



# Amnesty International

Orange County

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

November 2006

<http://www.aiusaoc.org>

## Amnesty Presses Internet Freedoms at UN's Internet Governance Forum

*The Inaugural Meeting of the United Nations-sponsored Internet Governance Forum (IGF) took place in Athens, Greece from October 30–November 2. An Amnesty International delegation attended to ensure that human rights remained central to the conference proceedings and issued the following statement at the opening of the forum.*

The Internet is one of the most powerful inventions of the digital age. It has the potential to empower and educate, to cross cultural boundaries and create global communities. It offers the means for any individual with access to a computer and a gateway to the internet to communicate with others across the world in a free flow of information and ideas—a powerful force for human rights.

But, while the Internet has brought freedom of information to millions, for some, it has led to imprisonment by governments that have sought to curtail this freedom. Websites and blogs have been shut down; firewalls built to prevent access to information. Governments have restricted and filtered search engines to keep information from people in their territory.

Amnesty International has documented the failures of governments to respect and protect the rights to freedom of information, expression, association and privacy, and has highlighted the collaboration of businesses in some of these violations.

Yahoo! via its Chinese partner company, Alibaba, has provided the authorities with private and confidential information about its users that has been used to convict and imprison journalists. It has also agreed to censor and deny access to information. Microsoft shut down the blog of New York Times researcher Zhao Jing on the basis of a government request. The company has also admitted that it responds to directions from the Chinese government in restricting users of MSN Spaces from using certain terms. Google has launched a censored version of its international search engine in China.

Recent abuses reported have included imprisoning people for transmitting news and opinions in emails, chat-rooms and on websites, and denying access to information and opinions on the Internet through content removal and filtering of search engines. At particular risk are those who defend the human rights of others.

Chinese journalist Shi Tao used his Yahoo! account to email a US-based website about an internal government directive instructing journalists how to handle media coverage of the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square crackdown. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison for “illegally providing state secrets to foreign entities.” Yahoo! provided information to the government that was used in his prosecution.

Tunisian lawyer and human rights defender Mohammed Abbou is serving a three and a half year prison sentence largely

for publishing articles critical of the Tunisian authorities on the Internet.

Vietnamese political dissident Truong Quoc Huy was first arrested in October 2005 with two other young people after chatting on a democracy and human rights website. He was held incommunicado for nine months then released, but, on August 18, 2006, he was rearrested in an Internet cafe in Ho Chi Minh City, where he had logged on to a chatroom. His whereabouts remain unknown and no charges have been publicised.

Amnesty International considers Shi Tao, Mohammed Abbou, Truong Quoc Huy and many others to be prisoners of conscience. We are deeply concerned about the participation of both governments and businesses in the repression of fundamental human rights through their control of the Internet.

In the United States, Amnesty International has been supporting domestic legislative efforts to protect freedom of expression and privacy on the Internet, including the recently proposed Global Online Freedom Act, but these efforts will be insufficient to address all states and non-U.S. companies.

All states and all companies must be held to the same standards for upholding and promoting international human rights and humanitarian law, norms and standards. Every organ of society is responsible for ensuring that human rights are respected and promoted, including business. Any individual or organization defending human rights peacefully and legitimately should be protected.

Amnesty International calls on governments:

- to release immediately and unconditionally all those imprisoned because of the expression online of news and peaceful opinions;
- to cease harassment and threats against people seeking to express, impart or receive information on the Internet;
- to neither restrict nor arbitrarily interfere with the operation and usage of the Internet in ways that violate the fundamental rights to information, freedom of expression and privacy. This includes prior censorship, monitoring and surveillance that does not conform with countries human rights obligations;
- to align domestic and local law and regulation with international human rights laws, norms and standards.

*Continued on page 3*

## October Meeting Minutes

### Group #141 Orange

#### Letter-Writing Actions

The group wrote 44 letters and signed several petitions. These included letters to Vietnamese government officials on behalf of the group's adopted prisoner of conscience, the Venerable Thich Huyen Quang, a Buddhist monk under house arrest, charged with "sabotaging the policy of national solidarity"; to U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales on behalf of former university professor Sami Al-Arian, a Palestinian still held in detention despite being acquitted by a jury of terrorism-related charges; and to Japanese officials asking for compensation for survivors of that country's sexual slavery system during World War II.

#### Human Rights Day Event

The group is planning an event with the Irvine and Long Beach groups to commemorate Human Rights Day, December 10. See the article elsewhere in this newsletter for more information.

#### Upcoming Meetings

The group discussed having a social event with a potluck at our December 19 meeting with all the other local groups invited.

The group is planning to discuss goal-setting at our January 16 meeting.

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## October Meeting Minutes

### Group #178 Long Beach

#### Attendees

Norma Edwards, Mike Farris, Deidre Gaffney, Kevin Gaffney, Katherine Kehoe, Pyi Maung, Melody Mendenhall, Jim Roberts, Robin Schneider, Linda Veazey, Sara Wall, Steve Wicke.

#### Special Focus Case for Western Region: Shi Tao

The new special focus case for the Western Region is Chinese poet and journalist Shi Tao, who used his Yahoo! e-mail account to send a message to a U.S.-based pro-democracy web site. The case touches on issues of Internet censorship in China and Yahoo!'s business ethics. The case is also part of Amnesty's Business and Human Rights program. Campaign actions will be directed at China and will also go to Yahoo! to ask them to speak up to the Chinese government on behalf of the prisoner of conscience whose arrest they facilitated. You can see more about the case at [http://www.amnestyusa.org/business/shi\\_tao.html](http://www.amnestyusa.org/business/shi_tao.html).

Kevin volunteered to sign up for the campaign on behalf of the group (and probably the Orange group as well?). The campaign is scheduled to end in June 2007, or earlier if Shi Tao is released!

#### Regional Conference

Linda reported back from the Tucson regional conference where she was heavily involved in the resolutions process. Results are posted in the members' section of Amnesty International. She also somehow managed to hear some speakers and told the story of two activists who were arrested in Tucson for taking a dying man to the hospital. Shanti Sellz

and Daniel Strauss are members of a faith-based organization ([nomoredeaths.org](http://nomoredeaths.org)) that helps illegal immigrants who are crossing the desert into the United States.

#### Meeting Guests

We welcomed Melody Mendenhall to the meeting. Thanks to Robin for continuing to bring friends to share our meeting! We also welcomed back Pyi, a Burmese activist, who brought Katherine Kehoe with him. Pyi told us his story of how he fell into activism as a young teen in Burma and soon was forced with his family into exile. Pyi has a film of human rights abuses there that he is working on. Katherine lived in Burma for an internship and is now also active in helping the Burmese people from the outside. She promised to get us details of a nurse in Burma who has been arrested.

#### War on Terror Campaign

Steve brought us more depressing news. We all commiserated over the Military Commission Act. U.S. citizens will still have the right to habeas corpus but citizens and non-citizens alike can be thrown into Guantanamo as enemy combatants. Secret detention is also ok. See Amnesty's response at <http://www.amnestyusa.org/news/document.do?id=ENGAMR511542006>.

#### Group News

- Members of the group are hard at work with members of the Irvine and Orange groups as well as the United Nations Association Orange County chapter planning a December 10 Human Rights Day Write-a-thon. It will probably take place at the CAMP in Costa Mesa. The event will take place over five hours, so plan to join us to write some letters at some point that Sunday afternoon!
- The group talked about having a joint party/meeting on December 19. We'll talk more at our next meeting.
- We sent 54 letters. We will be bringing more letters to handwrite to our meeting as some of our members want to do that in addition/instead of the usual preprinted letters we usually have. Sara has also volunteered to write letters in Spanish.

The groups next meeting will be Wednesday, November 15.

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## Human Rights Day Event

The Orange County and Long Beach Amnesty groups, in conjunction with the Orange County chapter of the United Nations Association, are planning a write-a-thon to commemorate Human Rights Day, Sunday, December 10.

The event will be held at The CAMP, 2937 Bristol Street, Costa Mesa, at the corner of Baker and Bristol Streets. The CAMP is a small innovative retail site specializing in outdoors and action sports retailers (<http://www.thecampsite.com>).

Plans are still being finalized but the event is planned to run from around 10:30 AM to 4:30 PM. The event will be broken into three two-hour blocks, each devoted to a current human rights concern: the situation in Darfur in the Sudan, violence against women, and the "war on terror" and the Air Torture Campaign. Some other ideas being considered include showing movies, having live music, and selling items from the United Nations Association store.

## Eritrea: Gospel Singer Helen Berhane Released

*This article is taken from a November 6, 2006 AIUSA press release.*

Amnesty International welcomes the release a few days ago of Eritrean gospel singer Helen Berhane, who had been detained incommunicado without charge or trial for two and a half years at Mai Serwa army camp.

Helen Berhane was among 2,000 detained members of banned evangelical churches in Eritrea, including her own Rema church, which has been subjected to sustained persecution by the Eritrean government in the last four years.

She spent most of her detention in inhuman and degrading conditions inside a metal shipping container which was used as a prison cell. The authorities reportedly tortured her many times to make her recant her faith. In October 2006, she was admitted to hospital in Asmara as a result of new beatings. She was released in late October but is said to be confined to a wheelchair due to the injuries she sustained to her feet and legs. She refused to abandon her faith despite the threats and ill-treatment.

Amnesty International urges to the Government of Eritrea to respect its Constitution and its obligations under international law to respect freedom of religion and freedom against arbitrary and incommunicado detention, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of prisoners.

Notwithstanding Helen Berhane's release, Amnesty International remains concerned that the systematic persecution of people on the basis of their religion continues unabated in Eritrea.

On October 15–16, 2006, over 150 men, women and children, members of the Kale Hiwot (Word of God) Church, the Full Gospel Church, the Church of the Living God and the Rema Church, were arrested at their homes in Mendefera town, 50 km south of the capital Asmara. Twelve members of the Rema church were also arrested in Adi-Quala town, further south, for worshipping in a private home. Two of them, Immanuel Andegergesh and Kibrom Firemichael, reportedly died in a nearby army camp as a result of torture.

In addition, there are scores of members of other faith groups who have been kept in indefinite and incommunicado detention without charge or trial. They include three Jehovah's Witnesses detained for 12 years for refusing military service, and dozens of members of dissenting groups of the official Or-

thodox Church and Muslim Council.

### Background Information

Since 2002, only the Orthodox, Catholic and Lutheran Christian churches and Islam have been allowed to operate in Eritrea. Members of some 35 minority Christian evangelical churches face fierce persecution, even though freedom of religion is guaranteed in the Eritrean Constitution. An estimated 2,000 members of minority churches, including about 20 pastors, are currently detained. Detainees are held incommunicado in harsh conditions without charge or trial. They are imprisoned in police stations at first, then in army camps and security prisons in different parts of the country, including the main military training centre at Sawa. Some are held in metal shipping containers and underground prisons. Several detainees have become seriously ill and are rarely provided with adequate medical treatment. They are repeatedly tortured by being beaten and being tied up in painful positions, in an effort to make them cease worshipping and recant their faith.

### Internet Governance Forum Continued from page 1

Amnesty International calls on IT and telecommunications companies:

- to publicly commit to honoring human rights, and develop human rights policies that state a clear commitment to support the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and comply with the requirements of the UN Global Compact;
- to be transparent about any words, phrases or concepts they are filtering or censoring, and the laws under which they are doing this;
- to exhaust all judicial and administrative remedies when faced with requests that would deny a persons right to privacy or free expression;
- to exercise leadership in promoting human rights with governments and to participate with civil society in efforts to promote peoples fundamental rights.

Amnesty International looks forward to being a part of the process that will protect human rights on the Internet and ensure that all organs of society live up to their responsibility in promoting and upholding these rights. We are eager to participate in and support any process that stems from this conference that aims to ensure that the Internet is a place where human rights of all people are respected and protected.

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

# Calendar

## November

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

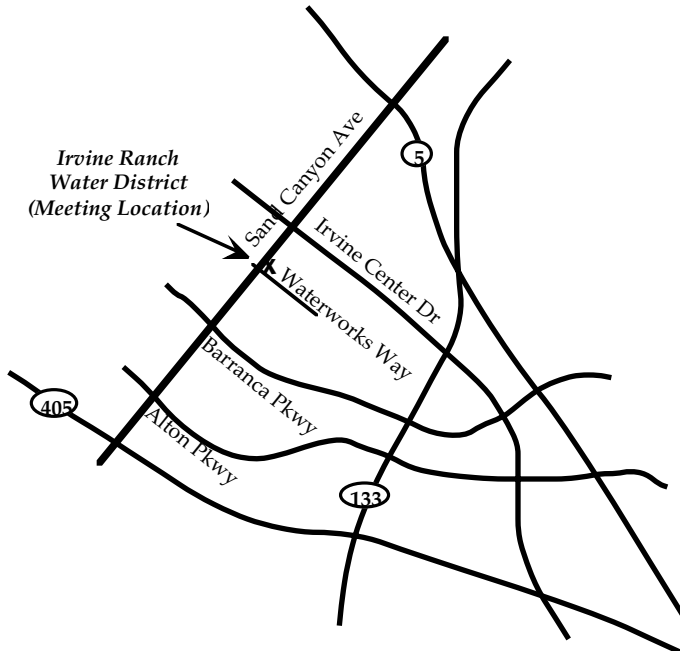
**Group #141 Orange Monthly Meeting** in Classroom 3 at the Sisters of St. Joseph, 480 S. Batavia Street, in Orange. Look for the classroom/auditorium building behind the main building. Drive around and to the back. Group #141 meets the third Tuesday of each month. For further information about the group, contact Kevin Gaffney at xhuskr@aol.com.

27 Monday 7:00 PM

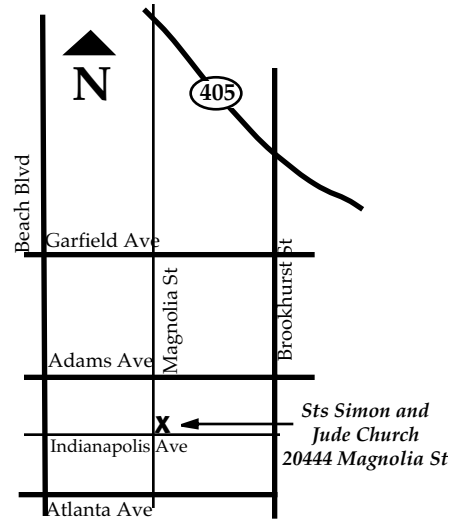
**Group #596 Huntington Beach Meeting** at Saints Simon and Jude Church, Adult Center, 20444 Magnolia Street in Huntington Beach. See details on the website <http://www.hbamnesty.com/main.htm>.

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 #178 Irvine Meeting Location



Group #596 Huntington Beach Location

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