



---

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## ORANGE COUNTY

---

GROUP #141 ORANGE

GROUP #178 IRVINE

Newsletter

June 2002

---

## World: U.S. Human Rights Violations Undermine Global Leadership Charges Amnesty International Upon Release of Annual Report

*This article is taken from May 28 AI press releases.*

Forty-one years to the day that Amnesty International was founded with a call to action in the London Observer, the organization released its 2002 Annual Report on the status of human rights in 152 countries. Now the largest grassroots human rights organization in the world, Amnesty International charged today that many governments have scrimped on human rights following the September 11 attacks in the United States, using the "war on terrorism" to quash legitimate dissent or justify ongoing conflicts.

The organization also contended that the deficient human rights record of the US government erodes its capacity for human rights leadership, limiting the pressure the US can exert on other governments to improve their human rights practices. Amnesty International offered as evidence eight specific actions by the US government that weaken its foreign policy hand, with dire consequences for people worldwide. The actions included: widespread detention of foreigners post-September 11; use of the death penalty; failure to prosecute known torturers seeking safe haven in the US; pending use of military tribunals; export of torture devices; exceptionalism to international treaties; mistreatment of asylum-seekers; and selective recognition of Geneva Conventions protections.

"Citizens around the world suffer the consequences when the US defaults on its responsibility to promote human rights," said Dr. William F. Schulz, Executive Director of Amnesty International USA. "How can we pressure the Saudis to extradite Idi Amin when the US government fails to prosecute or extradite known torturers on American soil? How can the US condemn Russia's violations of the Geneva Conventions in Chechnya after selectively applying them to detainees in Guantanamo Bay?"

The 300-page report demonstrates that strides were made globally in several important human rights indicators. In particular, the organization documented a decrease in use of the death penalty among countries surveyed, continuing a downward trend that began in 1997. Last year 27 countries, including the US, carried out executions as compared to 40 in 1997.

Amnesty International's report documents that 56 nations (37% of countries surveyed) detained prisoners of conscience, continuing an encouraging five-year decline. Amnesty International has been heartened by the recent releases of high-profile prisoners of conscience on whose behalf the organization campaigned, including General Jose Gallardo (Mexico), environmentalists Rodolfo Montiel and Teodoro Cabrera (Mexico), Ngawang Choephel (Tibet), Aung San Suu Kyi (Myanmar) and, just two weeks ago, Dr. Taye Wolde-Semayat (Ethiopia).

The organization also documented a continuing decline in torture, down to 73% of countries surveyed, compared with 90% in the 2000 report. The two-year decline coincided with Amnesty International's second international campaign against torture. However, impunity for past crimes plagues far too many victims, as "disappearances" remain unresolved in 35 countries (23% of countries surveyed), a 64-percent increase from 1991.

"The US government fails to understand that human rights are far from an impediment to national security—they are the foundation," said Schulz. "By sacrificing human rights in the name of national security, the US government loses the moral authority to criticize blatant transgressions by allies who usually are responsive to US pressure on human rights."

"As it works to maintain a global coalition for its war on terrorism, the US government has instituted a self-imposed gag order, stifling its criticism of the human rights practices of many old and new allies," Schulz continued. "No better example of that was President Bush's public appearance two weeks ago with Prime Minister Mahathir of Malaysia at which virtually no mention of Malaysia's abysmal human rights record was made while praise was heaped on the Prime Minister for his support of anti-terrorism efforts. The actions of the US government provide a de facto green light for other nations to ignore fundamental human rights standards."

Amnesty International urged that respect for human rights encompass not only the universality, but also the indivisibility of all rights, economic, social and cultural as well as civil and political. As globalization spreads, bringing greater wealth to some and destitution and despair to others, human rights activists must promote not just legal justice but also social justice.

"An ethical approach to globalization can mean nothing less than a rights-based approach to development," said Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International. "When Amnesty International talks of a world of freedom and justice, we mean a world in which every person enjoys all of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards."

In August 2001, the organization expanded its agenda to address new demands in a changing world. In the future, the organization will not only work on those civil and political rights that have formed the heart of its campaigning for forty years, but it will also mobilize to ensure that economic, social and cultural rights are respected.

The report is available on the internet at <http://www.amnestyusa.org/annualreport>.

## May Meeting Minutes

### Group #141 Orange

#### Attendees

Ravi & Rukshana Alexander, Joe Azadi, Jeannine Christensen, Kevin Gaffney, Deidre Jackson, Priscilla Rocco, Ernie Solheid.

#### Letter-Writing Actions

The group worked on a South Asia Regional Action Network (SARAN) action dealing with human rights abuses being committed by security forces in Nepal in the context of escalating fighting between the security forces and members of the Communist Party of Nepal.

The group also sent six letters on behalf of Nguyen Dinh Huy, a prisoner of conscience in Viet Nam, held since 1993 because of his association with an organization named Movement to Unite the People and Build Democracy.

Finally, the group sent seven letters to Israeli authorities calling on them to stop the demolition of Palestinian houses as collective punishment or on alleged security grounds.

#### Outreach and Tabling

Tami Jacoby arranged for the group to table at the Gypsy Den in Santa Ana on Friday, June 28, 5:00-10:00 PM, and on Saturday, June 29, 8:00 AM-12:00 PM. Tami and Priscilla will be tabling Friday evening and Deidre will be tabling Saturday morning. The Gypsy Den is located at 125 N. Broadway at the Artists' Village. They serve breakfast. Contact Tami at (714) 639-4021 or Lkrbrnfan1@aol.com if you're interested in helping out.

#### Goals

Deidre led the group in a brainstorming session focussing on what has worked for the group in the past and leading to the group deciding on a set of goals for the next six or so months.

The goals adopted by the group, in order of priority, are as follows:

1. Get a new prisoner of conscience. Work on the case of Rebiya Kadeer, the Special Focus Case for the Western Region until we get a new case.
2. Plan a summer picnic for the area groups, as we've held for the past two years.
3. Be more proactive of death penalty events. Invite death penalty coalition members to our meetings.
4. Table at college campuses beginning in September. Contact the Student Area Coordinator, and perhaps professors.
5. Sign up for the Russia Campaign, scheduled to begin in October.

#### New Prisoner Case

The Orange group has (finally) been assigned a new Action File for a Vietnamese prisoner of conscience. Thich Huyen Quang was head of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, which is not recognized as a lawful organization in Vietnam. He has been detained under house arrest since 1982 without charge or trial, suffers from high blood-pressure, arthritis, and stomach ulcers. He is 82-years-old. His outspoken defense of human rights and in particular the right to practice religion freely has resulted in his being in conflict with the Vietnamese authorities.

## Notes from the AGM: Bending the Arc Toward Justice

*This article, by AIUSA Executive Director William Schulz, is taken from the June 2002 Monthly Mailing.*

A few weeks ago we completed a very successful Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Seattle—one of the best-attended in recent history. Perhaps the business highlight of that event was the unanimous adoption of our new strategic plan for 2003–2006, which was the culmination of a three-year effort. The AGM took place against the backdrop of the crisis in the Middle East and of course the ongoing challenge to human rights posed by the global struggle for security.

In my remarks to the meeting, I tried to put our task as human rights advocates into a larger context and wanted to share with you excerpts from what I said:

“Those who would torture without remorse and kill without regret may at the moment be in the ascendancy. But never forget: the arc of the universe bends toward justice if enough people grab onto the justice end of the arc and hold on. Human history is moving in our direction. Who would ever have thought even five years ago that we would today have an International Criminal Court? But history requires our help.

“And what that means is that it requires us to do something human beings rarely do — to be loyal not to one nation or another, not to one ideology or another, not to one side or another, but to the coursing blood and fragile sinew that makes up every human being. “I have eaten challah with Israeli friends in Tel Aviv and hummus with Palestinian friends in Nablus. I have stood at the Wailing Wall and inserted a paper prayer in its cracks and I have kneeled in the Al Aqsa mosque complex and spoken a whispered prayer through my lips. I have walked on the shores of Galilee and on the beaches at Gaza. Amnesty International's job is to remind every nation, every ideologue and every side, of the sanctity of that coursing blood and fragile sinew.

“Stephen Spender was a fierce opponent of the Fascists during the Spanish Civil War. But that did not prevent him from making the following observation about himself:

‘When I saw photographs of children murdered by the fascists, I felt furious pity. But when the [Fascists] talked about [Communist] atrocities, I merely felt indignant that people should tell such lies. In the first case I saw corpses, in the second only words . . . gradually I acquired a certain horror of the way in which my own mind worked. It was clear to me that unless I cared about every murdered child impartially, I didn't really care about children being murdered at all.’

“To care about every injured, suffering, murdered person impartially is a large and demanding task and it requires a certain gentleness of spirit, a certain quiet recognition that every single one of us is flawed and that the life we are given is not a practice run.

“The arc of the universe bends toward justice. Grab on. Hold tight. Care impartially for every suffering person. And be gentle with each other and the world. For in the end the world is desperate for our kindness and that is the best legacy of all that we can leave.”

## Upcoming Events

### Run for Freedom

The Fifth Annual Run for Freedom, a 5/10K/Children's race sponsored by the Southern California Amnesty International groups, is scheduled for Saturday, June 15 in Huntington Beach. The 10K run begins at 7:30 AM, the 5K at 8:45 AM, and the 1/2K Children's Run at 9:45 AM. The race location is on Pacific Coast Highway between Beach Boulevard and Newland Street.

The 5th Annual Run for Freedom, a 5/10K/Children's race sponsored by the Southern California Amnesty International groups, is scheduled for Saturday, June 15 in Huntington Beach. The race organizers expect between 800 to 1000 runners this year.

Over one hundred volunteers are needed for the day of the race for a variety of tasks such as staffing the registration table, collecting bib numbers from the runners at the finish line, and handing out water to runners on the course. Please contact the volunteer coordinator Rhonda Seiter at [Rjseiter@aol.com](mailto:Rjseiter@aol.com) or (714) 969-4442 to sign yourself and your family and friends up!

To register for the run, you can print out a registration form at the race website [www.runforfreedom.org](http://www.runforfreedom.org) or register online at [www.active.com](http://www.active.com).

For further information, consult the race website or contact Kathy Brown at the Culver City AI office at (310) 815-0450.

## Good News Stories for 2001

In 2001 Amnesty International learned of the release of many prisoners of conscience, commutations of death sentences and improvements in the situation of many other victims of human rights abuse. Here are a few of their stories. Countless other people are still in need of our help.

### Tibet

Jigme Sangpo, Tibet's longest serving prisoner of conscience, was released in April. The 76-year-old former primary school teacher, who had been beaten and spent time in solitary confinement, was released on medical parole, eight years before the end of a 28-year sentence in Tibet's notorious Draphi Prison. He had spent most of the past 40 years behind bars.

Jigme Sangpo's release follows the release in January of another Tibetan prisoner of conscience, Ngawang Choephel. An ethnomusicologist, Ngawang was released on medical grounds after serving six and a half years of his 18-year sentence. He thanked AI members for their years of work to gain his free-

dom. He expressed gratitude for organizing numerous events highlighting his case and urged AI members to continue their work to get other Tibetan prisoners released. "It is important that you succeed in other cases like you succeeded in my case," said Ngawang Choephel.

### Turkey

Eren Keskin, a leading member of the Human Rights Association, and Osman Baydemir, its vice-president, received repeated death threats because of their human rights work.

Eren Keskin received telephone death threats, and calls threatening rape. On April 9, she learned that a man arrested in Konya had confessed that he had intended to kill her. Osman Baydemir was followed and also received telephone death threats. Plainclothes gendarmes reportedly came to see him in Diyarbakir in November 2000, and told him: "We have lost our patience. There are many people. If we say 'Kill' they will kill".

Following an Urgent Action appeal, the death threats stopped and the two asked AI to pass on their greetings and thanks to all who took part. Eren Keskin said: "I have been a human rights defender for 10 years, but it was only after Amnesty International issued the Urgent Action that for the first time the authorities proposed to protect me and my colleague. I highly appreciate the activities of the Amnesty members on our behalf and send my warmest thanks to them."

### Uzbekistan

Marat Rakhmanov's death sentence was commuted to 15 years' imprisonment by the Supreme Court of Uzbekistan on April 24, 2001.

According to his lawyer, Marat Rakhmanov was severely beaten by police while he was in custody awaiting trial, and confessed only after being tortured. To AI's knowledge, the authorities have done nothing to investigate these allegations.

Marat Rakhmanov's sister, Mayra, told AI: "They took him out of prison and didn't tell him anything. He thought he was taken to be shot. Only once he had arrived in the colony in Namangan, the other prisoners told him where he was and he understood that he might have been granted clemency . . . He said, 'I feel as if I was born a second time'."

In June, Mayra sent the following message: "Your help has been priceless and our gratitude to you is immense. You helped to preserve my brother's life. We wish you good health and success in your difficult, but necessary struggle. We thank God that in such difficult and frightening times we received the support of such wonderful people. We are eternally indebted to you because life has no price."

If you would like to continue receiving this newsletter and supporting the work of Amnesty International Group #141 and Group #178, please return this coupon to the appropriate address with annual dues of \$10.00. Dues are used to cover the costs of this newsletter and of letters on behalf of prisoners. Your address label contains your membership expiration date.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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

### Return to:

Amnesty International  
Group #141 Orange  
P.O. Box 864  
Orange, CA 92856

Amnesty International  
Group #178 Irvine  
P.O. Box 16243  
Irvine, CA 92623

Please make your check payable to either Amnesty International Group #141 or Group #178. Contributions to AI are tax-deductible. Thank you for your interest and support!

# Calendar

## June

**15** Saturday 7:30 AM

**5th Annual Run for Freedom** in Huntington Beach on Pacific Coast Highway between Beach Boulevard and Newland Street. See the article on page 3 of this newsletter for more information.

**18** Tuesday 7:00 PM

**Group #141 Orange Monthly Meeting** at the Orange Civic Center, Conference Room C, at 300 E. Chapman Avenue, in Orange. For further information about the group, contact Deidre Jackson at (562) 430-7381.

**24** Monday 7:00 PM

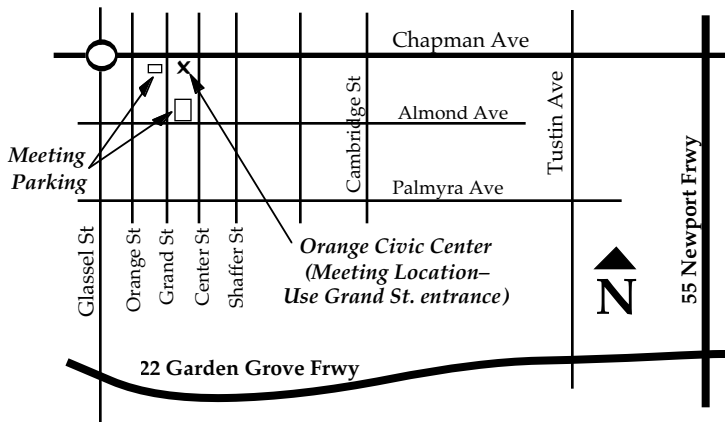
**Huntington Beach Group Monthly Meeting** at Saints Simon and Jude Church, Room 7B, 20111 Magnolia Street in Huntington Beach. For further information about the group, contact Darcie Guy at (714) 374-5786.

**25** Tuesday 7:00 PM

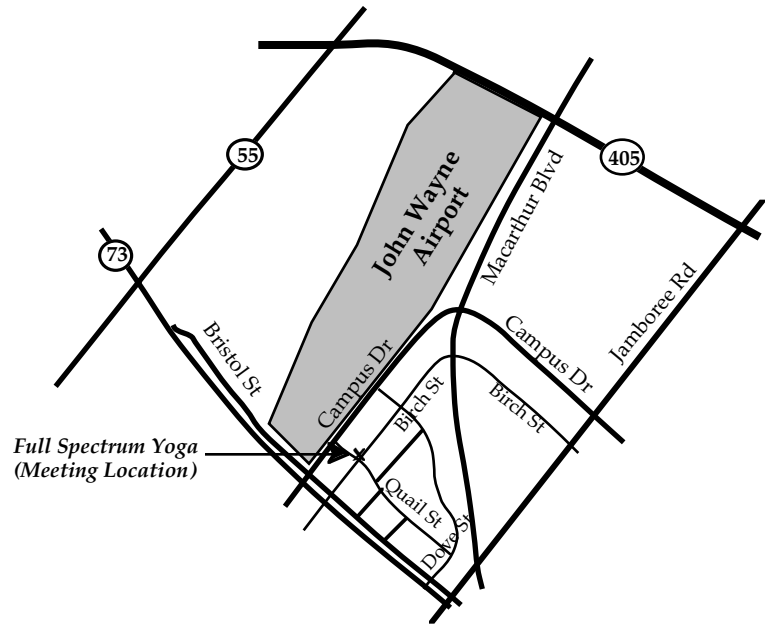
**Group #175 Long Beach Monthly Meeting** at the Unitarian Universalist Church, 5450 Atherton Street, Long Beach. Letter-writing from 7:00–7:30. Group #175 meets on the fourth Tuesday of each month. For further information about the group, contact Bobbi Kendig at (562) 420-1155.

**25** Tuesday 7:30 PM

**Group #178 Irvine Monthly Meeting** at Full Spectrum Yoga, 2018 Quail Street, Newport Beach (across from John Wayne Airport). Group #178 meets the last Tuesday of each month. For more information about the group, contact Jacques Kilchoër at (714) 557-8427.



**Group #141 Orange Meeting Location**



**Group #178 Irvine Meeting Location**

Amnesty International Group #178  
 P.O. Box 16243  
 Irvine, CA 92623