



Amnesty International

Orange County

GROUP 141 ORANGE • GROUP 175 LONG BEACH
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June 2006

<http://www.aiusaoc.org>

USA: UN Committee Against Torture Condemns US Detention Policies

This article is taken from a May 19, 2006 AIUSA press release.

Today the United Nations Committee Against Torture has added to the growing pressure on the United States authorities to prohibit, prevent and punish all acts of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment at home and abroad; to close Guantánamo; to end secret, incommunicado and indefinite detention; to prevent “disappearances”; and to stop the practice of “rendition.”

Clearly, the Committee did not accept the USA’s assertion that the problem of torture and ill-treatment of detainees in US custody was restricted to “relatively few actual cases of abuse and wrongdoing.” The Committee’s findings point to a systematic failure of the USA to live up to its international obligations, including under the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and to protect detainees from abuse. The USA should take these findings to heart.

Amnesty International welcomes the Committee’s findings and urges the US government to begin immediately to implement its recommendations and to report back to the Committee, as required. In relation to the “war on terror,” the Committee’s recommendations include that the USA should:

- End secret detention, which is per se a violation of the Convention against Torture. The Committee stressed that all secret detentions must be disclosed and that all detainees must be fully registered. The latter is a crucial safeguard against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. This would include all detainees in US custody in Afghanistan, Iraq, Cuba and at undisclosed locations. The Committee regretted the US government’s “no comment” policy on whether or not it is operating secret detention facilities. It called on the US government to “publicly condemn any policy of secret detention.”
- Prevent “disappearances,” which are per se violations of the Convention. The Committee rejected the US government’s notion that “disappearances” do not constitute a form of torture.
- End the practice of “rendition,” the extra-judicial transfer of detainees between countries. All detainees in US custody must be protected from transfer to situations where they will be put at risk of torture.
- Cease detentions at Guantánamo and close the facility. Indefinite detention without charge per se violates the Convention.
- Prevent the use of any interrogation techniques that amount to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading

treatment. The Committee regretted the USA’s lack of clarity in relation to interrogation techniques which has led to “serious abuses of detainees” in US custody.

- Ensure full investigations into acts of torture and ill-treatment and prosecute “all those responsible” for such acts, with punishments commensurate with the crime. The Committee expressed its concern about the lenient sentences that have been handed out in many cases of torture or other ill-treatment by US personnel in Afghanistan and Iraq.
- Recognize and ensure that the Convention applies “at all times”—whether in times of war or peace—and that its provisions apply fully to “all persons under the effective control of [US] authorities, of whichever type, wherever located in the world.” The Committee rejected the US government’s view that the Convention is not applicable in the context of armed conflict.

On US domestic issues, the Committee was concerned about numerous aspects of prison and detention policies. Its recommendations include:

- Ensure the separation of children from adults in detention. In addition, it called upon the USA to review its use of life imprisonment in the case of children, given that such sentences can amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. In a joint report issued in October 2005, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch reported that more than 2,000 child offenders were serving sentences of life imprisonment without the possibility of parole, in violation of international law.
- Ensure that women in custody are treated fully in accordance with international standards. The Committee expressed particular concern at the practice of shackling of pregnant women detainees during labour.
- Review the regime in “super-maximum” security prisons, particularly the resort to prolonged isolation of prisoners. This reiterates the Committee’s 2000 recommendation.
- Strictly regulate the use of electro-shock weapons, such as tasers and stun belts, and limit their use to a substitute for lethal force. The Committee stressed that the practice of using electro-shock weapons to restrain those already in custody was a breach of the Convention and should be eliminated. The USA rejected the Committee’s findings in 2000 on electro-shock weapons. It should not reject its recommendations a second time.

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May Meeting Minutes

Group #141 Orange

Letter-Writing Actions

The group sent a total of 28 letters this month. These included letters to officials in Sri Lanka asking that witnesses to a killing of five Tamil students be given protection, to officials in Chad asking about the whereabouts of 12 people detained incommunicado for their human rights activities, to US government officials asking that Guantanamo detainee, Jumah al-Dossari, who has attempted suicide 12 times, be given a trial, and finally to Senator Dianne Feinstein asking that funding for UN peacekeeping operations be maintained.

Artists Village Tabling

The group had to postpone its planned tabling at the Artists Village in Santa Ana due to the city not being able to find our insurance paperwork. In addition, sadly, Jeannine Christensen's father-in-law passed away the weekend we were planning to table.

We will be looking at rescheduling for either August or September.

May Meeting Minutes

Group #175 Long Beach

Attendees

Lizette Ashcraft, Mary Kay Dunn, Norma Edwards, Deidre Gaffney, Kevin Gaffney, Joan Jack, Cathleen Kilgallen, Shéan McMahon, Elizabeth Petras, Linda Veazey, Steve Wicke

Group News

- The group welcomed longtime Amnesty activist and new Long Beach resident Linda Veazey to the meeting.
- Again, Norma forgot to count how many letters we sent off (not quite as many as usual to the absence of prolific letter providers Bobbi Kendig and Jim Roberts and the fact that Norma left most of hers on her printer). Thanks to some members who still remember how to write by hand, we did manage to send some off, including letters to our local law enforcement chiefs inquiring whether or not they've signed Amnesty's pledge affirming a commitment to combat discrimination and violence against LGBT people.
- For the December 10 event, Norma suggested having a Human Rights Day picnic (perhaps at William R. Mason Regional Park in Irvine). We could make it a social event but still feature a speaker or two, information, and maybe even activities (Kevin suggested "Dunk the Dictator"). We could have a focus/theme for it, such as providing information from the Denounce Torture and War on Terror campaigns. Cathleen promised to convey these ideas and gather others when she visits our colleagues behind the Orange curtain.
- Our speaker from California Peace Action was unable to attend due to car trouble but should be there June 21. She will talk about her group's work to curb the global epidemic of arms trafficking.
Annual General Meeting
Our own new member Linda played an important role at

the AGM as a member of the resolutions committee (a role in which she will continue to serve on behalf of the Western Region). She told us all about the behind-the-scenes and goings-on. Almost all the resolutions passed (the two Katrina resolutions were merged). The procedure took so long that the closing plenary was delayed! Linda told us the committee has some changes planned for the resolutions process. Apparently Cathleen threw the gathering into a tizzy (well, as much as an Amnesty resolutions crowd can be thrown into a "tizzy") as she tried to vote on behalf of several groups. Finding nothing in the rules to bar such activity, she was allowed to proceed, possibly inspiring yet more new procedures for the resolutions committee to work out. Thanks, Cathleen for voting for us! Otherwise, both Cathleen and Linda reported general satisfaction with the AGM.

Congress Goes on the Record

The House and Senate passed concurrent resolutions on May 3 denouncing abuses against women in the Mexican border state cities of Juarez and Chihuahua.

Congress is now on record condemning the ongoing abductions and murders of women in Juarez and Chihuahua. The resolution presses the Bush Administration to work through the Mexican Government to protect women and prosecute the perpetrators of the violence. Ciudad Juarez and Chihuahua have been plagued with the abduction, sexual assault and brutal murders of over 400 young women since 1993.

"Our next step is to publicize this great action by Congress and to highlight the need for the Mexican authorities to take action," says Chris McGraw of AIUSA's Legislative Office. "It's time for us to submit letters to the editor to newspapers and to make sure to get the word out about this important step by the U.S. Congress."

UN Committee on Torture

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In its opening statement to the Committee in Geneva on 5 May, the US delegation stressed that the USA "is committed to upholding our national and international obligations to eradicate torture and to prevent cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment." It recalled that the USA "was founded on the principle of respect for human dignity" and that the country "has a long tradition of international leadership against torture."

Regrettably, the years between the USA's first appearance in front of the Committee against Torture in 2000 and its second in May 2006, tell a different story. The USA's record in relation to detentions, particularly in the context of the "war on terror," has been a matter for serious and growing international and domestic concern. The USA's selective approach to international law and standards, its frequent resort to secrecy, and its resistance to judicial review must now end. Full and effective measures to protect any and all detainees from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, full and prompt investigation of all abuses, and full accountability for any such abuses, must be the order of the day.

Trail Blazing AGM In Portland

This article is taken from the June 2006 AIUSA Connect.

Urgency, relevancy, continuity, change, diversity, opportunity. If "Make Some Noise" was the official and more light-hearted theme for AIUSA's 2006 Annual General Meeting in Portland, OR April 28-30, the more serious underlying theme may best be captured in these six, sometimes complementary, sometimes contradictory words.

One needed only to pick up a newspaper to grasp the urgency of Amnesty International's mission in a world where torture and secret detention have become tools in the Administration's "war on terror." The other five words were frequently on the lips of the nearly 1,000 activists from across the country who attended AIUSA's largest meeting and policy making forum.

Addressing the members for the first time in his official capacity Saturday afternoon, incoming Executive Director Larry Cox made it clear that Amnesty International was standing at a crossroads and that to remain relevant it had to embrace change, while remaining true to its founding principles.

"One of the great scandals of the human rights movement when I was in it for the first time was its neglect of discrimination against women, against racial and ethnic groups or against people with different sexual orientations," Cox said. "And we spent a lot of time trying to figure out why we weren't more diverse and it never occurred to us that if we were not working visibly, strongly, effectively on the human rights violations that affect all the diverse communities in our society, and if we were not working strongly and visibly on the human rights violations that affect more than 50 percent of the human race, we were never going to become as diverse as the world we're trying to change. And this is incredibly important work to do, because we cannot change the world unless we get everyone involved. And we cannot get people involved unless we are talking to communities about the issues that are hurting them, killing them, that have for years degraded them. That's what we've begun to do, but we've got a lot more work to do and it's my hope that we'll be able to increase this work in the years to come."

But the first order of business at this AGM was to again make it clear where Amnesty International stood on an ancient but all too contemporary evil. The meeting kicked off Friday afternoon with an appropriately noisy rally attended by some 500 early arrivals in Portland's Pioneer Square to denounce torture. It was a fitting way to jump start a busy weekend that featured a full slate of panels, workshops, plenary sessions, net-

working lunches, caucuses and a town hall meeting in which members got to meet and question candidates running for the Board of Directors. The AGM also featured an "Ideas Fair," an on-site Internet Café, actions and even a movie screening room.

Delegates raised the decibel level again at a sold-out concert Saturday night to "Make Some Noise for Darfur" headlined by Suzanne Vega, Collective Soul and Incubus. The concert, hosted by Mira Sorvino, raised more than \$32,000 cash and gained over 1,100 signatures on a petition for Darfur.

Three Florida State University students, Mandy Hood, Lindsey Dry and Caleb Selman, traveled diagonally across country from Tallahassee to be at the meeting, about as far as it is possible to travel within the contiguous states. "I think it is important to be here, especially now," offered Hood. The FSU contingent was part of a massive youth presence at Portland. And that impressed new "grey-headed" members John and Lynn Dixon who traveled from Eureka, California, making AIUSA's Annual General Meeting the focus of their spring "vacation."

"The thing that got my attention to come here was the torture issue," John Dixon said referring to recent headlines. "And it just struck me that there's an issue where it doesn't make any difference what your politics is, but how can one not be against torture? And yet it doesn't seem to be something that is outraging the country. And the other thing, frankly is we badly needed a vacation and I was on the internet and I was looking at Amnesty International and I said, 'Hey Lynn, want to go on vacation and get depressed?' "

In fact, the Dixons found the experience anything but depressing. It was very uplifting," Dixon acknowledged. And was sort of a serendipitous time to come, because we saw the changing of the guard; the swan song of the old director was eloquent and touching and the new director is full of energy." "And we're so delighted to see so few gray heads here," chipped in Lynn. It's wonderful."

AIUSA's next Annual General Meeting is slated for March 22-25, 2007 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Vermont Passes Law to Protect Women in Prison from Custodial Sexual Misconduct

Amnesty International USA applauded lawmakers in Vermont for passing legislation that protects women in prison from custodial sexual misconduct—the sexual abuse of inmates at the hands of corrections staff. Vermont was the last of the 50 states to pass a law directly addressing such abuse, though many of those states' laws are severely inadequate.

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Calendar

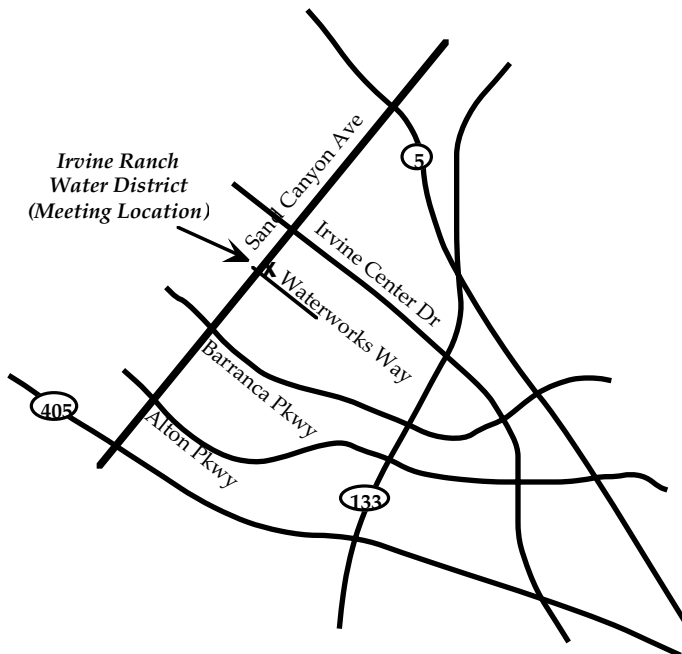
June

20 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.

21 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.



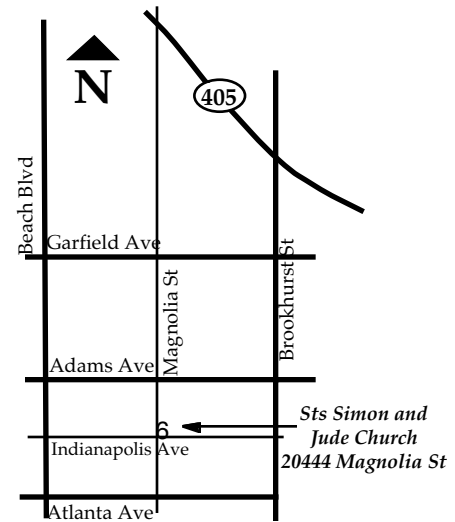
Group #178 Irvine Meeting Location

26 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>.

27 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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