

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

ORANGE COUNTY

GROUP #141 ORANGE
Newsletter

GROUP #178 IRVINE
February 2003

Amnesty International's "State of Human Rights" Address

This statement, by AIUSA Executive Director William F. Schulz, was given at a candlelight vigil outside the White House on January 25.

We have heard it time and again: "The world changed on September 11th." And indeed it did. Americans became more fearful. Our government became more repressive. But one thing did not change: the importance of upholding the fundamental values on which our nation was founded. In fact, September 11th lead us to cherish these American values more than ever. Freedom of speech. Respect for human dignity. Freedom of religion. Justice for all. Tolerance. As former President Jimmy Carter put it so wisely: "We must adjust to changing times and still hold to unchanging principles."

Our nation's borders must be protected. The life and liberty of Americans must be defended. But tragically our government, in pursuit of national security, has cast aside some of the values we hold dear. Ironically, it was President Bush who put those principles so well in his State of the Union address one year ago, "America will always stand firm," he said, "for the non-negotiable demands of human dignity: the rule of law; limits on the power of the state; respect for women; private property; free speech; equal justice; and religious tolerance." Mr. President, those words ring hollow today.

Amnesty International stands today in the shadow of the White House, just days before a new State of the Union address, to tell George Bush that his actions in the name of national security run roughshod over American values. Discrimination runs roughshod over American values. Racial profiling, ethnic profiling, religious profiling, special registration, monitoring of foreign students – these actions recall racist policies our nation long ago pledged to abandon.

National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice said in December: "When the framers of the American Constitution wrote, We, the people, they did not mean me. My ancestors were three-fifths of a man and, indeed, it would be the 20th century before American women were given the right to vote. But little by little and day by day, we get closer to those ideals and to a society that is truly tolerant and diverse and just."

Tolerant, diverse and just. Noble values—but sadly in short supply in George Bush's America. In our America, discrimination is not the American way.

Torture runs roughshod over American values. The US played a leadership role in developing international instruments to combat torture. President Bush's father got it right when he said in 1991, "The United States must continue its vigorous efforts to bring the practice of torture and other gross abuses of human rights to an end wherever they occur."

In George Bush's America, US officials admit to mistreating, even torturing, suspects to extract information. In our America, torture is not the American way.

Railroading justice runs roughshod over American values. In this country, several American citizens who stand accused of crimes in the aftermath of September 11th are being held incommunicado without charge or trial and without access to a lawyer and the protections of due process. Since when does this

country substitute "inalienable" rights for "when convenient" rights? In George Bush's America, basic rights protected in the Constitution are summarily denied. In our America, injustice is not the American way.

Bulldozing civil rights runs roughshod over American values. In the last year, more than 1,200 men from Muslim or Middle Eastern countries were taken into custody in nationwide sweeps. These detentions have been marked by extreme secrecy and the denial of basic human rights, including the presumption of innocence. What's more, the CIA has been given a green light to snoop on American citizens in the US; the FBI and other police agencies conduct "sneak and peak" searches of people's homes and offices, and Congress has created a definition of "domestic terrorism" so broad that the government could even impose harsh penalties for staging political protests.

In George Bush's America, the government takes bold steps to curtail Americans' rights to privacy and freedom of expression. In our America, trampling civil rights is not the American way. Closing our nation's doors to refugees runs roughshod over American values. From America's earliest days, immigrants have enriched us with their creativity, ingenuity and talent. Some sought opportunity. Others sought refuge. All looked with longing and hope to Lady Liberty. In George Bush's America, our government slams shut our doors to the frightened and the persecuted. In our America, turning back refugees is not the American way.

Appeasing tyrants runs roughshod American values. Our government's newfound support of dictators who are our allies in the war on terrorism poses dangers in the long run for Americans. Supporting the Mujahadeen in Afghanistan planted the seeds for the rise of the Taliban. Supplying Saddam Hussein with arms against Iran helped produce the Saddam Hussein whom we would battle today. But in waging the war on terrorism, we have forgotten our history lessons. Today we appease and call China, Uzbekistan, Pakistan—all leading human rights violators—our friends and allies.

In George Bush's America, strategic decisions trump human rights protection in our foreign policy. In our America, getting into bed with bullies is not the American way.

Amnesty International may not be able to stop our government from shredding American values, but we sure are going to try. We are here at the White House to say: "We will not be intimidated. We will not be frightened. We will not be silenced." The stakes are too high; the suffering is too great; the cruelty is too blatant; the hopes are too green. Security and human rights go hand in hand, and we are here to walk with them. We are here at the White House to say to our government: "You can intimidate the prisoner; you can frighten the immigrant; you can silence the refugee, but we will not be intimidated and we will not be frightened and we will not be silenced. We will stand up for freedom and security and human rights. And we will prevail

January Meeting Minutes

Group #141 Orange

Attendees

J. Kevin Gaffney, Deidre Jackson, Tami Jacoby, Katherine Limon, Priscilla Rocco, and Ernie Solheid.

Letter-Writing

We sent 10 letters on behalf of our adopted prisoner of conscience, the Venerable Thich Huyen Quang, in Viet Nam, calling for his release from house arrest.

Death Penalty Event

Deidre and Tami reported on the death penalty event "Voices from Inside," held in Orange on December 10. Over 100 people attended the event, which featured three excellent speakers. These included Mark Patterson, who was defense attorney for Mannie Babbit, who was executed three years. Mr. Patterson described the problems with Babbit's defense, including the fact that the trial lawyer had no capital trial experience and slept through much of the trial. Another speaker was Mark Massengil, whose son was brutally murdered by his ex-wife's boyfriend. Mr. Massengil opposed the prosecutor seeking the death penalty for his son's killer, wanting him to contemplate his crime in prison.

AI's Policy on War with Iraq

Deidre and Kevin discussed AI's policy on the United States going to war with Iraq, based upon their participation in a conference call with AIUSA Western Regional Director Cossette Thompson and Eric Sears, out of the AI DC office, and the Iraq Action Guide, put together by AI. Amnesty is not taking any position on the war itself since it's not against international law for nations to wage war. Instead, Amnesty is concerned solely with the human rights implications of such a war, particularly on the civilian population. Any war should only be carried out under the auspices of the United Nations and human rights should be protected in that case.

In terms of its members, Amnesty's position is that AI members can attend peace rallies as AI members provided Amnesty's message is put forward. Amnesty cannot be listed as sponsoring such an event. Amnesty is asking members to hold a vigil of "Solidarity and Sorrow" for the people of Iraq.

After some discussion and considerable disagreement over Amnesty's position, the group decided not to try to put together our own such vigil.

January Meeting Minutes

Group #175 Long Beach

Attendees

Tony Dorono, Mike Farris, Kevin Gaffney, Deidre Jackson, Bobbi Kendig, Jim Roberts, and Jamie Skaluba.

Letter-Writing

We generated seven letters to Nepal.

New Members

We welcomed new attendees, Tony and Jamie. Tony has been very active in addressing human rights violations in the Philippines, having experienced some himself. Jamie has joined the corporate world momentarily to "see the other side," but her heart lies with human rights organizations.

Announcements

Jim informed the group of an upcoming online chat with Beth Ann Toupin, AIUSA Iraq Country Specialist, to take place February 2.

An AI Mini-Conference will be held March 1 at Cal State Fullerton.

Jim advised that the AIUSA Board had issued a controversial statement regarding the personal assaults reported by AI researcher Barbara Bocek. Police and the FBI have questioned the validity of her recent report of a violent attack in Seattle. The Board's statement took no stand on the subject but called for the organization to move on. This has resulted in a storm of protest among AI researchers and volunteers who are concerned about the vulnerability of human rights activists working with weak support.

Presentation

Kevin and Deidre explained some of the changes in AI's Mandate and how these changes came about. They provided graphic examples of the kinds of work that we will be able to do in the future and how we will be able to prioritize our efforts. All agreed that this presentation was useful to our group.

Next Meeting

Next month's meeting will be held in the lounge of the Unitarian-Universalist Church on February 25 at 7:00 PM. All are welcome to join us to share views of human rights and the world scene.

January Meeting Minutes

Huntington Beach Group

We held a Women in Religion Panel at our last meeting. Our speakers were Sister Maureen Sheehan of Sts. Simon and Jude; Linda Ecker, Cantor at B'nai Tzedek Synagogue; Shobhna V. Vora, M.D., a Hindu Practitioner, and Rahma Kunbargi from the Islamic Society. We had approximately 50 participants.

The questions from the event appear below. Our moderator was Shyamal Leonard, who did an outstanding job. Another big thank you to Rhonda for assembling 40 Amnesty packets for the attendees and Mahsa Abassi and Dick Carlburg for their help in structuring the questions. It was a big success thanks to them!

- (1) How has your particular religion assimilated to this country - specifically related to women's roles?
- (2) Is there a difference in roles between women as they are portrayed in your religious texts vs. actual roles of women in your religion?
- (3) What is the future vision of women's role in your religion?
- (4) What is the biggest misconception about your religion? About women's roles within your religion?
- (5) Are you seeing an increase in religious tolerance as a result of technology/education?
- (6) How politicized do you feel your religion is in the world?
- (7) What roles has/does missionary work play in your religion and what is its purpose?

January Meeting Minutes

Group #178 Irvine

Campaign Updates

Julie Ralls, Stephanie Jones, and Jacques Kilchoër gave updates on the various campaigns the group is working on. Jacques will put Stephanie Jones in contact with Norma Edwards; Stephanie Jones had questions about the Women's Campaign

Letter-Writing Actions

32 letters were written at our last meeting.

The group worked on a West Africa Regional Action Network (WARAN) action for Bisher Al-Rawi and Jamil Al-Banna, detained in Gambia, whereabouts unknown.

Great American Write-In

We announced the Great American Write-In, which will be held on Saturday, 8 March 2003. Group 178 will have a table there as we do every year. Stephanie Jones, Julie Ralls, Al White, Lynn Mikami, Jacques Kilchoer volunteered for tabling on that date (9:30 AM-1:00 PM).

Fundraising

Kim Hansen will try to obtain more details on having an Irvine Improv Comedy Night as a fundraiser.

Donald Mikami offered to arrange a plan where a local medical professional would donate part of their office fees to Amnesty International. Contact ai_irvine@aiusaoc.org for details.

Southern California Mini-Conference

The 3rd Annual Southern California Amnesty International Mini-Conference will be held next month, on Saturday, March 1, on the campus at Cal State Fullerton. This will be an opportunity for activists from throughout the area to network, to share successes, and to develop effective strategies for human rights work. Attendance is free!

Directions and a map are on the flyer enclosed with this newsletter.

Book Discussion

One of the sessions offered at the mini-conference will be a human rights book discussion of *The Tattooed Soldier* by Hector Tobar. You should read the book in advance to participate in the book discussion.

The novel is the story of two Guatemalan adversaries together by chance on the streets of Los Angeles, where they play out the endgame of a deadly struggle begun in their homeland, one a middle-class government worker in his na-

tive land, the other a former member of a death squad.

For more information, contact Kimberly Yang at (310) 207-6322 or kimberly.yang@stanfordalumni.org.

Russian PoC Grigory Pasko Paroled

Amnesty International welcomed the release of Russian journalist and environmentalist Grigory Pasko on January 23 and called for his conviction to be quashed. Pasko was freed on parole from a prison colony in the Russian Far East after serving two-thirds of his four-year sentence on treason charges.

"The long ordeal he has endured was a throwback to the repression of the Soviet era," said William F. Schulz, Executive Director of Amnesty International USA.

"By reporting on the Russian navy's illegal dumping of nuclear waste off the coast of Vladivostok and informing the public about the dangers of such acts to human life and health, Grigory Pasko was exercising his right to freedom of expression and acting in full compliance with Russian law," Schulz said. "As this odyssey of trials and retrials illustrates, the Russian justice system remains deeply flawed."

Amnesty International adopted Grigory Pasko as a prisoner of conscience as after he was imprisoned solely for exercising his basic human right to freedom of expression.

In 1993, Grigory Pasko filmed a Russian navy tanker dumping radioactive waste and ammunition in the Sea of Japan. In this film and in a series of articles, he exposed the threat to the environment caused by ships of Russia's decaying Pacific Fleet, including nuclear submarines. He also reported on corruption inside the fleet and passed on public information on these issues to Japanese journalists.

As a reporter for a Russian Pacific Fleet newspaper, Pasko was first arrested in 1997 for passing allegedly sensitive information to Japanese media, but two years later he was acquitted of all spying charges. After an appeal, in December 2001 a Military Court in the city of Vladivostok gave Pasko a four-year sentence for treason and espionage.

Amnesty International believes that his prosecution was political reprisal for exposing the dumping of nuclear waste at sea as well as corruption in the Russian Pacific Fleet. The organization believes that the case is a clear breach of national and international norms protecting freedom of expression that the Russian state is obliged to protect. Pasko is currently appealing his sentence to the Presidium of the Russian Supreme Court. The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg has taken Pasko's case and is expected to reach a decision by the end of 2003.

If you would like to continue receiving this newsletter and supporting the work of Amnesty International Group #141 and Group #178, please return this coupon to the appropriate address with annual dues of \$10.00. Dues are used to cover the costs of this newsletter and of letters on behalf of prisoners. Your address label contains your membership expiration date.

Name _____

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Group #141 Orange
P.O. Box 864
Orange, CA 92856

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Irvine, CA 92623

Please make your check payable to either Amnesty International Group #141 or Group #178. Contributions to AI are tax-deductible. Thank you for your interest and support!

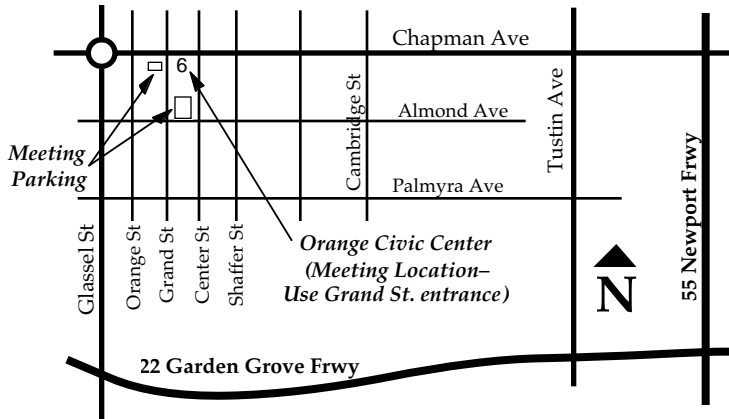
Calendar February

18 Tuesday 7:00 PM

Group #141 Orange Monthly Meeting at the Orange Civic Center, Conference Room C, at 300 E. Chapman Avenue, in Orange. For further information about the group, contact Deidre Jackson at (562) 430-7381.

24 Monday 7:00 PM

Huntington Beach Group Monthly Meeting at Saints Simon and Jude Church, Room 7B, 20111 Magnolia Street in Huntington Beach. For further information about the group, contact Darcie Guy at (714) 374-5786.



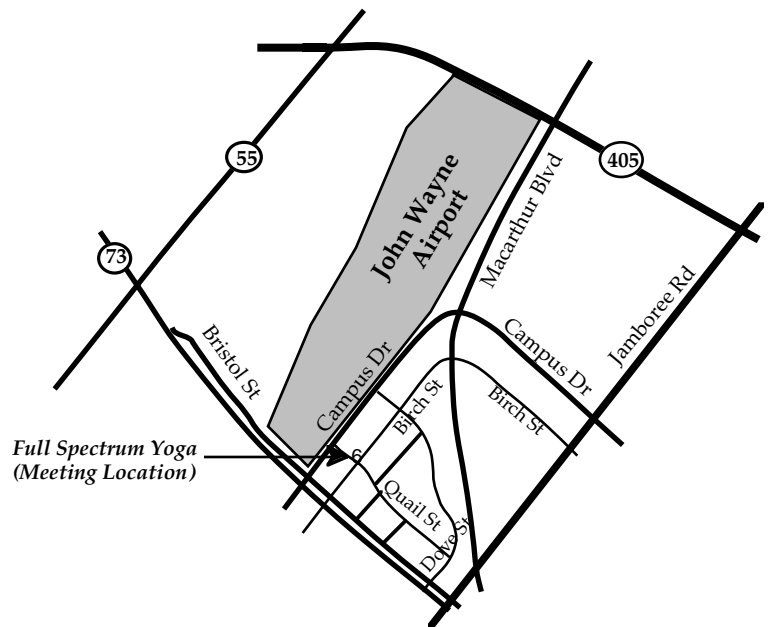
Group #141 Orange Meeting Location

25 Tuesday 7:00 PM

Group #175 Long Beach Monthly Meeting at the Unitarian Universalist Church, 5450 Atherton Street, Long Beach. Letter-writing from 7:00-7:30. Group #175 meets on the fourth Tuesday of each month. For further information about the group, contact Bobbi Kendig at (562) 420-1155.

25 Tuesday 7:30 PM

Group #178 Irvine Monthly Meeting at Full Spectrum Yoga, 2018 Quail Street, Newport Beach (across from John Wayne Airport). Group #178 meets the last Tuesday of each month. For more information about the group, contact Jacques Kilchoer at (714) 557-8427.



Group #178 Irvine Meeting Location

Amnesty International Local Group 178
Post Office Box 16243
Irvine, California 92623-6243