



Amnesty International

Orange County

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

April 2009

<http://www.aiusaoc.org>

Group 178's New Action File: Hu Jia of China

This article is taken from the Amnesty International Action File and articles from the Los Angeles Times and the London Times.

Hu Jia and his wife Zeng Jinyan, pictured here with their baby, are Chinese Human Rights activists. In their case, AI fears for their safety and that they may be at risk of torture or ill-treatment.

Hu Jia is one of China's best-known environmental and HIV/AIDS activists. He is one of the founders of the Beijing-based HIV/AIDS NGO Loving Source. Since 2004, Hu Jia has been arbitrarily detained or placed under house arrest at various times. His wife, Zeng Jinyan, who became famous worldwide for the blog she maintained while her husband was held incommunicado, was kept under house arrest at the same time as Hu. Although her blog is blocked in China, Zeng continues to update her blog through various channels.



Current Status

Two days after the birth of the couple's daughter, Hu Qianci, on November 13, 2007, Zeng Jinyan was immediately placed under house arrest again. Hu Jia was removed from home by police in December 2007. On January 28, 2008, Hu Jia was formally charged with "inciting subversion". He was sentenced on April 3, 2008, to three years and six months' imprisonment and one-year deprivation of political rights for "inciting subversion of state power" by the Beijing Municipal No. 1 Intermediate People's Court.

The charges against him cited comments that he made during interviews with foreign media and articles he wrote that appeared on the internet. The last straw may have come when, in September 2007, he coauthored "The Real China and the Olympics," an open letter that described mass evictions to make way for stadium construction, imprisonment of journalists, Internet censorship, religious repression and other human rights violations.

Hu Jia's mother was allowed to attend the trial, but his father and wife were barred from the courtroom. Several other associates of Hu Jia, including fellow activists, were reportedly prevented from attending or forcibly moved out of Beijing at the time of his trial. His lawyers were only given three working days to prepare their defense.

Following Hu Jia's detention, Zeng Jinyan and their infant daughter were under continuous house arrest; with up to 30 police surrounding the home most of the time. No one was allowed to visit Zeng at her home, making it impossible to obtain baby formula to feed her daughter. She was not even allowed to take the baby for a walk outdoors to get some sunshine. Police warned her several times that if she does not "cooperate" or tries to talk to media or anyone about Hu Jia's detention, that she would also be detained and asked her to think how that would affect the baby.

During his latest imprisonment Hu Jia has made a protest against a "prison public trial meeting" which violated basic human rights and human dignity. These meetings are a way of maintaining total control over convicts who make mistakes or break the law when they are in prison. All the other convicts are made to watch and learn, as a kind of "education."

In October 2008, the Beijing Prison authority informed Hu Jia's family that he was moved on October 10, 2008 from Chao Bai Prison to the Beijing City Prison. Hu Jia's family welcomed this move as the prison is much closer to their home, and it would therefore be easier for them to visit. However, whether this will be of any practical benefit remains to be seen.

The Couple's Activities

Zeng and Hu regularly informed overseas journalists and human rights organizations about the human rights abuses taking place in China, and provided news of human rights defenders imprisoned or harassed by the authorities. They released a video documentary film in March 2007 about their house arrest. On May 18, 2008, the couple was blocked from visiting Europe to meet with European civil society groups and to share their experiences.

The European Parliament awarded Hu Jia the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought in December 2008. The assembly listened to a video message from Zeng Jinyan. The prize was placed in front of an empty seat marking Hu Jia's absence.

Health Concerns

Hu Jia is in the early stages of sclerosis of the liver and needs daily medication for Hepatitis B, which he did not receive in the first week of detention. The lawyers applied to the police for release on bail for Hu Jia on medical grounds at the end of January 2008, but were rejected. His wife reports that he did not look well when she saw him during a prison visit in June 2008. An official said Hu Jia would have to serve at least one third of his sentence before he could apply for medical parole.

March Meeting Minutes

Group #141 Orange

Welcome to new members Christa and Chris! We hope you can continue attending.

Letter-writing

The group wrote about 40 letters, including a group of letters on behalf of Chinese prisoner of conscience Shi Tao, who was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment in April 2005. We also wrote to the Ambassador of Eritrea on behalf of prisoners Aster Fissehatsion and Estitauos Seyoum, two of the so-called G15, detained since 2001; to the US Representative to the United Nations Susan Rice calling for accountability in Gaza and southern Israel; and to the Ambassador of Sudan calling on the government there to reverse its decision to suspend operations of humanitarian aid organizations there.

Shi Tao Case

Kevin discussed some of the activities revolving around the case of Shi Tao. Some important upcoming dates include

- April 20: the day Shi Tao sent the email that resulted in his imprisonment.
- April 27: the day he was sentenced.
- May 3: World Press Freedom Day
- June 4: the 20th anniversary of the killings in Tianamen Square.
- July 25: Shi Tao's birthday.

Amnesty is also planning an action targeting Yahoo!—"Tell Yahoo! to reBOOT human rights—since information provided by Yahoo! China resulted in Shi Tao's arrest. For the action, groups are going to send a boot to Yahoo! with signatures, letters, photos, etc.

Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

The group screened a new Amnesty video dealing with economic, social, and cultural rights, part of Amnesty's new broader focus. The video focussed on the case of Digna Ochoa, a human rights lawyer for indigenous people in Mexico who was assassinated in 2001, a rape counseling center in South Africa, offering HIV health care, and the Kensington Welfare Rights Union in Philadelphia.

March Meeting Minutes

Group #175 Long Beach

Present

Lizette Ashcraft, Mary Kay Dunn, Norma Edwards, Deidre Gaffney, Mike Farris, Jim Roberts, Steve Wicke

Death Penalty

Lots of activity in the death penalty abolition movement. Governor Bill Richardson of New Mexico signed an anti-death penalty bill before our meeting. Colorado, Illinois, Maryland, Montana, Kansas, and two other states were still moving forward on reforms as of our meeting time.

Mary Kay informed us that the L.A. Coalition for Death Penalty Alternatives is setting up a speakers program. A high school student will be one of the first speakers at a gathering of other students. Also, in May there will be a film event with

African-American and religious leaders. Mary Kay also told us about Texas Court of Criminal Appeals Presiding Judge Sharon Keller who is facing judicial misconduct charges for closing the courthouse door on a death row inmate's last minute appeal before his execution. (http://www.mysanantonio.com/news/Judge_Sharon_Keller_facing_judicial_misconduct_charges.html)

Myanmar/Burma

Great news! Ma Khin Khin Leh was released in February! Ma Khin Khin Leh served nearly 10 years of a life sentence seemingly for the sole reason that her husband, a student activist, helped plan a demonstration to be held in Bago on July 19, 1999, to protest government policies and to show support for the National League for Democracy (NLD).

AI sections and AIUSA have worked for Ma Khin Khin Leh's release for many years; first as the subject of an Action File for local group campaigning efforts, as the AIUSA Midwest Region's Special Focus Case from 2005 until recently and finally as one of AIUSA's Priority Cases in tandem with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. It is entirely possible that she was released in part because of Amnesty members' actions on her case. As for Aung San Suu Kyi, her detention order is up in May, and everyone is wondering what will happen. The U.N. Special Rapporteur made another visit but nothing much happened.

One disturbing development, despite the release of Ma Khin Khin Leh and other political prisoners recently, the number of political prisoners in Myanmar has doubled since 2007. There are 2,028 confirmed political prisoners, but it is suspected that the number is actually higher. There is currently an action (not Amnesty) to obtain 888,888 signatures calling on the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to make it his personal priority to secure the release of all political prisoners in Burma, as the essential first step towards democracy in the country. The target of 888,888 signatures symbolizes 8.8.88, the day the junta massacred some 3,000 people who courageously protested in Burma's largest democracy uprising. You can sign the petition at <http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/fbppn.htm>

Group News

We wrote letters to government officials of the Sudan to allow aid workers back in the country; we also wrote letters about the International Criminal Court, Darfur, and the Sudan to Hillary Clinton and others; we wrote to China for Shi Tao; we wrote again to the governor of Georgia to spare Troy Davis' life; we also wrote to Eritrea, the Congo, and Saudi Arabia about human

Amnesty Urges China to Overturn Death Sentences for Tibet Protesters

Amnesty International has condemned a decision on April 9 by a court in Lhasa to hand down death sentences to two Tibetans, Losang Gyaltshe and Loyar, accused of starting fatal fires in Lhasa during protests in March 2008. Two other people were given death sentences with a two year reprieve and one person has been sentenced to life imprisonment. It is unclear if they will appeal on their sentences but ultimately, China's Supreme People's Court will have to review today's death sentences, as it does in all death penalty cases.

March Meeting Minutes

Group #178 Irvine

Human Trafficking Presentation

At our March meeting we hosted Sandra Morgan from the Orange County Human Trafficking Task Force. Sandra Morgan learned about human Trafficking in Greece where she also witnessed the activity of Amnesty International, and mentioned that the AI members she saw in Greece were very dedicated. In Sandra's presentation we learned that human Trafficking is a very real problem in Orange County. Human trafficking is different from smuggling: in smuggling, the person is crossing a national border and consents to the illegal operation. In human trafficking, the victim either does not consent or the consent is rendered meaningless by the subsequent actions of the trafficker.

Human trafficking is one of the fastest criminal industries. The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act, passed by US congress in 2000, defines the severe forms of trafficking as sex trafficking (commercial sex acts induced by coercion or in which the person is under the age of 18 years); and labor trafficking: involuntary servitude, debt bondage or slavery. Sandra Morgan also mentioned cases of marriage in which a spouse will bring someone from overseas but keep control of their documents and finances to prevent them from seeking independence.

One interesting point she mentioned is that, when you see an opportunity to purchase a good or service very inexpensively, you should stop and ask yourself: why is this so cheap? Am I profiting from the work of an indentured worker?

For any questions, or to report suspected cases of human trafficking, contact the National Human Trafficking Resource Center at 888-3737-888.

Other News

Our new member Sara brought a proposal for our mailing to Irvine national members which could be more cost-effective than sending out a flyer in an envelope with a return postcard. Jacques and Sara will come up with a design for the April meeting.

The Irvine group has a new Action File, Hu Jia of China (see accompanying article in the newsletter). At our April meeting we will focus on the actions to take for our new Action File.

Slovakia: Police to Investigate Ill-Treatment of Romani Youngsters

This article is taken from an April 8, 2009 AIUSA press release.

Amnesty International is deeply concerned by the cruel,

inhuman and degrading treatment of six Romani youngsters—three of them who are reported to be under the age of 18—detained at a police station in Kosice which was depicted on a video published on the internet. The footage shows the boys being forced by police officers to slap and kiss each other repeatedly. The clip also shows them being forced to take off all of their clothes while being watched by more police officers who were taking pictures of them. In dialogue audible on the clip the boys are shouted at, and racially abused. The incident is said to have taken place on March 21, 2009 but the video was only circulated on April 7, initially by a reporter from the Slovak newspaper SME.

The head of Slovakia's police force publicly condemned this incident at a press conference today and announced an investigation.

Roma in Slovakia, as elsewhere across Europe, continue to face discrimination in access to education, housing and health services, and remain vulnerable to racist attacks and police ill-treatment.

Hundreds Released as Gambian Witch Hunts End

This article is taken from an April 8, 2009 AIUSA press release.

Hundreds of people held in a government-backed witch hunt in The Gambia have been released without charge. Observers cited pressure resulting from Amnesty International helping to publicize the story as the reason for the mass releases and subsequent halting of the witch hunts.

It was reported by Amnesty International last month that up to 1,000 people in the country had been snatched from their villages by witch doctors and then taken to secret detention centres.

They were then forced to drink hallucinogenic concoctions, which led many to have serious kidney problems. At least two people are known to have died of kidney failure after being subjected to the ordeal.

There were also reports of women being raped by witch doctors and security forces, specifically after they were given the concoction and had lost control of themselves. People were also reported to have been robbed after they drunk the potion.

Eyewitnesses and victims told Amnesty International in March that the witch doctors, who they say are from neighboring Guinea, are accompanied by police, army and national intelligence agents. The witch doctors were invited to The Gambia early this year, soon after the death of President Jammeh's aunt. The President is reported to believe that witchcraft was used in her death.

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!

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

For (check one):
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Calendar

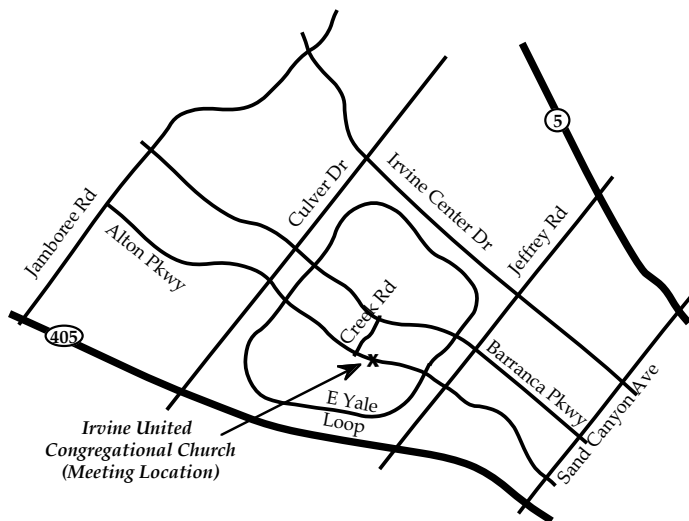
April

15 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.

16 Thursday 7:00 PM

Film Screening of the Frontline documentary *Ghosts of Rwanda* at the Irvine United Congregational Church, Plumer Hall, 4915 Alton Parkway, Irvine, sponsored by AIUSA Group 178 and Orange County for Darfur. For more information, including directions, go the website http://www.aiusaoc.org/common/calendar.html#ghosts_of_rwanda.



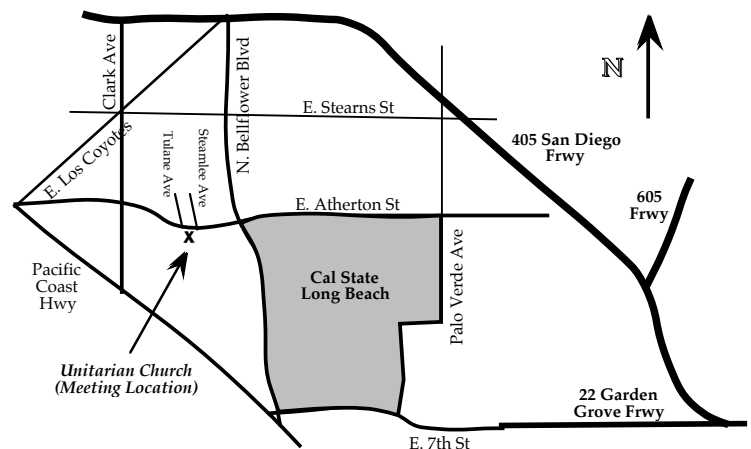
Group #178 Irvine Meeting Location

28 Tuesday 7:00 PM

Group #141 Orange Monthly Meeting at the Sisters of St. Joseph Center, 480 S. Batavia Street, in Orange. The meeting room is in the Special Events Center located behind (west of) the main building (the Motherhouse). After entering the complex from Batavia Street, drive around the south side of the Motherhouse and park in the lot in the back. Look for the signs directing you to the meeting room. For further information about the group, contact Kevin Gaffney at xhuskr@aol.com.

30 Thursday 7:30 PM

Group #178 Irvine Monthly Meeting at the Irvine United Congregational Church, 4915 Alton Parkway, Irvine. For more information about the group, contact Jacques Kilchoer at jacques.kilchoer@aiusaoc.org.



Group #175 Long Beach Meeting Location

Amnesty International
Group 178
P.O. Box 17186
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