



Amnesty International

Orange County

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

March 2007

<http://www.aiusaoc.org>

U.S. Foreign Policy Hinders Human Rights Work Around the World

This article is taken from a March 6, 2007 AIUSA press release.

In response to the Department of State's release today of its Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, Amnesty International said that while the reports recognize the plight of human rights defenders around the world, they fail to acknowledge that U.S. foreign policy may have exacerbated conditions for many of these brave individuals. In the name of national security, the Bush administration continues to turn a blind eye to many instances of abuse by countries cited by the State Department for appalling human rights records.

"Today's reports provide useful data that should be factored into foreign policy decisions," said Larry Cox, Amnesty International USA executive director. "However, if the Bush administration persists in allowing other considerations to trump human rights concerns, the real-world impact of these reports will be greatly diminished."

"There are many countries listed in these reports that have questionable human rights records, including Turkey, India, Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia," said Cox. "The United States can, in its capacity as a major donor, provide the leadership to help end abuse around the globe. However, for meaningful change to occur, the Bush administration must not only give lip service to condemn the abuses, but also must refuse to conduct business as usual with repressive governments."

"While Amnesty International welcomes the reports' emphasis on accountability, until the United States changes its own policies of holding detainees indefinitely, in secret prisons and without basic rights, it cannot credibly be viewed as a world human rights leader," added Cox. "Human rights abuses must not be hidden behind a façade of national security rhetoric."

Amnesty International and others have reported that the United States is believed to have transferred, "rendered" or "disappeared" more than one hundred detainees in the war on terror to countries that the report cites for torture or ill-treatment of detainees. Dozens are still missing today, and may be at risk of torture.

Amnesty International's analysis reveals that the United States, in the context of the war on terror, has been silent on human rights abuses committed by many of its new-found friends. In the Balochistan province of Pakistan, for example, Amnesty International has documented torture, possible extrajudicial executions and other unlawful killings and disappearances.

The section regarding Iraq omits crucial elements of the

full human rights picture in that country. It lacks any information about human rights abuses against Iraqis perpetrated by U.S. personnel, especially in detention centers. It fails to acknowledge the severe legal and judicial flaws in the Iraqi judicial system, epitomized by the rushed execution of Saddam Hussein. It does not adequately document patterns of abuse and discrimination by the Iraqi government against vulnerable groups such as religious minorities, women, and gays and lesbians. Finally, the section fails to recognize the sheer scale of the Iraqi refugee problem—some 1.2 million people, according to most estimates, who have fled Iraq due to the utter lack of security there.

In today's report, the State Department asserts that in Egypt, "The continued imprisonment of former presidential candidate Ayman Nour raised serious concerns about the path of political reform and democracy in the country. Continuing a trend begun in 2005, the government arrested and detained hundreds of activists affiliated with the banned-but-tolerated Muslim Brotherhood, generally for periods lasting several weeks." Yet Egypt remains one of the United States' largest recipients of foreign assistance and a key landing pad for U.S.-sponsored "extraordinary renditions" of terror suspects. Amnesty International has reported that President Hosni Mubarak has expanded Egypt's emergency laws to suppress freedom of speech and expression. Recently, an Egyptian student was sentenced to four years in prison for expressing his views on his blog. In 2006, the Egyptian government cracked down on NGOs.

The State Department reports emphasize the further limiting of freedom of press and speech by Russian President Vladimir Putin. In 2006, he temporarily closed NGOs operating in the country, and the re-registration of Amnesty International was temporarily delayed. Government pressure continued to erode media organizations' autonomy. The government used controlling interest in all major media outlets to blunt criticisms against it and to prevent news about human rights violations from Chechnya from reaching the masses. There were credible reports that government pressure led to self-censorship on the part of many journalists. The United States should work with European allies to pressure Russia to cease curtailing the freedom of its citizens.

"We welcome the State Department's contribution to the effort to protect individual human rights defenders around the world," said Cox. "But the administration as a whole must ensure that its deeds match its words. Courageous human rights defenders deserve no less."

February Meeting Minutes

Group #141 Orange

Letter-Writing Actions

The group wrote about 60 letters. These included multiple letters to Senators Boxer and Feinstein regarding U.S. use and export of cluster munitions, Bush administration practices in the "war on terror," the imprisonment of three of former prisoner of conscience and Chinese human rights activist Rebiya Kadeer's children, and the mounting human rights crisis in Chad, the Central African Republic, and the Sudan.

Guatemala Action Case

Jeannine reported on the case of 15-year-old Guatemalan student Isabel Franco who was raped, tortured and murdered in December 2001. Amnesty is citing her murder as a sad example of the dramatic increase in gender-based violence that has taken place in Guatemala. The rate of murders of Guatemalan women has continued to rise—from 60 deaths in 2000 to 665 deaths in 2005. The Guatemalan Government has failed to investigate these killings, including Isabel Franco's. Her family has pressed the government for action but has experienced increasing harassment and intimidation for doing so.

Mexican Journalist Wins Sagan Award

Jeannine also reported that Lydia Cacho, a Mexican journalist jailed for publishing a book implicating prominent businessmen in a vast child pornography ring near Cancun was chosen to receive the 2007 Ginetta Sagan Award. Ms. Cacho also runs the Center for Women's Assistance in Cancun, a refuge for abused women.

Each year, Amnesty awards the Ginetta Sagan prize to a woman working on behalf of the human rights of women and children in her native country. The award is named in honor of the late Ginetta Sagan, who was imprisoned in her native Italy during World War II for her role in resisting fascism. After the war Sagan went on to pioneer and work for Amnesty International for 34 years.

Lydia Cacho will be one of the featured speakers at this month's AI Mini-Conference at Cal State Fullerton.

December Write-a-thon

Kevin reported that the Orange County and Long Beach groups won an iPod for signing up new AIUSA members at last December's write-a-thon at the Camp in Costa Mesa. The groups succeeded in getting about 200 letters written, short of the groups' original goal of 300, but still great.

February Meeting Minutes

Group #178 Long Beach

Attendees

Lizette Ashcraft, Norma Edwards, Bill Elwell, Deidre Gaffney, Kevin Gaffney, Elizabeth Petras, Jim Roberts, Steve Wicke.

Karen Campaign

Jim let us know that Amnesty will launch a campaign for the Karen people of Myanmar on March 12. Many Karen flee to Eastern Burma/Myanmar and cross the border to live in refugee camps in Thailand. Jim will be in contact with groups with Myanmar POCs (which includes Long Beach and Orange) to let them know more information as it is available. Jim ex-

pressed frustration that London did not consult country experts in planning this campaign. They had been hoping for a campaign focusing on the many elderly and ill POCs in Myanmar. However, he said that there were apologies and promises for better efforts next time, and of course, the Karen people are also in an abysmal situation that needs attention.

War on Terror Campaign

Steve brought us the latest news about Guantanamo and legal decisions. The group sent letters to our senators urging a five-point human rights agenda: 1) Close Guantanamo; 2) Ban torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment; 3) Close secret prisons; 4) Restore the writ of *habeas corpus*; and 5) End extraordinary renditions.

Resolutions

Linda Veazey, our very own Western Regional Representative to the National Resolutions Committee, was laid out at home with a sinus infection but gamely called in on Kevin's cell phone, put on speaker mode, to lead us through this year's Annual General Meeting resolutions. We were able to go through all 11 resolutions semi-cheerfully and happy that our votes will be cast in Minnesota. (And we didn't put our visitor to sleep!) Thanks, Linda. Have fun at the AGM, and keep everyone in line. Long Beach says just say no to studies, "emergency" resolutions that aren't, and missed deadlines for resolution submissions. Stop the madness!

Group News

- The group welcomed William Elwell, a long-ago urgent action writer who thought he would check out a meeting after seeing our calendar listing in the paper. Bill donated \$20 to the group for postage. Thanks, Bill! Bill was also encouraged to rejoin Amnesty and check out the new, easy-to-use action center online.
- Once again, Norma forgot to count letters, but there were a lot! We sent letters to Myanmar, Guatemala, Thailand, China, and Washington, DC (about MANY topics!).

Prisoner Writes to AI

Ziyad Hmeidan, a fieldworker for the Palestinian human rights organization Al-Haq, who is currently being held under administrative detention, recently wrote back to activists who had written him as part of AI's Summer Postcard Action. Ziyad Hmeidan, who remains imprisoned at Nafha Prison in Israel, has been in jail since May 2005. In the excerpt below from his letter of December 24, he speaks to Amnesty members and others who have supported him:

"In spite of all this, I feel a ray of light extending from my suffering, and reaching my people, and then to all the people of the world who are suffering from oppression. I also feel more pain for those who are outside the prison, those who suffer from the pains of freedom. But still, I look into the future to see you, dear beloveds. You who believe in your mission and do not give up on it. In spite of the hardships you still ring the bell, regardless of the miserable reality of our world. Your huge efforts and gracious feelings, expressed through even one word, letter or picture on a postcard of a smiling child or a wild horse, make a great difference, believe me. When I receive news of your constant work to assist me in my crisis, I feel that life and hope are running in my veins . . ."

Southern California Mini-Conference

The 6th Southern California Amnesty Mini-Conference will be held on Saturday, March 31, 9:00 AM-5:30 PM at the California State University, Fullerton campus. There will be a free continental breakfast at 9:00 AM. Admission is free and there is no pre-registration required.

The conference will feature invited speakers and workshops. Scheduled speakers include:

- **Lydia Cacho**, Mexican investigative journalist and winner of the 2007 Ginetta Sagan Award;
- **David Berger**, co-author of AI's report on life in prison without parole for juveniles;
- **Sara Petite**, singer/songwriter and human rights activist; and
- **Ali Azizi**, AIUSA Board Member speaking about his missions to Yemen.

Workshops include: Guantanamo Prisoner Group Work, Death Penalty, Introduction to Amnesty International, AI International Congress Issues and Resolutions, Stop Violence Against Women, Juveniles in the Justice System, Western Regional Special Focus Case Shi Tao, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

If you need flyers or a map please contact the Los Angeles office at (310) 815-0450.

Directions

- Cal State Fullerton is located west of the Orange (57) Freeway in Fullerton. The university is bordered by Nutwood Avenue to the south, State College Boulevard to the west, Yorba Linda Boulevard to the north, and the 57 Freeway to the east. For a map, visit <http://www.fullerton.edu/campusmap>.
- Coming from either the south or the north on the 57 Freeway, exit at Nutwood Avenue. Go west on Nutwood. Turn right at the campus entrance just past the Marriott Hotel (at the first traffic light after turning onto Nutwood). Follow E. Campus Drive through the construction zone to Parking Lot F.
- Follow the signs to University Hall. The registration desk will be outside University Hall Room 252 at the south end of the building on the 2nd floor. There are stairs outside and an elevator inside the building leading to the registration area.

Great American Write-In

The 22nd annual Great American Write-In will be held on Saturday, March 24, 9:30 AM-1:00 PM. The Great American

Write-In is sponsored by Women For: Orange County in cooperation with dozens of organizations, 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, phone (949) 262-1001 or email womenforoc@aol.com.

2007 AIUSA Annual General Meeting

The 2007 AIUSA Annual General Meeting (AGM) will take place at the Hilton Milwaukee City Center March 23-25 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The theme of this year's conference is Ordinary People, Extraordinary Change. The AGM is Amnesty International USA's annual national conference for all members and activists to join, meet, learn, discuss and create extraordinary change. For information, see the conference website <http://www.amnestyusa.org/events/agm>. (Online registration is now closed. Registration will be available on site.)

New Mexico House Passes Abolition Bill

On Monday, February 12, 2007, the New Mexico House of Representative passed a death penalty abolition bill by a 41-28 vote. House Bill 190, which now heads for the New Mexico Senate, would abolish the death penalty in New Mexico and replace it with life in prison without parole. The 41-28 margin by which the bill passed represents progress from the 38-31 vote a similar bill received in the New Mexico House in 2005. The New Mexico Legislature's current session ends on March 17, 2007. If House Bill 190 passes both houses of the New Mexico Legislature and is signed into law, it would take effect on July 1, 2007.

Turkmenistan: Environmental Activist Freed

"We won! Andrei is free!"

Yevgenia Zatoka (Andrei's wife)

Amnesty International is happy to report that Andrei Zatoka was released from jail on January 31. Andrei had been detained on December 17 by local police at the airport in his home city of Dashoguz. There were allegations that he was targeted to punish him for his peaceful work as an environmental activist. He and his supporters are grateful for the appeals sent by AI's Urgent Action network on his behalf.

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!

Name _____

Address _____

City, State & Zip _____

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

Return to:
Amnesty International
Group 178
P.O. Box 14485
Irvine, CA 92623-4484

For (check one):
 Orange Group
 Irvine Group
 Huntington Beach
 Long Beach

Calendar March

20 Tuesday 7:00 PM

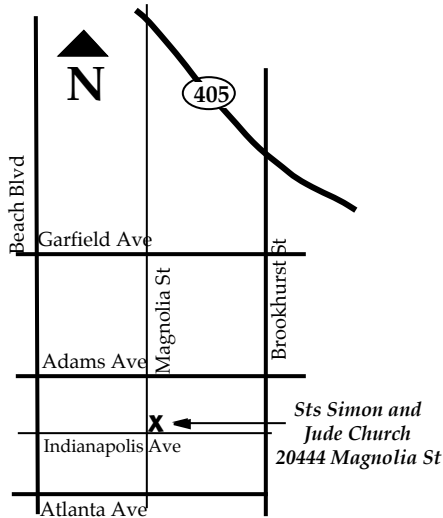
Group #141 Orange Monthly Meeting in Classroom 3 at the Sisters of St. Joseph, 480 S. Batavia Street, in Orange. Look for the classroom/ auditorium building behind the main building. Drive around and to the back. Group #141 meets the third Tuesday of each month. For further information about the group,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

24 Saturday 9:30 AM-1:00 PM

22nd Annual Great American Write-In at Lakeview Senior Center, Woodbridge Community Park, off of Lake Road, between Barranca and Alton Parkways in Irvine. See the article on page 3 of this newsletter for further information.



Group #178 Irvine Meeting Location

26 Monday 7:00 PM

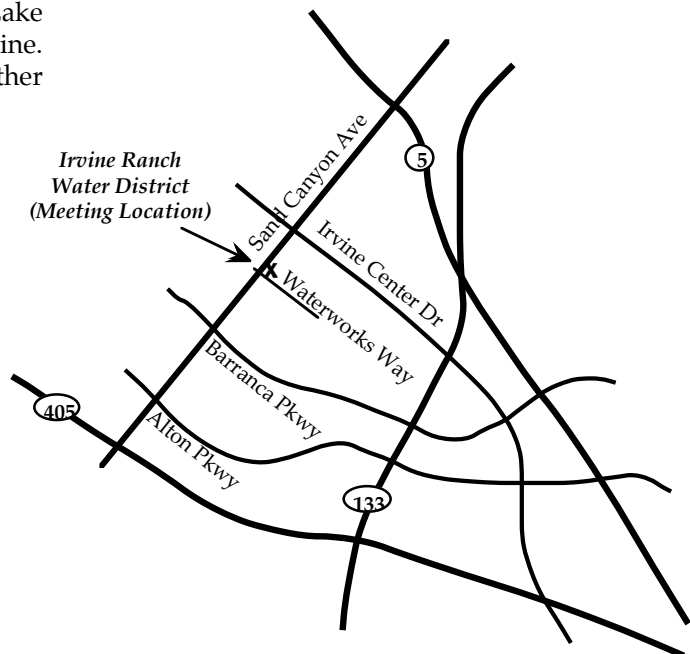
Group #596 Huntington Beach Meeting at Saints Simon and Jude Church, Adult Center, 20444 Magnolia Street in Huntington Beach. See details on the website <http://www.hbamnesty.com/main.htm>.

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.

31 Saturday 9:00 AM-5:30 PM

AI Southern California Mini-Conference on the campus of Cal State Fullerton. See the article on page 3 of this newsletter for further information.



Group #596 Huntington Beach Location

Amnesty International
Group 178
P.O. Box 14485
Irvine, CA 92623-4484