

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

ORANGE COUNTY

GROUP #141 ORANGE

GROUP #178 IRVINE

Newsletter

November 2002

Russian Federation: New Report Exposes Extent of Human Rights Abuse

This article is taken from an AIUSA press release issued October 29, 2002.

With the publication of a new report on human rights violations in Russia, Amnesty International denounced the hostage-taking at a theater in Moscow's Melnikov Street as "another example of how ordinary people's human rights are flagrantly disrespected" in the Russian Federation.

As the nation mourns the tragedy, Amnesty International Secretary General Irene Khan added her voice: "I mourn the victims and extend my condolences and sympathy to the grieving families, to those who were injured by the ordeal, physically and mentally."

She cautioned that the conflict in Chechnya had already claimed a high human toll. She urged the authorities to safeguard the human rights of all civilians—both Russians and Chechens.

The human rights organization's 102-page report, *The Russian Federation: denial of justice*, launched today in Moscow, exposes the broad extent of human rights violations in Russia. It shows how victims are blocked from justice and remain vulnerable to renewed abuse. Perpetrators, meanwhile, regularly evade responsibility and are essentially free to commit further violations

Beginning the organization's first-ever campaign on the country, Amnesty International is calling for urgent action to combat "a fateful cycle of human rights abuse" in Russia.

"The awful hostage-taking in the Moscow theatre is a terrifying reminder of the unsolved situation in Chechnya. We have condemned this criminal act as a despicable abuse of human rights," Irene Khan said.

"This mass hostage-taking is yet another outrageous human rights abuse arising from a conflict, which has led to huge human suffering of all those involved, in a country where abuses are common and redress for them a rarity."

"When people around the world think about human rights abuses in Russia, they think about Chechnya. But what is much less known is that the same climate of impunity which has marked the Chechen situation unfortunately permeates the entire criminal justice system of Russia."

Amnesty International's *Denial of justice* report exposes human rights violations across the country. These include torture in police stations; cruel, inhuman and degrading conditions in crowded disease-ridden prisons; racist violence against ethnic and religious minorities and foreigners; and abduction, "disappearance" and torture, including rape, in Chechnya.

"A pernicious cycle of human rights abuse exists in Russia today. If President Putin wants to promote Russia's role as a global player he must begin by delivering real justice and rights for everyone in Russia," stated Ms. Khan.

"At this crucial moment in Russian history, President Putin must show international political leadership and not commit the same mistakes of the west by curtailing human rights in the name of combatting 'international terrorism'."

"President Putin must not use the 'war against terrorism' to avoid confronting the denial of justice which permeates all of Russian society," she concluded.

Amnesty International sets out dozens of recommendations for immediate reform and is calling on both the Russian authorities and the international community to act on these. They include the adoption of a law specifically criminalizing domestic violence, the establishment of an independent body to investigate acts of torture and the removal of all elements of the passport and registration system which serves as a basis for systematic discrimination.

The report lists cases such as that of:

- Marina T. was stopped by traffic police in Yaroslavl' on March 5, 1999 and, apparently suspecting that she was drunk, they took her to a sobering-up facility. Once there three officers and a medical practitioner reportedly forcibly stripped her naked, hit her head against the wall and punched her in the face. She said that she was dragged by the hair into an adjoining room where she was raped by four men. During the court hearing the next morning, Marina T. says that she attempted to describe her torture to the judge, but that he interrupted her and accused her of being abusive towards the police officers before they detained her. Marina T. lodged a complaint with the procuracy, and two years later at the final hearing, the court found one officer guilty of premeditated infliction of bodily harm—but released him immediately under an amnesty. Two other officers were given suspended sentences and stripped of the right to work as police officers for two years. Marina T.'s lawyers have challenged the verdicts and the process is continuing.
- Alaudin Sadykov, a 51-year-old schoolteacher, who was detained by Russian security officials on March 5, 2000 and taken to a police station in Grozny's Oktiabrskii district. He was reportedly beaten, forced to eat his own hair, and burned with red-hot pieces of metal; burn scars on his hands are still visible. He told Amnesty International: "They beat me and said, 'Let's cut off his head'. They took a large knife for slaughtering animals and cut off my left ear completely. Then they said, 'We'll cut your head off later.'" An investigation into his treatment was later suspended on the grounds that the perpetrators could not be identified.

October Meeting Minutes

Group #141 Orange

Attendees

Ravi Alexander, Jeannine Christensen, Kevin Gaffney, Deidre Jackson, Tami Jacoby, Katherine Limon, and Ernie Solheid.

Letter-Writing

We sent a total of 18 letters on behalf of our adopted prisoner of conscience, the Venerable Thich Huyen Quang, in Viet Nam, calling for his release from house arrest. Many thanks to Rukshana Alexander for preparing our PoC letters this month.

New Member

The group welcomed Katherine Limon to our meeting. Katherine is a long-time member of Amnesty International and a former student group coordinator.

Death Penalty Event

Deidre provided an update on the death penalty event "Voices from the Inside," scheduled for Tuesday, December 10, International Human Rights Day, at the St. Joseph Center in Orange. Details are on the enclosed flyer.

Human Rights Day Event

The north San Diego County AI groups will hold their 14th annual Walk for Human Rights at the Oceanside Pier. The event may be held on either Saturday or Sunday the weekend before Human Rights Day, December 10. We should know for sure by the November meeting.

December Meeting/Holiday Party

The group will hold a holiday potluck party in lieu of our regular December meeting at the United Nations Association store in Santa Ana. This will be on our regular meeting day, Tuesday, December 17, but starting an hour earlier at 6:00 PM. All the groups in the area are invited! This will be an opportunity to do some shopping as well as socializing. Dorothy Augustine is coordinating with the UNA.

Web Page

The group discussed fixing our Website. We will discuss this further at the November meeting.

October Meeting Minutes

Group #175 Long Beach

Attendees

Mary Kay Dunn, Mike Farris, Kevin Gaffney, Bobbi Kendig, and Jim Roberts.

Letter-Writing

We generated four letters to Viet Nam on behalf of our POC, Nguyen Dinh Huy.

We reviewed the presentation last month by our Vietnamese guest speakers. All agreed that their comments were helpful and very moving. We spent some time discussing the situation and how to proceed.

AI Mandate

Noting that many of us missed Kevin and Deidre's summer presentation on changes in the AI mandate, the group asked for an update. Kevin agreed to consult Deidre to ar-

range another date, probably after the first of the year.

New High School Group

Jim announced the formation of a new AI group at Jordan High School. It was suggested that we invite the participants to join us sometime for cross-fertilization.

Human Rights Day Event

Kevin reported that the north San Diego County Amnesty groups will again host a demonstration for Human Rights Day, December 10, at the Oceanside pier.

Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will take place Tuesday, November 26, in the lounge of the Unitarian-Universalist Church in Long Beach. Everyone is welcome to join in our efforts to assure human rights for all in these times of uncertainty.

Mexico: Digna Ochoa's Memory Merits a Full Investigation into Her Death

A year on from the killing of human rights lawyer Digna Ochoa, Amnesty International expressed its regret at the lack of real progress on the official investigation.

"The authorities need to overcome the flaws and irregularities that characterised the initial stages of the investigation," Amnesty International said.

Digna Ochoa, a human rights lawyer, was shot dead in her office in Mexico City in on October 19, 2001.

"The authorities must fulfil their commitment to effectively and impartially investigate her killing and ensure that human rights defenders can carry out their legitimate work without fear of reprisals," Amnesty International stated.

"If justice is not done in this case—which has enjoyed so much international and national attention—what hope is there for numerous other cases of human rights violations against human rights defenders and others?"

Amnesty International believes that the anniversary of Digna Ochoa's killing is a poignant moment to recall her outstanding contribution to the protection of human rights in Mexico through her tireless work to force the authorities to investigate human rights violations and bring those responsible to justice. It is also a crucial moment to remind the authorities of their commitment to effectively and impartially investigate her killing.

A new prosecutor, Margarita Guerra, was appointed to head the investigation on August 1, 2002. She has declared her willingness to implement recommendations from the Inter American Commission on Human Rights and allow their international forensic experts to participate in the investigation. However, although the participation of these experts has reportedly been agreed by the relevant authorities, the measure has yet to be implemented.

"Delays in the participation of these forensic experts will further undermine the credibility of the enquiry and its findings," Amnesty International said.

"It is vital that the Mexican government and other governments make resources available to enable experts to fully conduct their work as soon as possible".

From World's Policeman to Block Bully

This article is taken from a column in the November 2002 Monthly Mailing by AIUSA Executive Director William F. Schulz.

The developing crisis over Iraq presents all of us who care about human rights with major challenges. On the one hand, Amnesty has long criticized the Iraqi regime for a systematic pattern of human rights violations, including torture, extrajudicial executions, imprisonment of prisoners of conscience, and forcible expulsions. Should Iraq indeed possess and choose to use weapons of mass destruction, which are inherently indiscriminate and are incapable of being used in a manner that distinguishes between civilians and combatants, the result might be a human rights crime of massive proportions.

On the other hand, though Amnesty maintains its traditional neutrality on the question of whether the use of force is justified, we have appropriately reminded the United States that it must abide by the U.N. Charter which provides for the Security Council to authorize the use of military force only as a last resort once peaceful means for resolving a conflict have been exhausted. We have said too that any military action that is taken must be in accordance with international humanitarian law and the laws of war and that the international community must support and protect the refugees and asylum seekers who will inevitably emerge in such a military confrontation. These, as well as the question of sanctions against Iraq and the effect of such sanctions on the Iraqi people, are difficult ones with which we must grapple.

At the same time the Iraqi crisis raises still broader concerns about the U.S. approach to the international community that may ultimately have far more deleterious consequences for human rights than anything that does or does not happen in Iraq. If you have not yet familiarized yourself with a pamphlet entitled "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America" published recently by the Defense Department (and summarized quite helpfully in an article entitled "Dick Cheney's Song of America" in the October issue of *Harper's* magazine), you should definitely do so.

For this document outlines the Bush Administration's commitment to seeing to it that the United States remains so powerful militarily that it can never again be challenged by any other entity and it clarifies that such a goal may well only be achieved by unilateral and preemptive actions, such as that contemplated against Iraq, with or without the sympathy and support of the larger international community. One of the great ironies of this tome is that those on the American right who have long bewailed the role of the United States as the "world's policeman" (and hence vociferously condemned U.S. action in such places as Somalia, Haiti and Kosovo) are now touting the U.S.'s capacity to be, in Secretary of State

Colin Powell's telling phrase, the biggest "bully on the block."

And what does such an approach mean for human rights? Well, the whole human rights regimen since the end of World War II, beginning with the Nuremberg trials and the adoption in 1948 by the United Nations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and continuing through the creation of an International Criminal Court, has been built upon the presumption of international cooperation. That is the notion that true global security will be built not by one party (one "bully") alone but by a mutually reinforcing commitment among greater and greater numbers of countries to international law backed by force, if need be, but backed by force utilized only as a last resort and authorized by the international community itself, principally through the United Nations. "Dick Cheney's Song of America" turns that whole notion on its head.

And so, as we struggle with the hard questions the Iraq crisis will present us over the next few months, let us never forget the larger context in which those questions need to be answered.

Will the United States set itself on a course of world domination, convinced that the only route to security lies in frightening the rest of the world into being "good" or will we recognize that the wise use of power balances global interests with national ones and that most of the problems in this world—terrorism, environmental destruction, impunity for human rights crimes—cannot be solved by any one country alone, even though that country be the biggest bully?

In many ways I suspect this will be the most telling decision our leaders and we will make over the next few years with the most lasting effect on world affairs (and certainly upon human rights) long after George Bush, Dick Cheney and Saddam Hussein have left the stage. Our job as human rights activists is to be prepared to push for the right option.

Summer Postcard Action Update

Tunisian authorities recently released two of three prisoners of conscience featured in this summer's Postcard Action. Hamma Hammami and Samir Taamallah were freed days after a court rejected their appeal. The third featured prisoner, Abdeljabbar Madouri, remains imprisoned.

The three men had been sentenced "in absentia" in 1999 on charges of membership in an unauthorized organization, the Tunisian Workers' Communist Party. After living in hiding, the men came forward in February 2002 to hear a court decision on their application to set aside the decision of the 1999 trial. However, the hearing was marked by serious irregularities, and the verdict confirmed prison sentences of up to more than 11 years, later reduced to a maximum of three years and nine months.

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

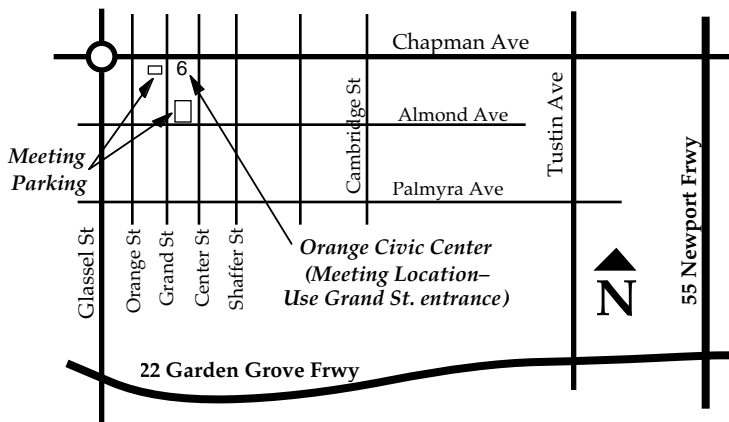
November

19 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.

25 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.



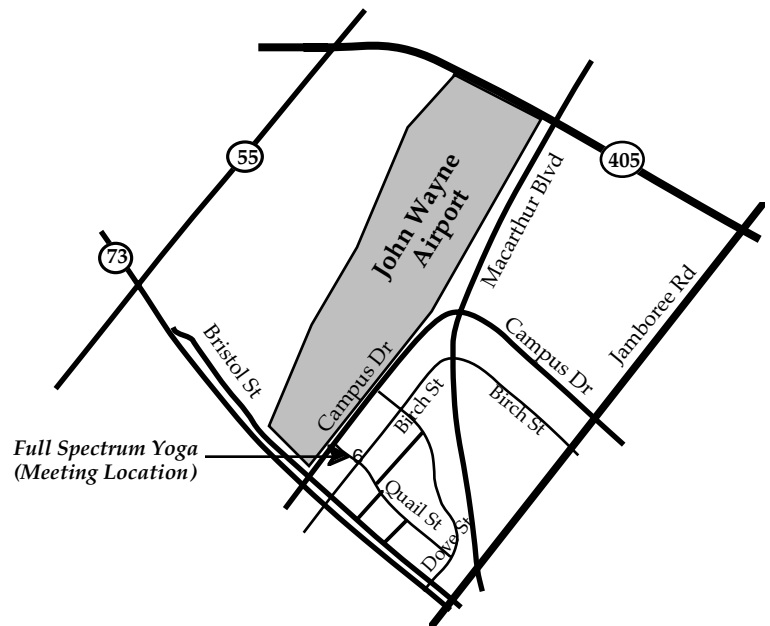
Group #141 Orange Meeting Location

26 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.

26 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 Kilchoer at (714) 557-8427.



Group #178 Irvine Meeting Location

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