



Amnesty International

Orange County

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

December 2007–January 2008

<http://www.aiusaoc.org>

Stop the Human Rights Meltdown: Make Human Rights Real

This message is from Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International, on the occasion of International Human Rights Day 2007.

As we approach the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we have cause for both celebration and challenge.

We celebrate the impressive development over six decades of international human rights standards, laws and institutions that have improved the lives of many around the world.

The Universal Declaration reflects global values of equality and justice. It inspired the struggle to end apartheid in South Africa, and to promote democracy in Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia. It has led to progress to end the death penalty, to outlaw torture, to promote the equality of women, to protect the rights of children, to turn the tide against impunity. Above all, it has moved a worldwide community of ordinary men and women to join in the fight for justice and equality for all.

But this is not only a moment for celebration and self-congratulation. It is also a time of challenge – the challenge of making rights real, of closing the gap between the promise of the Universal Declaration and the performance of governments and others.

From Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, human rights are being violated, neglected and eroded with audacity and impunity by governments, big business and armed groups. Renewed commitment is needed by governments as well as civil society to convert rhetoric into reality, disillusionment and despair into hope and action.

In Darfur, murder, rape and violence continue unabated. It is not enough for world leaders to wring their hands in horror. We call on them to resource the UN/ AU peacekeeping force properly so that it can protect people effectively.

In Zimbabwe, human rights defenders and political dissidents are being attacked, tortured and thrown into prison without a fair trial. Amnesty International's recent mission to the country has reinforced our worst fears. We call on governments like South Africa that have influence on President Mugabe to use their influence to bring an end to the violations.

In the Middle East impunity, injustice and human rights abuses are a major obstacle to peace and justice, yet world leaders in Annapolis paid scant attention to them. We call on the international community to put human rights at the centre of the political dialogue.

Today, the International Olympics Committee is meeting to assess progress towards the 2008 Olympics in China. The Committee must not overlook the repression by the Chinese

authorities of activists who are protesting forcible evictions to clear land for the Olympics and other projects, or the restrictions on Chinese journalists and internet users. The Olympics Committee must use its influence with the Chinese government to end these practices, which are both contrary to human rights and to the spirit of the Games.

In Myanmar, crimson-robed monks courageously marched to protest the repression and impoverishment of their people but were brutally crushed by the military junta. The neighbouring governments of Myanmar are major trade partners of the military regime. They have power and influence that they must use to pressure the military regime to release Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other prisoners of conscience and bring about change.

In Pakistan, dark suited lawyers who took to the streets to demand the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary fared no better than the Burmese monks—because like the Myanmar junta, the Pakistani General too has powerful allies. The allies must prioritize human rights over political expediency and misguided security strategies. The failure to do so risks aggravating both human rights and security problems.

A global strategy of counter-terrorism, led by the world's most powerful government, has undermined fundamental principles of human rights, while extremists and armed groups have unleashed a downward spiral of violence that has endangered the lives of ordinary people everywhere. Parliaments, courts and civil society must call for respect of human rights and the rule of law as the path to greater security. More attention and resources must be allocated to tackle the hidden or forgotten human rights scandals that destroy millions of lives and livelihoods. While the atrocities of wars make the newspaper pages, very few people are aware that violence against women causes more casualties than armed conflicts.

While world leaders remind us daily of the threat of weapons of mass destruction, the sale and transfer of small arms and conventional weapons, which kill a thousand people a day continue unchecked.

While the advantages and opportunities of economic globalization are evident, there is far less understanding of the failure to respect economic, social and cultural rights that is marginalizing and impoverishing millions of people.

In Bali today the international community is debating the dangers of global warming. The human rights meltdown

Continued on page 3

November Meeting Minutes

Group #175 Long Beach

Present

Mary Kay Dunn, Norma Edwards, Deidre Gaffney, Kevin Gaffney, Shean McMahon, Jim Roberts, Linda Veazey

Burma/Myanmar

With everything that's been going on, there is still no word from the International Secretariat about the news that our prisoner, Ye Htut, may have been released. Meanwhile, the UN rapporteur has returned from a visit and will make a report on December 11. (Meanwhile, since our meeting, there has been lots of news from Myanmar. Incidentally, the government claims that only 91 people were arrested in the crackdown.

Western Regional Meeting

Linda, Deidre, and Kevin reported back from the meeting. Hilary's resolution ("democratic process" in Amnesty) was split into three resolutions and passed. Other resolutions that our group voted against were passed but may encounter trouble at the Annual General Meeting in April. The conference was good, and the opening plenary was very moving.

Death Penalty

The American Bar Association called for a moratorium on executions. They said the death penalty should be immediately halted in five states: Indiana, Georgia, Ohio, Alabama, and Tennessee. http://www.cumberlink.com/articles/2007/11/08/editorial/rich_lewis/lewis51.txt

Group News

- Kevin will do a presentation at the January meeting about the Western Region's Prisoner of Conscience, Shi Tao. (http://www.amnestyusa.org/Global_Writeathon/Shi_Tao/page.do?id=1011500&n1=3&n2=34&n3=65).
- The group sent letters to President Bush, the royal Saudi ambassador and royal officials in Saudi Arabia, officials in Myanmar as well as the ambassador, officials in Iran, and two holiday cards to Belarus for a total of 55 letters.
- PLEASE NOTE: We will not be having a December meeting at the Unitarian Church. Instead, we will be having a write-a-thon/party at Norma's house. Everyone is invited. Sunday, December 16, 3–6 PM. 3529 Loomis Street, Lakewood 90712 (cross street Downey). It will be an appetizer potluck. (Kevin suggests bringing something from your prisoner's country. Or maybe something international?) Bring your friends! (Kids welcome too.) For more information, e-mail Norma at beachykeeno@yahoo.com or call 562-425-4353.

November Meeting Minutes

Group #141 Orange

Letter-Writing

The group sent out letters to Saudi Arabian officials on behalf of three men who had been tortured by government officials there for homosexual activities; to officials in Iran protesting the death sentence given to Kurdish journalist Adnan Haseanpour, an advocate for cultural rights for Iran's Kurdish minority; and to Sri Lankan officials concerning "disappearances"

committed by security forces in that country.

Western Regional Meeting

Kevin and Deidre reported on last month's Western Regional Meeting, held in San Francisco. Magdaleno Rose-Avila, former AIUSA Western Regional Director emceed the Opening Plenary, which featured an address by AIUSA Executive Director Larry Cox.

Kevin and Deidre reported on the Working Parties on resolutions. One of the resolutions that passed had been proposed by Hilary Naylor, which proposed changes to try to make the Board of Directors more accountable. Another resolution which passed, proposed by Brent Fulton, called for the December 10 Global Write-a-thon to be a "signature event" for AIUSA, in which groups would be "strongly encouraged" to participate. It would also change it to a fundraising event, where members would solicit pledges for letters written. Kevin and other group members expressed concern over essentially being locked into a specific event as well as the cost involved. Another resolution called for a study on human rights impacts of border issues, and specifically what happens to immigrants crossing the desert.

Kevin attended the Media and China Olympics Workshop. Amnesty wants members, if we can do anything with the media, to focus on four areas in connection with the 2008 Olympics: the lack of information on the death penalty in China, re-education through labor, human rights defenders, and internet censorship. The first action file for the China Olympics Campaign is expected in December; Kevin will take charge of this campaign for the group. Kevin also discussed the Shi Tao Workshop and Yahoo! US's response.

Deidre attended the workshop on new Amnesty issues, where she learned that just as in the past, Amnesty did not take a stand on apartheid, Amnesty has no stand on genocide. Furthermore, they do not consider what is happening in Darfur to be genocide. While it is a human rights crisis, it does not meet the definition of genocide. This means we cannot coalition with many of the other groups. Similarly, Amnesty does not take a position on armed conflicts.

Deidre also attended a workshop on economic, social, and cultural rights of the Roma, commonly referred to as Gypsies, which Deidre learned is considered an ethnic slur. Many of the Roma are targeted for human rights abuses from outsiders and many of the women are victims of domestic abuse from within their own community. Many of the children are not allowed to go to school.

Other News

Jeannine reported that Senators Richard Durbin (D-IL) and Sam Brownback (R-KS) have introduced legislation into the Senate to restrict U.S. military assistance to governments that recruit or use child soldiers in their armed forces. The Child Soldier Prevention Act of 2007 (S. 1175), introduced in April, also urges the United States to expand its efforts to help remove and rehabilitate children from armed forces and militia groups around the world.

Meeting Day Change

The group will begin meeting on its new meeting day, the fourth Tuesday of each month, in January 2008.

Releases of AIUSA Action File Cases

Concord, Massachusetts, Local Group 15 learned that Myanmar authorities released their adopted prisoner, Thet Naung Soe, during November. A student sentenced to 14 years for protesting outside Yangon's city hall in 2002, Thet Naung Soe was freed from Insein Prison along with several other prisoners of conscience shortly after a visit to Myanmar by the UN's human rights envoy.

They were celebrating up and down the West Coast as Group 4 in Seattle and Group 30 in San Francisco both learned in October of the release of their long-time jointly adopted prisoner, Ngawang Phulchung, a Tibetan monk. Chinese authorities freed Ngawang Phulchung, who had been imprisoned for more than 18 years from Chushul Prison, on or about October 21. He was incarcerated for 18 years and six months of his 19-year sentence before receiving a six-month sentence reduction on September 22, 2005. Reports indicate that he is now at his home with his family.

Indigeneous Woman Set Free

A prisoner of conscience and mother-of-five has been released from jail in Mexico after spending more than 18 months in custody.

Magdalena García Durán, an indigenous Mazahua street vendor, was set free on November 22 after courts said there was no evidence justifying her detention and trial on charges of kidnapping and attacks on public roads.

After her release, she thanked Amnesty International, which had campaigned extensively on her behalf.

Magdalena García had been in prison since May 4, 2006, when she was arbitrarily arrested in San Salvador Atenco, Mexico State, during demonstrations.

Several police officers pulled her out of a van and beat and kicked her repeatedly. She was then handcuffed, covered and forced to lie on top of other detainees in a waiting vehicle. Officers repeatedly threatened to kill her "like a dog."

After six days in detention she was informed of the charges against her and committed for trial. She has consistently denied the charges and her defence lawyer has presented evidence to show that she was not involved in the violent offences she was accused of.

Amnesty International believes Magdalena García's prolonged detention was politically motivated and totally unjustified. The authorities failed to provide evidence of her alleged crimes and there are indications that the little evidence available was probably fabricated.

Amnesty International remains concerned for the fate of

more than 150 people who still face charges following demonstrations in San Salvador Atenco, and for 20 people who continue to be detained on the same charges and evidence as Magdalena García Durán.

Ignite Hope, Advocate Change at AIUSA's 2008 Annual General Meeting

Amnesty International members attending AIUSA's 2008 Annual General Meeting April 25-28 in Washington will have a unique opportunity to go straight to the halls of congress and educate members of Congress about human rights issues and lobby them on upcoming human rights legislation.

The theme for this year's AGM is "Ignite Hope, Advocate Change," and that is what Lobby Day Monday, April 28 is all about, a chance to show the power of a strong and organized AI membership demanding bold leadership in the fight for global human rights.

During early bird registration, through January 18, members receive \$25 off AGM registration. This fee covers all AGM programming, including workshops, trainings and panels.

Go to <http://www.amnestyusa.org/agm> to register for the AGM.

Human Rights Meltdown

Continued from page 1

around the world today is no less a threat to the future of humanity, the call to action no less urgent.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights began as an initiative of governments but today it is the common endeavour of people everywhere.

Every human has rights. That is the essence of our humanity. It places on each of us the duty to stand up, not just for our own rights but also for those of others. That is the spirit of international solidarity. That is the true meaning of universal, indivisible human rights.

As citizens of the world:

- We believe human rights abuses anywhere are the concern of people everywhere.
- We pledge to harness the power of individuals to galvanize action for justice and equality for all.
- We are outraged at the betrayal of our leaders, and are determined to hold them to account.
- We commit ourselves to creating a global culture in which every person can realise their human rights.
- We will carry the message of hope of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to every region of the world in the 60th anniversary year.

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 shown with annual dues of \$10.00. Dues cover the costs of this newsletter and of stamps used for saving lives. Your address label contains your membership expiration date. Join us!

Name _____

Address _____

City, State & Zip _____

Return to:

Amnesty International
Group 178
P.O. Box 17186
Irvine, CA 92623-1718

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!

Calendar

December

16 Sunday 3:00–6:00 PM

Write-a-thon/Party at Norma Edward's house at 3529 Loomis Street, Lakewood 90712 (cross street Downey). It will be an appetizer potluck. Everyone is invited. Bring your friends! (Kids welcome too.) For more information, e-mail Norma at beachykeeno@yahoo.com or call 562-425-4353.

The local groups are not holding meetings in December but will resume their regular meetings in January 2008.

January

16 Wednesday 7:00 PM

Group #175 Long Beach Monthly Meeting at the Unitarian Universalist Church, Rooms 1 and 2, 5450 Atherton Street, Long Beach. Letter-writing from 7:00–7:30. For further information about the group, contact Norma Edwards at (562) 425-4353.

28 Monday 7:00 PM

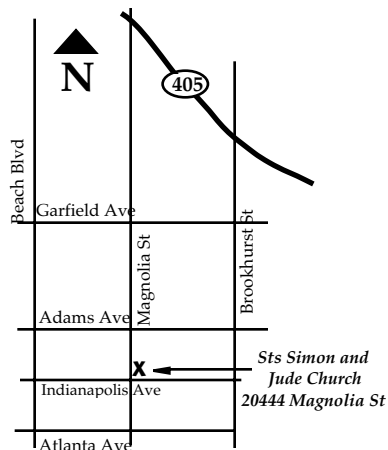
Group #596 Huntington Beach Meeting at Saints Simon and Jude Church, Adult Center, 20444 Magnolia Street in Huntington Beach. For more information, email Anne Saxe at annegalan56@hotmail.com.

22 Tuesday 7:00 PM

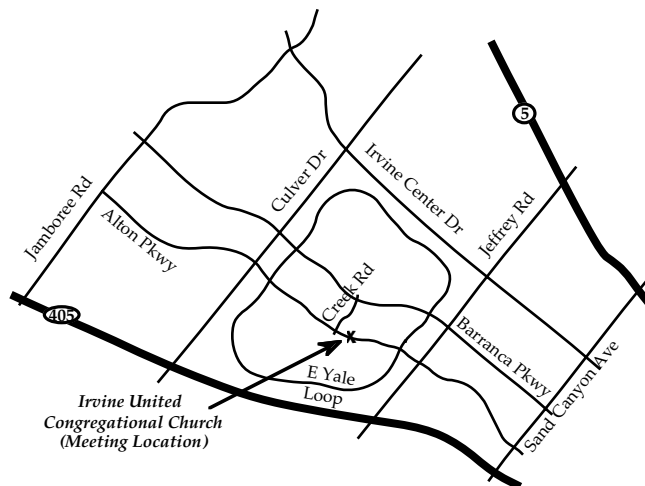
Group #141 Orange Monthly Meeting at the Sisters of St. Joseph, 480 S. Batavia Street, in Orange. Look for the classroom/auditorium building behind the main building. Drive around on the south side of main building and park in the back. Look for the signs for the classroom number. For further information about the group, contact Kevin Gaffney at xhuskr@aol.com.

31 Thursday 7:00 PM

Group #178 Irvine Monthly Meeting at the Irvine United Congregational Church, 4915 Alton Parkway, Irvine. See details on the web page <http://www.aiusaoc.org>. For more information about the group, contact Glen Nielsen at nielsenelectric@cox.net.



Group #596 Huntington Beach Location



Group #178 Irvine Location

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