



Amnesty International

Orange County

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

May 2009

<http://www.aiusaoc.org>

US: Mixed Messages from President Obama after 100 Days

This article is taken from an April 29 AI press release.

100 days after taking office, President Obama's record in terms of US counter terrorism policies has been assessed in a new Amnesty International report. The organization describes the message from the presidency as "mixed."

When he took office on January 20, 2009, President Barack Obama inherited a legacy of torture, impunity and unlawful detention. The legacy is the result of the USA's response to the attacks of September 11, 2001. The response has been marked by an assault on the framework of international human rights law.

Human rights violations—including the crimes under international law of torture and enforced disappearance—were not only committed, but were also justified, by the US government as necessary and legal.

Images of caged, shackled detainees in the US naval base at Guantánamo Bay in Cuba; of torture and other ill-treatment at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq; of Gulfstream jets used to transfer detainees to secret prisons around the world; have been seared into the public consciousness.

During his campaign for the presidency, Barack Obama committed himself to closing the Guantánamo detention facility and ending torture by US personnel. To what extent these commitments would mark a real shift towards bringing the USA into compliance with its international human rights obligations in the struggle against terrorism remained to be seen.

Amnesty International issued a checklist on November 5, 2008 against which to assess the progress made towards this goal in the new administration's first 100 days.

After the election, the organization called on President-elect Obama to take 17 concrete steps during his first 100 days in office towards:

- closing Guantánamo and ending illegal detention;
- eradicating torture and ill-treatment;
- ending impunity.

At the end of the 100 days, it is clear that significant steps have been taken by the new administration, including some to undo the damaging detention and interrogation policies developed under the previous administration.

However, other changes have been more symbolic than substantial. The little action taken by the new administration on accountability for past human rights violations has cemented the impunity nurtured in the past, for at least some of the perpetrators.

"President Obama's actions—within 48 hours of taking office—to close Guantánamo within a year and end secret CIA detentions was very welcome," said Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International.

"Closure and disclosure will not be complete until the US Government follows through by ending all unlawful detentions, bringing to justice all those responsible for torture and other serious human rights violations carried out during the Bush administration, and providing real remedies to victims."

"We have seen some important positive developments in the first 100 days but there are still some steps that are either incomplete or remain to be taken. For instance, on Bagram where hundreds are still detained with no solution in sight."

Amnesty Responds to President Obama's Address on National Security

In response to President Barack Obama's national security address May 21, Amnesty International's executive director Larry Cox issued the following statement:

"Today President Obama said the right words about returning to the rule of law and reclaiming America's moral authority. Now he needs to ensure his actions reflect American values and the rule of law.

"The president said that the struggle against terrorism is a struggle rooted in values. In the past eight years, the United States has abandoned deeply held principles and empowered those who seek to harm Americans. The president recognized the perils of sacrificing our values to pragmatism, which is precisely the challenge he faces in closing Guantánamo.

"Revising the military commissions is a mistake. It is a system so broken, so discredited, that it cannot be saved by any amount of administrative or legislative duct tape. Americans have put faith in their federal court systems for more than 200 years. All detainees can be tried in these courts and brought to justice. The rule of law must be our guide as the nation seeks to close Guantanamo and reclaim its moral authority.

"When the United States wanted to understand how something like September 11th was allowed to happen and how to prevent another occurrence, Americans turned to an independent and bipartisan commission. The country faces similar questions today regarding abuses committed in the name of national security. Americans cannot simply turn the page and pretend that these things never happened. An independent commission must be established to find the answers."

Amnesty Distressed by Death of Libyan Government Critic Fathi el-Jahmi

This article is taken from a May 21, 2009 AIUSA press release.

Amnesty International is greatly distressed by the news of the death of Libyan government critic Fathi el-Jahmi earlier today in an Amman, Jordan, hospital following his transfer from detention at the Tripoli Medical Center in Libya.

An advocate of political reform, he was detained in Libya in March 2004 and held without charge or trial, most recently at the Tripoli Medical Center. Approximately two weeks ago, he was flown to Jordan for medical treatment.

"Fathi el-Jahmi was a towering democracy activist and fearless government critic who never allowed himself to be silent. He is an inspiration to many and his message of freedom of speech and governance lives on," said Zahir Janmohamed, Amnesty International USA advocacy director for the Middle East and North Africa.

Amnesty International is still seeking clarification from the Libyan authorities as to the circumstances in which el-Jahmi, who was an Amnesty International prisoner of conscience, became seriously ill and was transferred to Jordan.

However at this time, our most immediate thoughts are with his family to whom we extend our deepest sympathy.

As an Amnesty International prisoner of conscience, el-Jahmi's case was championed by the human rights organization. For approximately three years, Amnesty International held vigils in Boston and New York City and more than 17,000 supporters took action pushing for el-Jahmi's release. Activists also urged senior U.S. government officials including then-Senator Joseph Biden and other members of Congress to raise el-Jahmi's case with senior Libyan officials.

Background

Amnesty International considered Fathi el-Jahmi to be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression through his TV interviews and contacts with U.S. diplomats.

Libyan authorities arrested el-Jahmi in 2002 after he called for free speech and political reforms during a conference in Tripoli. He was convicted and sentenced to five years in prison, but was released in March 2004 following international pressure. Authorities detained el-Jahmi weeks later, after he repeated his call for democracy during a television interview.

During 2004, el-Jahmi was held in solitary confinement, denied visits by his family and allowed only occasional access to a doctor, though he suffered from diabetes, high blood pressure and a heart condition.

In February 2005, a delegation from Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) and the International Federation of Health and Human Rights Organizations was allowed to visit el-Jahmi and conduct a medical assessment. These organizations assessed that he had until then been receiving only "sporadic and inadequate medical treatment," despite "suffering from several chronic and mutually adverse conditions (diabetes, hypertension, coronary artery disease) that are independently life

threatening and difficult to control." In January 2008, a number of organizations released statements expressing their concern about el-Jahmi's deteriorating health.

April Meeting Minutes

Group #178 Irvine

Letter-writing

We wrote letters for:

- Epifanio Pascual Nguema Alogo and José Eworo Mba (Equatorial Guinea)—torture and denial of medical treatment
- Luís Vaz Martins and other members of the Human Rights League (Guinea-Bissau)—fear for safety
- Asking our government to form a commission and investigate the allegations of torture on detainees in US custody after 9/11
- Filep Karma and Yusak Pakage (Indonesia)—prisoners of conscience
- Troy Davis (USA)—ask for commutation of death sentence
- Ebrima B. Manneh (The Gambia)—prisoner of conscience

Campaign Updates

Darfur: Anne provided us with a letter to the Ambassador of the African Union Mission to the UN, asking the government of Sudan to reverse its decision to expel humanitarian aid agencies such as Oxfam, Care, Save the Children and Medecins Sans Frontières.

Western Africa: Jacques brought letter-writing actions for recent West Africa cases (see above) from Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, and The Gambia.

Finances

For fund-raising, we will try to have a henna-painting booth at the Global Village festival in Irvine in September. Jacques will investigate what would be needed for us to have a booth there. Perhaps we could purchase some Amnesty pins (jewelry style) for resale?

We have had success in the past with Julie's henna-painting fund-raisers so we should continue with those when Julie is available.

Action File

We devised a plan of action for our new prisoner action file, Hu Jia of China. Our immediate goals are:

- Have each member write a letter to their Member of Congress. Jacques will prepare a sample letter.
- Mention Hu Jia's case on social action networks (for those of us who have Facebook or Twitter accounts).
- Have at least one tabling event per quarter to publicize his case.
- Have a t-shirt available at our CafePress store.
- Finish the article on our POC for the website.

Upcoming Meetings

We plan to invite the Burmese student who spoke at Long Beach group meeting last year.

April Meeting Minutes

Group #141 Orange

Letter-writing

The group wrote about 60 letters, including letters to:

- Chinese officials on behalf of Western Region Special Focus Case Shi Tao;
- President Obama dealing with Guantanamo detainees and urging him to end illegal detention;
- Myanmar officials concerning prisoner of conscience Zarganar, a famous comedian;
- Iranian officials concerning Ali Nejati, a trade unionist;
- the president of Belarus calling for a moratorium on executions;
- Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano expressing concern over the state of immigration detention; and
- Representative Dana Rohrabacher asking him to support the release of Fathi el-Jahmi, a Libyan prisoner of conscience.

100 Days Campaign

Kevin discussed Amnesty's 100 Days Campaign and went through some of the items on Amnesty's checklist for President Obama. Even though the first 100 days of his administration have passed, Amnesty is asking members to continue pressing President Obama on the checklist items.

May Meeting—Shi Tao's Case

July 25 is Shi Tao's birthday so we will be having a birthday celebration at our May meeting. Also, June 4 is the 20th anniversary of the killings in Tianamen Square. Chris and Krista will be bringing drinks, Moyra will be bringing cupcakes, and Deidre and Kevin will bring cups, plates, etc. We will sign birthday cards to send to Shi Tao.

Amnesty is organizing an action targeting Yahoo!—"Tell Yahoo! to reBOOT human rights"—since information provided by Yahoo! China resulted in Shi Tao's arrest. For the action, the Orange and Long Beach groups are going to send a boot to Yahoo! with signatures, letters, photos, etc. Kevin is donating an old pair of cowboy boots for the action that he will be bringing to the May meeting.

Other News

- Julie talked about the recent debate at Chapman University featuring John Woo and other law professors there.
- Deidre talked about Aung San Suu Kyi's case. Her house arrest was scheduled to end on May 24 but, as has been reported in the news, the government has brought new charges against her and she is now on trial. There is an

election coming up next year but her party and all other opposition parties have chosen not to participate because of restrictions put on them by the ruling junta.

- In Sri Lanka, the government reported that combat operations against the insurgent group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have ceased. However, there are over 50,000 civilians still trapped in a five-mile-square area still held by the LTTE. <http://blog.amnestyusa.org/iar/no-relief-for-sri-lankas-trapped-civilians/>.
- There is a Global Day of Action for Troy Davis on May 19. He lost his latest round in the Court of Appeals. He can either re-apply to the Appeals Court or appeal to the Supreme Court.
- Deidre talked about the case of Fathi el-Jahmi, a Libyan journalist who was arrested in and has been detained for five years. Amnesty is asking members to contact their U.S. Representatives to sign onto an action calling for his release. (On May 21, it was reported that he had died—see the article on page 2.)
- Amnesty is calling on Congress to form an independent commission to investigate torture under the Bush administration and is asking members to contact senators urging them to do so. Senator Dianne Feinstein's telephone number is (202) 224-3121.
- June is Torture Awareness Month. Amnesty is asking groups to do an event such as showing a movie, such as *Torture and Democracy* or *Taxi to the Dark Side*.
- Ballots for the AIUSA Board of Directors are due May 9. Kris Brady, formerly from this area, was running for the board.
- AI Secretary General Irene Khan will be stepping down at the end of the year.
- Julie reported that Sister Helen Prejean is speaking at the Irvine United Congregational Church on May 31. She will be speaking at 2:00 following a luncheon at 12:30. The luncheon costs \$20 but the presentation is free.
- The Sisters of St. Joseph, at whose center we meet, screens films with human rights themes the first Friday evening of each month. We proposed asking about leaving a flyer with information about our meetings at the film screenings.

New Prisoner Case

Kevin talked to Jim Roberts about the group being assigned a new adopted prisoner. There are currently only three individuals at risk available for adoption but more are expected to be added in July. Since we're already pretty booked for the next few months, the group decided to wait.

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

May

20 Wednesday 7:00 PM

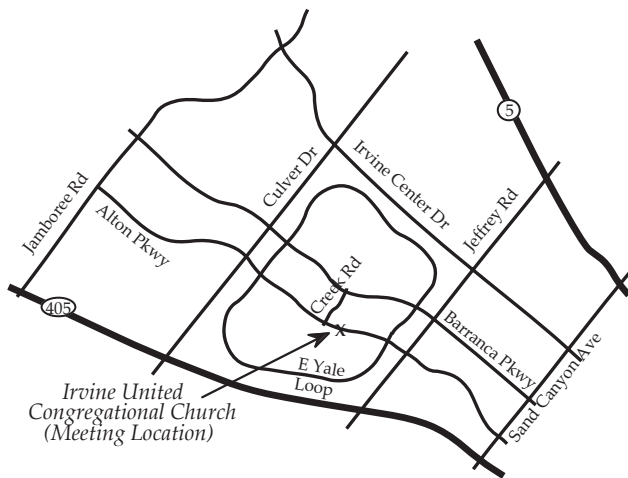
Group #175 Long Beach Monthly Meeting at the Unitarian Universalist Church, Rooms 1 and 2, 5450 Atherton Street, Long Beach. Letter-writing from 7:00–7:30. For more information about the group, contact Norma Edwards at (562) 425-4353.

26 Tuesday 7:00 PM

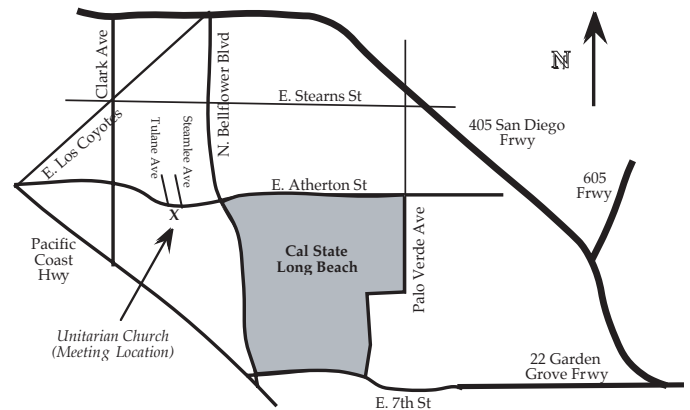
Group #141 Orange Monthly Meeting at the Sisters of St. Joseph Center, 480 S. Batavia Street, in Orange. The meeting room is in the Special Events Center located behind (west of) the main building (the Motherhouse). After entering the complex from Batavia Street, drive around the south side of the Motherhouse and park in the lot in the back. Look for the signs directing you to the meeting room. For more 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. For more information about the group, contact Jacques Kilchoer at jacques.kilchoer@aiusaoc.org.



Group #178 Irvine Meeting Location



Group #175 Long Beach Meeting Location

Amnesty International
Group 178
P.O. Box 17186
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