



Amnesty International

Orange County

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

June 2003

Amnesty International's 2003 Annual Report

War in Iraq Had Negative Consequences for Human Rights of Millions Worldwide

This article is taken from a May 28 AI press release.

While the overthrow of Saddam Hussein has brought greater freedom for the Iraqi people, the politics and distraction of the war in Iraq have had unintended, negative consequences for millions of people worldwide, Amnesty International charged today. The organization released its 311-page 2003 Annual Report on the status of human rights in 151 countries—the largest number of countries reported on by any human rights organization—at a Washington, DC, press conference.

“Regardless of how much greater liberty Iraqis may eventually realize, the Bush Administration’s war in Iraq has contributed to [not quite right; they have liberty but not security, etc; not sure if we can say security is a stated objective so play around with this if need be], diminishing human rights for millions of others worldwide,” said Dr. William F. Schulz, Executive Director of Amnesty International USA. “While billions were spent to dethrone Saddam Hussein, dictators and rebels elsewhere wreaked havoc on millions of people across the globe with little attention and even less condemnation from the US government or the international community.”

Forty-two years to the day that Amnesty International was founded with a call to action in the *London Observer*, AIUSA released a list of four countries and one international body where human rights were casualties of the war. The administration is hurting the fragile cease-fire in the Ivory Coast, a former French colony, by undercutting the French proposal for United Nations peacekeepers in the African nation as a penalty for France’s opposition to the war in Iraq. The UN Human Rights Commission became ensnared in US-Iraq relations, failing to condemn Cuba’s mass arrests of peaceful government critics who received patently unfair, rushed trials and harsh sentences; US military action in Iraq was used by several nations as an excuse for the commission’s failure to take action. In the United States, civil liberties erosions in the name of national security included a discriminatory registration system with interrogations of males from predominantly Arab and Muslim nations and detention of asylum-seekers from Iraq fleeing Saddam Hussein’s brutality. The organization also cited the Philippines and Ethiopia as nations receiving increased US assistance as a reward for their support of the war in Iraq despite serious human rights problems in those countries.

“People who came to the sweet land of liberty seeking greater freedom had to swallow a bitter pill, as the US govern-

ment used national security as the impetus to enact discriminatory and mean-spirited practices,” said Schulz.

The organization also cited Chechnya, China, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Israel/Occupied Territories/Palestinian Authority and Yemen as places whose worsening human rights situations are grave cause for concern.

The failure of the UN Human Rights Commission to pass resolutions against blatant human rights violators such as Zimbabwe, Sudan and Cuba has undermined the credibility, influence and effectiveness of this body. The resolutions failed to pass, in part, due to the perception that the US has repeatedly demonstrated contempt for international law. For instance, Argentina’s President Duhalde was quoted in the April 20, 2003, *New York Times*, saying: “ ‘We consider it inopportune’ to condemn Cuba, ‘considering that this war in Iraq is a unilateral violation of human rights’ and the US has begun to threaten Syria.”

The report presents data on key human rights indicators, including the death penalty, a category in which the US is a leading violator. China, Iran and the United States—a so-called “axis of executioners”—accounted for 81 percent of all known executions in 2002, with recorded executions in each country numbering 1,060, 113 and 71, respectively. Amnesty International research shows that over the last decade, an average of three countries annually have abolished the death penalty in law or practice. In 2002, Cyprus and the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (now Serbia and Montenegro) abolished the death penalty for all offenses, and Turkey abolished the death penalty except in times of war. By the end of the year, 112 countries—more than half the world—had abolished the death penalty in law or practice.

Meanwhile, only hours after the press conference, Virginia was scheduled to take the life of Percy Levar Walton, a diagnosed schizophrenic, a fact the judge was unaware of as he weighed mitigating circumstances to determine whether Walton would live or die.

“Human rights are not for a select few—those who live on land covering oil or in regions of strategic interest,” Schulz said. “The United States possesses the capacity and know-how to ease the suffering of millions worldwide. Now it must demonstrate the will to do so.”

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

May Meeting Minutes

Group #141 Orange

Attendees

Ravi Alexander, Rukshana Alexander, Jeannine Christensen, J. Kevin Gaffney, Deidre Jackson, Tami Jacoby, Valerie Orleans, Fiona, and DeDe.

Letter-Writing

We wrote 6 letters to Nepal, 10 for our adopted prisoner of conscience in Viet Nam, 5 to Dianne Feinstein concerning the Women's Convention (CEDAW), and 7 to U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell concerning the crisis in Iraq.

Prisoner Case

Valerie has offered to take over as prisoner coordinator from Ernie while he is on "baby-leave," to keep us informed of what's happening with the Venerable Thich Huyen Quang.

Death Penalty

Tami will be showing a one-hour documentary called *Death Letters* at the next meeting.

Volunteers

We discussed the various openings for volunteers on AI's many committees. (Death Penalty, Women's Campaign, board nominations).

Summer Picnic

Lastly we discussed our annual summer picnic! It will be either the 16th or 23rd of August, at Hart Park in Orange. We are hoping to persuade Vangee to cater the event again this year since last year's food was so delicious.

Next Month's Meeting

Change of Venue for June's Meeting: We were unable to secure our usual meeting room for the June meeting so we will be meeting at Ravi and Ruckshana's home in Anaheim Hills, at 492 Old Bucket Lane, Anaheim Hills 92807. Same time and date.

May Meeting Minutes

Group #175 Long Beach

Attendees

Mike Ferris, Kevin Gaffney, Bobbi Kendig, Jim Roberts, and Jamie Skaluba.

Letter-Writing

The group generated five letters on behalf of Nguyen Dinh Huy of Viet Nam, and five letters on an Urgent Action Case in Sudan along with two postcards on other prisoners in Syria and Viet Nam.

Western Regional Conference

The Western Regional Conference will be held in Redondo Beach October 31–November 2. We noted the opening date (Halloween) and shared ideas for appropriate costumes for the occasion. Would we go as prisoners or dictators, Buddhist monks or presidents? Possibilities are endless.

The Congo

An international AI press release urges the UN Security Council to dispatch troops to the Democratic Republic of Congo. Jim noted that advocating the use of force is not within AI's policy of neutrality, but the situation in the Congo calls for some action. The question arises: Under what circumstances is AI's Secretary General justified in

acting against AI guidelines? We did not come up with an answer.

Thailand

A police massacre took place under the guise of a drug war in Thailand. AI has condemned the massacre and called for an investigation. There may be an AI demonstration when the Thai Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawahra, meets with President Bush in the near future.

New Group Coordinator

Bobbi Kendig will serve as Group Coordinator starting in June.

Area Coordinator

The group agreed that we would welcome an Area Coordinator to our meetings. As a long-established AI group, we see the AC's role primarily as a contact person providing information and feedback. Kevin will talk to the Regional Office about this.

Treasury

Kevin reported that the treasury is too low for comfort. The mailing list will be weeded out to save postage. Jim promised to visit the Blues Cafe before the next meeting to see if they will be willing to help us with our fundraiser.

Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, June 24, in the lounge of the Unitarian-Universalist Church in Long Beach. We will begin writing letters at 7:00 PM and conduct business starting at 7:30.

The July meeting will be held at Limerick's Irish Pub on Naples Island in order to better celebrate Jamie's birthday.

Membership Dues

Any Long Beach members whose membership is past due will not receive the newsletter after the June mailing. If you want to pay, please send your dues in to Kevin Gaffney at 320 12th Street #8, Seal Beach, CA 90740. If you believe you had already paid, but the date shown on the front label does not reflect your payment, please email or call Kevin at xhuskr@ao1.com or (562) 430-7381.

Letter-Writing Action

The following is a sample letter for an action in Sudan to be sent to Mr. Ali Mohamed Osman Yassin, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, Ministry of Justice, Khartoum, Sudan.
Dear Minister,

I am deeply concerned for a 14-year-old girl who is well along in pregnancy and who was therefore sentenced on May 17 to 100 lashes. I urge that this sentence be commuted immediately if it has not already been commuted. This girl is a child herself and is certainly in no condition to tolerate a flogging.

I am informed that your country is a party to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that "No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment." If Sudanese law calls for a flogging in cases like this, please use the power of your office to work for amending the law to meet international standards.

Send copies to: Ambassador H.E. Khidir Haroun Ahmed, Embassy of the Republic of the Sudan, 2210 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington DC 20008.

Western Regional Planning Group

This article was submitted by Darcie Guy, a member of the Western Region RPG.

The Western Regional Planning Group (RPG) met in San Francisco March 29–30. The RPG is a group of about 15 representatives from across the region that meets annually. The RPG sets the budget for the Western Region of AIUSA and allocates funds for campaigns, events, and training for the region.

The Western Region RPG can have up to 15 members. We require four representatives from the Standing Committee on Membership Development, one Area Coordinator representative, one Student Area Coordinator representative, and we just added a requirement for a State Death Penalty Area Coordinator. The remaining positions are “members at large,” which loosely translates into general Amnesty members.

Each fiscal year, the Board of Directors determines the budget for AIUSA. These budget numbers are then passed to each region and each region determines the budget for their area for each year, keeping in mind the focus for Amnesty at the international level. The themes that Amnesty will be focusing on through 2017 are Discrimination, Impunity, Physical and Mental Integrity, Armed Conflict, People on the Move, Women and Girls, and Poverty. These themes become the backbone of the campaigns, events and training that AIUSA will roll out. Going forward there will be an increased emphasis on recruitment of younger members.

AIUSA Focus and Campaigns

The Imagine Campaign will primarily be a media campaign based upon John Lennon’s famous song. There was a kick-off event in LA in December 2002. This campaign will be in swing for the next two years, the period that Yoko Ono lent Amnesty the rights to the song. AIUSAs website has information on upcoming events.

People on the Move will focus on migrants and will cover such issues as the War on Terrorism, the INS, the Patriot Act, and human rights post 9/11.

There will be a brand new two-year campaign focusing on Violence against Women beginning this fall.

Discrimination will be a dominant theme throughout 2003 and into 2004. The Western Regional Conference will try to reach out to the Latino community. Bunche Fellow Christina Vargas will head up this outreach. The Regional Conference will be held in Redondo Beach November 2003 and as a result there will be no mini-conference in Southern California in 2004. The budget for the mini-conference for

2004 was re-directed to a SDPAC meeting.

There will be three public hearings in 2003–2004. A hearing on police brutality will be held in LA and focus on lesbian, gay, and transgender issues. The second on racial profiling will be held in San Francisco. The last will focus on children in INS custody (no location finalized).

Economic, Social and Cultural Rights will be a two-year focus for 2003–2004. The Human Rights Educators Network will hold on this issue an institute in Summer/Fall 2003 in Seattle, Washington. There will also be training available through GLAD and state, area, and regional conferences for individual members and local/student groups.

Physical and Mental Integrity will be a Western Region and AIUSA focus. The RPG received a request for the addition of yearly State Death Penalty Area Coordinators meeting, which was funded.

The region will again focus on a Weekend of Faith; New Mexico will be the focus state in 2003.

Budget

We discussed the decreasing budget of AIUSA. While AIUSA overall had to cut \$1.1 million from its budget for next year, the membership department was spared the worst of it, having to cut only \$14,400. Each region was asked to cut \$2,500 for 2002–2003 budget and \$2,500 for 2003–2004 budgets. (Note AIUSA’s fiscal year runs from October 1 through September 30 of each year.) This was covered under money set aside for the Run for Freedom that was cancelled. Additionally, AIUSA will not be filling any more open positions temporarily. Local groups should be aware of the additional financial pressure as they move forward on events, conferences and training.

Signature Event

We reviewed a request for a “signature” Western Region event and a proposal by Brent Fulton for a letter-writing marathon for December 2003. The RPG decided to focus funds on the Film Festival series that has been growing over the last four years. The newest addition will be the West Hollywood Film Festival in June 2003. There will be an additional location (perhaps Wyoming) in 2003–2004 and will be the “signature” event for the Western Region. While the RPG did like the letter-writing marathon, it felt that with the decreasing budgets, this could best be done at a local level with each local group. Groups could perhaps pursue the idea of a pledge/donation for each letter written to make this a fund raiser. The RPG felt the film festivals had the greater appeal for the public and therefore advertising dollars should go there.

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
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Please make your check payable to Amnesty International. Contributions to AI are tax-deductible. Thank you for your interest and support!

