



# Amnesty International

## Orange County

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

January 2009

<http://www.aiusaoc.org>

## Time for a Global Response to Global Problems

*This is Amnesty International Secretary General Irene Khan's message on the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, released December 10, 2008.*

Terrorists go on a rampage of senseless killing in Mumbai. Exhausted and terrified refugees pour into Uganda to escape the fighting in eastern Congo. Ten people are executed in Iran. Three hundred thousand civilians are displaced in northern Sri Lanka.

Slowing rates of economic growth cast deep gloom around the world. Not a particularly auspicious moment to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Anniversaries are a time for reflection and review. It is true that in many respects the human rights situation today is vastly improved from that in 1948. The equality of women, the rights of children, a free press and a fair judicial system are no longer disputed concepts but widely accepted standards that many countries have achieved and others are aspiring to. But it is equally true that injustice, impunity and inequality remain the hallmarks of our time.

If there is one lesson to be drawn from recent events in Mumbai, it is that our liberties remain precious, under threat, and in need of constant vigilance and protection. Governments have a duty to protect people from terrorism, and they will be under pressure—as happened after 9/11—to tighten security.

But in that process they must not repeat the mistakes of the US-led War on Terror. Detaining people indefinitely, holding them in legal limbo in prisons like Guantanamo camp, condoning or conducting torture, weakening due process and the rule of law are not the way forward.

Free societies are attacked by terrorists precisely because they are free. To erode our freedoms in the name of security is to hand victory to the terrorists.

It is not enough, though, simply to hold on to our rights. We must expand the benefits of human rights to all who are deprived, discriminated and excluded. The global financial crisis has shown how wrong was the assumption that unrestrained growth would inevitably lead to prosperity, and that the rising tide would lift all boats.

The tide has become a tsunami swallowing not only big financial institutions but also the homes and hopes of many poor people around the world. Millions of people are being pushed back into poverty even as billions of dollars are being invested in bailing out those very institutions that have brought us to this state.

Wealthier nations have resources and established safety nets to help those who fall behind in their country. The poor in poor and emerging economies have to fend for themselves.

Those with the least margin of survival will pay the most for the greed of the bankers in Wall Street and the City of London.

Women working in a garment factory in Ho Chi Minh City in Viet Nam, miners hauling minerals from Mano River in West Africa, workers at an industrial estate in the Pearl River Delta in China, telephone operators at an outsourced office in Gurgaon, India will bear the heaviest brunt of the economic decline. If falling remittances and international aid force governments to cut back on social programmes and poverty eradication projects, the consequences could be disastrous.

In economic terms, growth is being wiped out. In human rights terms, the rights to food, education, housing, decent work and health are under attack. We face a dual challenge: fulfilling human rights in order to eradicate poverty and preserving human rights in the face of terrorism.

Human rights are universal—every person is born free and equal in rights and dignity. Human rights are indivisible – all rights, whether economic, social, civil, political or cultural—are equally important. There is no hierarchy of rights. Free speech is as essential as the right to education, the right to health as valuable as the right to a fair trial.

The tectonic plates of global power are shifting, and there is now realization among world leaders that they must work together if they are to deal with the economic maelstrom. The invitation recently extended by the US Administration to 20 leading economies of the world—including China, Saudi Arabia, India and Brazil—to plan a global response to the economic crisis is a concrete sign of the new drive to be inclusive.

Being inclusive does not only mean fitting more chairs around the existing table. It also means signing up to global values. The Universal Declaration provides those set of values.

In 1948, in the face of the enormous challenges, world leaders turned to the Universal Declaration as the affirmation of their common humanity and the blue print for their collective security. Today's world leaders must do the same.

### A New Website!

The website for the Orange County and Long Beach AI groups, located at <http://www.aiusaoc.org>, has been completely redesigned and updated, with new information and features being added daily. Visit the site for the latest news about the local groups and upcoming events in the area. Many thanks to Jacques Kichoer for the tremendous amount of work in getting the site up and running!

## November Meeting Minutes

### Group #141 Orange

#### Letter-Writing

In addition to working on AIUSA's Holiday Card Action, the group sent over 30 letters, mostly dealing with Darfur. These included letters to officials in Iran concerning several prisoners of conscience, including Ma'soumeh Ka'bi and her five children, ages 4 to 14, being held solely to force Habib Nabgan to give himself up to Iranian authorities.

We also wrote to the president of the United Nations Security Council, Neven Jurica, asking him to deploy peacekeepers to protect the people of Darfur, and to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice thanking her for supporting the International Criminal Court's work on Darfur.

Finally, we wrote to Georgia Governor George Perdue asking him to commute the death sentence of Troy Davis, who many believe is innocent of the crime for which he has been sentenced to death.

#### Group Membership

The group also discussed several issues related to group membership of the Orange County and Long Beach groups. Kevin proposed calling a meeting of the group coordinators in January to open up the discussion.

## End of the Year Recap

### Group #175 Long Beach

#### November Meeting Minutes

In November we started on our holiday actions and started planning an event for December 10, Human Rights Day. The highlight of our meeting was a visit from Sundie Zin, a student at Cal State Long Beach. She gathered money from friends and family to make a visit to her homeland, Myanmar, in July. Specifically, her intent was to visit the Delta to help Cyclone Nargis victims in any way she could.

Sundie kept a very low-profile and had to resort to some deception to make her way to hard-hit areas. It was two months after the disaster and the main road to the area was fixed, but that was about it. Shelters and food were being sold to victims; medicines, water purification tablets, food, and basic shelter were desperately needed. Sundie mentioned the Orange County-based organization Giving Children Hope as being on the ground distributing supplies. Sundie used her money to purchase six shelters for people without homes. She also talked about the need in Myanmar and other parts of the world for basic shelters that can be set up, especially after disasters.

Sundie's story was an inspiration and an example of what a difference one person can make in the world. Thank you to Jim for inviting her to the meeting after both Jim and Naomi went to an art show of beautiful photographs of Myanmar that helped finance the trip.

#### Human Rights Day: December 10 Write-a-thon

Long Beach participated in Amnesty's global write-a-thon by holding an event from 11 AM to 8 PM at the Zephyr Café in Long Beach. Angelique, Mary Kay, Jim, Naomi, Kevin, and

Deidre were all on hand to help out and write letters. Jacques Kilchoer from the Irvine group joined us as well. We exceeded our goal of 150 letters by 6! We didn't meet our goal of signing up new members to the national organization at the event, but maybe someone went home with a brochure and joined. We definitely touched base with some longtime members in the café who were happy to see us and take some action.

Thank you to everyone for your participation and support. Special thanks go to Brock Dockstader, owner of the (vegetarian) Zephyr Café. Not only did he offer his café to us as a place for the event, but he kept the restaurant open four hours past its closing time just for us. If you're in the area and in the mood for good food, show your support!

([http://www.presstelegram.com/dining/ci\\_4320282](http://www.presstelegram.com/dining/ci_4320282))

## China Blocks Amnesty Website

*This article is taken from a January 13, 2009 AIUSA press release.*

Chinese authorities have once again blocked Amnesty International's main website inside mainland China.

In a recent effort to clean up "vulgar" internet content, the Chinese authorities have targeted many sites including MSN, Baidu and Google. Since January 8, 91 websites have been closed, according to state media reports. Other sites recently blocked include the blog portal, Bullog.

"We fear the re-blocking of Amnesty International's website indicates a widening crackdown, particularly as 2009 will see a number of important commemorations," said Roseann Rife, Deputy Director of Amnesty International's Asia Pacific Programme.

This year will see many notable anniversaries in China, including the 50th anniversary of the 1959 uprising in Tibet, the 30th anniversary of the "Democracy Wall" movement, and the 20th anniversary of the crackdown on the 1989 pro-democracy Tiananmen protests. All of these could inspire protests and trigger government crackdowns.

Amnesty International's website was unblocked in China shortly before the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Other sites unblocked then included some human rights organizations and media outlets, including the BBC Chinese website. At the time, Amnesty International welcomed the move and expressed hope that this signalled a more open attitude toward human rights.

China will soon release its first ever Human Rights Action Plan, which, according to the State Council Information Office, would cover areas such as governance, democracy, rule of law, the rights of women, children and ethnic minorities, and include provisions for human rights education.

Despite this, authorities have targeted websites and blogs that reprint and collect signatures for Charter 08, a petition signed by many well-known academics and human rights activists that proposes a blueprint for fundamental legal and political reform in China.

Amnesty International had recently called for the immediate release of Liu Xiaobo, a signatory of Charter 08, currently under "residential surveillance" in China.

Amnesty International has called upon the Chinese authorities to immediately re-establish access to the organization's website.

## November/December Meeting Minutes Group #178 Irvine

### November/December Meeting

Our group traditionally does not meet in December. Since our meeting days have changed from Tuesday to Thursday, we will not meet on the last Thursday in November which often coincides with the Thanksgiving holiday. The group decided that our meeting days will now be the last Thursday of every month, except in November and December when we will have one combined meeting for those two months on the first Thursday in December.

We welcomed two new members to our meeting, who had been recruited by our faithful group member Dean, and were also joined by Anne from the Huntington Beach group. Welcome to all our new visitors!

Jacques reported on his visit to the Western Regional Conference and urged our group members to sign up at least one new person as national members as part of AIUSA's campaign to increase membership. The group voted to support financially the ongoing effort to redesign the aiusaoc website.

### Letter-Writing

We wrote holiday cards for Amnesty International's Holiday Card Action, which included the following cases.

- Algeria: Louisa Saker, who has not seen her husband Salah Saker since 1994 (the date of his arrest without a warrant);
- Russia: Ruslan Bessonov, Maksim Genashilkin and Dmitri Pavlov, who may have been tortured and ill-treated to force a confession of murder;
- China: Hu Jia and Zeng Jinyan, who have been repeatedly harassed and detained by authorities on account of their human rights activism;
- Eritrea: Patriarch Antonios, the 80-year-old leader of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, under house arrest since January 2006 for protesting the imprisonment of three Orthodox priests;
- Guatemala: Fredy Peccerelli who has been threatened, followed, watched, and shot at because of his work as the head of the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation;
- Indonesia: Filep Karma and Yusak Pakage, arrested for raising a Papuan independence flag during a demonstration in 2004;
- Mexico: The Women of Atenco, arrested during protests by members of a local farmers organization in the town of San Salvador Atenco in May 2006;

- Rwanda: François-Xavier Byuma, President of Turengere Abana, an organization that investigates violations of children's rights, sentenced to 19 years' imprisonment following an unfair trial;
- Sri Lanka: Vettivel and Valarmathi Jasikaran, arbitrarily detained since March 2008, accused of "aiding and abetting" a journalist who published articles critical of the government;
- Turkmenistan: Sapardurdy Khadzhiev and Annakurban Amanklychev, members of a local human rights organization, prisoners of conscience since 2006;
- USA: Mohammed Mohammed Hassan Odaini, still detained in Guantánamo despite being cleared for release over two years ago;
- Zimbabwe: Women of Zimbabwe Arise, whose members have been repeatedly arrested for organizing peaceful demonstrations protesting the human rights situation in the country.

### Action File

We discussed the long-standing Group 178 Action File, Dr. Sa'adey, "disappeared" in Syria since 1979 (see our website for details of his case). Our new member Kolua said she would be interested in looking into his case in more detail and Jacques will send her a copy of the case file. This case has not seen any recent activity, so we also voted to ask for another action file from the national organization.

### January Meeting

At our meeting on Thursday 29 January 2009, our group, in conjunction with Living Ubuntu / Orange County for Darfur, will be hosting local photographer Kent Treptow, who recently visited Mongolia and photographed Mongolian street children who take cover down under manholes to survive the extreme cold. Come join us as Kent tells us the stories of these children, both haunting and inspiring at the same time. You can see his photographs at [http://www.dailypilot.com/special\\_reports/mongolia](http://www.dailypilot.com/special_reports/mongolia). Check our website for more details: <http://www.aiusaoc.org/irvine>

## 2009 Annual General Meeting

The 2009 Amnesty International USA Annual General Meeting will be held in Boston, Massachusetts, at the Boston Park Plaza Hotel and Towers, March 27-29, 2009. The theme of the conference is "Seizing the Moment, Building the Movement." Register by February 6 to receive the Early Bird discount registration rates. For registration forms and for more information, visit the website <http://www.aiusa.org>.

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 \_\_\_\_\_

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City, State & Zip \_\_\_\_\_

**Return to:**  
Amnesty International  
Group 178  
P.O. Box 17186  
Irvine, CA 92623-1718

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Please make your check payable to Amnesty International. Contributions to AI are tax-deductible. Thank you for your interest and support!

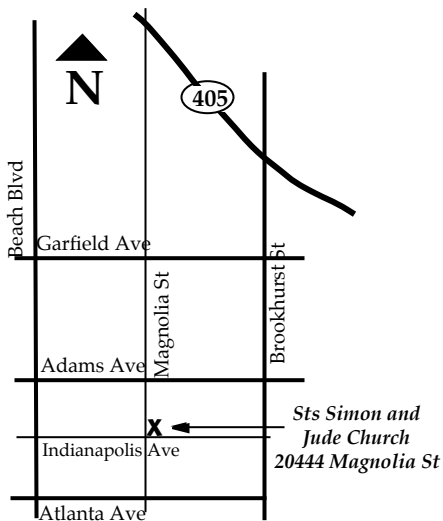
# Calendar January

**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.

**27** Tuesday 7:00 PM

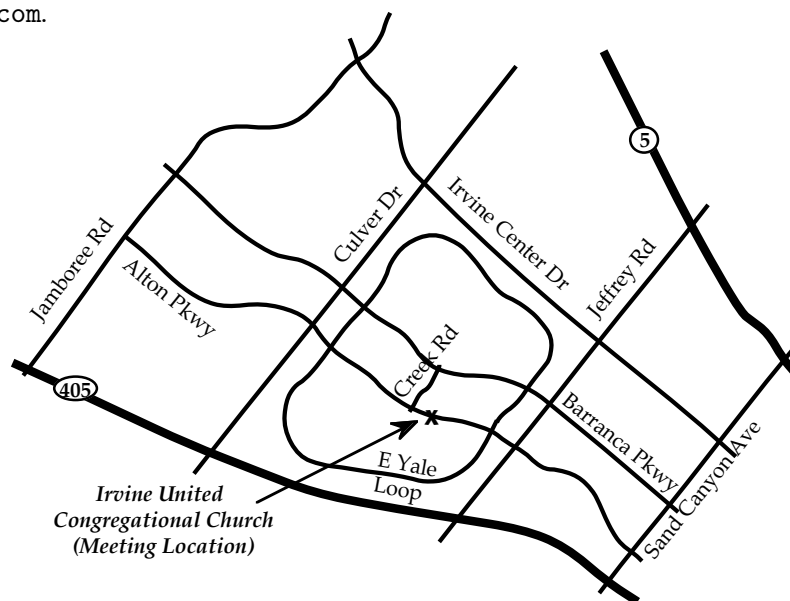
**Group #141 Orange Monthly Meeting** at the Sisters of St. Joseph Center, 480 S. Batavia Street, in Orange. The meeting room is in the Special Events Center located behind (west of) the main building (the Motherhouse). After entering the complex from Batavia Street, drive around the the south side of the Motherhouse and park in the lot in the back. Look for the signs directing you to the meeting room. For further information about the group, contact Kevin Gaffney at [xhuskr@aol.com](mailto:xhuskr@aol.com).



**Group #596 Huntington Beach Location**

**29** Thursday 7:30 PM

**Group #178 Irvine Monthly Meeting** at the Irvine United Congregational Church, 4915 Alton Parkway, Irvine. The group is hosting a special presentation by photographer Kent Treptow, who will be discussing the plight of street children in Mongolia. For more details, see our website <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**

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