



Amnesty International

Orange County

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

March 2009

<http://www.aiusaoc.org>

Unrest in Tibet Continues as Human Rights Violations Escalate

This article is taken from a March 10, 2009 AI press release.

March 11 marked the 50th anniversary of the failed Tibetan uprising in 1959, which led the Tibetan leader, the Dalai Lama, to flee to India.

Last year's anniversary saw a wave of largely peaceful protests in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and Tibetan-populated areas in neighboring provinces. These protests led to arbitrary arrests and other human rights violations including prolonged detention and imprisonment, torture and other ill-treatment.

The Chinese authorities' failure to address the long-standing grievances of the Tibetan people, including unequal employment and educational opportunities, scores of Tibetans detained and the intensification of the "patriotic education" campaign has fueled protests that have continued over the past 12 months.

Overseas Tibetan organizations have documented between 130–200 individual protests since March 2008.

Monks and nuns, laypeople and nomads have been taking part in popular protests across Tibetan-populated areas. Reports of Tibetan protests are matched by those of tightened security measures and calls to "crush" any demonstrations of support for the Dalai Lama, especially over the recent weeks. Despite this, popular Tibetan protests have continued across the region.

The "Winter Strike Hard Unified Checking Campaign" was launched in Lhasa on January 18. The campaign aimed to "vigorously uphold the city's social order and stability", targeting in particular those who are not permanent Lhasa residents.

According to the Lhasa Evening News, in the first three days of the campaign, the police had "thoroughly checked" nearly 6,000 people in residential blocks, rented accommodations, hotels, guesthouses, internet cafes and bars. The police had detained 81 suspects by January 24, including two for having "reactionary songs and opinions" on their mobile phones.

The People's Armed Police are reported to have shot a 24-year-old Tibetan monk who set himself on fire on February 27. The monk was holding a homemade Tibetan flag with a picture of the Dalai Lama on it. The incident took place after the local authorities dispersed a group of hundreds of monks who had gathered to observe a prayer ceremony.

The continued lock-down in Tibet has made independent verification of reports difficult and raised fears that reports of human rights violations that reach the outside world represent just a fraction of the whole.

Amnesty International has called on the Chinese authorities to allow access to UN human rights experts and other independent observers to investigate the human rights situation in the TAR and in Tibetan populated areas in neighboring provinces.

The Chinese authorities have turned down as "inconvenient" requests for visits to the TAR by several UN human rights experts. In March, they launched a white paper on "50 years of democratic reform in Tibet" in which they accuse "Western anti-China forces" of training "the Dalai Lama clique" and supporting "separatist forces" that try to restrain and split China.

These signal a worrying trend by the authorities to turn inwards and frame the protests as isolated criminal incidents and a failure to acknowledge the scale and strength of grievances held by the Tibetan people across the region.

According to the United States' Congressional-Executive Commission on China, more than 1,000 people detained for protests of March 2008 remain unaccounted for. Testimonies of those released, tell a story of desperate prison conditions, including beatings, refusal of medical treatment, and inadequate food and drink.

Official reports state that 76 people have been sentenced in connection with the unrest in spring 2008. Those convicted have received sentences ranging from three years fixed term imprisonment to life imprisonment. Most of them have been sentenced for crimes described as "arson, looting, picking quarrels and provoking troubles, assembling a crowd to storm state organs, disrupting public service, and theft."

Amnesty International has documented a pattern of unfair trials, including a failure on the part of the Chinese authorities to distinguish between individuals engaged in peaceful protests and those perpetrating criminal acts. Amnesty International has called on the Chinese authorities to account for all those who have been killed, injured or gone missing, and for all those detained in Tibet, including their names, whereabouts, and any charges against them.

The organization has also called for a prompt and impartial investigation into the allegations of torture and other ill-treatment of Tibetan detainees, with a view to bringing those responsible to justice; a prompt and impartial investigation into the deaths of individuals detained in official custody over the last year and the immediate and unconditional release of all those detained solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly.

February Meeting Minutes

Group #175 Long Beach

Present

Lizette Ashcraft, Mary Kay Dunn, Norma Edwards, Deidre Gaffney, Kevin Gaffney, Jordan Glassman, Trevor Owens, Elizabeth Petras, Jim Roberts, Angelique Saavedra, Naomi Steinfield,

Coalition for Alternatives to the Death Penalty

Naomi and Mary Kay were able to attend another meeting of this newly formed group. A mission statement was drafted, and the group worked on an operational plan. In the future, committees will meet separately to get some work done. Rather than focusing exclusively on abolition of the death penalty, strategies include getting a moratorium, especially in the counties sending the most death penalty cases to the state (including Los Angeles and Orange County). There is good news though: death penalty reform or abolition bills are currently making their way through the legislatures in New Mexico, Montana, Maryland, and Missouri. Nebraska recently outlawed the electric chair and almost abolished executions altogether. The effort lost by only one vote. (Post-meeting update: On March 4, the Maryland Senate reached a compromise on a death penalty repeal bill by amending the bill so as to restrict capital prosecutions. The proposed revision to the state's death penalty statute would preclude murder cases where the only evidence is eyewitness testimony and, in turn, require DNA evidence, videotaped evidence, or a voluntary videotaped confession.)

Speaker: Free the Slaves

We were happy to welcome Sue Murat from Free the Slaves. She began by telling us a bit about her background. She began to see how the international community responds to crisis when she formed her own organization that delivered books to Croatia. She was distressed by the U.N. being hamstrung to help when obviously needed. Later, she met one of the founders of Free the Slaves, Dr. Kevin Bales, and was so inspired by his message and plan to end slavery, that she jumped in to volunteer her time to the organization. She has gone on missions to see how they work and told us about their different strategies. Sadly, as stated on the organization's Web site (freetheslaves.net), "There are more people in slavery today than at any time in human history—27 million. This growth in the number of slaves is driven by the population explosion, widespread impoverishment of people and their resulting vulnerability, and government corruption so that people are not protected from the violence of enslavement." There are many ways to help out. Take a look at FTS's Web site for ideas, make sure to work on ending slavery through Amnesty work as well. When buying gifts, consider supporting former slaves by purchasing their wares either through the FTS Web site or directly from Made by Survivors.

Burma/Myanmar

Jim told us that U.N. Envoy Gambari recently visited Myanmar, but to no avail. Aung Sun Suu Kyi was let out of house arrest to meet with him and reportedly looked well. Also in the news, Secretary of State Hilary Clinton said that the U.S. will take a new look at Myanmar, seemingly admitting that our strategies so far have not seemed to have influenced any

change. Elections are scheduled for next year under the new constitution. It is widely believed that the elections will guarantee an indefinite military government. There are currently an estimated 2,140 prisoners of conscience, an all-time high. It is planned that Amnesty will have 15 POCs for groups to adopt, with the first two to go up on the Individuals at Risk Web site in March.

Group News

Kevin reported that \$85 came in to the treasury, but \$190 went out. One cost-saving method we've come up with is to put our letters in separate envelopes but then put them in a larger manila envelope together to send them overseas (90 cents a letter is killing us!).

Upcoming Events

In Darfur

Orange County for Darfur and Moving Target Theatre are presenting *In Darfur*, a play by Winder Miller at various times this year and at various locations in Southern California. The play is a provocative account of three intertwined lives at a camp for internally displaced persons in Darfur, Sudan: an aid worker's mission to save and protect lives, a journalist's pursuit to deliver a page one story, and a Darfuri woman's quest for safety.

The next performances are scheduled for Sunday, March 15, 6:30 PM, at St. Anselm's of Canterbury Episcopal Church, 13091 Galway Street, Garden Grove, and Saturday, March 21, 7:00 PM, at Christ Our Redeemer Church, 46 Maxwell Street, Irvine. All performances are free. For more information, see www.livingubuntu.org/events/2009/in-darfur/.

4Darfur Awareness Concert

The Troy High School Amnesty International Group, in conjunction with groups from Valencia, Dana Hills, and Los Alamitos High Schools, and the Amnesty International local groups in Orange County, are presenting a concert to benefit Darfur on Saturday, March 14, 3:00–7:00 PM, at the Orange Coast Unitarian Universalist Church, 1259 Victoria Street, Costa Mesa. Tickets are \$8.50, purchased online at <http://troyai.blogspot.com/> or \$10 at the door. See the website http://aiusaoc.org/common/darfur_concert.html for more information, including a map and directions.

Great American Write-In

The 24th annual Great American Write-In is scheduled for Saturday, April 4, 9:30 AM–1:00 PM, at Lakeview Senior Center in Woodbridge Community Park, 20 Lake Road, between Barranca and Alton Parkways, Irvine.

At this free annual event, sponsored by Women For: Orange County, representatives from more than 40 different organizations and advocacy groups, including Amnesty International, will set up tables with information regarding some of today's most vital issues, including education, health care, human and civil rights and the environment. Attendees are invited to visit the various booths and then voice their opinions by writing letters to government and corporate decision-makers, in the hopes of bringing about constructive change. For more information, including a map and directions, go to http://aiusaoc.org/common/great_american_write_in.html

February Meeting Minutes

Group #141 Orange

Letter-writing

The group wrote 42 letters, including letters to Senators Boxer and Feinstein asking for an investigation into abuses conducted in the "war on terror"; to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton concerning the use of rape as a weapon of war in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo; to Secretary of State Clinton asking the U.S. State Department to investigate Israel's use of white phosphorus munitions in Gaza; to President Obama applauding his recent executive orders on Guantanamo but asking that detainees be promptly charged and set up an independent commission to investigate abuses in the "war on terror"; and to the Minister of Justice in Eritrea concerning the so-called G15, a group of prisoners of conscience detained there since 2001.

100 Days Campaign

Kevin talked about Amnesty's 100 Days Campaign to urge President Obama to take concrete steps in the first 100 days of his term to ensure accountability for torture and illegal detention. Amnesty feels that he has made progress on several items and has achieved two items on the checklist.

1. Confirm the U.S. will permanently close the detention facility at Guantánamo;
3. Revoke the July 20, 2007 Executive Order that authorized the continuation of the CIA's program of secret detention.

As part of the campaign, the group decided to work specifically at the next few meetings on these checklist items:

8. Commit the US administration not to arbitrarily deprive anyone of their liberty, and immediately end the US government's opposition to full *habeas corpus* hearings for detainees in Guantánamo and other similar situations.
10. Issue an executive order that the USA will not, under any circumstances, resort to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, as defined under international law.
14. Reject impunity for crimes under international law such as torture and other ill-treatment of detainees, and enforced disappearance.
17. Announce that his administration will work to ensure that victims of human rights violations for which the US authorities may be responsible will have meaningful access to redress and remedy.

John Woo Action

Julie talked about the recent actions protesting the appointment of John Woo as a visiting law professor at Chapman University in Orange. John Woo was one of George W. Bush's legal advisors and the principal author of several memoranda that were used to justify the use of torture in interrogating military detainees.

February Meeting Minutes

Group #178 Irvine

Welcome to our new members who came for a first visit to our group meeting. We hope to see you again next month.

Letter-writing

We wrote letters

- for our action file case Dr. Sa'adey of Syria

- asking for a commutation of the death penalty sentence for Troy Davis who is on death row in Georgia (USA)
- asking for US leadership in strengthening the UN Peacekeeping Mission to the Democratic Republic of Congo
- asking the US State Department to investigate reports of White Phosphorus munitions being used in the Gaza conflict
- asking the US Secretary of State to establish an office of Gender Integration to ensure that gender issues are integrated with foreign assistance

Finances

We voted to send our yearly contribution to Amnesty International USA. The national organization asks for a minimum \$50 contribution from each group, we voted to send \$178 to commemorate our group number. Recent expenses: consultant fee for website, donation to IUCC for meeting room, fee for table at Great American Write-In.

Campaigns

Our group is going to sign up for the Darfur campaign, group member Anne S. will be our campaign coordinator.

Action File

We are still waiting to hear from the national organization on the status of our current action file, Dr. Sa'adey of Syria. Kolua S. has talked to colleagues and confirmed that it is very difficult to get information from Syria. In the meantime we have decided to take on a new action file, and have asked the national organization for either the China POC cases (our first choice since group member Ting H. can help us with his expertise on China) or, as a second possibility, the Hmong prisoners from Laos, which Jordan G. suggested should be a priority since there is a risk of torture. (Update since last meeting: we will be given the China POC cases, look for our article in next month's newsletter with details on the Irvine group's new action file.)

Group Promotion

Mailing: We will be sending out a postcard announcement of our group meetings to national AIUSA members in Irvine zip codes, with a return postcard asking them to give us their e-mail address for the mailing list we are building. Jacques K. and Sara F. will each have a postcard proposal at the next meeting, we will review them and decide on which is best for our mailing.

Tabling: As soon as we get confirmation from the management company, we will have a table at The Block in Orange to promote Amnesty International's presence in Orange County. Possibly 28 March, check your e-mails for the date. Our next tabling event after this will be at the University Centre in Irvine.

Upcoming Events

See other newsletter articles for the 4Darfur Awareness concert on 14 March in Costa Mesa (organized by AI local high school groups) and the Great American Write-In in Irvine on 4 April.

March Meeting

At our March meeting, we will have invited speaker Sandra Morgan from the Orange County Human Trafficking Taskforce, who will speak about the human trafficking that happens right here in our backyards. See website for full details <http://aiusaoc.org/irvine/meetings.html>.

Calendar

March

18 Wednesday 7:00 PM

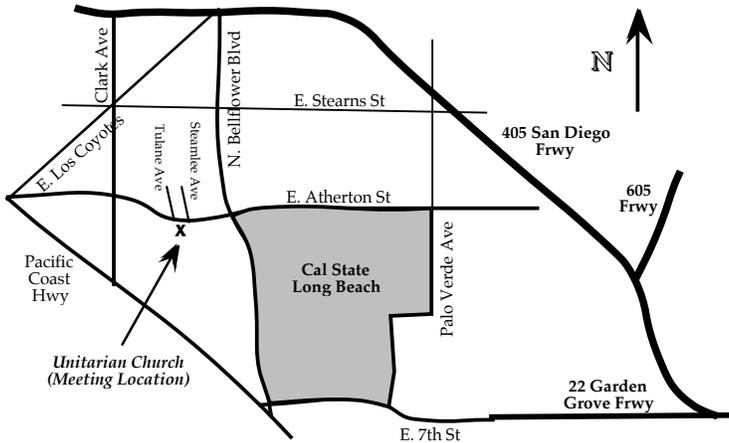
Group #175 Long Beach Monthly Meeting at the Unitarian Universalist Church, Rooms 1 and 2, 5450 Atherton Street, Long Beach. Letter-writing from 7:00–7:30. For further information about the group, contact Norma Edwards at (562) 425-4353.

24 Tuesday 7:00 PM

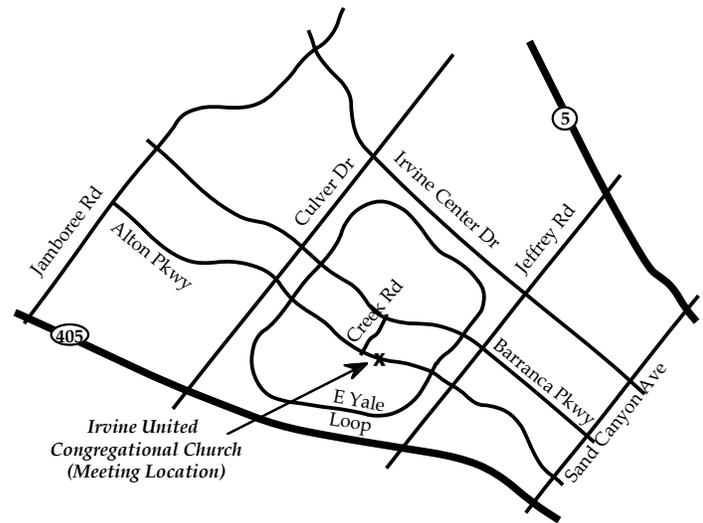
Group #141 Orange Monthly Meeting at the Sisters of St. Joseph Center, 480 S. Batavia Street, in Orange. The meeting room is in the Special Events Center located behind (west of) the main building (the Motherhouse). After entering the complex from Batavia Street, drive around the south side of the Motherhouse 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.

26 Thursday 7:30 PM

Group #178 Irvine Monthly Meeting at the Irvine United Congregational Church, 4915 Alton Parkway, Irvine. Sandra Morgan from the Orange County Human Trafficking Taskforce will speak about the human trafficking that happens right here in our backyards. For more information about the group, contact Jacques Kilchoer at jacques.kilchoer@aiousaoc.org.



Group #175 Long Beach Meeting Location



Group #178 Irvine Meeting Location

Amnesty International
Group 178
P.O. Box 17186
Irvine, CA 92623-7186