



# Amnesty International

Orange County

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

May 2008

<http://www.aiusaoc.org>

## Legislation to Address Violence Against Women & Girls Worldwide Introduced in House of Representatives

*This article is from a May 1, 2008 AIUSA press release.*

Violence prevention, women's and human rights leaders today hailed the introduction late yesterday in the House of Representatives of groundbreaking legislation to address the global crisis of violence against women and girls. The International Violence Against Women Act (I-VAWA – HR 5927) is being sponsored in the House by Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Howard Berman (D-CA). It would apply the force of U.S. diplomacy and foreign aid over five years toward preventing abuse and exploitation, which is estimated to affect one in three women worldwide.

I-VAWA authorizes more than \$200 million annually in foreign assistance for international programs that prevent violence, support health programs and survivor services, encourage legal accountability and change public attitudes, promote access to economic opportunity and education, and better address violence against women in humanitarian situations. It would deal with preventing violence in all of its forms, including honor killings, bride burnings, acid burnings, dowry deaths, genital mutilation, mass rapes in war, or domestic violence. I-VAWA (S. 2279) was introduced in the Senate last October by the bipartisan leadership team of Joseph Biden (D-DE) and Richard Lugar (R-IN).

"Violence against women is an egregious human rights violation which affects all aspects of women's lives, from their personal health and safety to their ability to earn a living and care for their families," said Ritu Sharma Fox, co-founder and president of Women Thrive Worldwide, formerly the Women's Edge Coalition. "This historic bill will enable our country to help lift one of the major barriers to women's empowerment worldwide."

"Now that the International Violence Against Women Act has been introduced in both chambers, we will make its enactment a major priority," said Esta Soler, president of the Family Violence Prevention Fund. "Day after day, we are horrified by reports of brutal violence being committed against women and children worldwide. This legislation can help our country make a difference and take a stronger stand. We won't rest until it becomes law."

The legislation was introduced in the House the day after Amnesty International USA brought more than 200 activists to Capitol Hill to talk to lawmakers about violence against women. "The International Violence Against Women Act takes a coordinated, comprehensive approach to preventing human rights violations against women worldwide," said Larry Cox,

executive director of AIUSA. "On Monday, Amnesty International activists from Florida to Oregon met with more than 100 congressional offices to ask for support for the International Violence Against Women Act. We will work vigorously to see this historic bill become U.S. law. We are grateful to Congressmen Berman for his leadership to stop the escalating violence against women and girls worldwide."

In 2005, Amnesty International USA, the Family Violence Prevention Fund and Women Thrive Worldwide convened meetings to develop the legislation, recognizing that violence is a worldwide problem that needs to be addressed in a comprehensive way, and that stand-alone programs are not enough. More than 150 U.S.-based experts including 40 women's groups overseas gave advice on the bill. More than 60 human rights, women's, humanitarian, development and faith-based organizations support it.

The new legislation would develop strategies in countries around the world for U.S. programs to address violence against women and girls. It creates the first high level U.S. State Department office working explicitly on violence against women, increasing diplomatic attention to violence against women and girls. The coordinator would seek to integrate best practices in violence prevention across the government's diplomatic and foreign assistance work, while adding financial support for local health programs and reform efforts.

For example, the legislation calls for funding to support locally led efforts to reform practices and change social attitudes that condone violence against women and girls, better address this violence in humanitarian assistance programs, and train lawyers and police on how to better deal with domestic violence cases. It also supports local efforts by bolstering the work of women's organizations overseas that are already working to end violence against women in their countries.

I-VAWA would also decrease potential sexual exploitation and abuse by U.S. humanitarian workers, military personnel, military contractors and police involved in peacekeeping operations by creating training programs to prevent such abuse and a complaints mechanism for reporting problems.

The United Nations Development Fund for Women estimates that at least one of every three women globally will be beaten, raped, or otherwise abused during her lifetime.

For more information about the I-VAWA, please visit [www.endabuse.org](http://www.endabuse.org) or [www.womenthriveworldwide.org](http://www.womenthriveworldwide.org).

## April Meeting Minutes Group #141 Orange

### Letter-Writing

The group sent out 25 letters this month, all dealing with the human rights situation in China as part of the Olympics Campaign. These included letters to the Chinese Minister of Justice on behalf of human rights defender and prisoner of conscience Hu Jia, who has been sentenced to three-and-a-half years' imprisonment for "inciting subversion of state power."

We also wrote to the Chinese Prime Minister on behalf of Shi Tao, another prisoner of conscience, and, related to his case, to Representative Dana Rohrabacher asking him to support the Global Online Freedom Act of 2007. This proposed legislation would help American companies resist pressure from authoritarian governments to compromise their principles.

We also wrote to President Bush urging him to promote human rights in China before the Olympics. Finally, we wrote the Chinese President urging him to release fifteen monks and other imprisoned for participating in peaceful demonstrations in Tibet.

### Websites

Members of Amnesty International California Local Group 148 have traveled to the Chad-Sudan border to take direct action in the refugee camps. They have created an amazing online interactive website, [www.stopgenocidenow.com](http://www.stopgenocidenow.com), where you can see and interact with the survivors as they tell their personal stories. The website includes some video of their visit, showing fighting in the distance from the roof of their hotel.

Amnesty has another new website [www.tearitdown.org](http://www.tearitdown.org) asking visitors to sign up to tear down Guantanamo. After each visitor signs up, one pixel is removed from a picture of prisoners being held at Guantanamo.

### Olympic Actions

Kevin reported that we've finally been added to AIUSA's Olympic Action email list. The four main goals are to stop executions, ensure fair trials, defend human rights activists, and freedom from censorship. Kevin pointed out that many of the protests associated with the Olympic torch were not supported by Amnesty. We are trying to target officials in China to promote change and to remain positive. Amnesty is also trying to make sure that people know we are targeting government policies, not the Chinese people. There's a long list of people on whose behalf the Campaign will be working.

Kevin proposed an event tied to the Olympics Campaign at El Dorado Park in Long Beach, perhaps a "Human Rights Olympics," with events having human rights themes. We could combine this with our (more or less) annual summer picnic into this event. Kevin said he will contact Norma Edwards to look into holding this there.

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## April Meeting Minutes Group #175 Long Beach

### Present

Diana Budd, Mary Kay Dunn, Norma Edwards, Deidre

Gaffney, Kevin Gaffney, Glen Nielsen, Jim Roberts, Naomi Steinfeld, Nita Tunac, Steve Wicke

### Success Story

Sami al Hajj, a Sudanese cameraman for the television station al-Jazeera, was released from Guantanamo. He was held by the U.S. government without charge for more than six years. Sami al Hajj has said that while in U.S. custody he was subjected to a range of torture and ill-treatment, including beatings and denial of prescribed medication for cancer. Our group joined Amnesty International volunteers worldwide who wrote letters to U.S. authorities on behalf of Sami al Hajj. We received a response from Rear Admiral Mark Buzby that everyone is treated "safely and humanely" at Guantanamo. In addition, we were told that a "proposal to begin a program for family telephone contact has been submitted to Department of Defense officials."

### Death Penalty

Mary Kay told us about the news that the Supreme Court is considering whether child rapists can be executed. A decision is expected this summer. (<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=89660806>)

### Amnesty Elections

Most of our meeting was taken up discussing Amnesty resolutions that Linda would vote on for us at the Annual General Meeting. There was lots of discussion, some explanations for our first-time visitors, Diana and Nita, and general consensus on the resolutions. Nita is a graduate student who was visiting to learn more about an NGO. She was able to give us more information about the Dream Act, which was part of one of the resolutions. She was excited to find out that another group was talking about this issue. ([www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/10/24/AR2007102402478.html?tid=informbox](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/10/24/AR2007102402478.html?tid=informbox))

### Letters

We sent letters to President Bush, to China, to Vietnam, to our senators, and about native women in Alaska. We sent a total of 32 letters.

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## Freedom for Moroccan Jailed Over Facebook Profile

A Moroccan who was jailed for creating a Facebook profile of a prince has been released from prison. Fouad Mourtada, a 26-year-old IT engineer, was freed on March 20, 2008, after being pardoned by the king.

Fouad Mourtada had been given a three-year prison term and fined 10,000 dirhams (US\$1,320) in February for creating a profile of Morocco's Prince Moulay Rachid on Facebook. He was convicted after a trial in Casablanca.

Two Amnesty International delegates observed the trial. They said they were concerned that the trial failed to satisfy international fair trial standards.

Benedicte Goderiaux, one of the organisation's observers, welcomed the release, but said "Allegations that Fouad Mourtada was ill-treated by police during interrogation still need to be investigated."

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## Amnesty International Launches National Tour of Guantanamo Cell Replica

On May 8, Amnesty International USA launched its national tour of a life-size Guantanamo prison cell replica in Miami to increase public awareness and mount pressure on the Bush administration to close down the U.S.-controlled detention facility in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

AIUSA members and other activists gathered at the Tina Hills Pavilion in Miami's Bayfront Park to experience the cell and show their support for the immediate closure of this prison facility. Many participants, dressed in Guantanamo-style orange boiler-suits, held signs urging the U.S. government to stop the torture, end indefinite detentions without charge or trial and shut down Guantanamo.

"Standing inside the constricting Guantanamo cell replica, I could not believe that the U.S. government considers this—solitary confinement, stress positions, lack of habeas corpus and indefinite detention—appropriate justice," said Larry Cox, AIUSA executive director, who spoke at the event. "At a time when Americans are clamoring for an end to terror, the Bush administration looks for ways to expand its powers through dubious legal lingo and continue its unlawful assault on the rule of law. When Americans want justice for specific crimes, we get arbitrary human sacrifice."

The cell is an exact replica which includes a steel toilet, florescent lights, frosted windows and a sliding metal door. In addition, visitors may record a 30-second reaction video that will be posted on youtube.com and tearitdown.org as well as sign the global petition to shut Guantanamo down. Americans across the nation will have an opportunity to obtain a tangible glimpse into the life of a Guantánamo detainee and have their voice heard in denouncing the Bush administration's unlawful policies carried out in the name of national security.

Five former U.S. Secretaries of State who served both Republican and Democratic presidents—Madeline Albright, James Baker, Warren Christopher, Henry Kissinger and Colin Powell—concurred at a recent University of Georgia roundtable discussion that closing the detention facility is important to bolstering the United States' image abroad. Even the former chief prosecutor at Guantanamo Bay Colonel Morris Davis denounced the use of torture-tainted evidence in detainee trials. President Bush said he'd "like Guantanamo to end."

"Guantanamo Bay continues to be the shameful global icon of this administration's outright disregard for basic human dignity and the rule of law," said Cox. "By assaulting core American values including the right to challenge one's incarceration and allowing techniques long associated with dic-

tators and despots, President Bush has squandered the United States' moral leadership around the world. It's time to remove the ugly blot on the America we believe in and shut down Guantanamo."

## See AI's Waterboarding Video

Amnesty International's hard-hitting new waterboarding video is sweeping the Internet. You can see it at Amnesty's new website [www.unsubscribe-me.org](http://www.unsubscribe-me.org), aimed at combating combat human rights abuses in the "war on terror."

## AGM Speaker Tells of Ordeal at Hands of U.S. Government

Speaking via satellite hookup from his flat 3,000 miles away in Birmingham, England, Moazzam Begg could not gauge the reaction of his audience. But the attendees jammed into the auditorium at Amnesty International USA's Annual General Meeting (AGM) hung on every word as he described his ordeal as an illegal prisoner of the United States government. Abducted at gunpoint by Pakistani police and CIA officers in January 2002 and held, mostly in solitary confinement, in a series of clandestine detention sites from Kandahar to Bagram and finally at Guantánamo Bay, Begg endured 300 interrogations before being released without charge or apology January 25, 2005. The British national told the audience that after years in secret detention he actually "welcomed" the shift to Guantánamo. "Something that is secret often is much more sinister than something open," he explained.

More than 800 activists attended the AGM, AIUSA's largest membership gathering, in Washington DC April 25–28, participating in workshops, panels, discussing AIUSA initiatives and formulating policy for the section through the resolutions process. Taking advantage of the AGM's location this year in the nation's capital, some 250 activists extended their stay to participate in AIUSA's 2008 "Lobby Day." They visited more than 100 Congressional offices on behalf of the International Violence Against Women Act. Also at the AGM, AIUSA honored Betty Makoni, founder of the Zimbabwe Girl Child Network, as this year's recipient of the Ginetta Sagan Award for her work helping young Zimbabwean women gain access to education and opportunities.

Herbert Fithian, 84 and a World War II veteran and his wife Kathryn, 83, were attending their third AGM. He has been a member of AIUSA's Urgent Action Network since its inception. "It's amazing that there are so many young people here. It's thrilling," said Kathryn. Johannah Bogart, 18, an Ohio State freshman was attending her first. "I sort of expected it to be all students so it's cool to see every age group represented. It's been exciting."

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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Irvine, CA 92623-1718

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 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

21 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.

26 Monday 7:00 PM

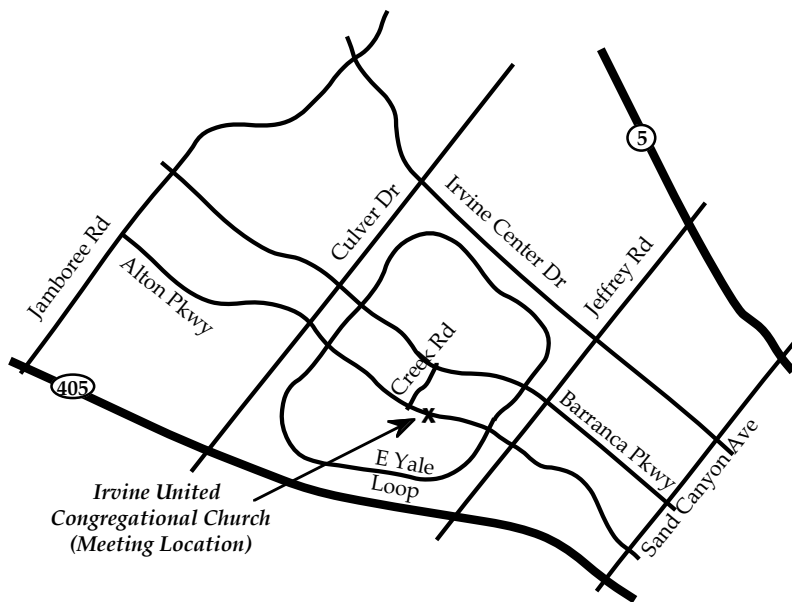
**Group #596 Huntington Beach Meeting** at Saints Simon and Jude Church, Adult Center, 20444 Magnolia Street in Huntington Beach. For more information, email Anne Saxe at [annegalan56@hotmail.com](mailto:annegalan56@hotmail.com).

27 Tuesday 7:00 PM

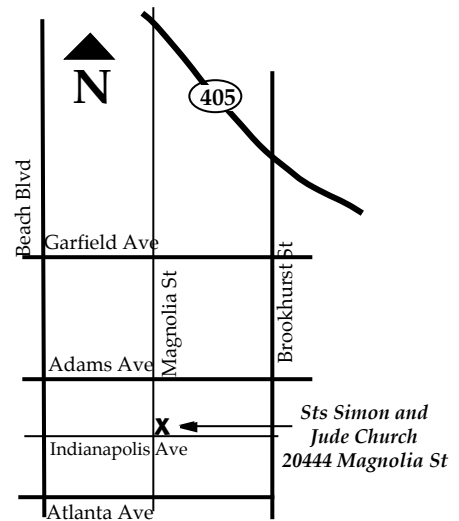
**Group #141 Orange Monthly Meeting** at the Sisters of St. Joseph, 480 S. Batavia Street, in Orange. Look for the classroom/auditorium building behind the main building. Drive around on the south side of main building and park in the back. Look for the signs for the classroom number. For further information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

29 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](mailto:jacques.kilchoer@aiusaoc.org).



Group #178 Irvine Meeting Location



Group #596 Huntington Beach Location

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P.O. Box 17186  
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