



# Amnesty International

## Orange County

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

July 2008

<http://www.aiusaoc.org>

## An Open Letter to the President of the People's Republic of China

*With one month until the Beijing Olympics, on July 9, Amnesty International Secretary General Irene Khan wrote a five-point appeal to Hu Jintao.*

Your Excellency

With one month remaining until the much-anticipated start of the XXIX Olympiad in Beijing, I ask you to take five steps toward the “development of human rights” pledged by the Beijing Olympics Bid Committee in 2001. Over the last year Amnesty International has collected hundreds of thousands of voices from around the world echoing this call. I join them in urging you to take this historic opportunity to act.

Amnesty International recognizes the Chinese government’s efforts to address some longstanding human rights concerns. I am particularly encouraged by the apparent progress made in reducing the use of the death penalty through the Supreme Peoples Court review process. I also appreciate recent statements by a number of Chinese officials, including Chief Justice Xiao Yang, that China is following the global trend towards abolishing the death penalty. Amnesty International also welcomes the news that 1,157 people held in connection with the protests in Tibetan-populated areas of China last March have been released. The official commitment to “full media freedom” and regulations for foreign journalists represents another step towards realising greater freedom of expression for journalists.

These developments notwithstanding, the preparation for the Olympics has actually had a negative impact in some areas of human rights. Official persecution of human rights activists continues, particularly those making connections between ongoing human rights violations and China’s hosting of the Olympics, including Ye Guozhu, Hu Jia and Yang Chunlin who are serving prison sentences solely for having expressed their views peacefully. The “clean-up” of Beijing through the extended use of Re-education Through Labour is a worrying development, particularly as it ignores domestic calls for reform of this arbitrary system of detention.

Amnesty International calls on you to grasp the opportunity of the Olympic Games to implement the following five recommendations—supported by many inside and outside China—before the Games begin:

- Release all prisoners of conscience—including Ye Guozhu, Hu Jia, Yang Chunlin and any others detained in connection with the hosting of the Olympics solely for expressing their views peacefully;
- Prevent the police from arbitrarily detaining petitioners, human rights activists and others as part of a pre-Olympics “clean-up”;

- Publish full national statistics on the death penalty, commit to a reduction in the number of capital crimes—especially those for non-violent offences—and introduce a moratorium on executions in line with UN General Assembly resolution 62/149 adopted on December 18, 2007;
- Allow full access and freedom of reporting for both Chinese and international journalists in all parts of China in line with promises of “complete media freedom” in the run-up to the Games;
- Account for all those killed or detained in the wake of the March 2008 protests in Tibet, particularly 116 people officially acknowledged to still be in custody, and ensure that those detained for their involvement in peaceful protests are released and that others receive a fair trial.

I believe that delivering on these five points will go a long way towards the Games being remembered not only for positive achievements on the sports field but in the field of human rights as well.

Yours sincerely,  
Irene Khan, Secretary General

## Thousands to Join Human Art Petition

A global day of action on Saturday July 12, aims to use human aerial art to call on the Chinese authorities to ensure a positive human rights legacy for the Beijing Olympics.

Thousands of Amnesty International supporters around the world will be teaming up with Circle Up Now, to create large images on the ground which are only fully visible from above. From Delhi to Bamako and Asunción, thousands of people in over twenty locations will join together to form words such as “Freedom”, “Dignity”, and “Justice” representing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—which turns 60 on December 10, 2008.

Created on the eve of the anniversary of Beijing being granted the 2008 Olympics, this powerful “visual petition” will be an appeal to the Chinese authorities to honor the commitment they made in 2001 to improve human rights.

“The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Olympic values aspire to a world where the dignity and fundamental rights of all individuals are respected without discrimination,” said Amnesty International. “Seven years ago, the Chinese authorities promised the Olympics would bring improvement for peoples human rights but instead repression of activists and journalists has continued because of the Olympics.”

## June Meeting Minutes

### Group #175 Long Beach

#### Present

Lizette Ashcraft, Mary Kay Dunn, Norma Edwards, Mike Farris, Antony Gabriele, Deidre Gaffney, Kevin Gaffney, Bobbi Kendig, Elizabeth Petras, Naomi Steinfeld, Jim Roberts, Steve Wicke

#### Aung San Su Kyi and Burma

The living symbol of Myanmar's suppression of its people, Aung San Su Kyi, turned 63 on June 19. There is still no word on her condition since cyclone Nargis.

Unfortunately, international attention has passed from Myanmar and the aftermath of the cyclone and refusal of aid. Meanwhile, a new report comes that eastern Myanmar is in the midst of almost full-blown ethnic cleansing. In more bad news, Amnesty has closed 96 Burmese action files.

On June 15, there was an editorial in the *Los Angeles Times* (<http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/la-op-cha15-2008jun15,0,7475604.story>) about China that mentioned their distancing themselves from Myanmar. We talked about one possible reason being that after being hit by their natural disaster, they were able to more clearly see the horror of Myanmar's regime and actions and their place in the world. (Of course, China is still helping to prop up the Sudanese with arms.)

#### China/Olympics Campaign

Kevin bought postcards for the campaign and an article from the *L.A. Times* about a retired professor who was jailed for talking about bad construction in schools. His charge was "inciting state subversion." We also talked about continuing internet censorship, labor camps, and capital punishment. Amnesty will not produce actions during the Olympics and asks volunteers to remain sensitive to the aftermath of the earthquake in China and the effect on the citizens.

Kevin is organizing a get-together at El Dorado Park on the second weekend of August. We can have "Olympic" games like "Douse the Dictator," etc.

#### The America We Believe In

Steve gave us information about the U.S. Supreme Court invalidating Section 7 of the Military Commissions Act, which will basically restore habeas corpus for Guantanamo detainees (<http://www.aclu.org/scotus/2007term/31441res20070824/31441res20070824.html>). Physicians for Human Rights (<http://physiciansforhumanrights.org/>) has released a report entitled *Broken Laws, Broken Lives*, which details medical evidence and the impact of U.S. torture. Perhaps some members of our government will be charged with war crimes eventually.

#### Group News

- We sent summer cards to prisoners of conscience (POCs) and groups working for human rights. We also sent letters to U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Zalmay Khalilzad asking for an expanded arms embargo to Sudan; letters to various Chicago officials about ongoing abusive police actions; letters to Myanmar officials about various prisoners in ill health; letters to Michael Chertoff, Secretary of U.S. Department of Homeland Security, asking the U.S. to

do more for Iraqi refugees, in particular Palestinian ones, who are suffering even more (hard to imagine) than many other groups.

- Don't forget to bring items for the Pretty Bird Woman House Drive to our July meeting. PBWH is an emergency shelter for women on the Standing Rock reservation in South Dakota. Urgently needed items are pots, pans, baking items, queen sheets, rugs to put by entry doors, large or small storage bowls or cooking bowls, laundry soap, bags, toiletries, diapers, aspirin, blankets, new or gently used winter clothes for women

## June Meeting Minutes

### Group #141 Orange

#### Letter-Writing

The group sent out a total of 28 letters to UN Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad urging him to call for an expanded arms embargo on Sudan; to the mayor and police superintendent of Chicago expressing concern about allegations of abuse of citizens based upon their sexual orientation; to Myanmar officials on behalf of Myo Yan Naung Thein and U Ohn Than, prisoners of conscience being held in prison there; to U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff concerning Palestinian refugees who fled Iraq now in need of resettlement; and to internet service providers Baidu.com, Sina, and Sohu.com expressing concern over the violation of rights of internet users in China.

We also sent 15 postcards as part of the China Olympics Campaign dealing with prisoners in China and 8 cards as part of AIUSA's Summer Postcard Action.

#### China Olympics Campaign

Kevin talked about the China Olympics Campaign. He pointed out that there may be concern that by targeting human rights issues in China so soon after the earthquake there, Amnesty may appear to be unsympathetic. However, we can point out that while the earthquake was a natural tragedy that could not be prevented, human rights abuses are an unnatural tragedy that can be stopped. The *Los Angeles Times* just this week had an article about a retired school teacher who was imprisoned for speaking out about shoddy construction of school buildings that resulted in their collapsing during the earthquake, in contrast to government buildings.

#### News

Virginia Governor Timothy Kaine commuted the death sentence of Percy Levar Walton June 9, just one day before his scheduled execution on the grounds that Walton is mentally incompetent. Walton was set to be executed on June 10 for the murder of three people in Danville in 1996.

#### Upcoming Events

- The group is not meeting in July since there was no meeting room available at the St. Joseph Center.
- The group decided to purchase a copy of the documentary *Darfur Now* from the Amnesty website to show at our September meeting.
- Kevin reported that the Long Beach group is interested in participating in a picnic on Saturday, August 9, at El Dorado Park in Long Beach. As part of the event, we can stage mock Olympic games events.

## June Meeting Minutes

### Group #596 Huntington Beach

#### Letter-Writing and Discussion

Seven members were present at the June meeting of the Huntington Beach AI group. We wrote numerous cards in support of groups and individuals as part of AI's Summer Postcard Action. A petition requesting that Orange County Employees Retirement Systems divest funds from companies contributing to genocide was distributed and signed by all. The group viewed Amnesty's documentary "Darfur Now" and discussed the various obstacles to resolving the situation in Darfur.

#### Upcoming Events

We also discussed upcoming Amnesty-related events, including the 5-mile hike along Huntington Beach (PCH and Magnolia) on July 12th at 8:30 AM. The walk is a stand against violence against women for UNIFEM's United Nations Development Fund for Women. Information is available from Stephanie at [stephanie@socal.rr.com](mailto:stephanie@socal.rr.com) or (714) 963-1658.

Another AI-related event takes place on Saturday, September 6th at 9:30 AM at Inspiration Point in Corona Del Mar (corner of Orchid and Ocean Blvd). At least 100 people are needed to form the words "END GENOCIDE NOW!" for a photo to be sent to whomever wins the next presidential election. See [www.livingubuntu.org/events](http://www.livingubuntu.org/events) for more details.

## Thich Huyen Quang Dies in Hospital

The Venerable Thich Huyen Quang, Supreme Patriarch of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV), died on July 5. He was the Orange group's adopted prisoner of conscience since June 2002.

Regarded as a symbol of the fight for human rights and religious freedom in Viet Nam for his campaign against the religious controls imposed by his country's communist governments, Quang achieved international renown in 1982 when two laureates nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Born Le Dinh Nhan in Binh Dinh province in southern Vietnam in 1919, Quang entered the monastic life at the age of 12. In 1945 he joined the movement resisting French colonial rule, but in 1951 he was jailed by Viet Minh revolutionaries for refusing to submit to communist control. Released in 1954, Quang was returned to prison in 1963 after challenging the US-backed South Vietnamese regime of the Catholic President, Ngo Dinh Diem, for its discrimination against Buddhists. Later that year he was appointed deputy leader of the newly formed UBCV.

When Vietnam came under communist rule in 1975, like

many other religious groups the UBCV was subjugated by the government of the now unified state, and in 1977 Quang wrote to the Prime Minister, Pham Van Dong, detailing 85 specific instances of government repression. This led to his arrest, charged with opposition to government policy, together with five other prominent church leaders.

Brought to trial the following year, Quang received a two-year suspended jail sentence. His crimes were "agitating against the military service law and other social duties" and "sabotaging the peoples solidarity bloc, counter-revolutionary propaganda and exploiting religion to undermine security and order."

In 1981 Quang was arrested again, for his refusal to sanction the incorporation of the UBCV into the official Vietnam Buddhist Church (VBC) that would allow the state to exercise greater control. The following year Quang was exiled to a pagoda in central Vietnam's Quang Ngai province, where he was kept under constant surveillance.

Quang became head of the UBCV in 1992, and in 1993 he issued a "Buddhist Proposal for Democracy and Human Rights", proposing not only religious freedom, but also free elections in a multi-party system. In particular, he called for the abolition of Article 4 of the constitution, which enshrined the political monopoly of the Communist Party. The following year security forces visited his pagoda, confiscating all his official papers and the seal of the UBCV. Quang was subsequently transferred to a new location where he was kept in total isolation.

This predicament did not go unnoticed; in 1998 Nobel Peace Prize laureates, including the Dalai Lama, publicly called for his release.

Although he remained steadfast in his opposition to the Government, there were signs of improving relations in 2003 when Quang met the then Prime Minister, Phan Van Khai, in Hanoi. However, in October that year Quang was confined to the Nguyen Thieu monastery in Binh Dinh and cut off from other UBCV leaders. This new crackdown was in response to a meeting held by the UBCV to elect a new church leadership. Quang was also accused of possessing official papers containing national secrets.

This marked a watershed for Quang. In 2007 he refused on principle to attend a congress of the VBC in Hanoi and declined to participate in the International Day of Vesak Buddhist celebrations hosted by the Vietnamese Government in May. In the same year the Paris-based International Buddhist Bureau accused the police of Binh Dinh province of preventing Quang from attending a hospital check-up, although this was denied by a spokesman.

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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☐ Long Beach

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

# Calendar

## July

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.

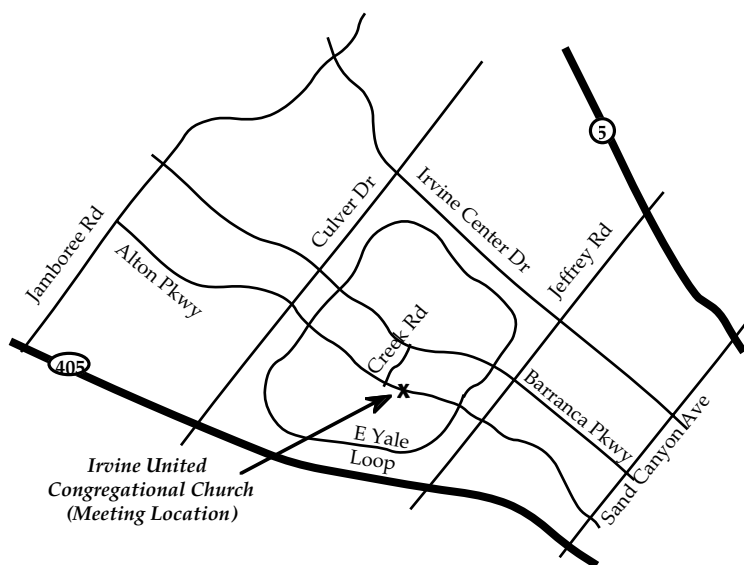
**Group #141 Orange is not meeting this month. We'll resume our regular monthly meetings in August.**

28 Monday 7:00 PM

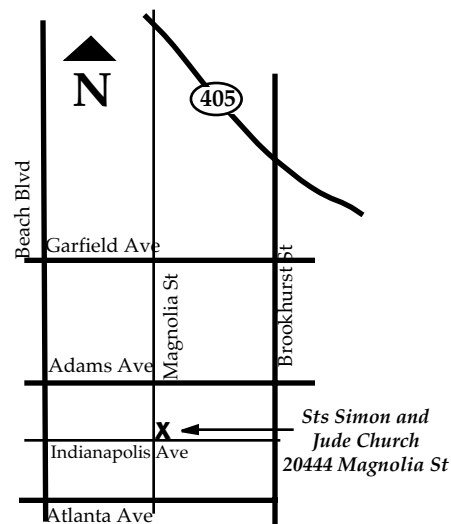
**Group #596 Huntington Beach Meeting** at Saints Simon and Jude Church, Adult Center, 20444 Magnolia Street in Huntington Beach. For more information, email Anne Saxe at [annegalan56@hotmail.com](mailto:annegalan56@hotmail.com).

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 Jacques Kilchoer at [jacques.kilchoer@aiusaoc.org](mailto:jacques.kilchoer@aiusaoc.org).



Group #178 Irvine Meeting Location



Group #596 Huntington Beach Location

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