



Amnesty International

Orange County

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

January 2004

<http://www.aiusaoc.org>

The State of Human Rights in the Union 2004

The President will soon stand before Congress and address the nation in the annual tradition known as the State of the Union, fulfilling his obligation to the U.S. Constitution requiring him to brief Congress periodically. This comes at a time when many are concerned about the Bush administrations policies and their effect on both Constitutional guarantees and fundamental human rights. The President will undoubtedly speak of the state of security in the nation and of the success of our security forces abroad, of missions accomplished and missions yet to be completed, and of issues of justice for those responsible for terrorist and torturous acts. The United States and all governments have a responsibility to protect their citizens against terrorism and human rights abuses. One of the best ways to accomplish this important task in the near and longterm is to uphold, promote, and defend human rights principles. As the President reports on the “war on terror,” many of us are asking whether U.S. policies are promoting human rights and whether they are just and contributing to a more secure world.

While the President speaks of the liberation of the Iraqi people from the oppressive regime of Saddam Hussein, U.S. courts are preparing to decide whether to uphold or defeat the Bush administration policies that hold US citizens indefinitely without charge or access to a lawyer, and that hold hundreds of men and boys in Guantanamo Bay without legal status, denied basic protections guaranteed under international human rights laws. Is this justice and does it build a more secure world?

The President will highlight the capture of Saddam Hussein as an end to a long era of torture, executions, and severe repression in Iraq. At the same time the President denounces torture, the United States is the focus of numerous reports alleging use of ill-treatment and even torture against detainees in military facilities abroad and in prisons at home. Also in the name of the “war on terror,” the United States has sent and deported individuals to countries where they were tortured, including the case of one Canadian who was detained at a U.S. airport, forcibly deported to Jordan and then sent to Syria where he was tortured before finally being released and allowed to return to his family in Canada. Is this justice and does it build a more secure world?

The United States has rolled back fundamental protections afforded in the U.S. Constitution and enshrined in international human rights law and treaties, and it is continuing this trend. Building on the USA PATRIOT Act, Congress has widely expanded the types of businesses that the FBI can serve national security letters to, gathering information without requiring

even perfunctory review and approval by a judge. Congress has introduced the CLEAR Act and the VICTORY Act, furthering a trend of diminishing restrictions on law enforcements ability to monitor and detain citizens and non-citizens, and increasing the concentration of power in the Executive branch without appropriate safeguards. Is this justice and does it build a more secure world?

The President will highlight his plans to provide temporary amnesty to millions of illegal immigrants, without mentioning the severely discriminatory policies of racially profiling individuals of Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian background, subjecting many to longterm detention, denying them access to lawyers, and deporting others who have lived in and contributed to this country with their families for years. Is this justice and does it build a more secure world?

The U.S. is among only a handful of nations that still execute juvenile offenders and is responsible for 19 of the 34 juvenile offender executions in the world since 1990. Four juvenile offenders were executed in the United States between 2002 and 2003—in the rest of the world, China was the only other government known to have executed one juvenile offender. Virtually every country in the world has eliminated the death penalty for juvenile offenders and more than half the nations of the world have abolished the death penalty altogether. In the face of growing recognition of the flaws in capital punishment, the U.S. has released from death row 112 people since 1973 due to evidence of their wrongful conviction. Many endured decades of wrongful imprisonment, and others even less fortunate were executed though there is strong evidence now that they may have been innocent. Is this justice and does it build a more secure world?

Pressing demands for security in the context of the “war on terror” means a proliferation of security assistance to countries that are new allies, despite their extremely poor human rights records. It also means that the range of new security technologies is developing rapidly, often without regulation. And it means that the Department of Commerce is continuing to license the export and sale of electronic shock equipment and other devices that can be used to torture prisoners, suspects, protestors and dissidents—some of this equipment is authorized to go to countries cited by Department of State for their records of committing torture. Is this justice and does it build a more secure world?

Many have argued that the undoing of valued liberties is a small price to pay in the name of security. However, countries

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December Meeting Minutes

Group #178 Irvine

Global Peace

Group member Alan White reported on his presentation at the Earth Resource Foundation on the topic of Global Peace Issues. Attending were representatives of human rights clubs from local high schools. Mr. White managed to weave into his speech numerous mentions of Amnesty International.

Annual General Meeting

The group will sponsor one or two members to attend the Annual General Meeting in New York City in April. The financial sponsorship will help cover part of the costs. Group members interested in some financial assistance to attend the AGM should contact the coordinator at ai_irvine@aiusaoc.org or (714) 557-8427

Fundraising News

Group member Julie Ralls, who has raised several hundred dollars in the past month with henna-painting fundraisers benefitting Group #178, may create a poster describing her fundraiser method for the Ideas fair at the Annual General Meeting.

The Huntington Beach and Irvine groups will participate in a fundraiser at the Improv comedy club in Irvine (at the Spectrum shopping center). The Irvine group will contribute \$125 to the initial cost.

Jacques Kilchoër will investigate having preprinted envelopes and donation forms to hand out to anyone who would be interested in making a donation to group 178.

Future Meetings

Alan White will contact ex-prisoner of conscience Ricardo (last name to be supplied later) from Chile and ask him if he would be willing to speak at one of our group meetings.

At our January meeting our speaker will be Robbie Prepas talking about her trip and work for the Centers for Disease Control in Afghanistan.

Upcoming Events

Group #596 Huntington Beach Meeting

Group #596 has a special speaker at their January meeting. Joanne Baker will be speaking about Tias Arms, a newly "born" organization (in its second year), which raises funds for the care of abandoned or orphaned children affected by AIDS in South Africa. The goal of this organization is to provide hospice care to babies and children who are dying. The group's website is www.tiasarms.com.

Joanne Baker was born and raised in Durban, South Africa. At the age of 21, she "ex-patriated" to the US and has been practicing as a registered nurse for thirty years. On a return trip to South Africa, in 2001, Joanne could not believe the devastation of AIDS. "To think of all those little defenseless children who had no voice, not only being left without parents or extended family but also to be in the process of dying! It seemed overwhelming. But upon holding these children who so openly gave of their love (and smiles), I returned to the US vowing to do something."

Please come and join us for this moving discussion. We

will have actions on for all attendees. The meeting will be on Monday, January 26 at 7:00 PM at Sts. Simon and Jude Church, Room 7B, 20444 Magnolia Street, Huntington Beach.

For more information contact Darcie Guy at (949) 742-5524 or Shyamal Leonard at (310) 422-0166 or consult the website <http://www.amnestyusa.org/events/western/>.

California Execution Scheduled

February 10 has been set as the execution date for Kevin Cooper, an African-American man on San Quentin's death row. The Committee to Stop the Execution of Kevin Cooper is urging concerned people to get involved now in this fight about the criminal injustice system, racism, and human rights.

There will be a local protest against the execution on Monday February 9, from 5:00 PM until midnight in Orange County at the Orange Plaza (Circle of Orange) at Glassell & Chapman in downtown Orange.

Journey of Hope

On Monday, February 23, Citizens United for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (CUADP) and California People of Faith Working Against the Death Penalty, Orange County Chapter, bring CUADP's national tour, "Journey of Hope . . . from Violence to Healing" to Orange County.

Abe Bonowitz, director of CUADP, prolific emailer and full time activist, is joined by Juan Melendez, a former prisoner exonerated from Florida's death row after facing execution for over 17 years, and Bill Pelke, who has been working to overturn the death sentence of his grandmother's murderer.

The program is being held at the St. Joseph Center, 480 S. Batavia in Orange and includes refreshments at 6:30 PM with the presentations from 7:00-9:00 PM.

End This "Shameful Practice"

Amnesty International's youth activists will join together in a massive worldwide push February 16-22 to demand an end to the juvenile death penalty. AI is making it a priority to put an end to the practice that four Supreme Court justices have called "this shameful act" by December 2005. During the International Week of Student Action, students will work to raise public awareness, both on campus and in their communities. They will also take direct action, bombarding both the U.S. and Pakistani Governments with letters, postcards and petitions demanding that they comply with international law, which forbids the executions of juvenile offenders. Twenty-one U.S. states currently allow 16- or 17-year-olds to be sentenced to death.

Check AIUSA's website in the coming weeks for more details.

Cell Phone Round Up

What do you do with more than 50,000 used cell phones? Fight domestic violence! AIUSA's Women's Human Rights Program co-sponsored a national cell phone collection with the Body Shop in October, collecting used cell phones to be sold, refurbished or recycled, with proceeds benefiting the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. AIUSA members' participation helped the coalition surpass the original goal of 30,000 cell phones by more than 20,000.

From the Executive Director

Members: Our Ace in the Hole

This column, by AIUSA Executive Director Bill Schulz, is taken from the December 2003-January 2004 Monthly Mailing

Amnesty International’s ace-in-the-hole has always been our huge grass-roots membership. As we try to influence both our own government and governments around the world—to say nothing of corporations—it is a huge asset to be able to say, “Amnesty International has more than 1.5 million members worldwide” or “I am speaking not just for myself but for the 320,000 members of AIUSA.” Much as we may sometimes resist the notion, numbers do count. They count in the measure of our influence and they count in the effect we can have on changing our society.

One myth that has long plagued AIUSA is the notion that volunteer activism is a legitimate substitute for formal membership—which of course includes paying membership dues. Many of our strongest activists are also dues-paying members—a commitment that we honor, and one that tangibly reflects their ownership of this unique organization.

It is also true that for a few of our activists—particularly students—paying dues would truly constitute a hardship (in which case it is still possible to join via a dues waiver). With that said, it is my guess that the vast majority of our student activists, who are some of our most devoted, both want and can afford membership. We just haven’t asked them to do so in an effective, systematic way.

But that is changing. Less than five months ago we began distributing very informally a new brochure designed to attract our student activists to formal membership. Before we even officially launched our student recruitment effort, hundreds had joined, many by visiting the website www.amnestyusa.org/join/student.

In October, we sent a student and youth recruitment packet to all registered student groups to formally launch our campaign. Our Student Area Coordinators are making this campaign a priority. This month we took our campaign outside the organization, by sending an e-mail to thousands of young people not currently affiliated with Amnesty. The e-mail contains a link to a 30-second video that connects the civil liberties restrictions occurring in this country to human rights crackdowns happening elsewhere. As an incentive, those who join receive an exclusive Amnesty International compilation CD featuring Coldplay, Radiohead, Beth Orton and others. Check out the

announcement on the back of Connect for more information.

In addition to the always-welcome revenue that it would generate, such formal membership will better integrate students into our institutional life, allowing them to vote in elections and serve as movement leaders. It may also make the transition to post-student member more seamless.

But membership has other benefits as well—for everyone, not just students. It increases one’s investment in the health of the organization. It allows us to provide more member services. And it signals Amnesty’s strength to the larger world.

If we are to transform ours into a culture that respects human rights, we can only do so by attracting far more people to our cause. I wrote last month about our many allies who, while not official A.I. members or contributors, are taking steps to promote human rights in their respective arenas. Those people are important to our movement. But equally important are those who formally support this institution—with their time, wisdom and energy, but also with their dollars and official affiliation.

So to those who are already members, we extend our deepest thanks. And to those who are not, we say, “We need you. We relish your enthusiasm but we also need your formal membership. The truth is that we will never be all we can be without you!”

William Schulz

State of Human Rights

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can and have protected themselves without sacrificing the fundamental principles of justice and human dignity that are enumerated in the U.S. Constitution and international human rights law and treaties. As this country pauses to reflect on the State of the Union that was 2003, we must assess whether the U.S. will continue on the path of trading liberty for security or if we are going to be a nation of leaders who will work within the community of nations to uphold fundamental human rights in both word and deed.

On January 20, 2004, Amnesty International USA, a grass-roots activist organization with more than 350,000 members nationwide, is launching a campaign to call for policies that are just and build a more secure world. Amnesty International members across the country are holding events and calling the White House to urge President Bush to lead by example and hold himself and his administration to the highest standards for human dignity and freedom.

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.

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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!

