



Amnesty International

Orange County

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

September 2008

<http://www.aiusaoc.org>

25 Years Remembering the Disappeared

This article is from a August 29, 2008 AIUSA press release.

Jorge Alberto Rosal Paz “disappeared” in Guatemala on August 12, 1983. The 28-year-old agronomist was kidnapped by armed military personnel in a jeep, while driving between Teculután and Zacapa. He was never seen again.

When he “disappeared”, Jorge Rosal was married with a daughter. His wife was expecting their second child. It is believed he had no political or religious affiliations. Despite reported sightings of him in detention after his kidnapping, the Guatemalan authorities denied all knowledge of what had happened.

Jorge Rosal is just one of hundreds of thousands of people who have been victims of enforced disappearances around the world in the past 25 years. And hundreds of thousands of family members and friends are still left without any knowledge of their fate. August 30 marked the 25th anniversary of the International Day of the Disappeared, a day to remember victims like Rosal.

The Day of the Disappeared was started in 1983 by the Latin American non-governmental organization FEDEFAM (Federación Latinoamericana de Asociaciones de Familiares de Detenidos-Desaparecidos) at a time when disappearances arose from authoritarian rule. Very little has improved since then. The government practice of kidnapping, abducting or detaining people and holding them in secret has continued and spread as more countries accept and justify this crime.

Enforced disappearances are taking place in all regions of the world, in countries such as Algeria, Colombia, Nepal, the Russian Federation, El Salvador, Sri Lanka, Tunisia and the former Yugoslavia—to name but a few.

On September 6, 2006, US President George W. Bush confirmed an open secret that the CIA was operating a program of prolonged incommunicado detention in secret locations. This practice has involved governments around the world to varying degrees. Those held in the program are victims of enforced disappearance. They are being held without anyone knowing where they are and are at risk of torture and death. President Bush reauthorized the program in 2007.

Since Pakistan joined the US-led “war on terror” it too has joined the list of countries practicing enforced disappearance. People who have disappeared include foreign and Pakistani nationals suspected of links to terrorist groups and political opponents of the Pakistani government pushing for greater rights for their communities, including Baloch and Sindhis.

In the 25th anniversary year, the UN Working Group on

Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances reported 41,257 pending cases across 78 countries. In the first year of the Day of the Disappeared, the Working Group reported 1,733 cases of disappearances across 11 countries. In the last year the worst national statistics referred to the Working Group were in Sri Lanka where 5,516 are currently registered as disappeared and 30 new urgent action cases were identified in relation to alleged disappearances.

The trend of disappearances has changed over 25 years. The Working Group and the Day of the Disappeared were started at a time when disappearances arose from authoritarian rule in Latin America. Today, disappearances tend to occur in nations suffering from internal conflict such as Colombia, Sri Lanka, Nepal, the Philippines and the Russian Federation.

The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (Convention against Enforced Disappearance) was adopted by the UN general assembly on December 20, 2006.

The culmination of years of hard work by associations of relatives of victims, NGOs such as Amnesty International and key governments, The Convention against Enforced Disappearance is one of the strongest human rights treaties ever adopted by the UN. Key to the Convention is the definition of enforced disappearance, the scope of extraterritorial jurisdiction that States must exercise, its provisions for reparations and implementation and the establishment of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances.

The Convention’s definition of enforced disappearance is: “The arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons, groups or persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such a person outside the protection of the law.”

So far, Albania, Argentina, Mexico and Honduras are the only States to have ratified the Convention. Another 73 have signed it.

Launched in September 2007, the International Coalition Against Enforced Disappearances (ICAED) exists to promote the ratification and implementation of the Convention. Take part and join our effort to ensure that victims and their families have access to justice, and not forget past crimes. Go to the ICAED’s website at www.icaed.org.

August Meeting Minutes

Group #175 Long Beach

Present

Lizette Ashcraft, Moyra Dake, Mary Kay Dunn, Norma Edwards, Mike Farris, Antony Gabriele, Deidre Gaffney, Kevin Gaffney

Burma/Myanmar

There is a great story about Burma in the *New Yorker*: http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/08/25/080825fa_fact_packer?currentPage=all

Jim heard about a new (c 2007) Aung San Suu Kyi biography. It is entitled *Perfect Hostage: A Life of Aung San Suu Kyi, Burma's Prisoner of Conscience*, and it is by Justin Wintle.

Death Penalty

Mary Kay brought an editorial from the *L.A. Times* about the Texas execution of Mexican national Jose Medellin. <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/la-ed-medellin17-2008aug17,0,7312494.story>. "Medellin was one of 51 Mexican nationals on death row in the United States who weren't informed upon their arrest of their right to meet with consular officials from their home country, a violation of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations ratified by the U.S. in 1969. In 2004, in a lawsuit brought by Mexico, the International Court of Justice ruled for the prisoners and directed the U.S. 'to provide by means of its own choosing, review and reconsideration of the convictions and sentences of the Mexican nationals.'"

"President Bush, who ironically was a strong supporter of capital punishment as governor of Texas, responded by essentially ordering Texas prosecutors to reopen Medellin's case and others affected by the ruling. Predictably, Texas and its courts refused, and in March, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Bush lacked the 'unilateral authority' to force state officials to comply with a treaty.

"As a matter of constitutional law, that was correct. But then Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. and the rest of the majority made an error of their own, holding that the Vienna Convention was not 'self-executing' and could be implemented only through additional legislation. As Justice Stephen G. Breyer pointed out in a persuasive dissent, the Constitution's supremacy clause says that 'all treaties . . . which shall be made . . . under the authority of the United States, shall be the supreme law of the land; and the judges in every state shall be bound thereby.' Alas, Breyer's view did not prevail, and Medellin is likely to be only the first of the Mexican prisoners to be executed."

Upcoming Events

Guantanamo Cell Tour: September 18–20

Amnesty International is bringing a life-size replica of a Guantánamo prison cell to cities across the USA. The cell tour is a way to bring the harsh realities of illegal detention to concerned citizens and call attention to the injustice and human rights abuses that Guantánamo symbolizes.

Please join us September 18–20 in Santa Monica for the cell tour's first West Coast stop. You'll be able to enter the cell, go through the conditions of isolation and record a video message to President Bush, letting him know where you stand

on Guantánamo and torture.

Together we can take action to end the human rights violations Guantánamo stands for: illegal detention, torture, denial of fair trials and habeas corpus, extraordinary rendition and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. Together we can close Guantánamo.

11:00 AM–8:00 PM, 3rd Street Promenade, Center Court (1300 block, between Arizona Avenue and Santa Monica Blvd.), Santa Monica. For more information, call 310-815-0450, email aiusaLA@aiusa.org, or visit www.celltour.org. Admission to the cell and all events is free. Be a part of the event and volunteer. Please RSVP to Norma Edwards (beachykeeno@yahoo.com) so we can plan our event more effectively.

Walk for Hope: October 18

Time once again for the Walk for Hope. Save the date of October 18 (9 AM–1 PM). The Walk for Hope is a reminder of the things that matter most in life: service, compassion, love. The entire five-kilometer route (three miles) is decorated with handmade, inspiring quotes. Walkers can also expect to find interactive activities along the walk route. The Walk is entirely free! Free food, free T-shirt, free live entertainment. Amnesty will table with information. You can register as a walker and ask people to donate to your group or simply encourage them to become a member of Amnesty International. We will need volunteers, so please contact Norma Edwards (beachykeeno@yahoo.com) if you would like to help tell people about Amnesty and human rights. For more information, see <http://www.bethecause.org/walksite/>.

Western Regional Conference: November 7–9

"Breaking Borders: 60 Years of Human Rights," the Western Regional Conference for Amnesty International, will take place November 7–9 in Pasadena. Early bird registration and special room rate before October 17! General Registration: AI Member \$30/Non-Member \$40. Student/Senior Citizen/Fixed Income: AI Member \$20/Non-Member \$30. All rates increase by \$10 after Oct. 17. Registration form available at www.aiusa.org/events/western/regionalconference. Room \$139 (single or double) for attendees if you book by October 17. Call (626) 577-1000 or (800) HILTONS and reference the "Amnesty Regional Conference" to obtain the group rate.

Clemency Denied for Troy Davis

In the face of an overwhelming public outcry the Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles shockingly refused to grant clemency to Troy Davis on Friday, September 12. Troy Davis is scheduled to be executed by the state of Georgia on September 23, for the murder of Police Officer Mark Allen MacPhail.

Mr. Davis' serious claims of innocence, which include the recantation of 7 out of 9 witnesses, have never been heard in court. Many of these witnesses have stated in sworn affidavits that they were pressured or coerced by police into testifying or signing statements against Davis. Further, no murder weapon was found and no physical evidence linked Davis to the crime. One of the two witnesses who has not recanted his testimony is Sylvester "Red" Coles, the principal alternative suspect, according to the defense, against whom there is new evidence implicating him as the gunman. Nine individuals have signed affidavits implicating Coles.

August Meeting Minutes

Group #141 Orange

Letter-Writing

The group sent out a total of 20 letters to Saudi Arabian and Iranian officials expressing concern about imposition of the death penalty for child offenders; to South African President Thabo Mbeki about harassment of human rights defenders in Zimbabwe; to Chinese officials on behalf of prisoner of conscience Hu Jia, sentenced to prison for "inciting subversion of state power"; and to U.S. Congressman Howard Berman asking him to co-sponsor the Global Online Freedom Act of 2007.

Darfur Now Screening

The group is going to be showing the documentary *Darfur Now* at our October 28 meeting. *Darfur Now* is a story of hope in the midst of one of humanity's darkest hours—a call to action for people everywhere to end the catastrophe unfolding in Darfur, Sudan. In this documentary, the struggles and achievements of six different individuals who are striving to end the suffering in Sudan's war-ravaged region.

Kevin is planning to talk to Tony Gabriele, the Group #148 South Bay Coordinator, about his possibly speaking about their Darfur activities.

Rwanda Speakers

Kevin reported that the Irvine group is planning to have some speakers who will discuss the situation in Rwanda at their September meeting. We could try to arrange for them to speak to our group.

Death Penalty Update

Jeannine reported on Amnesty's recently-published report on the death penalty in 2007, which includes a roundup of what's happening with the death penalty worldwide. During 2007, at least 1252 people were executed in 24 countries. Additionally, 3347 were sentenced to death in 51 countries. The numbers are certainly higher. A U.S.-based organization estimated over 6000 executions in China alone. Many countries carry out executions in secret, including China, Singapore, Malaysia, and Mongolia. Three countries, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Yemen, executed juveniles.

China Olympics Campaign Update

Kevin reported on the aftermath of the China Olympics Campaign. During the course of the games, Amnesty International documented continued patterns of human rights violations directed at peaceful activists and journalists in China, including petitioners and activists being denied permits to engage in peaceful demonstrations in government-designated protest zones in parks around Beijing. On August 18, after

repeated questioning from the media, the Chinese authorities claimed they had received 77 protest applications involving 149 people, but that 74 had been "withdrawn," two had been "suspended" and one had been "vetoed."

In another example of the absurdity of the human rights situation there, two elderly women aged 79 and 77, were accused of "disturbing public order" and assigned to one year of re-education through labor (RTL) after they applied to demonstrate in one of the official protest zones. They had been petitioning the authorities since 2001, when they were evicted from their homes to make way for a development project. Beijing city officials ruled that they would not have to serve their time in an RTL facility as long as they "behaved," but that restrictions would be placed on their movements.

Kevin indicated that Amnesty is disappointed especially with the International Olympic Committee, which did not follow through to ensure that China lived up to its promises when it was awarded the games.

Prisoner Update

Kevin indicated he would contact Jim Roberts about requesting a new prisoner of conscience for our group. We thought that since all of our recent prisoners were from Asia, it might be interesting to request one from another part of the world, such as Africa. However, Amnesty's recent focus is on country actions rather than on individual prisoners so there are fewer individuals designated as prisoners of conscience.

Peter Gabriel Receives Amnesty Award

Peter Gabriel was honored with the 2008 Ambassador of Conscience award in London on September 10, at the launch of Amnesty International's global music and human rights project, the Small Places Tour. The event outlined a preliminary list of 545 Small Places concerts (that could grow in excess of 1000 events) in 50 countries.

Gabriel received the award from former recipient, U2 guitarist the Edge. Other people to hold the title are Nelson Mandela, Vaclav Havel, Hilda Gonzalez and Mary Robinson. Now in its sixth year, the award recognizes exceptional individual leadership in the fight to protect and promote human rights.

Artists on the Small Places Tour will use their music to inspire and engage new human rights activists throughout the world. Events will include concerts in Namibia highlighting human rights in Zimbabwe; and in Estonia where fans will engage in Amnesty's campaign to release Burmese activist Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners in Myanmar.

The tour will culminate on International Human Rights Day on December 10, with dozens of concerts held throughout the world.

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

For (check one):
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☐ 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 September

17 Wednesday 7:00 PM

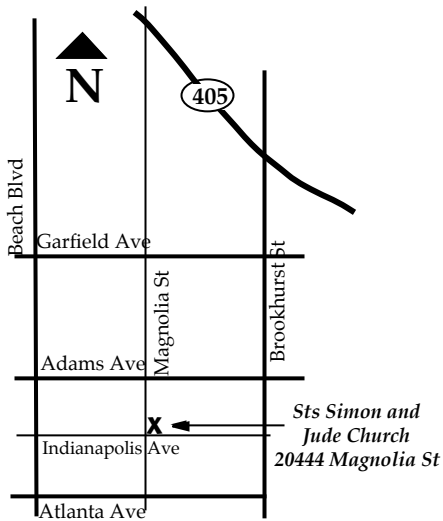
Group #175 Long Beach Monthly Meeting at the Unitarian Universalist Church, Rooms 1 and 2, 5450 Atherton Street, Long Beach. Letter-writing from 7:00–7:30. For further information about the group, contact Norma Edwards at (562) 425-4353.

18 Thursday

Guantanamo Cell Tour at 3rd Street Promenade, Center Court, in Santa Monica, through Saturday, September 20.

23 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.



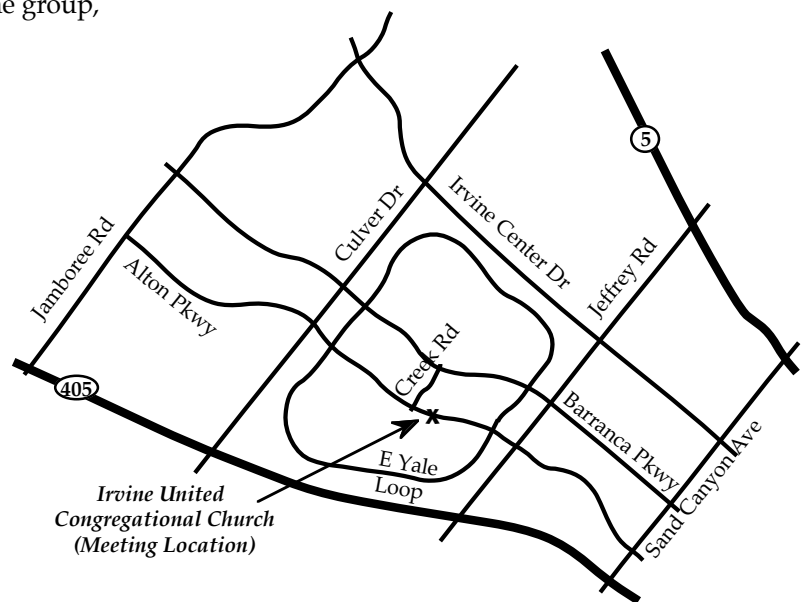
Group #596 Huntington Beach Location

25 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.

29 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

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