



# Amnesty International

Orange County

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

April 2008

<http://www.aiusaoc.org>

## China: The Olympics Countdown Crackdown on Activists Threatens Olympics Legacy

With little more than four months to go before the Beijing Olympics, few substantial reforms have been introduced that will have a significant, positive impact on human rights in China. This is particularly apparent in the plight of individual activists and journalists, who have bravely sought to expose ongoing human rights abuses and call on the government to address them. Recent measures taken by the authorities to detain, prosecute and imprison those who raise human rights concerns suggest that, to date, the Olympic Games has failed to act as a catalyst for reform. Unless the Chinese authorities take steps to redress the situation urgently, a positive human rights legacy for the Beijing Olympics looks increasingly beyond reach.

It is increasingly clear that much of the current wave of repression is occurring not in spite of the Olympics, but actually because of the Olympics. Peaceful human rights activists, and others who have publicly criticised official government policy, have been targeted in the official pre-Olympics “clean up,” in an apparent attempt to portray a “stable” or “harmonious” image to the world by August 2008. Recent official assertions of a “terrorist” plot to attack the Olympic Games have given prominence to potential security threats to the Olympics, but a failure to back up such assertions with concrete evidence increases suspicions that the authorities are overstating such threats in an attempt to justify the current crackdown.

Several peaceful activists, including those profiled in this series of reports, remain imprisoned or held under tight police surveillance. Despite some high profile releases, many more have been detained over the last six months for doing nothing more than petitioning the authorities to address their grievances or drawing international attention to ongoing human rights violations. Several of those detained have reportedly been subjected to beatings and other forms of torture or other ill-treatment. Those who have linked China’s human rights responsibilities to its hosting of the Olympics have been among the most harshly treated.

Foreign journalists continue to be obstructed from reporting on issues deemed sensitive by the authorities despite the introduction of new regulations last year, ostensibly aimed at increasing their freedom to cover news stories in China. Chinese journalists continue to work under conditions of tight control and censorship and those that publish articles critical of the authorities or official policy risk prosecution and imprisonment. Over recent months, new measures have also been introduced to increase official controls over the Internet, with

several HIV/AIDS news websites among those most recently targeted in Beijing. Reports suggest that information controls are also being extended to cover SMS text messaging in Beijing.

Despite long-standing efforts to substantially reform or abolish “Re-education through Labour” (RTL), the system remains intact and available for use by the Beijing police as a tool to sweep “undesirables” off the streets. Recent targets have included activists and petitioners, some of whom have reportedly been assigned to RTL after being detained in Beijing and forcibly returned to their home provinces. Recent reports of round-ups of petitioners in Beijing suggest that the authorities are resorting to methods similar to “Custody and Repatriation” (C&R)—an abusive system of administrative detention the abolition of which in 2003 was presented by the authorities as a major human rights improvement.

While the authorities have claimed that the restoration of Supreme People’s Court (SPC) review led to a significant reduction in the number of executions in 2007, they have failed to support their assertions by publishing full national statistics and other detailed information on the application of the death penalty in China. Such information is essential to allow Chinese and other independent observers to accurately assess the impact of SPC review, and to allow the Chinese public at large to debate and come to informed opinions on the death penalty. Recent reports indicate that the review process itself is beset by significant problems, including a lack of clarity on procedures for defence lawyers to access the SPC. No efforts have been made to reduce the large number crimes punishable by death, and two recent SPC judicial interpretations on damage to electric power facilities and the production or sale of fake medicine may actually encourage lower courts to impose the death penalty, even if crimes have non-lethal consequences.

Time is running out for the Chinese authorities to steer a new course prior to the Olympics based on respect for fundamental human rights—in particular rights to freedom of expression, movement and liberty and security of the person, which apply as much to those who may disagree with government policy as those who agree. It is crucial that the international community, including those with a stake in the Olympics, such as the International Olympic Committee and world leaders who will attend the Games, take a stronger stance with the Chinese authorities to bring an end to such abuses.

For information on activists silenced in the name of the Olympics go to <http://www.amnestyusa.org/countries/china/olympicsreport.pdf>

## March Meeting Minutes

### Group #141 Orange

#### Letter-Writing

The group sent out 36 letters this month. These included letters to Senators Feinstein and Boxer and to Representative Dana Rohrabacher asking them to support the inclusion of human rights monitoring and safeguards in the "Merida Initiative," a \$1.4 billion multi-year regional security cooperation initiative to combat organized crime and drug trafficking in Mexico and Central America.

We also wrote to the prime minister of Serbia and Montenegro welcoming Montenegro's signing of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and urging their full implementation of the convention.

We wrote to the Georgia State Board of Pardons and Paroles asking that they commute Troy Anthony Davis' death sentence. Davis' case has generated widespread attention and there are serious concerns about his guilt. We wrote to the Minister of Justice in Viet Nam asking for the release of five leaders of the United Workers Farmers Organization, whom Amnesty considers prisoners of conscience, imprisoned solely for exercising their human rights.

Another letter asked for a new and fair trial for François-Xavier Byuma, sentenced to 19 years imprisonment in Rwanda. Byuma is the head of an organization that investigates violations of children's rights, including sexual violence and forced labor.

Finally, we wrote to Syrian officials asking for the release of seven men in jail since early 2006 for publishing pro-democracy articles on the Internet.

#### Upcoming Events

- Death Penalty Focus is holding their annual awards dinner in Beverly Hills on April 24. See [www.deathpenalty.org/article.php?list=type&type=31](http://www.deathpenalty.org/article.php?list=type&type=31) for information.
- AIUSA's Annual General Meeting will be in Washington, DC, April 25-27. See [http://www.amnestyusa.org/News\\_and\\_Events/Annual\\_General\\_Meeting/page.do?id=1102288&n1=5&n2=47](http://www.amnestyusa.org/News_and_Events/Annual_General_Meeting/page.do?id=1102288&n1=5&n2=47) for information.

## March Meeting Minutes

### Group #175 Long Beach

#### Present

Lizette Ashcraft, Mary Kay Dunn, Norma Edwards, Mike Farris, Deidre Gaffney, Kevin Gaffney, Socheata Has, Bobbi Kendig, Ratana Lim, Shean McMahon, Vibol Muk, Naomi Steinfeld, Arun Thach, Linda Veazey, Steve Wicke

#### China/Olympics Campaign

Kevin told us that ISPs and Web sites are working with Human Rights Watch on crafting guidelines concerning censorship in China. Did you know that computers in China have tracking software? Apparently, Westerners and others with cash can override this system, but not the average person. As for the Olympics, all kinds of things are happening: some African runners are refusing to run because of pollution; many nations are pulling out of the opening ceremonies to protest China's human rights record in Tibet; protests are planned to

dog the torch as it circles the globe.

#### Cambodian New Year

Socheata updated us on her group's efforts to make sure that the Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister Sok An (second in command in Cambodia) did not represent the Cambodian-American community at this year's Cambodian New Year's Parade in Long Beach. As of the meeting, Socheata described how the organizing committee was basically giving them the runaround by not providing a report, as requested by a mediator with the city. It appears that the Sok An was not at the parade (from press accounts), but perhaps we can get the full update at the next meeting.

#### Resolutions

Linda will vote for us at the AGM this month in DC. At our April meeting we will discuss the resolutions and even confer with Linda over cell phone while she is in Chicago (thanks, Linda!). To check out the text of the resolutions, go to the members' section of the Amnesty Web site.

#### Letter Writing

The Myanmar authorities have intensified their persecution of political activists in the aftermath of the violent crackdown on mass peaceful protests last September. Since November 1, 2007, more than 100 political activists in different parts of the country, including in ethnic minority states, have been arrested. Further, at least 16 have been sentenced to prison terms, with the heaviest reportedly being life imprisonment.

The media is strictly state-controlled in Myanmar. All newspapers and other printed media must be submitted to the "Press Scrutiny Board" before publication or distribution; authors, editors, publishers, and distributors may be imprisoned for up to seven years for contravening the regulations. All publications, including novels, broadcasts, and videos are subject to government censorship. The Internet is also highly censored. Connections were cut throughout Myanmar during the crackdown last September, and the authorities repeated the tactic when a small group demonstrated on its one-month anniversary. The group wrote letters on behalf of imprisoned journalists.

Section 17/1 of the Unlawful Associations Act allows the authorities to deem any group unlawful solely on the basis of the head of state's opinion rather than on reason or evidence. Peaceful groups, which could include trade unions, political parties, student associations, or religious organizations, can arbitrarily be declared unlawful under these provisions. The group wrote letters on behalf of imprisoned monks.

Amnesty International has called for the amendment or repeal of security laws that are open to such wide interpretation and which can be used to diminish freedom of expression rather than as a legitimate defense of the security of the state. These laws, including the Unlawful Associations Act, have been used to imprison many political prisoners and subject rights and freedoms to far greater restrictions than are permitted under international law.

The group also wrote to St. Vincent ([www.infoplease.com/atlas/country/saintvincentandthegrenadines.html](http://www.infoplease.com/atlas/country/saintvincentandthegrenadines.html)) and other places, sending off more than 60 letters.

## Amnesty Calls on Governments to Lift the Veil of Secrecy around Executions

In a new report published on April 15, 2008, Amnesty International revealed that at least 1,200 people were executed in 2007 and expressed deep concern that many more were killed by the state, in secret, in countries including China, Mongolia and Viet Nam.

The report *Death Sentences and Executions in 2007* says that at least 1,252 people were executed in 24 countries and at least 3,347 people were sentenced to death in 51 countries. Up to 27,500 people are estimated to be on death row across the world.

The figures also show an increase in executions in a number of countries. Iran executed at least 317 people, Saudi Arabia 143 and Pakistan 135—in comparison to 177, 39 and 82 executions respectively in 2006.

Eighty-eight per cent of all known executions took place in five countries: China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the USA. Saudi Arabia had the highest number of executions per capita, followed by Iran and Libya. Amnesty can confirm at least 470 executions by China—the highest overall figure. The true figure for China is undoubtedly much higher.

China—the world's top executioner—classifies the death penalty as a state secret. As the world and Olympic guests are left guessing, only the Chinese authorities know exactly how many people have been killed with state authorization.

"The secretive use of the death penalty must stop: the veil of secrecy surrounding the death penalty must be lifted. Many governments claim that executions take place with public support. People therefore have a right to know what is being done in their name," Amnesty International said.

During 2007, many countries continued to execute for crimes not commonly considered criminal, or after unfair procedures. Among them:

- In July, father of two Ja'Far Kiani was stoned to death for adultery in Iran.
- In October, a 75-year-old North Korean factory manager was shot by firing squad for failing to declare his family background, investing his own money in the factory, appointing his children as its managers and making international phone calls.
- In November, Mustafa Ibrahim, an Egyptian national, was beheaded in Saudi Arabia for the practice of sorcery.

In Texas, USA, Michael Richard was executed on September 25 after a state courthouse refused to stay open an extra 15 minutes to allow the filing of an appeal based on the constitu-

tionality of lethal injections. Richard's attorneys had been unable to file the appeal on time because of computer problems—which they had already brought to the court's attention. The US Supreme Court then refused to stop the execution. Earlier in the day, however, it had agreed in a Kentucky case to review the lethal injection issue, a decision that led to a de facto moratorium on all other lethal injection executions around the country. The Supreme Court's ruling is expected later this year.

Three countries—Iran, Saudia Arabia and Yemen—carried out executions for crimes committed by people below 18 years of age, against international law.

But 2007 was also the year in which the United Nations General Assembly voted—by 104 to 54, with 29 abstentions—to end the use of the death penalty.

"The UN General Assembly took the historic decision to call on all countries around the world to stop executing people. That the resolution was adopted in December with such a clear majority shows the global abolition of the death penalty is possible," said Amnesty International.

"The taking of life by the state is one of the most drastic acts a government can undertake. We are urging all governments to follow the commitments made at the UN and abolish the death penalty once and for all."

## AIUSA to Launch National Tour of Guantanamo Cell Replica

Amnesty International USA will launch its national tour of a life-size Guantanamo prison cell replica in Miami, Florida, on May 8. Activists will gather to experience the cell and urge the Bush administration to shut down the U.S.-controlled detention facility in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Larry Cox, AIUSA's executive director, will kick off the Miami event where participants will be dressed in Guantanamo-style orange boiler-suits. Activists will also hold signs urging the U.S. government to stop torture, halt indefinite detention practices, and end the use of secret prisons. Visitors will be encouraged to experience the interactive cell on display at the event.

This cell replica will visit cities and towns across the United States. The cell is designed to provide all visitors with a tangible glimpse into the life of a Guantanamo detainee. The replica includes a steel toilet, florescent lights, frosted windows and a sliding metal door. Many detainees are held in isolation in similar conditions for as long as 23 hours a day.

See a panoramic view of the inside of the cell at <http://www.mediavr.com/hicks.htm>.

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!

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# Calendar

## April

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.

22 Tuesday 7:00 PM

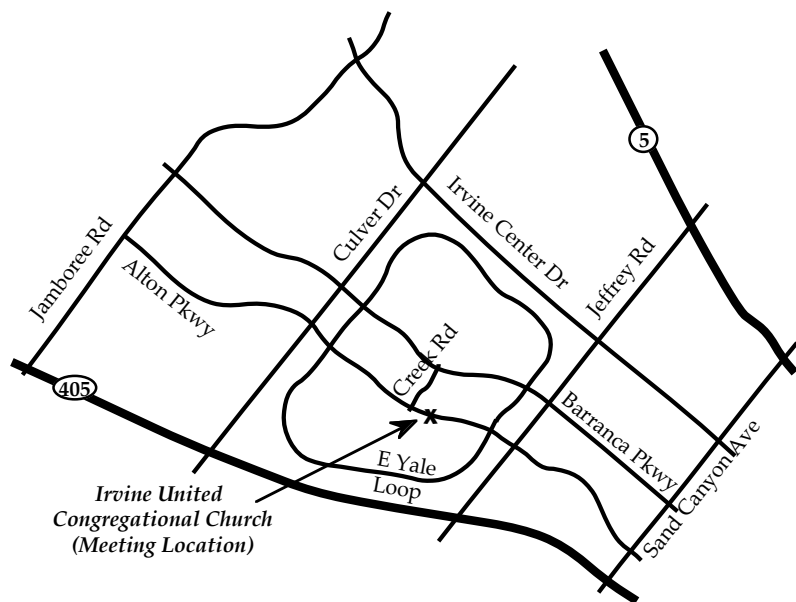
**Group #141 Orange Monthly Meeting** at the Sisters of St. Joseph, 480 S. Batavia Street, in Orange. Look for the classroom/auditorium building behind the main building. Drive around on the south side of main building and park in the back. Look for the signs for the classroom number. For further information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

24 Thursday 7:30 PM

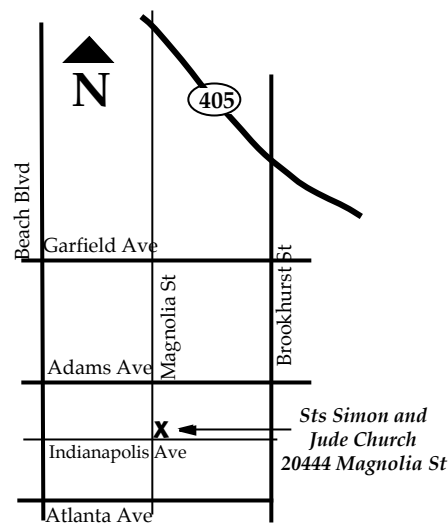
**Group #178 Irvine Monthly Meeting** at the Irvine United Congregational Church, 4915 Alton Parkway, Irvine. See details on the web page <http://www.aiusaoc.org>. For more information about the group, contact Jacques Kilchoer at [jacques.kilchoer@aiusaoc.org](mailto:jacques.kilchoer@aiusaoc.org).

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](mailto:annegalan56@hotmail.com).



Group #178 Irvine Meeting Location



Group #596 Huntington Beach Location

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