



Amnesty International

Orange County

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

February 2008

<http://www.aiusaoc.org>

AI Warns NATO Countries at Risk of Complicity in Torture in Afghanistan

This message is from the February 2008 AIUSA Connect.

In a new report released November 13, 2007, Amnesty International charges the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan with exposing detainees to risks of torture or other ill-treatment at the hands of Afghan authorities.

The report documents how ISAF forces—particularly those from Belgium, the United Kingdom, Canada, the Netherlands and Norway—have transferred detainees to Afghanistan's intelligence service, the National Directorate of Security (NDS), despite consistent reports of torture and other ill-treatment by the NDS.

"As a primary financial supporter of the National Directorate of Security, the United States has the responsibility to ensure that no further torture is committed," said AIUSA Executive Director Larry Cox. "This means not funding the NDS until the transfers of detainees to Afghan authorities is suspended and effective safeguards are established."

The United Nations reiterated its concerns about the NDS as recently as September when it called for investigations into allegations of torture and other ill-treatment by the NDS. Over the past two years, Amnesty International has received numerous reports of torture and other ill-treatment of detainees by the NDS, including beatings, exposure to extreme cold and food deprivation.

"The Bush administration should demonstrate that the United States still cares about human rights in the war on terror and use its position in NATO to encourage its partners to ensure that ISAF forces are not complicit in the torture of detainees in Afghanistan," said T. Kumar, Amnesty International USA advocacy director for Asia and the Pacific.

Amnesty International highlighted cases of detainees reporting being tortured after Canadian forces handed them to Afghan authorities. The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission corroborated the account of a farmer who said he was captured by Canadian troops while he says he was working the fields west of Kandahar. The troops handed him over to Afghan soldiers, starting what he described as a bloody six-month odyssey at the hands of Afghan interrogators from the military, police and intelligence services. He said they "beat him with rifle butts, deprived him of sleep, shocked him with electrical probes and thrashed him with bundles of cables."

The report also details how the Belgian and Norwegian governments lost track of transferred detainees and the dif-

ficulties encountered by British and Dutch forces in ensuring independent monitoring of detainees once in Afghan custody.

The report also examines Memorandums of Understanding and other bilateral agreements between the Afghan government and ISAF forces including those from Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom.

"NATO must work with its forces to ensure that the bilateral agreements are adhered to and detainees are treated in accordance with international standards," said Cox. "Otherwise, these agreements have less value than the paper they are written on." Amnesty International recommended that the ISAF temporarily suspend all detainee transfers to Afghan authorities and that independent monitors be given unrestricted access to all detention centers and unsupervised access to all detainees.

Saudi Arabia: Girl from al-Qatif Pardoned

In 2006, a young woman known only as "The Girl from al-Qatif" and her male companion were kidnapped at knifepoint by a gang of seven men shortly after they met. The male companion was attacked and then released. The woman, however, was raped by each member of the gang.

While the gang was eventually apprehended and sentenced for their crimes, a court in eastern Saudi Arabia saw the need to convict the woman and her companion of the crime known as *Khilwa*—being alone in private with a member of the opposite sex who was not an immediate family member. A year later on November 15, 2007, another court increased the sentences of all who were involved, including the rape victim. She and her companion had their sentences increased to six months imprisonment and flogging which was increased from 90 to 200 lashes.

The sentencing of the woman following her rape ordeal generated shock and anger among the public in Saudi Arabia and human rights activists abroad. It also generated a rare debate in the country on the inconsistencies of the judicial system and its failure to reflect the gravity of crimes committed against the woman. AI issued an Urgent Action in November and several updates to which many of our members responded with an outpouring of concern.

We are happy to report that the sentences of flogging and imprisonment imposed on the "Girl from al-Qatif" and her male companion were dropped under a pardon granted by Saudi Arabia's Head of State, King Abdullah, on January 16.

January Meeting Minutes

Group #175 Long Beach

Present

Moyra Dake, Norma Edwards, Mike Farris, Antony Gabriele, Deidre Gaffney, Kevin Gaffney, Bobbi Kendig, Glen Nielsen, Elizabeth Petras, Jim Roberts, Steve Wicke

Happy New Year! We had two group leaders (Tony: Redondo Beach, Group #148 and Glen: Irvine, Group #178) join us at our first meeting of the year, which was great! It was a very informative night.

Darfur/Sudan

Tony brought a fellow student from Cal State Long Beach, Moyra, and both told us a lot about the very confusing situation in Darfur. Tony told us that the Sudan Accountability and Divestment Act passed <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/01/world/africa/01sudan.html> (see also <http://www.sudandivestment.org>—non-Amnesty site, not Amnesty endorsed). We expressed that it was sometimes hard to know what action to take, and he recommended following what Amnesty is doing and checking out stopgenocidenow.org, savedarfur.org, and Save the Children as well. Tony said that he personally calls the White House every day on his cell phone (202/456-1111) to let the President know how important this issue is and that he hasn't forgotten. Moyra told a funny story about getting President Kufuor of Ghana's cell phone number and calling him when she went home there to urge him to do more to help the people of Darfur. (He was then head of the African Union.)

We began a discussion of why Amnesty has not called what's happening a genocide, even as President Bush has. Elizabeth promised to look into what the definition of genocide is in the U.S. genocide act.

Burma/Myanmar

The International Secretariat has confirmed that our prisoner, Ye Htut, was released. There are still really no details and no information on his current whereabouts. So while we are happy, we are not quite sure what to think yet. Jim has heard that Ye Htut has a sister living on the East Coast of the U.S. and is trying to contact her through his Burmese sources. The way he found out Ye Htut was released was he had contacted the editor of *The Irrawaddy* (<http://www.irrawaddy.org/>) to find out info about our prisoner. The editor, Aung Zaw (<http://www.aungzaw.net>), had been a student activist at the same time as Ye Htut. When Ye Htut was arrested in September 27, 1995, it was on charges of sending fabricated news abroad to Burmese dissidents and opposition media. Among the organizations to which Ye Htut allegedly confessed sending reports was the Thailand-based Burma Information Group (BIG), which publishes the human rights newsletter *The Irrawaddy*. Myanmar's official media claimed that BIG had presented a false picture of the country to foreign governments and human rights organizations. Ye Htut was sentenced to seven years in prison, but it is not known yet when he was released.

The America We Believe In

Steve told us that there are now less than 300 people in

Guantanamo. (After our meeting, there was a fair amount of press about a prisoner death: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/05/world/asia/05gitmo.html?_r=1&em&ex=1202360400&en=69559dc1ec42361a&ei=5087%0A&oref=slogin.) Steve talked about Jane Harman's bill, the Prevention of Violence Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism (HR1955/S1959) (www.sacbee.com/110/v-print/story/650840.html), which passed in the House and now goes to the Senate. Amnesty and the press were silent on the bill (but many blogs are talking about it).

Group News

- Our January presentation was postponed to this month: Kevin will do a presentation at the February meeting about the Western Regions Prisoner of Conscience, Shi Tao. (www.amnestyusa.org/Global_Writeathon/Shi_Tao/page.do?id=1011500&n1=3&n2=34&n3=65).
- We spent the January meeting writing more cards for the holiday action as well as petitions to Blackwater and Attorney General Mukasey about the impunity of military contractors, the president of Burundi about rape and impunity in his country, and President Bush about our relations with Pakistan.

January Meeting Minutes

Group #178 Irvine

In January we welcomed two new members to our group meeting. We discussed our plans for the next few months.

First on the order of business was the announcement by group leader Glen that he is busy commuting to San Francisco and will be spending more time there. Jacques will be the main group coordinator starting in February. Dr. Julie also announced that she has joined a medical board and will not be able to attend every meeting this year.

We decided to design a postcard and mail it out to national AI members with Irvine zipcodes. We calculate that this will cost several hundred dollars but we hope to increase group membership. We also will make a more concerted effort to publicize the group meetings. Felicity has several good suggestions. As part of our publicity effort we will do the following:

- Show movies or have special presentations more often
- Postcard mailing to national members as mentioned above
- Investigate cost of small advertisements in local newspapers
- Ask city of Irvine to put our special events on the mayor's calendar
- Try to advertise with other local congregations, for example University synagogue in Irvine

We also decided to change our meeting time to 19:30 (7:30 PM).

For the Western Africa Regional Action Network campaign, we wrote letters to protest the imprisonment of eleven gay men in Cameroon in July and August of 2007.

At our February meeting we will be showing the documentary *Justice Without Borders* (www.amnestyusa.org/justice), a film discussing human rights legal cases in Peru, Chile, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Hague, Guatemala, and Spain.

January Meeting Minutes

Group #141 Orange

Letter-Writing

The group sent out letters to officials in Ecuador asking for an investigation into death threats against opponents of a copper mine there; to officials in Macedonia regarding discrimination against Romani (commonly called gypsy) women and girls; and to Nepali officials concerning the "disappearance" of Sanjir Kamer Karna, a 24-year-old student who was arrested on October 8, 2003 with four friends, because of his interest in student politics.

Jeannine, Kevin, and Deidre all received cards back from Troy Davis, after sending him cards as part of AIUSA's Holiday Card Action. Troy Davis has been sentenced to death in Georgia for the murder of Police Officer Mark Allen McPhail, a murder he maintains he did not commit. There was no physical evidence against him and the weapon used in the crime was never found. The case against him consisted entirely of witness testimony which contained inconsistencies even at the time of the trial. Since then, all but two of the state's non-police witnesses from the trial have recanted or contradicted their testimony. Many of these witnesses have stated in sworn affidavits that they were pressured or coerced by police into testifying or signing statements against Troy Davis.

China Olympics Campaign

Kevin is still waiting to receive the first action as part of the China Olympics Campaign, scheduled for this year.

Other News

Jeannine reported on the case of U.S. weapons missing in Iraq. A Government Accountability Office report released last July revealed the Pentagon could not account for 30 percent of the weapons the United States distributed to Iraqi forces between 2004 and 2007.

Jeannine also reported on the FBI's investigation into Blackwater in Iraq. According to the *New York Times*, the FBI's preliminary findings indicate that at least 14 of the 17 Iraqis shot last September were killed by Blackwater personnel using unjustified, unprovoked deadly force.

Responding to reports November 13 that internet giant Yahoo! had reached a settlement involving two Chinese journalists jailed and allegedly tortured for emails the company turned over to the Chinese government, Amy O'Meara, AIUSA's director of business and human rights, said, while the settlement provided a "small measure of justice" to the families involved,

it failed to address the underlying problem, internet companies collaborating with government repression.

Shi Tao, a former writer for the financial publication *Contemporary Business News*, was sentenced to a decade in prison for allegedly providing state secrets to foreigners. Wang Xiaoning was arrested in 2002 after Yahoo! HK gave authorities information linking him to political writings posted online.

Belarus: Youth Leader Released

Amnesty International welcomed the release from prison on January 23 of Zmitser Dashkevich, leader of a youth organization that advocates political freedom in Belarus. AI mounted a global campaign to win his release featuring his case in a Global Write-a-thon in December through which thousands of people across the United States appealed for his release. As one of Amnesty International USA's SpecialFocusCases, Zmitser Dashkevich's case was a particular focus for action by Amnesty student activists, who joined youth activists around the world in sending 10,000 origami cranes to Belarusian authorities in a symbolic plea for freedom for Mr. Dashkevich and other prisoners of conscience.

Nebraska Enters the 20th Century

Statement of Larry Cox, executive director of Amnesty International USA, on the Nebraska Supreme Court ruling that declares the electric chair unconstitutional: Amnesty International USA welcomes the Nebraska Supreme Court decision to bar the electric chair. Nebraska was the last holdout that still allowed this outmoded method of execution, and the Supreme Court ruling is a sign of the times.

The highly gruesome aspects of the electric chair merely reinforce Nebraskans' repugnance and skepticism about executions. A bill to repeal the death penalty passed in the Unicameral Legislature's Judiciary Committee yesterday, a move that could put the state in line with New Jersey and several others in the country that are considering abolition.

Support for the death penalty is evaporating as lawmakers and the general public become more and more disillusioned with this broken system. The administration of the death penalty is arbitrary, biased, and flawed at every level. It diverts resources from proven crime prevention measures, is a waste of taxpayer resources and has the very real potential of putting an innocent person to death. This is an opportune moment for the people of Nebraska to shun not just the macabre process of electrocution, but the entire flawed system of capital punishment.

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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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 February

20 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.

25 Monday 7:00 PM

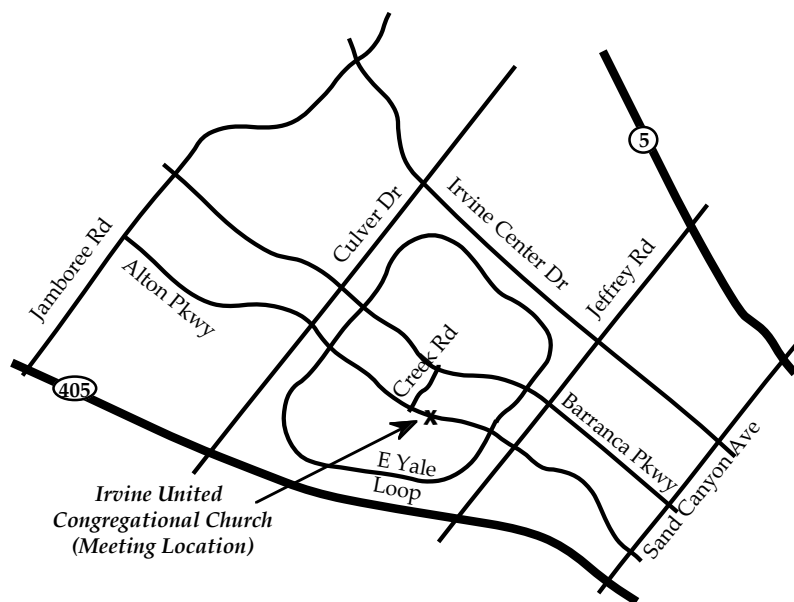
Group #596 Huntington Beach Meeting at Saints Simon and Jude Church, Adult Center, 20444 Magnolia Street in Huntington Beach. For more information, email Anne Saxe at annegalan56@hotmail.com.

26 Tuesday 7:00 PM

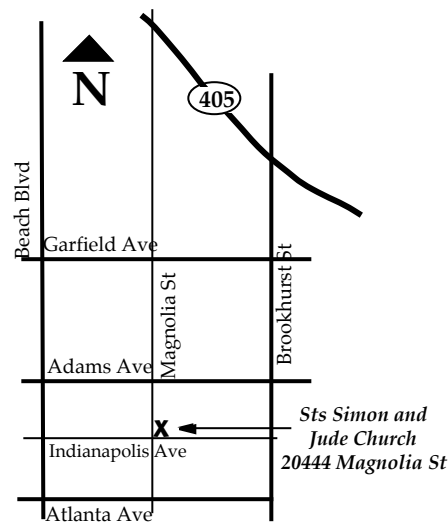
Group #141 Orange Monthly Meeting at the Sisters of St. Joseph, 480 S. Batavia Street, in Orange. Look for the classroom/auditorium building behind the main building. Drive around on the south side of main building and park in the back. Look for the signs for the classroom number. For further information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

28 Thursday 7:30 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 Jacques Kilchoer at jacques.kilchoer@aiusaoc.org.



Group #178 Irvine Meeting Location



Group #596 Huntington Beach Location

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