



Amnesty International

Orange County

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

June 2008

<http://www.aiusaoc.org>

China: Tiananmen Activists Must Be Released

This article is from a May 30, 2008 AIUSA press release.

June 4, 2008 marked the nineteenth anniversary of the Chinese government's crackdown on the pro-democracy demonstrations in and around Beijing's Tiananmen Square.

Hundreds of civilians were killed and thousands injured by the Chinese military, with tens of thousands arrested during the protests in 1989. Many other activists have subsequently been imprisoned for highlighting or questioning the government's actions that year.

With two months to go before the Olympics in Beijing, Amnesty International asks the Chinese authorities again to release those still in prison, to hold those to account those responsible for the crackdown, and to allow public mourning for and commemoration of the victims. Such a response will go a long way toward ensuring that the Olympic Games leave a positive human rights legacy.

On June 2, from London to Tel Aviv to Mexico City, thousands of Amnesty International supporters held demonstrations. Many laid red and white flowers in solidarity with the relatives of those killed and arrested and held a one-minute silence to commemorate the victims of the recent earthquake in the Chinese province of Sichuan.

Amnesty International commends the Chinese authorities for their prompt and responsive reaction to the needs of the many victims of this natural tragedy.

On the anniversary of the crackdown on pro-democracy protestors 19 years ago, Amnesty International urges the Chinese authorities to respond with similar openness toward the families of those who were killed and those who were imprisoned or otherwise silenced for exercising their right to protest.

Official statistics are secret, but according to the US-based Dui Hua Foundation, between 60 and 100 prisoners are still being held. On the eve of the anniversary this year, the Chinese Human Rights Defenders network published a list of 8 individuals who remained in prison in and around Beijing alone.

The Chinese authorities freed several prisoners in 2006 but continue to keep them under tight police surveillance and prevent them from engaging in any activities deemed politically sensitive, including speaking to journalists about their experiences.

Those who remain in prison include:

Miao Deshun, detained in June 1989 and convicted of arson. His original suspended death sentence was reduced to life imprisonment in 1991, and then to 20 years' imprisonment in 1998. He is currently held at Yanqing Prison on the outskirts of Beijing and due for release in September 2018.

Liu Zhihua was among a group of workers who organised a strike at the Xiangtan Electrical Machinery plant in Hubei province. His original sentence of life imprisonment for giving 'anti-government' speeches and inciting a mob to engage in 'beating, smashing and looting' was reduced to 15 years in September 1993, but extended again by five years in 1997 after he was involved in a brawl. With his sentence reduced by a further two years for good behaviour in 2001, he is currently due to be released on January 16, 2011.

Wang Jun, at the time an 18-year-old worker from Shaanxi province, was given a suspended death sentence for throwing rocks, breaking street lamps and setting fire to several vehicles during a "serious political disturbance" at the Xincheng Factory in Xi'an city on April 22, 1989. He is currently held at Fuping prison in Shaanxi province. After four sentence reductions, he is due for release on December 11, 2009.

More recently, journalists and other activists seeking to keep the crackdown in the public eye have been harassed, detained and imprisoned. They include:

The Tiananmen Mothers, a group of human rights activists whose children and other close relatives were killed during the crackdown, who have been calling on the Chinese authorities to allow victims' families the right to mourn in public, to end persecution of victims and their families, to release all those still imprisoned for taking part in peaceful protests and to implement a full and open inquiry into events of June 1989. Government authorities continue to subject them to harassment, discrimination and arbitrary detention.

Yang Tongyan (pen-name: Yang Tianshui), a freelance writer, continues to serve a 12-year prison sentence in Nanjing Municipal Prison, Jiangsu province, for "subversion" in connection with several charges, including writing in support of political and democratic change in China. He had previously served a ten-year prison sentence for criticizing the crackdown on the 1989 pro-democracy movement and allegedly trying to form an opposition political party. In 2007 he was reportedly forced to work making footballs and basketballs in an apparently toxic environment for 8-10 hours per day, but was transferred to lighter work as a prison librarian at the end of the year.

Kong Youping, a former trade union activist, was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment in September 2004 after he had posted articles and poems on the Internet calling for a reassessment of the 1989 pro-democracy movement. He is serving his sentence in Lingyuan prison, Liaoning province.

May Meeting Minutes

Group #141 Orange

Letter-Writing

The group sent out 24 letters this month. These included letters to Assistant Secretary of State Gregory Starr expressing concern over the State Department renewing its contract with Blackwater; President Bush urging him to take concrete steps to promote human rights in China when he attends the summer Olympics; the Myanmar ambassador and ASEAN about the cyclone; and to the UN and Secretary of State Rice about Darfur.

China Olympic Actions

Amnesty is asking activists to adapt actions to avoid any appearance of attacking the Chinese people, particularly when they are dealing with the earthquake, but to target the Chinese government.

Website

AIUSA's New York City-based Myanmar Action Team has its Informed Travel website up and running. To increase the site's search engine rankings, the Myanmar team requests that people paste the entire URL (<http://www.MyanmarTravelInfo.org/>) directly into Google, Yahoo, etc. and access it that way. The Informed Travel Project is trying to reach out to people interested in traveling to Myanmar to inform them about the human rights situation there.

Organization Changes

Kevin and Deidre talked about recent changes within Amnesty. The organization is moving away from work on individual prisoners of conscience and instead is focusing more on groups and regional issues. The term "prisoner of conscience" is being replaced by the term "individual at risk." For several years, the organization has been focusing on donors more than on members.

Area Coordinator

The group discussed asking the Western Regional Office to try to find an Area Coordinator for Orange County and Long Beach.

May Meeting Minutes

Group #175 Long Beach

Present

Lizette Ashcraft, Diana Budd, Mary Kay Dunn, Norma Edwards, Glen Nielsen, Jim Roberts, Naomi Steinfeld, Linda Veazey

Annual General Meeting

Our voting representative (and member of the national resolutions committee) Linda reported back from the AGM. She attended in April in DC. Unfortunately, she did miss some aspects of the conference as she was quite busy with doing the resolutions. (Thank you, Linda!) She reported that Irene Kahn was at the conference and gave us an overview of the resolutions that passed and failed. She also noted that the legislative aspect of the conference seemed to be very enthusiastically re-

ceived; people were very energized by visits to their Congress reps, and Amnesty provided lots of support. We all talked again about getting behind a topic that we can make visits about locally.

Death Penalty

Mary Kay brought us a copy of an editorial in the *Los Angeles Times* on April 18 once again calling for the abolition of the death penalty. We had a little discussion about the seemingly random use of the death penalty (who gets it and who doesn't). Below are some quotes from the editorial.

"What is cruel and unusual about capital punishment isn't the use of one combination of chemicals rather than another. It's the phenomenon cited by the late Justice Potter Stewart in 1972, when the high court invalidated death-penalty laws then on the books. Stewart wrote that 'these death sentences are cruel and unusual in the same way that being struck by lightning is cruel and unusual.' "

"That is still an accurate description of the freakish way capital punishment is administered. . . . Someday, a majority of the high court may join [Justice John Paul] Stevens in recognizing that the death penalty represents 'the pointless and needless extinction of life with only marginal contributions to any discernible social or public purposes.' Meanwhile, lawmakers should make such a conversion unnecessary by abolishing this anachronistic and inhumane punishment."

Burma/Myanmar

We spent a lot of time at the meeting discussing the current second tragedy occurring in Myanmar since Cyclone Nargis. Jim is keeping us informed via e-mail but gave us lots of insights at the meeting. As with most things in Myanmar, it is very possible that the death toll is much higher than has been stated.

An AI researcher had just returned before the cyclone and went right back, to the Thai border to monitor the situation. Western journalists and human rights workers have not been allowed in or to help, for the most part. (A few organizations were already based in Yangon but were waiting at the border with their supplies.) AI is asking ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) to use its influence to get Myanmar's junta to allow aid. AI also has a page with the latest news on the disaster at www.amnestyusa.org/other-countries/myanmar-burma/page.do?id=1011205&n1=3&n2=30&n3=955. There will be no UN action without China's acquiescence.

Meanwhile, no one has heard from Aung San Suu Kyi, though the junta has said she survived the cyclone. A neighbor reported that her roof blew off, and lights were seen in her house. Aung San Suu Kyi's birthday is June 19.

Group News

We wrote to Assistant Secretary of State Gregory Starr expressing concern over the State Department renewing its contract with Blackwater; President Bush urging him to take concrete steps to promote human rights in China when he attends the summer Olympics; the Myanmar ambassador and ASEAN about the cyclone; and to the UN and Secretary of State Rice about Darfur.

UBCV Patriarch Thich Huyen Quang Is in Hospital

The International Buddhist Information Bureau reported on May 31 that the Supreme Patriarch of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) Thich Huyen Quang is seriously ill and was admitted to the General Hospital in Quy Nhon on May 27 suffering from breathing problems due to a heart condition. The 89-year-old Patriarch is reportedly very weak.

Thich Huyen Quang has been the Orange group's adopted prisoner of conscience since June 2002. He has been detained under house arrest since 1982 without charge or trial, suffers from high blood-pressure, arthritis, and stomach ulcers. His outspoken defense of human rights and in particular the right to practice religion freely has resulted in his frequently being in conflict with the Vietnamese authorities. He was featured in last December's AIUSA Holiday Card Action.

14 Prisoners of Conscience in Equatorial Guinea Released

Amnesty International welcome the release on June 11 of 14 prisoners of conscience in Equatorial Guinea, including a pastor who was an outspoken critic of government treatment of minorities. Since 2002, Amnesty International activists in the United States and worldwide had repeatedly appealed for the prisoners' release in letters sent to government leaders.

Amnesty International called on the Equatorial Guinea government to unconditionally release remaining prisoners they continue to hold without charge or trial for their peaceful political activities.

Amnesty also urged authorities to thoroughly investigate allegations of torture against the 14 people who were pardoned by President Obiang and released on June 5 and to bring those responsible to justice. The prisoners were members of the political party, Democratic and Republican Front—some held for up to six years. They were adopted by Amnesty International as prisoners of conscience.

Those released last week include Reverend Bienvenido Samba Momesori, a pastor who has spoken out against the government's treatment of ethnic minorities like the Bubi (Rev. Samba is a Bubi). After rebel Bubi attacked military sites in the late 1990s, police rounded up hundreds of Bubi, torturing and imprisoning them. Rev. Samba, a father and husband in his mid-50s, was first arrested in 1998 and sentenced to death for his criticism of the government. He was released in 2002 only to be arrested again in 2003. He has been held without charge or trial since October 2003.

"Thousands of Amnesty International members through-

out the United States had repeatedly appealed to the Equatorial Guinea government for Rev. Samba's release since he was detained," said Tom Gill, Amnesty International USA's country specialist on Equatorial Guinea, who had written letters on behalf of the pastor. "Our members who focused on this case for years are overjoyed." Rev. Samba was the focus of intense advocacy through Amnesty International's Individuals at Risk and Freedom Writers programs.

"Amnesty International opposes human rights violations wherever they occur, even in small countries like Equatorial Guinea that rarely make headlines in the United States," said Gill.

According to Amnesty International and reports from African news agencies, Rev. Samba was hidden from Red Cross workers and his family for months while in prison. Eventually, his family got word that he was being held in the Evinayong Public Prison, hundreds of miles from his home in the capital of Malabo. There he lacked sufficient food and medical care.

Felipe Ondo Obiang, Guillermo Nguema Ela and another 11 prisoners of conscience were also pardoned. They had been arrested in March 2002, severely tortured in pre-trial detention and tried in a grossly unfair trial in May-June 2002. They were convicted of attempting to overthrow the government and to kill the president and sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment. They were held in Black Beach Prison in Malabo. Felipe Ondo Obinag was transferred to Evinayong prison without due process in June 2003, where he was held in torturous conditions. He was kept in solitary confinement for several months, and chained to the wall in his cell by his left leg. Although the conditions of his imprisonment had improved of late, he continued to be chained at night.

Amnesty International is concerned that prison authorities ordered all those released to stay in their villages of origin and not leave without authorization, despite the fact that most of them had been living in other towns for many years prior to their arrest.

The pardon, which was announced on national radio and television on June 4, listed the names of 37 people, including the 14 prisoners of conscience and 11 political prisoners. However, the list included the names of at least nine people who had already been released in 2003 and 2006.

Amnesty international now urges the government of Equatorial Guinea to release all those still detained without charge or trial because of their peaceful political activities, including several former members of the Progress Party of Equatorial Guinea, who are believed to have been arrested in March 2008 because of their past association with the party.

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

Calendar

June

18 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.

24 Tuesday 7:00 PM

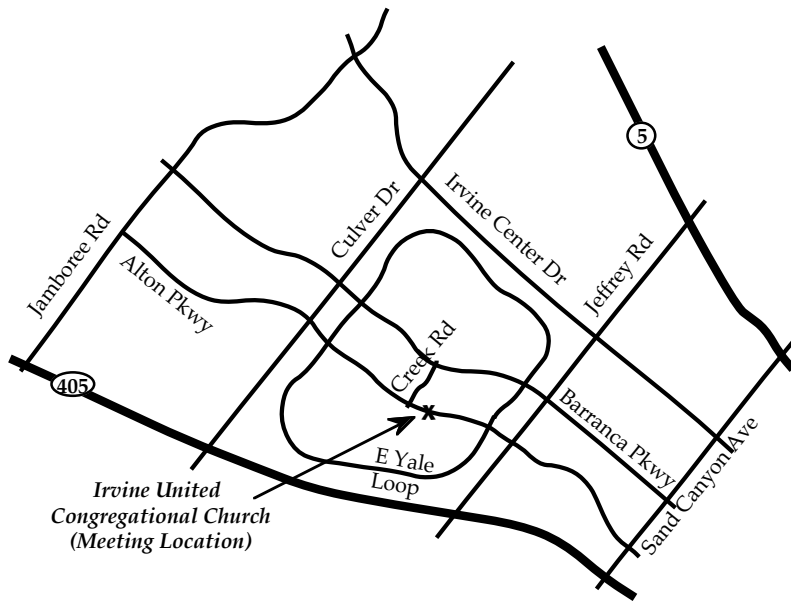
Group #141 Orange Monthly Meeting at the Sisters of St. Joseph, 480 S. Batavia Street, in Orange. Look for the classroom/auditorium building behind the main building. Drive around on the south side of main building and park in the back. Look for the signs for the classroom number. For further information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

26 Thursday 7:30 PM

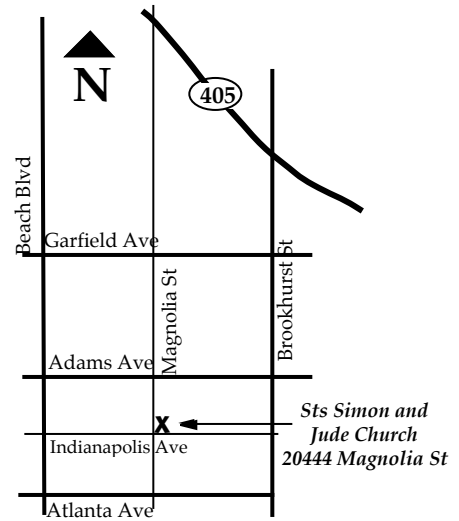
Group #178 Irvine Monthly Meeting at the Irvine United Congregational Church, 4915 Alton Parkway, Irvine. See details on the web page <http://www.aiusaoc.org>. For more information about the group, contact Jacques Kilchoer at jacques.kilchoer@aiusaoc.org.

30 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.



Group #178 Irvine Meeting Location



Group #596 Huntington Beach Location

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