



Amnesty International

Orange County

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May 2006

<http://www.aiusaoc.org>

Amnesty International's New Worldwide Death Penalty Report Finds United States Still Among Top Executing Countries

This article is taken from an April 19, 2006 AIUSA press release.

During 2005, at least 2,148 people were executed in 22 countries and at least 5,186 people were sentenced to death in 53 countries, Amnesty International disclosed today in its annual report on the death penalty worldwide. Across the world 20,000 people are scheduled to be killed by their own governments.

With 60 executions carried out in 2005, the United States remains one of the top executing countries, along with China, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Together the four nations accounted for 94 percent of all executions worldwide.

Despite these shocking figures, the global trend toward abolition of the death penalty continues to grow: the number of countries carrying out executions halved in the last 20 years and has dropped for the fourth consecutive year in a row. In 2005, Mexico and Liberia became the two most recent examples of countries that have abolished the death penalty.

"Around the world, public officials are realizing that government-sponsored punitive killing is unjust and ineffective at its very core: it is a cruel and unusual form of retribution that has no deterrent effect," said Dr. William F. Schulz, Executive Director of Amnesty International USA. "Meanwhile, as one of the four most active death penalty countries, the United States remains a glaring exception to this growing global consensus. AIUSA members are doing all they can to help put the United States back on the right side of history."

The Amnesty International report uncovers chilling facts about the other three top executing countries. In China, a person can be put to death for as many as 68 crimes, including non-violent infringements like tax fraud, embezzlement, and drug offenses. Lucrative deals are made in selling organs extracted from those who have been executed. China also accounts for almost 80 percent of all executions, with data available to Amnesty International indicating some 1,770 individuals put to death last year. Undoubtedly the real figure is much higher, with one Chinese legal expert recently estimating the true figure at around 8,000.

Iran executed at least 94 people last year and was the only country known to have executed juvenile offenders during that period. It put to death at least eight individuals for crimes committed while they were children, including two who were still under age 18 at the time of their execution.

In Saudi Arabia, people have been taken from their prison cells and executed without knowing that a death sentence had

been passed against them. Others have been tried and sentenced to death in a language they neither spoke nor read. Saudi Arabia executed at least 86 people in 2005.

In the United States, two men were released from death row in 2005 after evidence of their innocence emerged. In February, an Ohio judge fully acquitted Derrick Jamison in the murder for which he had received a death sentence two decades earlier. In November, a Pennsylvania jury dismissed all charges against Harold Wilson, who had been convicted in a triple murder in 1989. Jamison and Wilson became respectively the 120th and 121st death row inmates to be found innocent since 1973.

In March of last year, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the execution of juvenile offenders was unconstitutional, outlawing the practice. The United States had previously been a world leader in juvenile executions.

"Though it remains a national shame that the United States was the last country to formally reject executing juvenile offenders, we applaud the Supreme Court's ruling and hope it proves to be a harbinger of things to come in this country," said Sue Gunawardena-Vaughn, AIUSA's Director of the Program to Abolish the Death Penalty. "And while AIUSA celebrated last year's acquittals of Derrick Jamison and Harold Wilson, their cases serve as grim reminders of the fundamentally arbitrary and capricious nature of capital punishment."

The 60 prisoners executed in the United States in 2005 brought to 1,004 the total number executed since the use of the death penalty resumed in 1977; 12 more executions have been carried out thus far in 2006. The State of North Carolina plans to execute Willie Brown in the early hours of April 21. Approximately 3,400 prisoners were on death rows across the United States as of January 1, 2006. The death penalty is on the books in 38 states and is retained under military and federal law.

For a copy of Amnesty International's Death Penalty Statistics 2005, please see:

- World Developments:
<http://amnestyusa.org/abolish/developments>
- Facts and Figures:
<http://amnestyusa.org/abolish/figures>
- Death Sentences and Executions:
<http://amnestyusa.org/abolish/sentences>

For more on AIUSA's Program to Abolish the Death Penalty, please see: <http://amnestyusa.org/abolish>

April Meeting Minutes

Group #141 Orange

Letter-Writing Actions

The group sent a total of 30 letters this month. These included letters to the Guatemalan ambassador regarding concerns about the safety of Claudia Rivas, a teacher and secretary of a union of educational workers; government officials in Iran calling for the release of eight women and children prisoners of conscience; the Ethiopian ambassador regarding the detention of demonstrators; and Senators Boxer and Feinstein asking that they help ensure the success of the current African Union mission in the Sudan.

Artists Village Tabling

The Orange group will be tabling at the Santa Ana Artists Village Open House on Saturday, June 3. 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>

Parking can be found in the Artists Village Parking Structure at Third Street and Broadway. Walk through the galleries and studios, see a live performance or just hang out and enjoy the music, all for free.

Human Rights Day Event

Area Coordinator Cathleen Kilgallen proposed a joint Human Rights Day event for the Orange County and Long Beach groups. She is asking that each group choose a point person for planning the event.

April Meeting Minutes

Group #175 Long Beach

Attendees

Lizette Ashcraft, Norma Edwards, Deidre Gaffney, Kevin Gaffney, Joan Jack, Cathleen Kilgallen, Elizabeth Petras, Jim Roberts

Human Rights Day: December 10

Cathleen proposed the radical idea that we start planning ahead for a December 10 event. December 10 is Human Rights Day, and this year will be the 58th anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (see <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>). December 10 will be on a Sunday this year. The United Nations Association has already expressed interest in collaborating with Amnesty on an event, and, hopefully, all the Orange County groups and Long Beach can get together on this, so let's start brainstorming!

Movies and Human Rights

As we chatted and signed letters, Elizabeth mentioned seeing a very good movie that she hadn't previously heard about. Little did she know that the makers of the film had actually hooked up with Amnesty to use the movie to help educate the public on the arms trade. The movie is *Lord of War*, starring Nicholas Cage. The movie is available to members for screen-

ing parties (see <http://www.amnestyusa.org/lordofwar/index.html>). The group talked about starting some sort of human rights movie night, like Jacques used to organize at the Gypsy Den in Costa Mesa. Elizabeth suggested a couple of Long Beach venues, so we should pursue this further.

Group News

- The group was happy to welcome back Joan and greet a new visitor, Lizette, to the meeting. Both jumped right in to our discussions. Just what we like to see/hear!
- The group sent a total of 62 letters and postcards.

POC Freed From Mental Hospital

The Government of Turkmenistan released a 64 year-old prisoner of conscience from forced confinement in a psychiatric hospital on April 11. GurbandurdyDurdykuliev was arrested on February 13, 2004 after he asked President Saparmurad Niyazov for authorization to hold a peaceful political protest. Durdykuliev's was the subject of an intensive campaign in 2006 as one of AIUSA's five Special Focus Cases.

"Dissent is not an illness; it is a right protected by international law," said Michael O'Reilly, Amnesty International USA Casework Director. "The forcible psychiatric confinement of Gurbandurdy Durdykuliev was a chilling reverberation from the Soviet era, when many dissidents were locked away in psychiatric hospitals in an effort to silence them. We hope that Mr. Durdykuliev's reported release signals repudiation by Turkmen authorities of this odious practice."

AIUSA activists across the country worked on Durdykuliev's behalf. More than 400 AIUSA student groups in the Northeast adopted the dissident, sending hundreds of letters and petitions to Turkmen authorities calling for his immediate release. AIUSA also worked with Congress to draw more attention to Durdykuliev's case. Partly due to AI's efforts, 54 members of Congress sent a letter to the Turkmen president condemning the use of forced psychiatric confinement of political dissidents and calling for Durdykuliev's release.

Amnesty International remains concerned about Durdykuliev's health however. While in confinement, he was believed to suffer from severe stomach pains and the aftermath of a heart attack he experienced before his confinement.

On January 3, 2004, Durdykuliev sent a letter to President Niyazov and to the governor of the Balkan region, asking them to authorize a two-day demonstration on the main square of Balkanabad on February 18-19, to coincide with the President's birthday. He wrote: "We want to carry out a peaceful demonstration to express our disagreement with the policies of the President and other senior government officials and urge them to rectify any shortcomings in due course I ask you to refrain from using force against the participants of the meeting."

On February 13, six medical personnel and six others, possibly police, seized Durdykuliev at his house and took him to a psychiatric hospital in Balkanabad. Shortly afterwards he was transferred to a psychiatric hospital. A commission at the hospital, chaired by an official of the Ministry of Health, reportedly declared Durdykuliev mentally ill. He was officially diagnosed as suffering from "wild paranoia in an aggressive form."

From the Executive Director Taking On The Counter-Revolution

This is the second time I have had the privilege of working for Amnesty International USA. The first time around—some 30 years ago—AI was playing a groundbreaking role in what Martin Luther King Jr. called the “human rights revolution.” Coming out of the struggles of the ‘60s, I thought I was quite the expert on revolutions. But I could never have even imagined the scope and the power of the one I discovered through Amnesty International.

This was truly a global revolution carried out, not by armies or guerrillas, but by so called ordinary people doing the extraordinary.

In some countries they gave their freedom and even their lives. In others they gave their time and resources. Together they gave the world a new way forward, one that transcended tired ideologies, rejected violence and hatred. It was a revolution that drew its strength from universal rules of common decency and judged itself, not by power seized or territory taken and controlled, but by the liberation of their fellow human beings.

They didn’t always succeed. There were painful failures. Too many people never made it out of prison, died in massacres or from the malign neglect of economic injustice, an issue which we did not yet address. But there were also unimaginable victories - prison doors pried open, torture and execution chambers shut down, men, women and children freed and given new life. In the process dictators fell, entire countries were liberated and walls, whether of concrete and barbed wire, or racial segregation and oppression, were torn down. These concrete victories for individuals produced a new faith in human rights, a faith that made it possible to believe that we could, in the words of Martin Luther King Jr., “hew out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope.”

But we are living in a time when ominous new “mountains of despair” loom ever higher and hope seems harder and harder to find on an ever darkening horizon. That is why I came back to Amnesty International.

Because, while the “human rights revolution” is still far from its final objective of ensuring human freedom and dignity to everyone, everywhere, we are now facing squarely what could be called a “human rights counter-revolution,” an attempt to roll back gains we thought had been permanently established. Indeed the very idea that all human beings have inalienable rights that all governments and all political social and religious entities, however powerful, are bound to respect, has come under attack. This counter-revolution

wears many guises. There are those who, in the name of what is most holy and sacred, brazenly kill unarmed men, women and children. There are governments, as we know all too well, that respond to such outrages by justifying the unjustifiable—indefinite detention without trial, secret kidnappings and “disappearances,” torture and executions—instead of honoring those deaths by renewing their own commitment to human rights. When democratic governments resort to these tactics they empower and assist dictators and killers throughout the world and undermine the brave individuals fighting for freedom. Then there is the continued existence of spirit and life killing poverty, even in the richest country on earth.

This is the biggest challenge to the advance of human rights in my lifetime. To meet this challenge will require more of us doing more and doing it more effectively than ever before. If this was my responsibility alone I would be facing my own private “mountain of despair.” But because it is a responsibility I share with all of you, because of the way AI has grown stronger thanks to Bill Schulz and so many others, and because I have already seen what together we can do, I come to this job not just with joy and determination but with more than a large “stone of hope.”

Larry Cox, AIUSA Executive Director

Legislative News and Actions

Darfur Lobbying Paying Off

On March 16 the House of Representatives approved \$50 million for peacekeeping operations in Darfur. The Senate’s Emergency Supplemental Appropriations bill, which asks for \$100 million for peacekeeping operations in Darfur, goes to the full Senate for a vote at end of April. AIUSA members have actively lobbied their lawmakers to support additional funding for African Union peacekeeping operations in Darfur.

Juarez Resolution Passes

Meanwhile, the House International Relations Committee passed the Juarez/Chihuahua resolution on March 15. The resolution will now go to the full House for consideration and a vote. AIUSA activists also devoted significant lobbying to this resolution and it was a focus of AIUSA’s collaboration with the 2005 and 2006 tours of the Mexican super band Jaguares.

Two For Three On Trafficking Bill

The Senate recently passed two of three points raised in AIUSA’s 23,000 signature petition against human trafficking gathered last fall. The Senate gave its advice and consent to U.S. ratification of the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons. The Senate also extended the statute of limitations for prosecuting traffickers in the U.S. to ten years under the Department of Justice Authorization Act.

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

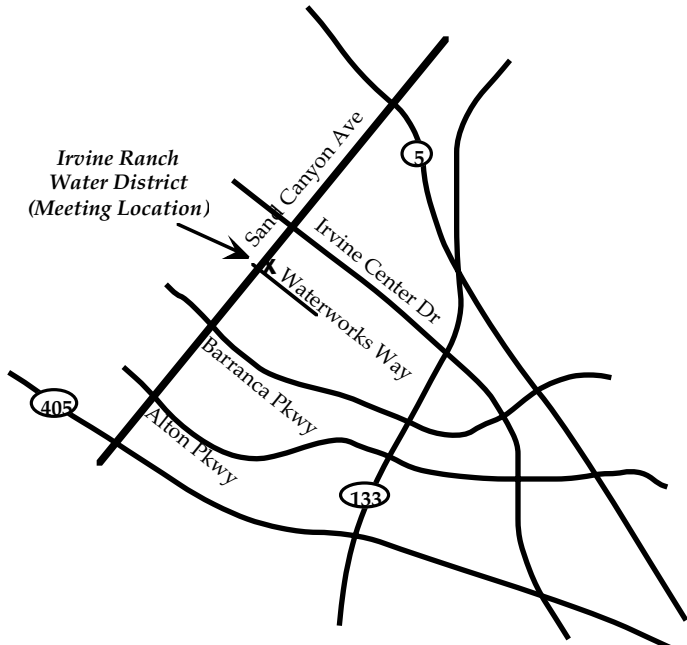
May

16 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 xhusker@aol.com.

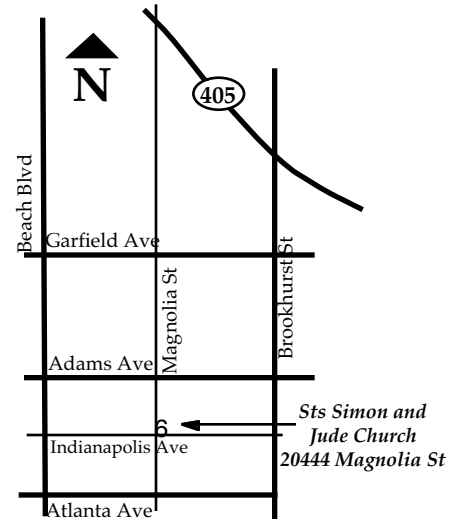
17 Wednesday 7:00 PM
Group #175 Long Beach Monthly Meeting at the Unitarian Universalist Church, Rooms 1 and 2, 5450 Atherton Street, Long Beach. Letter-writing from 7:00-7:30. For further information about the group, contact Norma Edwards at (562) 425-4353.

29 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>.

30 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 #178 Irvine Meeting Location



Group #596 Huntington Beach Location

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Group 178
P.O. Box 53862
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