conflict, the government has restricted basic civil liberties over the last year, causing the situation to deteriorate further. In the last few weeks more than 1,500 people have been arrested for either organizing or participating in political demonstrations, according to reliable estimates. On 8 March one protester was shot dead by police.

More than 12,000 people have died since the Maoists declared a “people’s war” on February 13, 1996. Hundreds more have ‘disappeared’, been tortured, abducted, raped or recruited as child soldiers. Hundreds of thousands of people have been forced to leave their homes behind to live in miserable conditions in temporary housing.

“Over a decade of conflict we have seen the human rights situation steadily worsen, with increasing numbers of civilian killings and injuries and, for a time, the highest number of reported ‘disappearances’ in the world,” said Irene Khan, Amnesty International’s Secretary General.

Amnesty International reiterated its call to the Nepali government to ensure its security forces are not allowed to get away with killings and other abuses. Perpetrators must be prosecuted and their victims allowed justice. The organization also called on the Maoists to take all possible measures to ensure that civilians are never harmed.

“The international community has a critical role to play in preventing further deterioration of the human rights situation,” said Irene Khan. “They need to continue to pressure the government to respect human rights and to meet their obligations under international law—including by restoring basic freedoms such as the right to peacefully demonstrate.”

The international community should review Nepal’s participation in peacekeeping operations abroad, given the Nepali Army’s poor human rights record at home. Amnesty International reiterated its request of February 2005 and called on those foreign governments that continue to supply weapons to Nepal to impose an arms embargo until the human rights situation has significantly improved.

“It would be easy for this conflict to slip off the political agenda given how long it has been going on, but for the sake of the people of Nepal for whom it is a daily tragic reality, the world must remain engaged and keep up the pressure on the government and the Maoists,” said Irene Khan.

Great American Write-In

The 21st annual Great American Write-In will be held on Saturday, March 11, 9:30 AM–1:00 PM. The Great American Write-In is sponsored by Women For: Orange County in cooperation with dozens of organization, including Amnesty International, the United Nations Association, and the League of Women Voters. At the Write-In, participants can meet representatives of local and national advocacy groups, learn about vital issues, and write to decision makers.

The Write-In will be held at Lakeview Senior Center, Woodbridge Community Park, off of Lake Road, between Barranca and Alton Parkways in Irvine. Admission, parking, and refreshments are all free! For more information, contact Ruth Gluck at (949) 581-3938 or Elaine Booth at (949) 654-0006.

Save the Date: So. Calif. Mini-Conference

The 5th Southern California Amnesty Mini-Conference will be held on Saturday, March 25, at the California State University, Fullerton campus. The conference will run all day and will feature invited speakers, workshop, and caucuses. If there are any workshops you would like to see or any you would like to present, contact Kris Brady at kris.simply@yahoo.com.

The AC Corner

From Cathleen Kilgallen, Area Coordinator for the Orange County and Long Beach groups

I would like to remind everyone to come to the Great American Write-In at the Lakeview Senior Center in Irvine on March 11th. The more letter-writing actions, the merrier! It sounds like it will be a blast, and also a great chance to get to know Glen, our new Irvine coordinator. I’m also looking into revamping the OC website, so any suggestions you might have regarding content or layout are more than welcome!

January Meeting Minutes

Group #141 Orange

Letter-Writing Actions

The group wrote letters dealing with actions in Myanmar, Uganda, Turkey, Eritrea, and Syria.

Nepal

Jeannine talked about the story from the December 2005–January 2006 *Connect* about former Chairman of Amnesty International's Nepal Section, Krishna Pahadi. This article is reproduced in the newsletter.

We also discussed screening the film *Schools in the Crossfire* at a future meeting, a documentary on how the schools in Nepal have been affected by the conflict there.

Share Power Campaign

Kevin and Deidre discussed AIUSA's Corporate Action Network Share Power Campaign. The campaign's goal is to hold corporations accountable, morally and legally, for human rights violations within and connected to their operations. See the campaign website <http://www.amnestyusa.org/business/sharepower> for more information. The website includes a new downloadable flash movie outlining the campaign's issues.

Artists Village Tabling

The group discussed the tabling in December at the Santa Ana Artists Village Open House. There were a lot of people who stopped by the table with "only a few kooks" and a ton of petitions signed. Overall, it was a good experience and the group decided to look into doing it again, perhaps in April.

Orange County Event

The group discussed with our new Area Coordinator Cathleen Kilgallen holding an event with the other Orange County and Long Beach groups. The Great American Write-In, scheduled for Saturday, March 11, was mentioned as an event all the groups could participate in. A purely social event, such as a picnic, was also discussed.

January Meeting Minutes

Group #175 Long Beach

Attendees

Darlene Adler, Norma Edwards, Deidre Gaffney, J. Kevin Gaffney, Bobbi Kendig, Cathleen Kilgallen, Shean McMahon, Elizabeth Petras, Naomi Steinfeld, Steve Wicke.

Happy New Year!

Nice to get the year off to a rousing start. We met in December at Saigon Express (actually called something else now) in Lakewood and signed holiday cards for prisoners of conscience but we missed our little kiddie table and chairs! We had a nice full meeting with Bobbi's coffee, Cathleen's cookies, a speaker, and a new person.

Amnesty's Outfront Campaign: Stonewalled Report

Darlene Adler, Outfront Coordinator for Los Angeles (let's just say Southern California, shall we?) came to tell us what the group has been up to. *Stonewalled: Police Abuse and Misconduct Against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People in the*

U.S. is the name of a report that documents serious patterns of police abuse, including incidents amounting to torture and ill-treatment. Darlene told us about the report's findings, which include the fact that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals are often targeted for arrest and abuse, with women and minorities experiencing the most problems. Outfront is asking police departments and county sheriffs throughout the country to sign a pledge affirming their commitment to combat discrimination and violence against LGBT people. <http://www.amnestyusa.org/outfront/stonewalled>

Darlene is going to let us know where Long Beach stands, and the group promised to write a letter either asking for the department to sign or thanking them if they have.

Torture Campaign

Steve brought us up to date on the Jose Padilla case as well as other current events (National Security Administration eavesdropping, etc.). The group discussed what might happen and whether Americans are getting fed up yet.

Group News

- The group welcomed Elizabeth Petras, a prodigious letter-writer who is also very nice.
- The group sent 48 letters.
- Jim Roberts, our POC coordinator, stopped by with an action for our prisoner in Myanmar but wasn't able to attend the meeting. He confirmed the story that roadblocks to Aung San Su Kyi's house (where she is still under house arrest) were removed, but said that it is never easy to understand what the ruling junta is doing and so it is hard to know what to make of the news.

January Meeting Minutes

Group #178 Irvine

Group Business

The group agreed to pay \$50 to participate in the March 11 Great American Write-In. Jacques and Kris will coordinate tabling for the event. It was shared with us that other groups are going so that is great! We could use most of the help setting up in the morning. Every group bring a letter or two. Looking forward to seeing you all there.

New Irvine Group Coordinator

Our group is pleased to announce our new Group Coordinator for 2006 is Glen Nielsen. Glen was born in San Francisco and grew up in Huntington Beach where he graduated from Marina High School. He has been married for 14 years with 3 daughters and recently became a grandpa. He is an entrepreneur who started his own company and moved that expertise to Amnesty in the 80's. He joined Amnesty in 1986 and became part of the Irvine Group where he was in charge of the POC from Benin. He moved on as Area Coordinator where he set up high school and local Amnesty groups. He also was the Death Penalty Coordinator for the state.

He has served in many capacities for Amnesty and we are pleased to have him as our coordinator. Please feel free to contact him as necessary. He can be reached at nielsenelc@cox.net.

The Power of the Pen

This article is taken from the December 2005–January 2006 Connect.

As former Chairman of Amnesty International’s Nepal Section, Krishna Pahadi knows the drill. As soon as Amnesty International learns someone has been unjustly arrested, the organization investigates the case and, if it concludes that person has been imprisoned solely for his or her non-violent conscientious beliefs or opinions, Amnesty designates the detainee a “prisoner of conscience” and soon the jailers find themselves inundated with mail from all over the world. And that is exactly how it worked when Pahadi himself was arrested by plain-clothed police in the offices of Nepal’s Human Rights and Peace Society February 9 as he was planning a non-violent demonstration to protest the King’s unilateral seizure of direct power a week earlier. Released from captivity in July, Pahadi visited the United States in November to, among other things, attend AIUSA’s Northeast Regional Conference and formally thank activists here for fighting for his freedom.

“I wrote many letters for prisoners of conscience,” he says. “But now I realize how important it is.” Pahadi was among more than 3,000 political prisoners detained during the first months of the king’s takeover. He was prepared for a long stay in prison.

“The police officers who arrested me told me, ‘you are finished for 10 years, you have no future,’” he recounts. “But eight days after my arrest, Amnesty International Secretary General Irene Khan visited Nepal and visited me inside the prison.” Khan carried word that Amnesty’s worldwide activist network was working for Pahadi’s release. He found out just how effective the campaign had been when he was set free, ironically on July 4, after almost five months in jail. “A police officer came to my room and handed me 218 letters,” he recalls. “Many of those letters came from the United States. I found some beautiful letters from children with pictures. Later I learned that AIUSA alone sent 37,400 letters to the different authorities of Nepal. So thank you very much. Because, not only me, many people in Nepal believe that if Amnesty International didn’t put the pressure on they would have kept us in detention for a long time.”

As soon as he was released Pahadi went back to work organizing rallies and demonstrations. He has devoted a good portion of his life to the struggle for human rights and peace in Nepal—first through his involvement with AI Nepal, then as a founding member of the Human Rights Organization of Nepal (HURON), and later as founding chair of the Peace Society. He has been arrested more than 25 times and has undertaken four hunger strikes. A published playwright, Pahadi has also written more than a dozen dramas that have been performed all over Nepal. That high profile has earned him the enmity of the royal government. He has been under constant surveillance

since his release and has been the subject of a smear campaign, with government officials and state-controlled media publicly branding him a “traitor” and a threat to Nepal’s national security.

That is probably because Pahadi isn’t shy about placing the blame for the continuing strife in his country squarely on the shoulders of King Gyanendra. After seizing direct power, the king declared a State of Emergency initiating a sweeping crackdown on dissent that included human rights defenders among the main targets. He also outlawed a number of fundamental rights—including the right to privacy and freedom of expression, press, assembly, movement and association. At least 45 human rights activists were among the more than 3,000 political prisoners detained during this period. Others were subjected to threats, intimidation and restrictions on their freedom of movement.

“It is the monarchy that is responsible for instability and the source of the conflict in Nepal,” declares Pahadi. “The king does not represent the people. Under the king’s direct rule there is no future for those who are for fundamental human rights and freedom.”

The king took direct control in the context a nine-year civil conflict that has claimed more than 12,000 lives. Thousands more have been tortured, abducted or “disappeared” in the course of the fighting between the government and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist.)

“The government would like to make Nepal a big jail. He (the king) is using the Maoist violence as an opportunity to grab power.” He believes that if a referendum goes to the people, he will be deposed.” Pahadi charges. We say, let’s go to the people and let them decide.”

Pahadi doesn’t spare criticism of the Maoist insurgents either who he says are no more interested in democracy than the monarchy they are fighting. “The Maoists are also responsible for grave abuses including killing innocent people, extortion, torture and recruiting children as soldiers.” He says it is the general population, caught in the vice-grip between the two warring factions, which suffers. “Now everything is paralyzed,” he says. “We lost more than 12,800 lives and if we are unable to stop this, Nepal will be known as a country of the graveyard.”

Despite the dangers, Krishna Pahadi fully intends to go home. There is work to do. “I assure you, I will continue my work in Nepal and we will build a strong foundation for the people’s movement,” he affirms. “The people of Nepal want to establish their own democratic system. We are ready to pay the price. If they detain me again after I return, I will accept prison as my home.”

Amnesty International’s million plus activists will know where to write.

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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Calendar

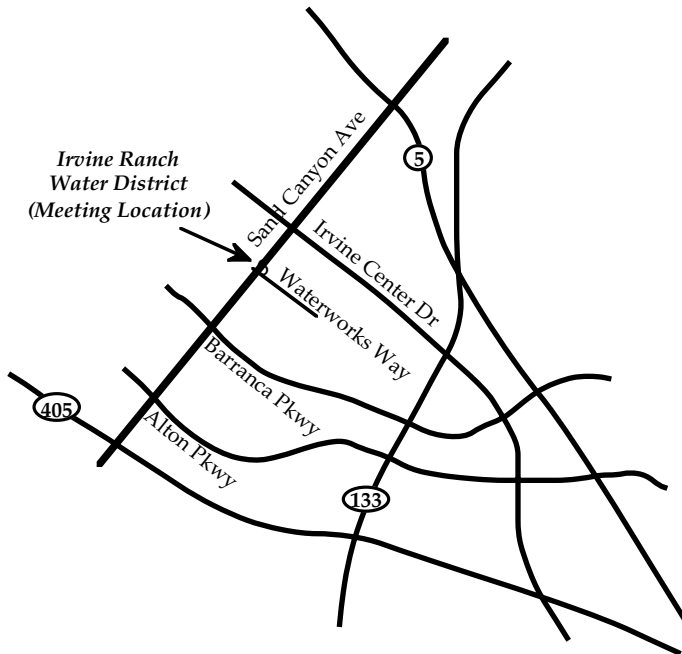
February

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 Kevin Gaffney at (562) 430-7381.

22 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.



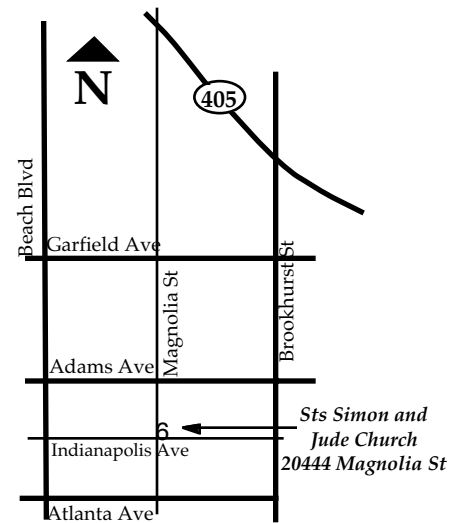
Group #178 Irvine Meeting Location

27 Monday 7:00 PM

Group #596 Huntington Beach Meeting at Saints Simon and Jude Church, Adult Center, 20444 Magnolia Street in Huntington Beach. See details on the website <http://www.hbamnesty.com/main.htm>.

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 Glen Nielsen at nielsen.electric@cox.net.



Group #596 Huntington Beach Location

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