



# Amnesty International

**Orange County**

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

April 2003

## In the Shadow of War, a Backlash Against Human Rights

*This article is taken from an April 2 AI press release.*

Since the military action by the USA, UK and their allies began in Iraq on March 20, a backlash against certain human rights has been witnessed around the world. These include: attacks on the rights to freedom of expression and assembly; excessive use of force by police against anti-war demonstrators; and restriction of asylum rights.

With the spotlight focused on the theatre of war, such abuses of human rights have been largely ignored. The following are just a few of many examples recorded by Amnesty International, which urges all governments to respect the right of people to express peacefully their opinions, and to refrain from using the war in Iraq as a pretext for curtailing or abusing fundamental human rights.

### **Freedom of expression and assembly**

Attempts by the authorities to prevent people from holding peaceful public demonstrations; the harassment and arbitrary detention of journalists, lawyers, government opponents and anti-war activists; and the use of "anti-terrorism" legislation have been part of attacks seen in many countries on the right to freedom of expression, assembly and association.

**Belgium:** Since early March, police have placed more than 450 anti-war demonstrators under administrative arrest, a form of "preventive" detention lasting up to 12 hours.

**Egypt:** Hundreds of people associated with the anti-war movement, including lawyers, journalists, MPs, academics and students, have been arrested since March 20 and some have reportedly been tortured. On March 21, security forces occupied the Egyptian Bar Association in Cairo for several hours.

**United Kingdom:** The Terrorism Act has reportedly been invoked in some areas, granting police special powers to "stop and search" people without reasonable suspicion. As a consequence, dozens of people have been stopped and searched. One person was allegedly arrested arbitrarily while filming police restraining a child at a demonstration.

**USA:** Thousands of people demonstrated against the war in cities across the USA in March, with many arrests for alleged public order offences. In Chicago more than 500 people were arrested after demonstrators blocked a major city artery on March 20. They reportedly included bystanders and demonstrators not engaged in unlawful behaviour.

### **Excessive use of force by police**

Since March 20, millions of people around the world have taken to the streets to protest against the war in Iraq. Some demonstrations have turned violent or have involved clashes

with the police; others have been peaceful. In both situations and in many countries, police have reportedly used excessive force against demonstrators. Demonstrators have faced beatings and other forms of assault by security forces, and thousands of protesters worldwide have been arbitrarily arrested. Some of those detained have been ill-treated or tortured.

**Egypt:** Dozens of anti-war activists were beaten severely and hundreds injured when police used water cannons, clubs and dogs against demonstrators. Journalists were among those injured by security forces as they were covering the anti-war demonstrations.

**Spain:** Up to 178 people were reportedly injured, some seriously, as a result of police action during peace rallies in Madrid on March 21 and 22. On March 22, police officers in anti-riot gear were reported to have responded to largely peaceful demonstrations, including of elderly people and families with children, with rubber bullets, and to have repeatedly beaten some demonstrators with truncheons.

### **Restriction of asylum rights**

In many parts of the world, asylum rights are being restricted or abused by states unwilling to comply fully with their international obligations to protect people fleeing their homes in fear of their lives.

**USA:** "Operation Liberty Shield" mandates the detention of asylum-seekers from Iraq and at least 33 other, as yet unnamed, countries that arrive in the USA and seek asylum at the point of entry. The policy allows the immigration authorities to detain "for the duration of their processing period" such asylum applicants "from nations where al-Qa'ida, al-Qa'ida sympathizers, and other terrorist groups are known to have operated," according to a Department of Homeland Security statement. Amnesty International believes that the mandatory detention of the group of asylum-seekers targeted by "Operation Liberty Shield" is a clear breach of international legal standards, which prohibits detention that is arbitrary and unlawful.

### **Recommendations**

Amnesty International calls on the governments concerned to:

- respect the rights to freedom of expression and assembly;
- ensure that law enforcement officials act in accordance with international standards, including on the use of force, arrest and detention, in the policing of demonstrations;
- ensure the effective protection of asylum seekers and refugees.

## March Meeting Minutes

### Group #141 Orange

#### **Attendees**

Jeannine Christensen, J. Kevin Gaffney, Deidre Jackson, Tami Jacoby, Katherine Limon, Valerie Orleans, and Priscilla Rocco.

#### **Letter-Writing**

We wrote letters to the UN Security Council, US Secretary of State Colin Powell, and various senators expressing concern for non-combatants in the Irai war. We also wrote to various Vietnamese officials on behalf of our POC, Thich Huyen Quang.

#### **Death Penalty Vigil**

Tami and Dick Carlborg were the only AI representaives at the death penalty vigil at the Orange Circle for the federal execution of Louis Jones, which took place March 18.

#### **Treasurer's Report**

Kevin, as treasurer, announced that we had received the latest check from the race committee and we now have a whopping \$1700 in the bank.

#### **Discussion Items**

Kevin also made a preliminary presentation about the latest International Strategic Plan (ISP) and will report back next month with a summary of the seven goals. We discussed the Cesar Chavez walk and although avery worthy cause none of us had the time to make a commitment to it. It was forwarded to the LA office. We also discussed compiling a current mailing list.

---

## March Meeting Minutes

### Group #175 Long Beach

#### **Attendees**

Mary Kay Dunn, Mike Farris, Kevin Gaffney, Bobbi Kendig, and Jamie Skaluba.

#### **Letter-Writing**

We generated five letters to the Secretary General of the Communist Party of Viet Nam on behalf of our POC, Nguyen Dinh Huy.

#### **A Traveler Returns**

We welcomed Mary Kay on her return from a three-month sojourn in Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Peru. She gave a report on her travels, including the ever-present negative reactions she found to the U.S. war in Iraq.

#### **Iraq War**

We discussed our own reactions to the war at some length. The group decided to attend a peace rally as a group, carrying the AI banner now that we are permitted to do so. Kevin will copy the AI talking points for us to hand out. On Friday, April 4 at 6:00 PM we will join a peace rally which meets each week at 5200 E. 2nd Street in Belmont Shore, Long Beach. Kevin stressed that our message while we wear the AI hat is our concern for human rights, not our political opinions.

#### **International Strategic Plan**

Kevin offered some information regarding AI's International Strategic Plan (ISP). With this plan we are permitted to

take part in rallies as AI members but not to co-sponsor them with political organizations. He will go over the ISP again at our April meeting.

#### **Mini-Conference**

Jamie and Kevin gave a brief report on the recent mini-conference. Kevin noted a big Vietnamese presence there. After talking with one of the their group, he sees the possibility of building a coalition with the local Vietnamese network.

#### **New Membership Program Coordinator**

Samer Rabadi has been chosen as the new Membership Program Coordinator in the Western Region.

#### **Next Month's Meeting**

Next month's meeting will be in the lounge of the Unitarian Universalist Church, 5450 Atherton Street, Long Beach, on Tuesday, April 22, at 7:00 PM.

---

## March Meeting Minutes

### Group #178 Irvine

We skipped the business section of the meeting to leave time for our two speakers.

#### **Mentors for Diversity Project**

Christina Vargas, Bunche fellow at the Amnesty International Los Angeles office, explains the "Mentors for Diversity" Project—a membership-based resource for increasing diversity in each region. The mentors will help facilitate the development of a "culture of diversity" within AI and provide advice to local and student groups for developing projects to further that goal. The mentors will be tyrained during the April AGM and groups can contact them for help soon after that date. The Western Regional office will send contact information to the local and student groups.

#### **Project Vote Smart**

Steve Spanier from Project Vote Smart (<http://www.vote-smart.org>) explains the principles behind the founding, and the work done by, the volunteers at Project Vote Smart. The organization is founded on non-partisan principles and the board of directors is composed of people from all sides of the political spectrum in the USA (some of the founders: former Presidents Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford, former U.S. Senators Barry Goldwater and George McGovern, and former U.S. Representatives Newt Gingrich and Geraldine Ferraro.) A small number of interns, volunteers and staff enter the voting records for US local, state and federal representatives. At the site you will find: Contact and biographical information; Key votes; Issue positions, provided by candidates; Campaign contributions; Interest group ratings from over 100 groups across the ideological spectrum.) The site is well worth the visit.

Mr. Spanier is volunteering to repeat his presentation at any interested Orange County organization. Contact him at [steve103@pacbell.net](mailto:steve103@pacbell.net).

#### **Next Month's Meeting**

For our April meeting, we will be showing the video on Human Rights in Russia available from the AI Los Angeles office.

## USA: More Double Standards as Another Child Offender Is Executed

In the same week that Secretary of State Colin Powell spoke of “the steadfast commitment of the United States to advance internationally agreed human rights principles worldwide”, the USA is set to violate a fundamental principle of international law respected across the world, Amnesty International said April 2, as Oklahoma prepared to execute Scott Hain for a crime committed when he was 17. Hain was executed as scheduled at 6:00 PM on April 3.

International law prohibits the use of the death penalty against anyone who was under 18 years old at the time of the crime. The USA is today virtually the only country prepared to flout this principle.

“Scott Hain is set to become the fourth child offender to be executed in the world in the past 12 months”, Amnesty International said. “All four will have been put to death in the United States.” Scott Hain would also become the 18th child offender reported to have been executed worldwide in the past six years. All but five will have been killed in the USA, whose President has repeatedly stressed its commitment to the rule of law.

On Monday, launching the US State Department’s reports on human rights in other countries, Secretary Powell referred to President Bush’s “solemn pledge that the United States will always stand for the non-negotiable demands of human dignity.”

“Warehousing a child offender for 15 years, before strapping him down and injecting him with poison—how does that uphold human dignity?”, Amnesty International asked, noting that last October four US Supreme Court Justices described the execution of prisoners for crimes committed when they were under 18 years old as “a relic of the past” and a “shameful practice.”

Also in October, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights found that by continuing this practice, the USA was violating a norm of international law from which no country can exempt itself. It noted that “the acceptance of this norm crosses political and ideological boundaries”, and added that violations had been roundly condemned by the international community. Numerous resolutions and statements at the United Nations have called for an end to the execution of child offenders.

### Background

The USA has put 21 child offenders to death since executions resumed in 1977, and another 80 prisoners await execution for crimes committed when they were 16 or 17.

Oklahoma executed Sean Sellers in 1999 for a crime committed when he was 16. Scott Hain is currently the only other child offender on Oklahoma’s death row, where prisoners are housed in conditions that violate international standards. Effectively housed underground, they are confined to their concrete cells for up to 24 hours without access to natural light or fresh air.

Scott Hain and Robert Lambert were sentenced to death for the 1987 murders of Michael Houghton and Laura Sanders. Although the state is still seeking Robert Lambert’s execution, he may yet be protected from execution by last year’s Supreme Court ruling that the execution of people with mental retardation is unconstitutional. The ruling came 13 years after the United Nations urged all countries to take that step.

## Upcoming Events

### Rights Readers Book Discussion Group

Amnesty International Group #22 in Pasadena/Caltech sponsors book discussions the third Sunday of each month at the Vromans Bookstore at 695 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena. This month’s discussion, which will be on the special day of Sunday, April 27, 6:30 PM, is on *A Sky So Close* by Betoool Khedairi.

According to author Hanan Al-Shaykh, “In this elegant, incisive debut, a young girl comes of age while aching for a sense of belonging. Daughter of an Iraqi father and an English mother, the unnamed narrator struggles with isolation both in the traditional Iraqi countryside where she’s raised and at the Western school of music and ballet that her mother insists she attend. Though she finds some semblance of solace in dance, her trials increase when her family moves to Baghdad. Then comes the outbreak of war, which compels her to move with her mother to England, where her most pointed heartaches await.

### Freedom from Discrimination Conference

Amnesty International is sponsoring the Imagine: Freedom from Discrimination Conference on Saturday, May 10, at Tom Bradley International Hall at UCLA. The conference will focus on important discrimination issues affecting the Los Angeles community and will feature workshops, an art exhibition and a student awards ceremony. California State Senator Gloria Romero and Los Angeles City Councilman Eric Garcetti will be speakers at the opening and closing plenary sessions.

If you have any questions, please contact Christina Vargas at the Western Regional Office, (310) 815-0450x106 or by email at [cvargas@aiusa.org](mailto:cvargas@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 below 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  
P.O. Box 864  
Orange, CA 92856

**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!*

