



Amnesty International

Orange County

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

March 2008

<http://www.aiusaoc.org>

USA: Torture in the Name of 'Civilization' President Bush Vetoes Anti-Torture Legislation

This article is from a March 10, 2008 AIUSA press release.

Make no mistake: every regime that tortures does so in the name of salvation, some superior goal, some promise of paradise. Call it communism, call it the free market, call it the free world, call it the national interest, call it fascism, call it the leader, call it civilization, call it the service of God, call it the need for information . . .

Ariel Dorfman, May 2004

On December 2, 2002, US Vice President Dick Cheney said, "Since the hour of the attacks on September 11th, our country has been fighting an unprecedented kind of war As the President has said, this is a fight to save the civilized world." On the same day, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld signed a memorandum authorizing the authorities at Guantánamo to use interrogation techniques that included stress positions, isolation, sensory deprivation, hooding, removal of clothing, and exploiting the individual phobias of detainees, such as fear of dogs.

Asked in an interview on February 14, 2008 whether he could say, after all the revelations about US detentions in the "war on terror", that the US "occupies the moral high ground", President George W. Bush replied that he could. "Absolutely," he said, "We believe in human rights and human dignity." Ten days earlier, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, General Michael Hayden, had confirmed that among the "enhanced" interrogation techniques used by the CIA as part of its secret detention program had been "waterboarding"—a form of torture that simulates drowning. Then on March 8, 2008, President Bush vetoed legislation aimed at preventing the CIA from using this and other "enhanced" techniques again. In a national radio address, he said that "we need to ensure our intelligence officials have all the tools they need to stop the terrorists."

Speaking on the eve of the veto, Vice President Cheney said: "We've interrogated high-value detainees, and gotten information that has saved American lives The war on terror is a battle for the future of civilization . . . [O]ur purposes are right and just. We stand for the highest ideals: liberty and equality; the dignity of the individual; and representative government."

Half a century ago, Jean-Paul Sartre wrote that torture "is a plague infecting our whole era Disavowed—sometimes very quietly—but systematically practised behind a façade of democratic legality, torture has now acquired the status of a semi-clandestine institution It is up to us to clean out our

own backyard, and try to understand what has happened to us, the French." Sartre's words appeared in his preface to the account by Henri Alleg, the editor of an Algerian newspaper, of torture at the hands of French paratroops during his secret detention in Algiers in mid-1957. Among other brutalities, Henri Alleg was subjected to the form of water torture that has become known in the USA as waterboarding:

"When everything was ready, [the interrogator] said to me: 'When you want to talk, all you have to do is move your fingers.' And he turned on the tap. The rag was soaked rapidly. Water flowed everywhere: in my mouth, in my nose, all over my face. But for a while I could still breathe in some small gulps of air. I tried, by contracting my throat, to take in as little water as possible and to resist suffocation by keeping air in my lungs for as long as I could. But I couldn't hold out for more than a few moments. I had the impression of drowning, and a terrible agony, that of death itself, took possession of me. In spite of myself, all the muscles of my body struggled uselessly to save myself from suffocation. In spite of myself, the fingers of my two hands shook uncontrollably. 'That's it! He's going to talk,' said a voice."

Some 45 years later, Abu Zubaydah, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri were waterboarded in secret CIA custody in order to get them to "talk". In a policy memorandum on detentions issued not long before they were tortured, President Bush had asserted that the USA would treat detainees "humanely", "including those who are not legally entitled to such treatment". Such people, of course, do not exist. Everyone has the legal right not to be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Every government official, every soldier, every interrogator, every intelligence agent, every contractor everywhere is bound by this legal prohibition. No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, including a state of war, threat of war, or any public emergency of any kind, can be invoked as justification for torture. The same goes for enforced disappearance. Both are crimes under international law. The USA has turned to both in its "war on terror".

Vetoing the intelligence authorization bill on March 10, the President said he remained committed to the CIA detention

Continued on page 2

February Meeting Minutes

Group #141 Orange

Letter-Writing

The group sent out approximately 40 letters this month. These are described in detail by Norma Edwards in the Long Beach meeting minutes, so the descriptions are omitted here.

Shi Tao and the China Olympics Campaigns

Kevin gave a detailed presentation of the case of Shi Tao, the Western Region Special Focus Case, and Amnesty's upcoming China Olympics Campaign. In April 2004, the Chinese journalist Shi Tao used his Yahoo! email account to send a message to a U.S.-based pro-democracy website. In his email, he summarized a government order directing media organizations in China to downplay the upcoming 15th anniversary of the 1989 crackdown on pro-democracy activists. Police arrested him in November 2004, charging him with "illegally providing state secrets to foreign entities." Authorities used email account holder information supplied by Yahoo! to convict Shi Tao in April 2005 and sentence him to 10 years in prison.

China has constructed an extensive system of Internet censorship, a "golden shield," to silence activists and journalists like All Internet traffic passes through government-controlled routers, and authorities are able to block access to many sites, to filter content, and to delete links or web pages considered "dangerous" or "subversive" through its "Golden Shield."

Shi Tao is being held under very harsh conditions in prison and is being forced to do slave labor. His family has been harassed by authorities. His wife underwent daily questioning by security officials and was persistently pressured to divorce Shi Tao, which she eventually did.

Yahoo! has disavowed responsibility for supplying the information that led to Shi Tao's imprisonment and in 2005 spun off its China operations to a new company called Alibaba. Yahoo! claims not to control day-to-day operations in China but owns 40 percent of it. Amnesty is trying to target Yahoo! here as part of its campaign on behalf of Shi Tao, beginning February 29. Amnesty will be targeting our congresspersons to write on behalf of Shi Tao to Chinese authorities and to Yahoo! This will tie into the upcoming China Olympics campaign. When they were awarded the olympics, China promised to improve human rights and Amnesty want to hold them to their promises. Kevin is expecting to receive the first action from that campaign soon. The four main issues of the Olympics campaign are the death penalty; punitive detention without trial; repression of human rights defenders; and unwarranted censorship of Internet.

Roma Women and Girls in Macedonia

Deidre gave some additional information about the plight of Roma (also called gypsy, although that term is regarded as a slur) women and girls in Macedonia. One problem they face is the expectation that they will be married by age 13. The Macedonian government refuses to educate them, claiming that there is no point because of this expectation. For this reason, very few have a high school education, making them unemployable. Also, most only speak Roma and not Macedonian, which is required for most jobs.

Upcoming Events

- Death Penalty Focus is holding their annual awards dinner in Beverly Hills on April 24.
- AIUSA's Annual General Meeting will be in Washington, DC, April 25-27.
- The Western Regional Conference is scheduled for November 7-9 in Pasadena. This year marks the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

GITMO Cell Tour Coming Soon

Wonder what life on Guantánamo is really like? An exact replica of a Guantánamo Bay prison cell will tour the country beginning in mid-March as a part of AIUSA's Denounce Torture Campaign. The cell is a part of our prioritized campaign to close Guantanamo and to stop the abuse of prisoners there as well as at other U.S. detention facilities. It will be a very powerful way for visitors to conceptualize the plight of Guantánamo detainees since they will be able to step into the cell themselves. The launch will take place in Los Angeles and thereafter the cell will travel to different parts of the country. This is a great opportunity to actually see how inmates in Guantánamo live and at the same time take a stand for their rights.

Anti-Torture Legislation

Continued from page 1

program "that complies with our legal obligations and our basic values as a people". His reference to "the people" calls to mind Henri Alleg's appeal at the end of his torture account: "All this, I have had to say for those Frenchmen who will read me. I want them to know that the Algerians do not confuse their torturers with the great people of France, from whom they have learnt so much and whose friendship is so dear to them. But they must know what is done IN THEIR NAME". In an interview in 2007, Henri Alleg, now 86 years old, said that no-one who had undergone waterboarding could say it was not torture. He added that "all tortures are illegal, and it is unacceptable for a civilized country today."

Perhaps the US administration is today working with the notion that if something is repeated often enough people may come to believe it. Deny enough times that waterboarding and other "enhanced" interrogation techniques are torture, repeatedly call them "lawful", reiterate at every possible opportunity that their use has "saved innocent lives", and perhaps people may be persuaded that their government is on the right side of morality and legality. Perhaps, if the government is successful, those so persuaded may include military judges assigned to oversee military commission trials at Guantánamo. If so, even statements extracted under water torture will be rendered admissible in a system set up as part of a detention regime designed to avoid independent judicial scrutiny of government action.

In his February 14, 2008 interview, President Bush suggested that "history will judge the decisions made during this period of time as necessary decisions". Amnesty International suggests that history will not look favorably on enforced disappearances, torture or unfair trials. Or those who authorized them.

February Meeting Minutes

Group #175 Long Beach

Present

Norma Edwards, Mike Farris, Deidre Gaffney, Kevin Gaffney, Socheata Has, Bobbi Kendig, Ratana Lim, Vibol Muk, Navy Phim, Jim Roberts, Naomi Steinfeld

Cambodian New Year's Parade Petition

We had visitors come to our meeting to tell us about a petition effort they have started. They don't agree with the decision to invite Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister Sok An (second in command in Cambodia) to represent the Cambodian-American community at this year's Cambodian New Year's Parade. We told them that Amnesty cannot officially sign on, but we talked about it. We had a discussion about Cambodia and human rights. Navy pointed out to us that Amnesty recently released a report on forced evictions in Cambodia. (http://www.amnestyusa.org/By_Country/Cambodia/page.do?id=1011128&n1=3&n2=30&n3=878) If you are interested in seeing the petition, go to www.petitiononline.com/newyear/petition.html. They are interested in getting signatories from all over (not just Long Beach).

China Campaign

Kevin is all set to make a presentation on Shi Tao at the March meeting. He told us that he will take on Amnesty's Human Rights in China campaign. The campaign will put the spotlight on China's abuses as the world gears up for the Olympics this summer. (<http://www.amnesty.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=10919>) Kevin also read us the poem "June," by Shi Tao.

Naomi Returns From Sri Lanka

Naomi has been away for more than a year and a half in Sri Lanka volunteering for the VSO organization. She was working in the mental health field in two different parts of the country (two consecutive jobs). She told us about her work and then we also talked a little about the situation in Sri Lanka. In a nutshell, things seem to be going downhill. The ceasefire has ended. The bombing campaign seems to be escalating.

Naomi offered to show her slides at a upcoming meeting. In addition to living in Sri Lanka, Naomi also visited some nearby countries. (<http://www.vsocan.org/display.aspx?pid=915&cid=915>)

Burma/Myanmar

The government announced there will be a referendum on a new constitution in May. If the constitution is passed, there will be parliamentary elections in 2010. Activists met this announcement with derision. www.statesman.com/news/con

tent/news/stories/world/02/10/0210myanmar.html)

Letter Writing

We wrote to the Counselor Minister of Myanmar at the embassy in Washington, DC, on behalf of five people sentenced in Myanmar under the Printers and Publishers Act. The Printers and Publishers Registration Law requires the approval by a censor of anything that is written and distributed in the country, including all books, magazines, other periodicals, song lyrics, and motion picture scripts—in most cases before the material is distributed and sometimes before it is printed.

We also wrote to our senators urging support for section 327 of the Conference Report on the Intelligence Authorization Act (H.R. 2082), which would ensure uniform interrogation standards for anyone in U.S. custody or control anywhere in the world, regardless of which agency is holding them.

We thanked Secretary of State Rice for her work in the Darfur conflict area, including securing critical funding for peacekeepers and humanitarian assistance and applying political pressure to bring us closer to the full deployment of UN-AMID in Darfur and MINURCAT/EUFOR in eastern Chad and the Central African Republic. We urged her to exert diplomatic pressure on European and other donor countries to immediately contribute the helicopters and other air and ground transport equipment needed by the UN to deploy and set an example by funding or securing contributions of this critical equipment. We also asked her to exert diplomatic pressure to strongly encourage mutual allies to press Khartoum to cease obstructing the deployment of UNAMID. This includes President al-Bashir's delays in approving the UN-AU list of troop-contributing countries, as well as land for bases, and freedom of communication and movement (during the day and at night) for all UN forces. Khartoum must also stop all related bureaucratic impediments to the physical deployment of personnel and equipment.

We wrote to Attorney General Michael Mukasey to say we are frustrated and outraged that serious allegations of rape, torture, and indiscriminate killing by government contractors in the "War on Terror" and Iraqi reconstruction continue to surface, but yet seem to be largely ignored by the Department of Justice (DOJ).

We wrote to Senior General Than Shwe of Myanmar about prisoners of conscience (with copies to minister-counselor).

We sent letters to the Social Minister, President, and Prime Minister of Macedonia about Romani women and girls suffering double discrimination, as Roma and as women, in access to key economic and social rights that the Macedonian government has an obligation to respect.

All told, we sent a total of 60 letters this month.

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

March

19 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 Tuesday 7:00 PM

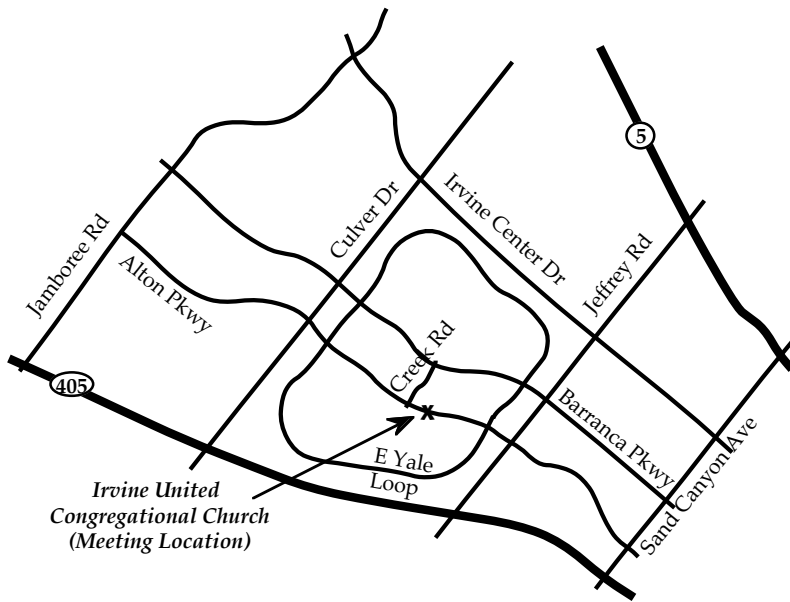
Group #141 Orange Monthly Meeting at the Sisters of St. Joseph, 480 S. Batavia Street, in Orange. Look for the classroom/auditorium building behind the main building. Drive around on the south side of main building and park in the back. Look for the signs for the classroom number. For further information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

27 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.

31 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.



Group #178 Irvine Meeting Location



Group #596 Huntington Beach Location

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