



Amnesty International

Orange County

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

July 2007

<http://www.aiusaoc.org>

Amnesty International Defends New Position on Abortion

This article is taken from AIUSA press releases and articles from the Catholic News Service.

Amnesty International has defended its new policy on abortion after a Vatican official said Catholics might need to withdraw their financial support of the organization.

In April, Amnesty's International Executive Committee adopted a new policy advocating the global decriminalization of abortion, following an international consultation that arose from the group's Stop Violence Against Women campaign. According to the policy, amnesty now supports a right to abortion for women impregnated by rape or incest or in cases of grave risks to the mother's health or life.

The committee had been authorized by Amnesty's International Council Meeting, held in Mexico in 2005, to set policy on the questions of "decriminalization of abortion, access to quality services for the management of complications arising from abortion, and legal, safe and accessible abortion in the cases of rape, sexual assault, incest and risk to a woman's life."

At its international council meeting in Mexico in August, Amnesty will consider expanding its policy on abortion. It said it would decide the question of whether a woman's "right to physical and mental integrity includes her right to terminate her pregnancy."

Responding to a statement from the Vatican, Amnesty International contradicted the claim of Cardinal Renato Martino, head of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, that Vatican funding for Amnesty International would cease. "We have not accepted funds from the Vatican and do not accept funds from any other state in support of our work against human rights violations," said Kate Gilmore, Executive Deputy Secretary General of Amnesty International.

"Millions of people around the world of many faiths and creeds donate to Amnesty International as individuals. Among them are welcome donations from members of the Catholic faith. We hope that Amnesty International's work against torture, against the death penalty and for the proper administration of justice including for women and girls will continue to draw active support from people of conviction the world over," said Kate Gilmore.

Defending the right of women to sexual and reproductive integrity in the face of grave human rights violations, Amnesty International recently incorporated a focus on selected aspects of abortion into its broader policy on sexual and reproductive rights. These additions do not promote abortion as a universal right and Amnesty International remains silent on the rights and wrongs of abortion.

"Amnesty International's position is not for abortion as

a right but for women's human rights to be free of fear, threat and coercion as they manage all consequences of rape and other grave human rights violations," clarified Kate Gilmore.

"Ours is a movement dedicated to upholding human rights, not specific theologies," she said. "It means that sometimes the secular framework of human rights that Amnesty International upholds will converge neatly with the standpoints of certain faith-based communities; sometimes it will not."

Last month, Cardinal Martino, through an interview, encouraged Catholics to withdraw support for Amnesty International, claiming that Amnesty International is "promoting abortion rights". Amnesty International's actual policy, however, standing alongside its long-standing opposition to forced abortion, is to support the decriminalisation of abortion, to ensure women have access to health care when complications arise from abortion and to defend women's access to abortion, within reasonable gestational limits, when their health or human rights are in danger.

On July 2, Bishop William S. Skylstad, president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, issued a statement urging Amnesty International to reverse the decision when its International Council meets in Mexico in August.

"The action of the Executive Council undermines Amnesty's longstanding moral credibility, diverts its mission, divides its own members (many of whom are Catholic or defend the rights of unborn children), and jeopardizes Amnesty's support by people in many nations, cultures and religion," Bishop Skylstad said.

On July 6, Larry Cox, Executive Director of AIUSA, issued a response to the bishop's statement, which included the following statements:

First, I believe strongly that we should not allow divergent views on any one issue to undermine our shared commitment to work together to end human suffering around the world. Through the years and despite differences of perspective, the Catholic church and Amnesty, though a secular organization, have stood as allies on fundamental questions of human dignity, especially in our shared opposition to the death penalty and our joint work to free prisoners of conscience jailed for their religious beliefs. We have accomplished a great deal together. It remains my fervent hope that we will continue to act upon our common devotion to these causes by working jointly on behalf of victims of abuse and torture, even though we cannot expect to agree on each and every issue.

Continued on page 3

June Meeting Minutes

Group #141 Orange

Letters

The group sent a total of 28 letters, including letters to Senators Boxer and Feinstein and U.S. Representative Dana Rohrabacher urging their support for peacekeeping operations in Darfur; to Egyptian officials on behalf of Abdel Karim Sulaiman Amer, who was arrested on November 7, 2006, and is being prosecuted for the peaceful expression of his views about Islam; and to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice urging strengthened enforcement of the Clean Diamond Trade Act.

Prisoner Case

We discussed our adopted prisoner, the Venerable Thich Huyen Quang, the Supreme Patriarch of the unofficial Unified Buddhist Church of Viet Nam, who has spent much of the time since 1982 under house arrest, charged with "sabotaging the policy of national solidarity."

The 86-year-old monk is reportedly suffering from heart problems and a lung infection. After Thich Huyen Quang's health continued to deteriorate, he was finally allowed to be hospitalized in September 2006 and was subsequently transferred to a private clinic in Ho Chi Minh City to receive more appropriate medical treatment.



Myanmar

Myanmar's military government renewed the detention orders on Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's on May 27 for yet another year. The detention order for the leader of the National League for Democracy had been due to expire on Sunday, May 27. There are currently more than 1,160 political prisoners, many of whom have been penalized solely for their peaceful dissent.

Summer Postcard Action

The group will be working on Amnesty's Summer Postcard Action at our July meeting. Please bring picture postcards to send to prisoners of conscience.

June Meeting Minutes

Group #175 Long Beach

Attendees

Mary Kay Dunn, Mike Farris, Christine Jung, Bobbi Kendig, Sally Quinn, Elizabeth Petras, Jim Roberts, Linda Veazey

Many thanks to Linda for leading the meeting while Norma was away!

- Bobbi and Jim graciously volunteered to put together a group history for the Long Beach/Orange County Web site.
- The group set about planning for a planning meeting. We will meet at the Belmont Brewing Company on the patio to plot the course of the group and review what we've done.
- The group sent 76 letters.

June Meeting Minutes

Group #178 Irvine

New members

We were happy to greet several new members who are also part of the congregation of the Irvine United Congregational Church.

Campaigns

We had a presentation on the Amnesty International Torture Awareness week (26 June 2007).

Restore Habeas Corpus

We talked about the history of *habeas corpus* and the recent issues in the USA concerning *habeas corpus*, in particular the situation of the detainees in Guantanamo Bay, reviewing the Supreme Court Decisions of *Rasul v. Bush*, *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld*, the Detainee Treatment Act of 2005, and the Military Commissions Act of 2006. We wrote letters to our federal representatives in the legislature to support the passage of Bill S.185 (Senate) and Bill HR 1416 (House), the Habeas Corpus Restoration Act of 2007.

Uganda

As mentioned last month, we have invited Dr. Ochan Otim (see his website <http://www.friendsforpeaceinafrica.org>) to come speak at an upcoming meeting about the severe human rights crisis in Northern Uganda that has been ongoing for two decades. This is the same presentation that was made at the AI Southern California Mini-Conference in March 2007. Glen Nielsen will be talking to Paul Tellstrom, the pastor of the Irvine United Congregational Church, to see if his presentation could be done at a date and time that would promote attendance from the Church congregation.

Publicizing Meeting

Our new members had several suggestions on how to get our meetings announced in the church order of service and the church newsletter, and also gave contact information for some of the local print media. Jacques Kilchoer will pursue these avenues to publicize our meeting more effectively.

New Field Organizer

Julissa Gómez is the new Field Organizer for the Western Region. Gómez was formerly the Human Rights Education Coordinator in the West where she developed and managed Amnesty's Human Rights Education program in partnership with Los Angeles middle schools, high schools and college student facilitators. Previously, she served as a community outreach coordinator for the Los Angeles Unified School District, working in the Pico-Union area managing 15 school projects. Julissa also has experience managing welfare to work program cases for GAIN and is the founder and governing board member for the California Chicano Community Project. She has an MA in Chicano Studies from California State University, Northridge.

Julissa met with members of the the Orange County and Long Beach groups on July 7 to introduce herself and to discuss the groups' health and other concerns. She described finding an Area Coordinator and a Student Area Coordinator for the region as one of her top concerns.

From the Deputy Executive Director Taking the U.S. Government to Court

Last month Amnesty International USA, the Center for Constitutional Rights, and New York University's Human Rights Law Center filed suit against the federal government in the U.S. Court for the Southern District of New York.

We took this action against the CIA, the Departments of Defense, Justice, State and Homeland Security because the government had not responded to our Freedom of Information Act request for information about ghost prisoners, extraordinary renditions and its secret detention operations. That request was initially filed in April 2006. Over a year later, after not having received any significant information from any of these agencies in response to our initial request or to our subsequent appeals against the governments' continuing denial that such information even exists, we took this action to finally force disclosure of the unlawfully withheld records. AIUSA is being represented pro-bono by the New York law firm of Wilmer-Hale, which has donated large amounts of time by experienced lawyers to this effort.

We hope this action will finally force the government to release its records about ghost prisoners the U.S. has held or is still holding and its secret detention apparatus in place since 2001. We also hope that any new information we obtain will shed much needed light on this dark and shadowy practice which denies prisoners their most elementary human rights, and will contribute to shutting down this abhorrent practice that contravenes our treaty obligations under the Convention against Torture and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

To help underscore why this practice must stop, six human rights groups: AI, Human Rights Watch, the Center for Constitutional Rights, Reprieve, the NYU School of Law and Cageprisoners, published a report the same day of the filing detailing the cases of 39 people who are believed to have been held in secret U.S. custody and whose current whereabouts remain unknown. They have entered the ranks of the "disappeared." If that weren't alarming enough, the report also named relatives of suspects who were themselves detained in secret prisons, including children as young as seven! Ironically, such measures reminded me of AI's reporting of violations in Iraq under Saddam Hussein, when the security forces picked up relatives, including wives and children, to pressure a father or husband to turn himself in.

We're turning up the pressure on Congress to restore *habeas corpus* and stop renditions. Our campaign to close down Guantanamo Bay (and disclose the rest of our illegal camps) continues to gather steam. A few days ago, former Secretary of State

Colin Powell added his voice to the chorus and even the new Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, has indicated that Guantanamo should be shut down. Progress, while still too slow, is being made.

The government now has sixty days to respond to our joint lawsuit regarding secret prisons and ghost prisoners. So we hope that no later than mid-August we will have further information to provide which, combined with your tireless efforts—even over the summer—can halt these shameful human rights violations by our own government.

Curt Goering, Deputy Executive Director

Abortion Position

Continued from page 1

In this spirit I wish to correct the misunderstanding conveyed in the bishops' statement which incorrectly asserted that AI has adopted a "pro-abortion stand." In fact, Amnesty International's policy on sexual and reproductive rights seeks to ensure that women and men can exercise their sexual and reproductive rights free from coercion, discrimination and violence. In doing so it responds to the human suffering caused by abuses of these rights. Defending the right of women to sexual and reproductive integrity in the face of grave human rights violations, AI does not promote abortion as a universal right but recognizes instead the right of women to be free of fear, threat and coercion as they manage the consequences of rape and other grave human rights violations.

AI will not advocate "abortion on demand," nor do we counsel individuals as to what choice they should make on abortion. We take no position as to whether abortion is right or wrong, nor on its legalization generally. Instead our position is focused on three areas of concern: opposition to imprisonment or other criminal sanctions for women or providers of abortion; support for medical treatment for women who suffer complications from unsafe abortions, and within reasonable gestational limits, support for women who seek abortion in cases of rape, incest or to preserve her life or when pregnancy poses a grave risk to her health.

Under this policy, AI will, as it always does, research and act on the most grave human rights cases. Nevertheless, AI continues to fervently oppose forced abortion, coerced sterilization, honor killings, human trafficking and other human rights abuses against women. We oppose, too, the coercion, isolation, and abuse that many women who have suffered violence face. And, we believe that those women who have survived rape, incest, or who face grave risk to their health or lives due to pregnancy should not be judged for their choices; within reasonable gestational limits and without force or coercion, they must be free to determine whether to continue the pregnancy.

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 _____

Return to:
Amnesty International
Group 178
P.O. Box 17186
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

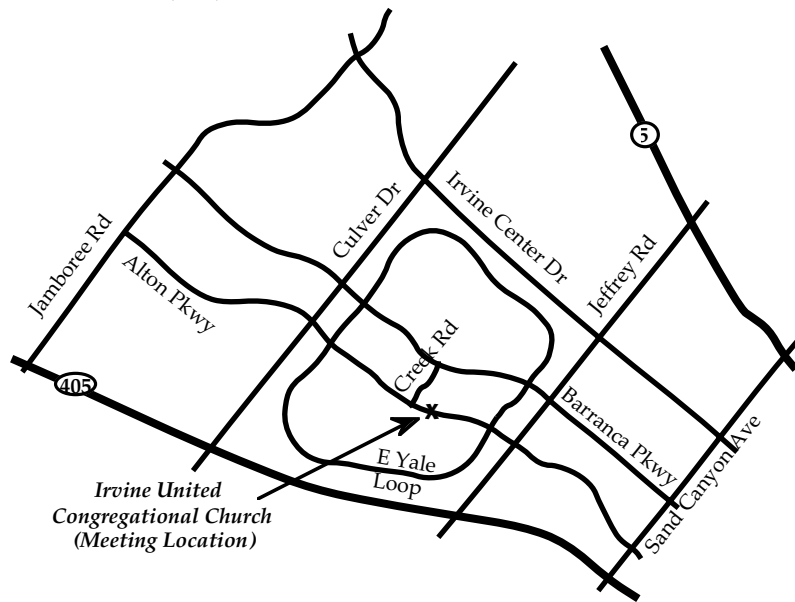
July

17 Tuesday 7:00 PM

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

18 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.



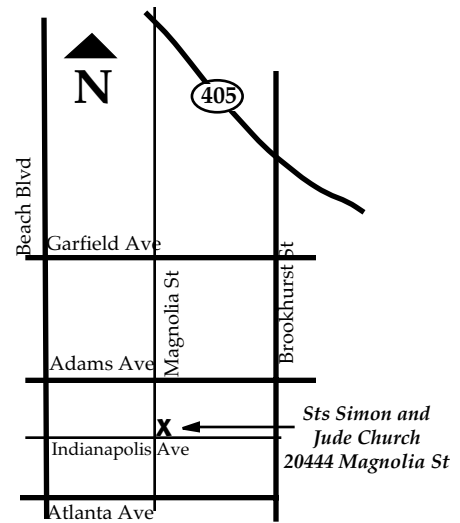
Group #178 Irvine Meeting Location

26 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.

30 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.



Group #596 Huntington Beach Location

Amnesty International
Group 178
P.O. Box 17186
Irvine, CA 92623-1718