



Amnesty International

Orange County

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December 2006

<http://www.aiusaoc.org>

Control Arms Campaign: UN Votes for Historic Arms Trade Treaty Proposal

This article is taken from a December 7, 2006 AIUSA press release.

Work on an international Arms Trade Treaty will begin immediately following a historic vote in the UN General Assembly today, which saw 153 governments supporting the proposed Treaty to prevent international arms transfers that fuel conflict, poverty and serious human rights violations. Only the United States voted against the proposal, and 24 governments abstained.

The UN General Assembly vote comes just three years after the launch of the Control Arms campaign, which has seen over a million people in 170 countries calling for a Treaty.

Three quarters of governments voted in favour of the proposal, which was also supported by an overwhelming majority of governments in the UN General Assembly's First Committee in October.

There was also strong support from the governments of Europe as well as the Pacific and Latin America.

"Significant support for an Arms Trade Treaty has come from some of the world's most gun-affected regions; this indicates not only widespread recognition of the problem but also widespread political will to take action," said Rebecca Peters, Director of the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA).

On December 1, 2006 the office of Senator Dianne Feinstein of California sent a letter signed by fourteen Democratic senators to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice asking for the US Administration to change its position on the Arms Trade Treaty resolution. Despite this appeal, the US remained the only government to vote against the proposal. The U.S. vote was especially disappointing since U.S. laws and regulations are generally seen to set an important standard for best practices at the national level.

"My current visit to Lebanon, Israel and the Occupied Territories has allowed me to see first hand the devastating consequences on civilians of the unregulated trade in weapons. It is vital that governments recognise the urgent need to turn this vote into meaningful action and ensure that a legally binding treaty on conventional arms becomes a reality," said Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International.

One of the first tasks for the incoming UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon, will be to begin canvassing the views of all UN Member States on the proposed Arms Trade Treaty in order to report back to the General Assembly in late 2007. The resolution calls on the UN Secretary General to collect the views of member states on the feasibility and draft parameters for "a

comprehensive, legally-binding instrument establishing common standards for the import, export, and transfer of conventional arms" and then to establish a group of governmental experts to examine the issue in detail and report back to the General Assembly.

"Today, we have seen an overwhelming majority of the world's governments accepting the need for an Arms Trade Treaty to prevent weapons sales that fuel conflict and poverty. That is a historic step. When the Control Arms campaign began in 2003 only 5 governments supported the concept of an Arms Trade Treaty. Today there are 153. Now governments must follow through and achieve a strong, effective Treaty. Every day that they delay is another day when thousands of lives are wrecked by armed violence," said Jeremy Hobbs, Director of Oxfam International.

About the Campaign

The idea for the establishment of globally binding rules on arms transfers began in 1995 with a few Nobel Peace Laureates including Amnesty International and Dr. Oscar Arias. The Control Arms campaign was launched by Oxfam International, Amnesty International and IANSA in 2003 and so far enjoys the support of over a million campaigners worldwide.

Blood Diamond: See the Film and Take Action Now

Warner Brothers is releasing a new film, *Blood Diamond*, on December 6. Set against the backdrop of Sierra Leone's civil war during the 1990's, the film portrays the devastating toll the illicit diamonds trade has played in financing the bloody wars that have killed countless innocent people.

Though the film is based on past events, conflict diamonds and child soldiers remain major problems in Africa, and Amnesty International and Global Witness have partnered with the film to help raise awareness and ensure that these problems are solved.

Visit <http://www.aiusa.org/blooddiamond> to learn more about the issues, view the trailer, and most importantly, to take action! With your help we can make sure diamonds are never again tied to human rights abuses.

Amnesty is selling the Blood Diamond/Clean Diamond bracelet, to help raise awareness about the issue of conflict diamonds in Africa. These bright red bracelets are available for purchase for only \$2 each from the Amnesty online store.

November Meeting Minutes

Group #178 Long Beach

Attendees

Lizette Ashcraft, Mary Kay Dunn, Norma Edwards, Mike Farris, Deidre Gaffney, Kevin Gaffney, Genevieve McClain, Elizabeth Petras, Jim Roberts, Robin Schneider, Linda Veazey

Holiday Dinner Instead of Meeting!

Please do not show up to the Unitarian church on December 20! Instead, meet the group between 6:45 and 7 PM at Saigon Rendezvous for dinner (and maybe a holiday card to a POC). The restaurant is located at 4501 E. Carson St. (SE corner of Carson and Norse Way, between Lakewood Blvd. and Clark Ave.). We will see you back at the church on January 17.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

Jim told us that Aung San Suu Kyi was recently visited by United Nations envoy Ibrahim Gambari. The following account is cribbed from a Herald-Tribune article: Aung San Suu Kyi told Gambari that she was in good health but needed more frequent medical attention. (Her doctor said he has not visited her since August 24.) Her tightly guarded meeting at a government office was the first time she had been allowed to leave her house since her last meeting with him in May. During a four-day visit to Myanmar, Gambari, who is the United Nations Undersecretary for Political Affairs, also spoke with officials of the ruling junta including the top leader, Senior General Than Shwe.

Gambari's visit comes two months after the United Nations Security Council voted to put Myanmar on its agenda, adding to international pressure on the generals on issues of human rights and political freedom. Aung San Suu Kyi has been under house arrest for 11 of the past 17 years. Her meeting in May with Gambari was the first in which a foreigner had been allowed to see her in more than two years. After her meeting Saturday, the United Nations released a photograph of her, unsmiling and somber.

China and the Death Penalty

Mary Kay brought us some truly disturbing articles about China. Apparently even China is admitting that executions are a bit out of control over there. Also, they have admitted to taking prisoners' organs for transplants. Jim pointed out that people are often executed immediately after their sentences are pronounced.

Naomi Steinfeld in Sri Lanka

Mary Kay visited Naomi recently in Sri Lanka and toured the area a bit as well. She mentioned how they have the death penalty for drugs in Singapore (where she passed through), which she saw advertised there. She said Naomi is doing well but there was some unrest while she was there (attacks).

Letter-Writing

The group sent 45 international letters and 11 to Washington, D.C., and completed four petitions.

Regional Conferences Had Sense of Urgency

This column, by AIUSA Executive Director Larry Cox, is taken from the December 2006–January 2007 AIUSA Connect.

More than 2,000 activists drove, biked, bused, flew, took

public transit or just plain walked to attend Amnesty International USA's five Regional Conferences during October and November. Nobody earned more frequent flier points than new AIUSA Executive Director Larry Cox and new Deputy Executive Director for Membership Mobilization Leo Givs who traveled to all five regional conferences for the first time since their respective appointments earlier this year. The peripatetic E.D. was a keynote speaker at each conference and an active participant in some of the workshops. Leo and Larry also hosted a Town Hall Meeting in each city hearing from as many AIUSA activists as possible about their ideas, feedback and concerns. Perhaps it was the political context, with issues of torture and illegal detention back on the nation's front pages as Congress debated and ultimately passed the President's Military Commissions Act in November, but there was a palatable sense of urgency as AI activists met in their respective regions to deliberate, to plan and to articulate their vision for an America We Can all Believe In once again.

Western Conference

The Western Regional Conference covered a lot of territory, literally and figuratively, as activists from 13 far-flung western states converged on Tucson, Arizona the weekend of October 13–15. The conference even had an international component with a road-trip, in conjunction with a local community organization, Borderlinks, to Nogales, Mexico to explore human rights issues on the border. In fact immigration issues played a large part in the conference, not surprising given the prominence of the issue in the host state.

Activists participated in dynamic workshops and exciting plenary sessions. They also had the opportunity to attend some unique offsite attractions, including events at the local Children's Museum and the University of Arizona. Eight student activists from a local middle school that brought 70 student activists to the conference opened proceedings by reading their own poetry and prose and showing their art, all on the theme, "What is the America I Believe In."

One goal of the Tucson conference was to bring in new members from the host state. More than one hundred new-to-Amnesty folks from the immediate Tucson area joined the approximately 400 conference attendees from across the vast region.

EU Report Confirms AI Findings

A preliminary report by the European Parliament's Temporary Committee investigating CIA activity in Europe, confirms Amnesty International's conclusions that complicity by European countries has allowed CIA renditions to occur in Europe.

The draft report by the Committee's Rapporteur, Claudio Fava, was released in November and found national security services in various countries were not being held accountable for their role in renditions. The report also highlights the failure of EU institutions and member states, candidate and associated countries, to fully cooperate with the investigation as well as their failure to carry out independent investigations into the role played by their authorities in the U.S. renditions program.

"Confronted once again with these facts, European leaders cannot continue to deny them just as the EU cannot maintain that it is not its business," said Amnesty International.

From the Executive Director

Defending the Rights of All, Yes, Even Saddam

This column, by AIUSA Executive Director Larry Cox, is taken from the December 2006–January 2007 AIUSA Connect.

The true test of a commitment to human rights is not our defense of those whom we admire. It is how we defend the human rights of someone whose acts we despise and condemn and whom we have long fought to bring to justice - someone like Saddam Hussein.

Few organizations have done more than Amnesty International to document the massive and horrific violations of human rights committed by Saddam Hussein or to fight to end them. AI repeatedly submitted reports to various UN bodies exposing gross violations in Iraq and calling for justice for the victims, urged the UN security Council to intervene in 1988 to stop massive violations against the Kurds, called for the deployment of human rights monitors following the crushing of the Shi'a and Kurdish uprisings in the north and south, and campaigned for a special rapporteur on Iraq. No one who has read any of AI's many reports on the suffering Saddam caused can fail to understand the anger of his victims or the demands of many that he be killed for what he did.

Yet, in November AI deplored the death sentence given to Saddam Hussein for his role in the killing of 148 people from al-Dujail village and AI stands opposed to his execution. Why? We have pointed out that the trial which led to the sentence was severely flawed by political interference, failure to provide adequate security to lawyers and witnesses (three defense lawyers were assassinated), and lack of respect for basic defense rights. We have pointed out that the killing of Saddam for these crimes will deny his other victims the chance to see him stand trial and have the truth of what happened to their loved ones revealed before a court and to the world.

These points are true but it is also true that even if they were not, AI would oppose the killing of Saddam Hussein for a simpler and more fundamental reason. The death penalty is the ultimate form of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment and as such it is wrong in all cases. International standards do not allow - and AI does not make - any exceptions. We refuse to make exceptions, not out of dogma, but out of experience, both our own and the longer experience of humanity. The whole world has witnessed time and again that once it is decided that certain human beings can lose all rights, including the right not to be tortured or subjected to cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment, the idea of human rights loses all meaning and the door is opened to an endless cycle of violence and cruelty.

It was to end this cycle of horror that nations in 1948 recognized their obligation to respect human rights universally. It is for that same reason that Amnesty International fights to protect those rights in all cases. We know - we have learned from

our work in country after country - that the execution of Saddam Hussein will not reduce killings in Iraq, but will instead be one more argument for more of them. That is why opposing Saddam Hussein's hanging is not acting against the people of Iraq but is standing with those, like the Kurdish leader and elected President of Iraq, Jalal Talabani, who oppose the death penalty and are fighting for a new Iraq, an Iraq that has gotten rid of the hangman so loved by Saddam, and is instead committed to the respect of human rights for all, even those who have committed massive crimes.

Iraq: One Year Later, No Word on Torture Probe

Amnesty International called on the Iraqi Government in November to publish the findings of its investigation into the so-called al-Jadiriya case involving the detention and torture of suspects under the control of the Iraqi Interior Ministry in November 2005.

Though the Iraq Government quickly announced it would investigate the abuses after they became public, one year later, the investigation's findings have still not been disclosed and those responsible for the incarceration, torture and brutal treatment of the detainees have not been held accountable.

On November 13, 2005, some 168 detainees, including children, were found being held unlawfully at a building in Baghdad's al-Jadiriya district under the control of Iraq's Interior Ministry, then headed by Bayan Jabr Solagh. They were in poor condition, malnourished and emaciated, and many complained that they had been tortured. According to the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), many of the detainees had injuries caused by electric shock torture, beatings and stabbing.

The detainees reported that several others who had been held with them had been killed by their captors or had died in detention. One detainee, a father of five, later told AI that he was beaten and suspended from the ceiling and that his interrogators "threatened to bring my wife, mother and sister and rape them in front of me. I was deprived of food and water for eight days, suffered electric shocks and cigarette burns on my hand and neck."

The detainees' plight came to public attention after a raid on the Interior Ministry building by U.S. forces. Coming in the wake of the Abu Ghraib prison scandal, the case provoked wide international attention and concern and the Iraqi Government promptly announced an investigation, but without giving further details. In February, U.S. ambassador to Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad, told a press conference that the U.S. was calling for "serious investigations" by the Iraqi authorities. At the same press conference, he said the United States had conducted its own investigation into the incident, but its outcome also has never been disclosed.

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

December

20 Wednesday 7:00 PM

Group #175 Long Beach Holiday Dinner at Saigon Rendezvous, 4501 E. Carson Street, Long Beach, at the SE corner of Carson and Norse Way, between Lakewood Blvd. and Clark Ave. For further information about the group, contact Norma Edwards at (562) 425-4353.

Because of the holidays, the Orange, Irvine, and Huntington Beach groups will not be meeting this month. All the groups will resume their regular meeting schedule in January.

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