



Amnesty International

Orange County

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

May 2007

<http://www.aiusaoc.org>

Death Penalty: Executions Fall as Pressure Grows for Universal Moratorium

This article is taken from an April 27, 2007 AI press release.

A death penalty free world is possible if key governments are willing to show political leadership, said Irene Khan, Amnesty International's Secretary General.

"Amnesty International is calling for a universal moratorium on executions. Only six countries—Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Pakistan, the USA and China—were responsible for 91 percent of all executions carried out in 2006. These hard core executioners are isolated and out of tune with global trends," said Ms Khan.

In 1977 only 16 countries had abolished the death penalty for all crimes. Thirty years on, the number of abolitionist countries continues to rise which is creating a momentum to end capital punishment. In 2006, the Philippines was the latest to join the 99 countries that have abolished the death penalty for ordinary crimes. Many more, including South Korea, stand on the brink of abolition.

In Africa only six countries carried out executions in 2006. Belarus is the only country that continues to use the death penalty in Europe. The USA is the only country in the Americas to have carried out any executions since 2003.

According to Amnesty International figures, the number of executions worldwide fell from 2,148 in 2005 to 1,591 in 2006.

Iraq joined the list of the world's top executioners in 2006. The use of capital punishment has increased rapidly following its reinstatement in Iraq in mid-2004. Since then, more than 270 people have been sentenced to death and at least 100 people have reportedly been executed. There were no executions reported in 2004 and at least three men were executed in 2005. In 2006, global attention on the televised hanging of Saddam Hussein in December belied the reality that the execution rate in Iraq had dramatically escalated over the year with more than 65 hangings, of which at least two of those put to death were women.

Iran's execution rate nearly doubled compared to 2005, with at least 177 people killed. In 2006, Pakistan joined the list of top executioners with at least 82 executions. Sudan executed at least 65 people, with the true number believed to be higher, and 53 people were executed in 12 states across the USA. Iran and Pakistan were the only countries that executed child offenders during 2006 – in violation of international law – four and one respectively.

China continues to be the world's top executioner. Amnesty International recorded more than 1,000 executions in China in 2006. Figures on the use of the death penalty are

a state secret in China and the true number is believed to be as high as 8,000.

"The 2006 death penalty figures are inexcusable but even officials in Iraq and China, two of the world's top-executioners, have spoken of their desire to see an end to the use of the death penalty in their respective countries," said Irene Khan.

Amnesty International also highlighted a number of cases which expose the cruel, arbitrary and unfair nature of the death penalty and the appalling suffering caused by every execution:

- Sri Lankan national Sanjaya Rowan Kumara was executed last November in Kuwait. He was initially declared dead immediately after the hanging, but when he was taken to the morgue, medical staff noticed he was still moving. Further examinations found a weak heartbeat. He was eventually pronounced dead five hours after the execution had begun.
- In the US last December, Florida Governor Jeb Bush suspended all executions in the state and appointed a commission "to consider the humanity and constitutionality of lethal injections." The decision came after the execution of Angel Diaz, who suffered for 34 minutes before being pronounced dead. It was later discovered that the deadly chemicals had been injected into soft tissue rather than the vein.
- In Iran, a man and a woman were stoned to death last May for having sex outside of marriage—despite a moratorium on executions by stoning declared by the Head of the Judiciary in 2002. In Iran, the size of the stones are predetermined so as not to cause instant death but to kill slowly.

The ever present danger of executing those innocent of the crime for which they were condemned exists wherever the death penalty is used. In 2006, three people were declared innocent after spending years on death row in Jamaica, Tanzania and the USA.

Around 20,000 people are estimated to be currently on death row across the world, waiting to be killed by the state.

"The death penalty is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. It is arbitrary, it has proven ineffective in reducing crime and it perpetuates a climate of violence in which justice can never be truly achieved," said Irene Khan.

"The death penalty must be abolished and a universal moratorium will be an important step forward," said Ms. Khan.

April Meeting Minutes Group #175 Long Beach

Attendees

Julie & Ryan Coyle, Mary Kay Dunn, Norma Edwards, William Elwell, Deidre Gaffney, Kevin Gaffney, Glen Nielsen, Elizabeth Petras, Jim Roberts

Welcomes All Around

The group welcomed back Glen Nielsen, who braved the long drive up from the OC for a visit, and Bill Elwell, a previous visitor, who was out of state and missed our thanks for his donation to the group in the last newsletter (so here it is again, Bill-thanks!). We were also happy to meet Julie and Ryan Coyle, who heard about our meeting when they attended the Mini-Conference (including Deidre and Kevin's Intro to Amnesty workshop) in March.

International Council Meeting (ICM)

Kevin was able to attend the ICM workshop at the Mini-Conference and gave us an overview. The ICM is a meeting of the worldwide sections of Amnesty International. Decisions are made that affect the direction of the organization. This year marks the 28th International Council Meeting. The ICM will take place August 10–17 in Morelos, Mexico.

Kevin told us about the two resolutions that the U.S. will bring to the ICM and also summed up the two big issues that will be under review. Chile and Mexico have each brought resolutions that would make Amnesty take a position on same-sex marriage; and four sections have brought differing resolutions on abortion. Amnesty is a democratic grassroots organization and your opinion counts. If you would like to read the resolutions and let the U.S. delegation know your thoughts, log onto the members section of the website and go to the ICM page. Many online discussions and call-ins with the U.S. delegates are also scheduled.

On a related note, Glen also mentioned Amnesty's Strategic Plan and said that Executive Director Larry Cox has stated that he would like to have it implemented by October.

Burma/Myanmar Update

Aung Sun Suu Kyi's birthday will be June 19. Some activists are trying to get their local governments to declare June 19 Aung Sun Suu Kyi Day to raise awareness. Jim told us that Amnesty has 44 official POCs in Myanmar. There are estimated to be at least 1,100 political prisoners in Myanmar who would probably qualify as POCs. In the United States, there are 12 groups working on 15 POC cases (including the Long Beach group).

Group News

The group sent nine letters to Myanmar and its American embassy; seven letters to the Attorney General and Governor of Nebraska about an execution; 20 letters to various officials in Honduras about the danger faced by members of a rights organization; ten letters to the Minister of Justice in Sudan about two women facing stoning; ten letters to China about Shi Tao, the Western Region's Special Focus Case POC; and ten letters to Eritrea about the house arrest of the Patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church.

April Meeting Minutes Group #178 Irvine

It was a new meeting place and a new meeting day! Now we meet on the last Thursday every month at the Irvine United Congregational Church (iucc.org) in Plumer Hall. It is a fine, large meeting room and we hope to be able to show videos and have speakers there.

We started out with the usual letter-writing (sample actions: Guantanamo Bay detainee, death penalty for adultery, deaths in Togo presidential elections, women prisoners of conscience in Iran, etc.).

Our group's treasury report showed little change in our balance, with expenses being the Great American Write-In fee and our final contribution to the December AI write-a-thon.

Glen spoke about the upcoming Western Regional Conference.

Jacques (representing Julie) gave us an update on the continued talks with Ngawang Choephel (ex-Tibetan POC) concerning a speaking engagement in Orange County.

Ting Huang gave us some updates on Human Rights issues in China.

For the Western Africa Regional Action Network Jacques spoke briefly on the Togo presidential elections in 2005 and the lack of government investigations in the deaths that occurred at that time.

We discussed various ways of publicizing our meetings amongst the church congregation, pastor Paul Tellström thinks that a number of people in his flock would want to come to our meetings. Glen will contact the appropriate church group on this subject.

One of us attended a very interesting presentation at the recent AI mini-conference at California State University, Fullerton and there was talk of asking the presenter to talk about Uganda at one of our upcoming group meetings.

Stay tuned for more developments! We plan exciting things for this year.

Bring Accountability to War on Terror

The United States Government has hired private companies to do a lot of its work in its so called "war on terror"—including interrogating detainees. But it hasn't done nearly enough to hold contractors and their employees accountable for the abuses they have allegedly committed. Contractors hired by the U.S. Government and military have reportedly tortured detainees and shot at civilians in Iraq, yet nothing has been done to investigate and hold the responsible people and companies accountable.

Right now, we have a window of opportunity to make a real change. Representative David Price (D-NC) recently introduced a bill that would bring transparency and accountability to U.S. military and security contracting. But it needs your support to pass. Amnesty International is urging its members to write their representatives in Congress and ask them to co-sponsor Rep. Price's bill, the Transparency and Accountability in Security Contracting Act of 2007 (H.R. 369).

U.S. Fails to Protect Native American and Alaska Native Women

This article is taken from the May 2007 AIUSA Connect.

Native American and Alaska Native women in the United States suffer disproportionately high levels of rape and sexual violence, yet the federal government has created substantial barriers to accessing justice, Amnesty International (AI) asserted in a 113-page report released April 24. Justice Department figures indicate that American Indian and Alaska Native women are 2.5 times more likely to be raped or sexually assaulted than women in the United States in general; more than one in three Native women will be raped in their lifetimes.

The United States Government has created a complex maze of tribal, state and federal jurisdictions that often allows perpetrators to rape with impunity—and in some cases effectively creates jurisdictional vacuums that encourage assaults. It is necessary to establish the location of the crime and the identity of the perpetrator to determine which authorities have jurisdiction, during which critical time is lost. This leads to inadequate investigations or a failure to respond.

Further complications are the lack of trained Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANEs) at Indian Health Service (IHS) facilities to provide forensic exams, and the potential for law enforcement to mishandle evidence when rape kits are used. The result is that Native women often do not get timely—or any—response from police, may not get forensic medical examinations, and may never see their cases prosecuted.

“Native women are brutalized at an alarming rate, and the United States Government, a purported champion of women’s rights, is unfortunately contributing to the problem,” said AIUSA Executive Director Larry Cox.

The AI report, *Maze of Injustice: The Failure to Protect Indigenous Women from Sexual Violence in the USA*, warned that government figures, as disturbing as they are, grossly underestimate the problem because many women are too fearful to report their rape or don’t believe it will do any good. According to one Oklahoma support worker, of 77 active sexual assault/domestic violence cases involving Native American women, only three victims reported their cases to the police.

The U.S. Government has undermined the authority of tribal justice systems to respond to crimes of sexual violence by consistent under-funding. Federal law limits the criminal sentences that tribal courts can impose for any one offense to one year and prohibits tribal courts from trying non-Indian suspects - even though data collected by the Department of Justice shows that up to 86 percent of perpetrators are non-

Indian.

In addition, AI’s research suggests that there is a failure at the state and federal level to pursue cases of sexual violence against Native women involving non-Indian perpetrators. One former federal prosecutor told AI, “It is hard to prosecute cases where there is a Native American victim and a non-Native American perpetrator.” Once a case is denied at the state or federal level, there is no further recourse for survivors of rape under criminal law.

“When elders say, ‘too many of our women and children have been raped,’ we know that we must come together to overcome the darkness and end the silence. What we don’t acknowledge, we carry with us,” said Denise Morris, executive director and CEO of the Alaska Native Justice Center and a speaker at the report launch. “The United States Government has a legal and moral responsibility to provide resources to Native organizations so they can begin to develop solutions and promote healing and wellness at the community level.”

Holiday Card Prisoners Say Thanks

Two Indonesian prisoners of conscience recently featured as part of AIUSA’s Holiday Card Action have written expressing their astonishment and thanks after receiving scores of cards of support from people, including schoolchildren, from all over the United States and elsewhere. The two trade unionists, who remain in prison, recently sent the following message to Amnesty International:

“We have received so many postcards which have really given us strength, but there is no way that we can reply to them all. It’s so important to us to say thank you so much to everyone for all the care and support you’ve given us. We feel so much in debt to you all but only God can repay you all what you have done for us, and may he bless you all.”

The two are among six men who were sentenced in early 2006 to prison terms between 14 months and two years. The six men were arrested in September 2005 after leading a strike at a palm oil plantation owned by the Indonesian company Musim Mas. During the strike, the factory gate was pushed down, injuring two company employees. Although there is no indication that any of the men were involved in violence, authorities charged them with “openly committing violence against persons or property.” At no point did the state establish that any of the men came into contact with the factory gate. It appears that the company and the local authorities used the damage to the gate as an excuse to arrest the six labor activists and weaken the union. Amnesty considers them prisoners of conscience and seeks their release.

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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Return to:
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 Irvine, CA 92623-1718

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

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

Calendar

May

15 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.

16 Wednesday 7:00 PM

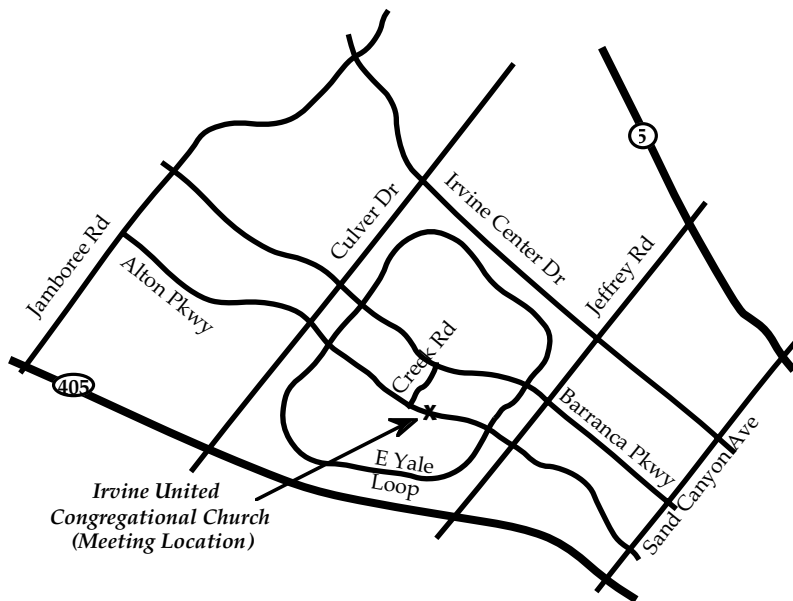
Group #175 Long Beach Monthly Meeting at the Unitarian Universalist Church, Rooms 1 and 2, 5450 Atherton Street, Long Beach. Letter-writing from 7:00-7:30. For further information about the group, contact Norma Edwards at (562) 425-4353.

28 Monday 7:00 PM

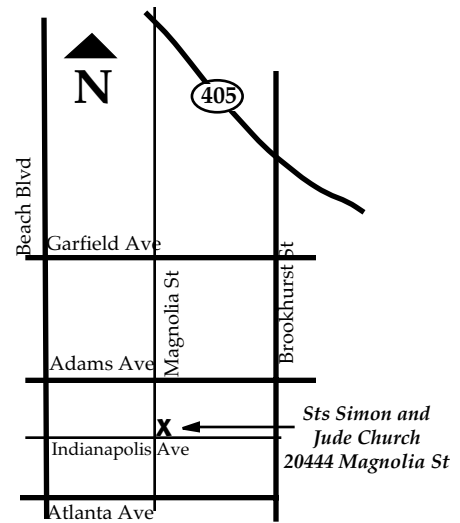
Group #596 Huntington Beach Meeting at Saints Simon and Jude Church, Adult Center, 20444 Magnolia Street in Huntington Beach. For more information, email c_olson@onebox.com.

31 Thursday 7:00 PM

Group #178 Irvine Monthly Meeting at the Irvine United Congregational Church, 4915 Alton Parkway, Irvine. **Please note the new meeting location and day!** See details on the web page <http://www.aiusaoc.org>. For more information about the group, contact Glen Nielsen at nielsenelectric@cox.net.



Group #178 Irvine Meeting Location



Group #596 Huntington Beach Location

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Group 178
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