

Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XII Number 7, July 2004

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, July 22, 7:30 PM. *Monthly Meeting* 414 S. Holliston, Caltech Y Lounge. Help us plan future actions on the Patriot Act, Campaign Against Discrimination, death penalty, environmental justice and more.

Tuesday, August 10, 7:30 PM. *Letter-writing Meeting* at the Athenaeum. Corner of California & Hill. **Please note that in the summer, the basement area where we usually meet is closed.** Look for us on the lawn or check with the receptionist. This informal gathering is a great for newcomers to get acquainted with Amnesty!

Sunday, August 15, 6:30 PM. *Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion Group.* Vroman's Book Bookstore, 695 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena. This month we discuss John Burdett's *Bangkok 8*. (More info below.)

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi all,

Hope you are enjoying the summer and keeping cool.

Lucas Kamp and Phil Lefcourt, group 2 members who are involved with the coalition for civil liberties report that there will finally(!) be a meeting of the Pasadena city council to vote on the resolution opposing the Patriot Act. it will be Monday July 19th 8 PM at the Pasadena senior center Raymond and Holly. Pasadena residents are encouraged to come. call the city council at 626-744-4311 to double check room number and time. if you are a Pasadena resident, also please email or phone your councilperson. for contact info, go to <http://www.ci.pasadena.ca.us>. Unfortunately, the US Congress did not pass the "Freedom to Read Protection Act" which would have amended the patriot act to prohibit the government from searching or seizing a patron's records from a bookseller or library. Amnesty and Group 22 will continue to campaign with locally and nationally on Patriot Act related human rights concerns.

Group 22 is starting a lending library of the books we have read in the rights readers human rights book discussion group. i have obtained a list of all the books our group has read (it is on the group 22 website at : <http://www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22;home.html>).

I have sent it out to the regular attendees of the book group to see which titles they would be able to loan out. Once we have this info, then i will send the list of books available to check out to the group 22 list-serve.

It looks like Guantanamo detainees will get their day in court. The US Supreme court recently ruled that the detainees are entitled to legal due process and have their "enemy combatant" status reviewed by the military. Amnesty has concerns about this process and has called for an independent inquiry to investigate the "war on terror" detention policies, practices and facilities.

Don't miss our monthly meetings as we are planning some interesting things-including bringing back "movie night" (popcorn and other refreshments supplied).

I am almost finished reading *Blood Diamonds* by Greg Campbell, a fascinating and gory (warning!) tale of "conflict diamonds" (obtained and sold illegally to finance brutal wars and killers), full of colorful and chillingly evil characters. Last year, we sent postcards to Senators Feinstein and Boxer in support of the "Clean Diamonds Act" and it was great to get the background on this on-going campaign. If you missed our conflict diamond discussion July 18, then please join us next month when we take our August break to read something a little more light, John Burdett's thriller *Bangkok 8*.

Take care,

Kathy

aigp22@caltech.edu

CONTROL ARMS CAMPAIGN

Urge US Government to Stop Arms Trade

In the last decade, over 5 million people were killed using conventional weapons, many of them civilians and many killed by illicit arms. The absence of effective international and national controls of arms transfers has led to countless atrocities and human rights abuses around the world. Amnesty International urges the US government to take action to establish effective mechanisms for the legal and transparent transfer of arms, and to prevent weapons from getting into the wrong hands.

Background

The uncontrolled proliferation and misuse of arms takes a massive human toll in lost lives and lost livelihoods. An average of US \$22 billion a year is spent on arms by countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America – a sum that would otherwise allow them to meet development goals such as reducing infant and maternal mortality. From Cote

d'Ivoire to Cambodia to Colombia, hundreds of thousands of people are unlawfully killed or maimed each year by conventional weapons. In situations marred by conflict, the availability of arms often leads to an escalation in levels of violence. In 2002, there were over 40 areas of sustained conflict involving armed violence around the world. In virtually all of these conflicts, the forces involved were responsible for abusing international human rights and humanitarian law.

The escalation of abuses attributed to the availability of arms is not solely limited to situations of conflict. In post-conflict cultures and even in peaceful areas, weapons contribute to violence. As weapon availability increases in an area, so does armed criminality. Armed groups are also often intimately linked with drug trafficking. Arms often reinforce male sexual and domestic violence against women. As a gun-based culture becomes prevalent, in countries like Kenya, boys drop out of school to become warriors. An estimated 300,000 children worldwide have been forced or have chosen to relinquish their childhood and work as soldiers in armed conflict; thousands more belong to criminal armed gangs.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the illegal arms trade generates widespread corruption and bribes. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001, many provisions regulating the availability of arms have been relaxed as countries seek to arm their allies. The US has significantly increased military aid to many countries including some that have committed grave human rights abuses and are thus identified by the State Department as having a "poor" human rights record. Weapons in too many hands increases violence, yet weapons in the wrong hands poses an even greater risk to civilians as these weapons are frequently used to commit human rights abuses.

The US has a dominant role in the global transmission of arms. From 1998 to 2001, the US, the UK, and France had earned more income from arms sales to developing countries than they had given in aid. The five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council – USA, UK, France, Russia, and China – are responsible for 88% of reported conventional arms exports. These countries that are profiting most from weapons transfers must also play a significant role in insuring that arms are exported and handled responsibly.

Currently there are no binding international laws to control arms, leaving the responsibility to national governments. With this system, even in a situation where a nation refuses to arm a country with a history of arms abuse, there is little to prevent another supplier from doing so. More and

more countries are beginning to produce small arms, many with little ability or will to regulate their use. Where national law governs arms trade, its efficacy is weakened by practices such as brokering by a third party or the licensing of arms technology to another country for production there. Governments are also often lax in determining the actual end use of guns, as the end-use certificate process is easily circumvented.

Amnesty International recognizes the legitimacy of states to purchase weapons for the defense of their citizens and their territorial integrity. However, this legitimacy has been grossly abused by states that have used arms supposedly acquired for legitimate ends to commit human rights abuses, including war crimes. Amnesty International believes that the vicious circle of arms transfers, conflict and human rights abuse is a global problem that needs a global solution, in which both supply and demand are addressed.

DRC: An Example of Arms Out of Control

The ongoing conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) provides one example of the devastating consequences of proliferation and misuse of arms. More than three million people have died during the past five years of war in the DRC. At least 50,000 people have died in the Ituri region where rival armed groups fight to control abundant natural resources, including diamonds, coltan, gold, copper, cobalt and timber. The revenue from these resources fuels an uncontrolled flow of arms into the region. Combatants have used these weapons to commit grave violations of human rights, including mass killings of unarmed combatants, the use of large number of child soldiers, kidnapping, and the routine use of rape as a method of torture.

Despite these atrocities, many countries, especially neighboring Rwanda and Uganda have continued to supply arms to the DRC, adding to the already sizeable quantities left over from previous conflicts. These countries have contributed to the devastation of the conflict by continuing to supply arms to insurgent groups, using ethnic and political conflict as a smokescreen for their continued exploitation of the natural resources. This uncontrolled flow of arms has enabled the Ituri conflict to expand into a devastating war in a place that had previously known conflict using only traditional weapons. Although a peace agreement has been signed and a transitional government is being established in Ituri, conflict may continue as long as the international community and, in particular, neighboring countries continue to contribute to a tense situation with the arms necessary for violent conflict.

The trade in arms which fuels the tragic conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo highlights the deficiencies in controls over the unchecked transfer of arms worldwide. Amnesty International is greatly

concerned by the continuous flow of arms into conflict territories used by the warring parties to commit grave violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. The unchecked flow of arms, both into areas of conflict and peaceful regions, contributes to increased violence and abuses. There is a need for binding international arms regulation to ensure that arms are used responsibly, with respect to the rights and lives of the international population.

For more information on the illegal arms trade see *Shattered Lives: the Case for Tough International Arms Control*, a report by Amnesty International and Oxford. http://www.amnestyusa.org/arms_trade/control_arms_report.html

Sample Letter

The Honorable [Your Senator’s Name]
 United States Senate
 Washington, DC 20510
 Dear Senator _____ :

I am deeply concerned by the unregulated proliferation of arms, which has contributed to devastating atrocities around the world. Often these arms flow to countries and armed groups who use them for torture, repression, and crimes against humanity. It is estimated that arms kill approximately 1,300 people across the globe each day – a total of half a million per year or almost one life per minute. I urge the United States government to examine the dangers and human rights impact of the unregulated or illicit transfer of weapons and to take steps to end such abuses.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is an example of how lax and at times non-existent regulation to conventional arms transfers have a devastating impact on human rights. Over three million people have died in the DRC since 1998 as a result of the misuse of these weapons. The abundance of arms is impelled by the exploitation of natural resources such as timber, coltan, diamonds, gold, and cobalt. These arms fuel violent conflicts between warring factions, which have resulted in gross and widespread violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. Abuses include mass killings, the widespread use of child soldiers, rape as a method of torture, the use of landmines, and kidnappings.

Some of the arms used to commit such atrocities in the DRC are reported to have been manufactured in the Belgium, China, France, Germany, Israel, Spain, the UK, and the United States. Some of these weapons were supplied directly to the belligerents and some may have been transported prior to the current conflict. Regardless, the long life span of

such weapons means that they continue to be responsible for current abuses.

The US government must improve its capacity to control its own arms transfers in order to further protect US citizens and those of other nations from armed violence. Further, the US must cooperate with other nations to develop guidelines to insure that all proposed arms deals—including those brokered by a third party—undergo strict and transparent licensing procedures, and that all arms manufacturers and brokers register with their country of citizenship or residence.

The United States has an important role to play in ensuring that no arms transfers are made to states where these items may be used to commit human rights abuses. The millions who have been maimed or killed in the DRC are but one example of the deleterious effects of the unregulated flow of arms around the world.

The US Senate has an obligation to play its part in halting this trade. I ask you to urge the Bush Administration to examine the human rights impact of the widespread misuse of weapons, improve enforcement of existing controls, and take steps to end the unregulated arms trade.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely, YOUR NAME and ADDRESS

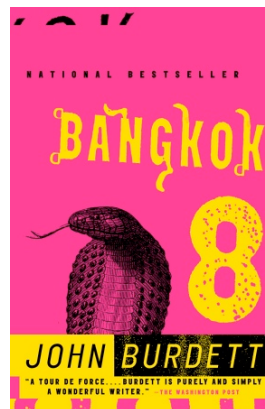
LETTER COUNT	
Urgent Action	13
Total	13
Want to add your letters to the total? Get in touch with lwkamp@sbcglobal.net	

RIGHTS READERS

Human Rights Book Discussion Group
 Vroman’s Bookstore
 695 E. Colorado Boulevard, Pasadena

**Sunday, August 15,
 6:30 PM**

Bangkok 8
 by John Burdett



Under a Bangkok bridge, inside a bolted-shut Mercedes: a murder by snake, a charismatic African American Marine sergeant killed by a methamphetamine-stoked python and a swarm of stoned

cobras. Two cops, the only two in the city not on the take, arrive too late. Minutes later, only one is alive: Sonchai Jitpleecheep, a devout Buddhist, equally versed in the sacred and the profane, son of a long-gone Vietnam War G.I. and a Thai bar girl whose subsequent international clientele contributed richly to Sonchai's sophistication.

Now, his partner dead, Sonchai is doubly compelled to find the murderer, to maneuver through the world he knows all too well, illicit drugs, prostitution, infinite corruption, and into a realm he has never before encountered: the moneyed underbelly of the city. Thick with the authentic, and hallucinogenic, atmosphere of Bangkok, crowded with astonishing characters, uniquely smart and skeptical, literary and wildly readable, Bangkok 8 is one of a kind.

"Bangkok 8 is one of the most startling and provocative mysteries that I've read in years. The characters are marvelously unique, the setting is intoxicating and the plot unwinds in dark illusory strands, reminiscent of Gorky Park. Once I started, I didn't want to put it down." --Carl Hiaasen

DEATH PENALTY

Juvenile faces capital trial in Texas

At a trial about to begin in Harris County, Texas, the prosecution is intending to seek a death sentence against Robert Acuna for a crime he is alleged to have committed when he was 17 years old.

International law, recognized by almost every government in the world, prohibits the use of the death penalty against those who were under 18 at the time of the crime.

Robert Acuna is charged with the murder of Joyce Carroll and her husband James Carroll, aged 74 and 75 respectively. Both were shot dead in their home in Baytown, near Houston, on 12 November 2003.

Jury selection for Robert Acuna's trial began this week. The trial proper is scheduled to begin on 2 August 2004. The lead prosecutor is Assistant District Attorney Renee McGee. Her co-prosecutor is Assistant District Attorney Vic Wisner. The District Attorney of Harris County is Charles A. Rosenthal.

The United Nations Guidelines on the Role of Prosecutors requires, among other things, that prosecutors "be made aware of...human rights and fundamental freedoms recognized by national and international law". The Guidelines state that prosecutors must "respect and protect human dignity and uphold human rights" in performing their duties.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Recognizing that the immaturity of young people and their capacity for growth and change renders the death penalty a singularly inappropriate punishment in such cases, international law bans the execution of child offenders, people who were under 18 at the time of the crime. The Geneva Conventions, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (ratified by 192 countries), the American Convention on Human Rights and the United Nations Safeguards Guaranteeing Protection of the Rights of Those Facing the Death Penalty, all have provisions exempting this age group from execution. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has found that the prohibition on the execution of anyone who was under 18 years old at the time of the crime is now a peremptory norm of international law (a *jus cogens* norm), from which no country can exempt itself.

Since 1990, Amnesty International has documented 36 executions of child offenders in eight countries – the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the USA, China and Yemen. The USA carried out 19 of the executions, more than all other countries combined. It is the only country which claims for itself the right to carry out such executions in its normal criminal justice system. The DRC has abolished the special military courts which led to the execution of a child offender in 2000; Yemen, Pakistan and China have abolished the death penalty against child offenders (although there are some residual problems in enforcing the law in the latter two countries); Saudi Arabia and Nigeria now deny such use of the death penalty; and Iran appears to be in the process of abolishing the death penalty for under-18-year-olds.

Nineteen of the 38 death penalty states in the USA set 18 (at the time of the crime) as the minimum age for death penalty eligibility, and another 12 states are abolitionist. Thus 31 US states, as well as the federal government, do not use the death penalty against child offenders. Of those states that do, Texas is by far the leading perpetrator, accounting for a third of the country's condemned child offenders, and 13 of 22 executions of child offenders carried out in the USA since 1977. Six of the last seven such executions were carried out by Texas executioners.

More than a third of the child offenders on death row in Texas and approximately one in seven of those currently condemned nationwide, were prosecuted in Harris County, where Robert Acuna is facing the death penalty. No whole state in the USA, apart from Alabama (and the rest of Texas), has more child offenders on death row than this single Texas jurisdiction.

In its October 2004 term, the US Supreme Court will revisit its 1989 decision allowing the execution of offenders who were 16 or 17 at the time of the crime. Its decision is expected in early 2005. In 2002, four of the nine Supreme Court Justices described the execution of child offenders as "shameful" and "a relic of the past".

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible:

- expressing sympathy for the family and friends of Joyce and James Carroll, and explaining that you are not seeking to excuse the manner of their deaths, to minimize the suffering caused, or to express any opinion on the guilt or innocence of the accused;
- explaining that you are deeply concerned that the Harris County District Attorney's Office is intending to seek a death sentence against Robert Acuna if it obtains his conviction, despite the fact that he was under 18 years old at the time of the crime;
- using any of the above or other information as you see fit in explaining your concern;
- urging that the District Attorney's Office drop its pursuit of the death penalty in this case.

APPEALS TO:

Assistant District Attorney Renee McGee
Harris County District Attorney's Office
1201 Franklin Street, Suite 600,
Houston, Texas 77002-1923

COPIES TO:

District Attorney Charles A. Rosenthal
Harris County District Attorney's Office
1201 Franklin Street, Suite 600
Houston, Texas 77002-1923

SUMMER POSTCARD ACTION *Send greetings to Sudanese HR Activist Saleh Mahmud Osman*

For many people, summer is a time for vacations, picnics and recreation. But for prisoners of conscience or those who defend human rights in many countries, summer brings no relief from the potential danger and sense of isolation they may face. By simply sending a postcard, however, you can help support these women and men. You will find information on several cases of concern on the Amnesty website, we include one here. Please send cards to these people expressing your support and encouragement. Some suggestions:

- Keep messages simple, such as: "We are thinking of you, and hope you are well."

- Don't discuss the politics of the country or the accusations against any prisoners.
- Please be sensitive to different cultural and religious mores. Picture postcards are good to use, but revealing pictures of men or women or references to alcoholic drinks could be offensive.
- International Airmail postage is 70 cents for standard size postcards.

For 20 years, Sudan has been gripped by a deadly civil war. While peace may finally be near between the government and one of the rebel groups, new opposition forces have erupted in Darfur in western Sudan. Conflict in Darfur has intensified since February 2003 when the Sudan Liberation Army and later the Justice and Equality Movement took up arms against the government, citing the marginalization of the region and a lack of government protection for agricultural ethnic groups from attacks by nomadic militias. The government then gave free rein to the nomadic militias (known as the Janjawid) to attack the villages of the agricultural ethnic groups. The Janjawid, supported and funded by the government, continue to attack, kill, rape and abduct civilians. One million people have fled their burnt villages to take refuge in towns, while more than 110,000 others have fled Sudan altogether, crossing the border into Chad. Human rights activists and lawyers have been arrested in many parts of Sudan in connection with the conflict in Darfur. Human rights lawyer Saleh Mahmud Osman was arrested at his home by members of the National Security Agency in February 2004. Because he has not been charged with any criminal offense nor given access to a lawyer, it is difficult to know exactly why Saleh Mahmud Osman was detained.

However, his arrest may be connected to his having provided legal assistance to victims of human rights abuses in Darfur, to detainees, and to prisoners facing the death penalty. He is being held in Kober Prison under the National Security Forces Act, which allows for detention without charge or trial for up to nine months. You may send Saleh Mahmud Osman cards of support via the Sudan Human Rights Group (SHRG).

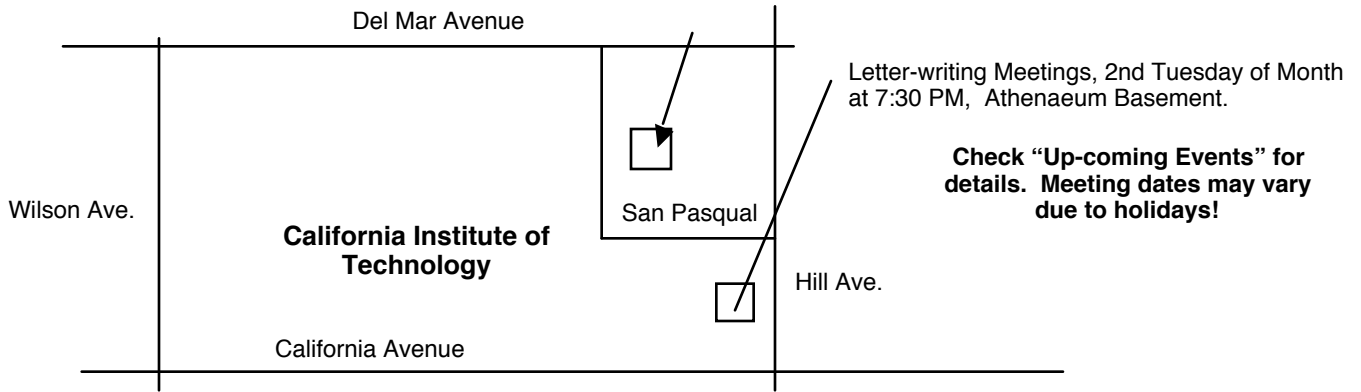
Please send messages of support to:

Saleh Mahmud Osman
c/o Husam Beshir
SHRG
PO Box 12877
11111 Khartoum
SUDAN

EDITOR'S LAST WORD:

Read us on line: <http://www.cco.caltech.edu/~aigp22>
Martha Ter Maat, 626-281-4039 / rightsreaders@yahoo.com

Monthly Meetings, 4th Thursday of Month, 7:30 PM,
Caltech Y Lounge, 414 S. Holliston.



From the 210 exit on Lake Avenue, head south, turn left on Del Mar
From the 110 continue on Arroyo Parkway north, turn right on California
Street parking is generally available.

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Amnesty International's mission is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of its work to promote all human rights.