



Amnesty International

Orange County

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

August 2007

<http://www.aiusaoc.org>

Ethiopia: Special Focus Case Mesfin Woldemariam Released

On July 20, after months of campaigning by Amnesty International, 38 Ethiopian opposition party officials, prominent human rights defenders, and journalists were released. The 38 were detained and imprisoned in connection with public demonstrations protesting alleged election fraud. Amnesty International considered most, if not all, to be prisoners of conscience. The group included:

- Professor Mesfin Woldemariam, founder and first president of the Ethiopian Human Rights Council and one of Amnesty International's Special Focus Cases;
- Dr. Berhanu Nega, elected Mayor of Addis Ababa and an economics professor; and
- Dr. Yacob Hailemariam, retired Norfolk State University law professor and former U.N. prosecutor at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.

The defendants were convicted on June 11 after a 14-month trial by the Federal High Court of Ethiopia. They refused to defend themselves insisting that their arrests, charges, detention and trials were politically motivated and that the trial was not likely to be fair. They were convicted on the basis of the prosecution evidence and prevented from making a statement in court after the prosecution case ended. The judge ruled that they had not submitted a defense and were guilty as charged, giving no reason for the sudden verdict. Ten co-defendants, including two civil society activists, Daniel Bekele and Netsanet Demissie, chose to defend themselves through counsel. Upon their release, the defendants received a pardon and had their political rights restored.

Mesfin Woldemariam is Ethiopia's most prominent human rights defender, respected for his integrity and tenacity. In early November 2005, authorities detained him on a variety of charges in connection with public demonstrations protesting alleged election fraud in the May 2005 elections in Ethiopia. The charges include "outrage against the Constitution," "obstruction of the exercise of constitutional powers," "inciting, organizing or leading armed rebellion" and "attempted genocide." If convicted, he could receive the death penalty. Amnesty International considers Professor Mesfin Woldemariam a prisoner of conscience and is calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

In 1991, Professor Mesfin founded the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO), a non-governmental organization that investigates and reports on human rights violations in Ethiopia. While the government initially approved of EHRCO,

it has been increasingly hostile to the organization. Authorities detained six EHRCO staff members for several weeks in June 2005. Professor Mesfin was the organization's chair until 2005 when he resigned and joined the election campaign of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), the main opposition party.

July Meeting Minutes

Group #141 Orange

Letters

The group sent a total of 28 letters, including letters to Pakistani officials on behalf of Younis Masih, sentenced to death for blasphemy; to the Georgia State Board of Pardons on behalf of Troy Davis, sentenced to death but who may be innocent; to Myanmar officials on behalf of Ma Khin Khin Leh, sentenced to life imprisonment for planning a peaceful demonstration; and to Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff regarding the detention of migrant families in US detention facilities.

Meeting with Julissa Gomez

The group discussed the recent meeting several members had with Julissa Gomez, AIUSA Western Region Field Organizer. As mentioned in last month's newsletter, among Julissa's top priorities are finding an Area Coordinator and a Student Area Coordinator for the area. Julissa also mentioned that there will be three main focuses of Amnesty in 2008: China, the death penalty, and the treatment of Native American women, as part of the Stop Violence Against Women Campaign.

Julissa pointed out that the LA office has a lot of commercial movies, such as *Road to Guantanamo* or *Blood Diamond*, that the groups can borrow. The groups have also been given more leeway to work with other organizations. In the past, we've been somewhat restricted in terms of the types of groups we can work with. Amnesty is moving email groups away from Yahoo to Google because of the case of Shi Tao, who was arrested after Yahoo provided information to Chinese authorities.

China Campaign

Kevin threw out some ideas about events focusing on China, such as the Amnesty Olympics, with letter-writing or games modeling some of the human rights abuses taking place in China now, such as the destruction of houses. Kevin will try to coordinate some activities with the other groups. We could also try to plan an event at next year's Southern California Mini-Conference.

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July Meeting Minutes

Group #141 Orange *Continued from page 1*

Website

The groups have almost completed all the work to be turned over the web designer. Kevin has been spiffing up the Orange group's site a bit in the meantime.

Fundraising

The group discussed fundraising—whether or not we need to do some, what we could use money for, and how to go about it. Ruby's and Rubio's both have fundraising opportunities for groups. Kevin was going to look into these.

Human Rights Day

The group threw out some ideas for a Human Rights Day event. Since the meeting, Kevin was contacted by Susan from the Orange County United Nations Association, who collaborated with us on the event at the CAMP last December. The OC/UNA board recently decided they are interested in collaborating on another event this year on Sunday afternoon, December 9.

Summer Postcard Action

The group will be working on Amnesty's Summer Postcard Action at our August meeting. Please bring 6 picture postcards to send directly to prisoners of conscience.

July Meeting Minutes

Group #175 Long Beach

Attendees

Lizette Ashcraft, Mary Kay Dunn, Norma Edwards, Kevin Gaffney, Jim Roberts, Linda Veazey

Letter-writing

Our small group managed to send out 51 letters, which included postcards to prisoners of conscience.

Walk for Hope in Long Beach on September 22

Amnesty International will once again participate in Be the Cause's Walk for Hope at El Dorado Park in Long Beach. The purpose of the event is to "spread more love in the world." The entire 5-kilometer route (3 miles) is decorated with hundreds of inspiring quotes, all of them hand-made. You can also expect to find interactive activities along the walk route. The walk is free with free snacks, a free t-shirt, and live entertainment. In addition, Be the Cause encourages nonprofits to use the opportunity to raise funds. If you would be interested in raising funds for your Amnesty group this way, please contact Norma Edwards at beachykeeno@yahoo.com. For more information on the event, go to <http://www.bethecause.org/walksite/>.

Our Prisoner of Conscience Ye Htut, and Other Burma/Myanmar News

Jim informed us that another group is now working on our POC again (they had stopped but have a new case coordinator in the group). The other group is in Northampton, Massachusetts, and may have a photo of Ye Htut or other information that we don't, since they started out with the case long ago.

Jim also told us that Amnesty released a report on July 16

about India selling attack helicopters to Burma. You can read the report, entitled *Indian Helicopters for Myanmar: Making a Mockery of the EU Arms Embargo?* at <http://www.amnestyusa.org/document.php?id=ENGASA200142007&lang=e>.

Death Penalty News

Mary Kay told us about a man in Iran who was in jail awaiting execution for 11 years for adultery and was recently stoned to death, 125 miles west of Tehran. The woman has not been stoned yet. Mary Kay also told us about how the rules differ for stoning men and women (the woman is buried up to her neck, the man up to his waist). We also discussed the case of Troy Davis, who received a 90-day reprieve of execution. These cases and more were mentioned in the *Los Angeles Times* editorial "Killing Machine" on July 14, which calls for the end of state-sponsored killing. You can still read this powerful editorial at <http://www.latimes.com/news/printedition/opinion/la-ed-death14jul14,1,3632375.story>. There is an action on the Troy Davis case at the AIUSA Action Center at <http://takeaction.amnestyusa.org>.

Group History

Thanks to Bobbi, Dagmar, and Jim for compiling a group history for the upcoming revamped website. We thought we would share it with you all here first.

Established in 1979, the Long Beach A.I. group has taken on long-term cases in which we have worked for the release of over a dozen prisoners of conscience (aka POCs) in Myanmar (aka Burma), Vietnam, Chile, Czechoslovakia (later the Czech Republic), Bulgaria, Romania, and Kosovo. Among the better-known POCs were Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar, Vaclav Havel of then-Czechoslovakia, and Nguyen Dinh Huy of Vietnam.

Since A.I.'s mission has expanded beyond the concern for prisoners of conscience and other political prisoners, the Long Beach group has worked on these additional areas:

- human rights campaigns focusing on world regions such as West Africa, Central Europe, and Southeast Asia;
- campaigns to end torture, the death penalty, violence against women, and abuses in the Global War on Terror, as well as working for children's rights and the rights of indigenous people;
- mailing thousands of letters, post cards and petitions over the years to governments on behalf of individuals at risk around the world, in addition to our regular work for our assigned individual prisoners of conscience;
- providing speakers to local organizations and schools;
- engaging with government officials, including our mayor and three members of Congress;
- holding dialogue with a major oil firm about the impact of its operations on human rights in Myanmar;
- conducting research on conditions of detention of asylum seekers while assisting some to validate their claims of asylum and to receive needed medical care; and
- persuading a local business to stop selling and exporting to military and police organizations a device known as thumb cuffs, which could be an instrument of torture.

July Meeting Minutes

Group #178 Irvine

Letter-writing

We wrote letters related to actions concerning the following people: Sigma Huda (Bangladesh), Osman Murat Ülke (Turkey), Tony Anthony Davis (USA). We also sent out cards for the Summer Postcard Action, which we will do again next month. Bring some picture postcards with you!

Finances

Julie donated a large sum to our group's treasury as a thank you for some computer help she received from one of our group members.

Upcoming Events

- We discussed the group's participation in the Walk for Hope on Saturday, 22 September 2007. Donations gathered can be designated to go to any of the participating organizations. Group members were encouraged to attend and have friends sponsor them (and Group 178) for the walk.
- We will invite Dr. Ocah Otim to repeat his well-received presentation on Uganda (from the 2007 mini-conference in Fullerton) at the Irvine United Congregational Church (IUC) on 16 or 23 September 2007.
- We will invite Liza Smith, a volunteer from Peace Brigades International, who has returned from Columbia in May 2007 and would like to describe her trip to local organizations. She would be available near the end of September or the middle of October. AI will give Jacques information on who to call to arrange this.

Publicity

In addition to our local efforts (publicizing more at the church that hosts our meetings, the IUC, and in local press outlets), we discussed the possibility of sending out postcards to national members in the city of Irvine and perhaps surrounding areas. Jacques will research the cost of printing a colour postcard that would entice people to come to our meetings, and find out from an Amnesty International office how many names we would get for Irvine and/or neighbouring cities. Dean suggested that that this publicity effort should be done in conjunction with a more important occasion than "just" a group meeting.

Actions

Jacques will be signing up for the Weekend of Faith in Action against the Death Penalty (19-21 October) and plans to have at least a table at his church, the Orange Coast Unitarian Universalist Church and, if possible, also at the IUC.

Jacques also announced that he will be trying a small Amnesty letter-writing group at the OCUUC, providing letter-writing actions once a month between services.

Important News

Jacques announced that he will bring drinks and ice to the next meeting.

July Meeting Minutes

Group #596 Huntington Beach

The HB group of AI met Monday night, July 27th. There were approximately 10 members present (a big night for us!). The meeting consisted of the following activities:

Darfur Banner

Barbara English of "Orange County for Darfur" brought a large banner to the meeting. Amnesty members dipped their palms in red paint and pasted their handprints onto the banner that already included dozens of red handprints. Orange County for Darfur is creating several of these banners to represent the bloodshed and loss of human life in Darfur. The banners were used for a YouTube video that included a question about Darfur for the recent Democratic Presidential Debate. Unfortunately the video was not selected for use in the televised debate, but the group is putting together a similar video for the upcoming Republican Presidential Debate that it hopes will be selected. For those interested in participating in this videotaping, please contact Anne Saxe at annegalan56@hotmail.com.

Summer Postcard Action

The AI group wrote postcards to individuals as part of the 2007 Summer Postcard Action. Approximately 30 postcards/letters were sent. We were pleased to learn that one of the proposed postcard recipients, prisoner of conscience Mesfin Woldemariam, founder of the Ethiopian Human Rights Council, was released just days before our meeting.

Group Priorities

The remainder of the meeting was spent identifying priority issues the group wants to focus on in the coming months. It was agreed that the ongoing War on Terror will remain a priority as will the Stop Violence Against Women Campaign. The group also decided to adopt a prisoner of conscience at next month's meeting.

Meeting with Dana Rohrabacher

Orange County for Darfur is planning a meeting with Rep. Dana Rohrabacher during the afternoon of August 9 to discuss Darfur. The meeting is for constituents only. Please contact Anne Saxe at annegalan56@hotmail.com if you are a member of the district and would like to attend.

Special Meeting Location Next Month

The HB group will not be meeting at its regular location in August. Instead, the next meeting will be held at an off-site location still to be determined. Please contact Anne Saxe at annegalan56@hotmail.com for more information.

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

August

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

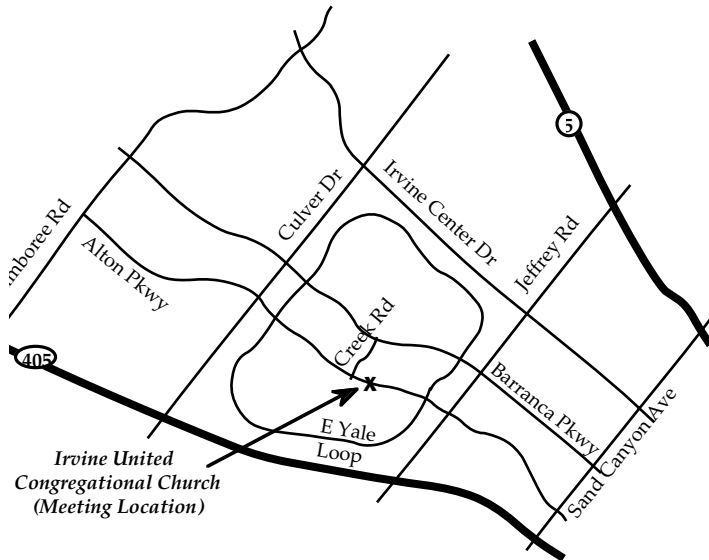
Group #141 Orange Monthly Meeting at the Sisters of St. Joseph, 480 S. Batavia Street, in Orange. Look for the classroom/auditorium building behind the main building. Drive around on the south side of main building and park in the back. Look for the signs for the classroom number. For further information about the group, contact Kevin Gaffney at xhuskr@aol.com. **Please bring some picture postcards to send to prisoners as part of AI's Summer Postcard Action.**

27 Monday 7:00 PM

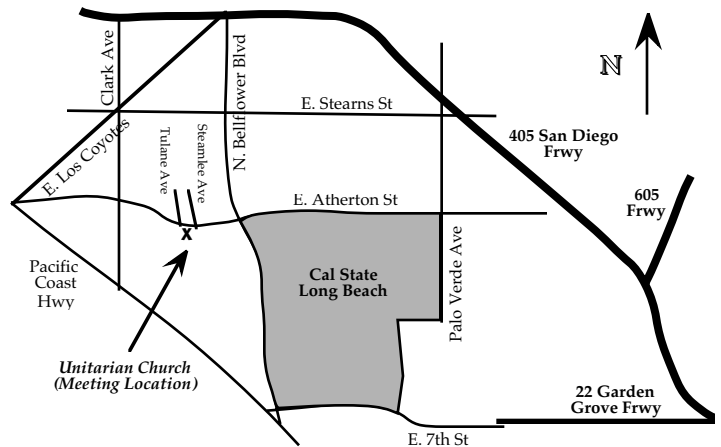
Group #596 Huntington Beach Meeting. The group will meet at a special location this month. Contact Anne Saxe at annegalan56@hotmail.com for more information.

30 Thursday 7:00 PM

Group #178 Irvine Monthly Meeting at the Irvine United Congregational Church, 4915 Alton Parkway, Irvine. 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 #175 Long Beach Meeting Location

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