

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, February 24, 7:30 PM. *Monthly Meeting* Caltech Y has moved. Just around the corner from our old meeting place, we moved to San Pasqual between Hill and Holliston, south side. You will see two curving walls forming a gate to a path-- our building is just beyond. Help us plan future actions on Tibet, the Patriot Act, Campaign Against Discrimination, death penalty, environmental justice and more.

Sunday, March 6, 7:00 PM. Introducing *Rights Reel*, a video discussion group. Caltech Y, same location as our monthly meetings (see above). This month we view "Brothers and Others," a film about Arab-Americans detained post-9/11.

Tuesday, March 8, 7:30 PM. *Letter-writing Meeting* at the Athenaeum. Corner of California & Hill. This month commemorate Women's Day by taking action! This informal gathering is a great for newcomers to get acquainted with Amnesty!

Sunday, March 20, 6:30 PM. *Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion Group.* Vroman's Book Bookstore, 695 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena. This month we discuss Clea Koff's *The Bone Woman*. (More info below.)

Saturday, March 26, 9:00 AM - 6:00 PM. *4th Annual Amnesty Mini-Conference.* Cal State University-Fullerton. Continental breakfast and admission FREE! Workshops include:

- Women's Campaign
- Death Penalty
- Refugees
- War on Terror
- AIDS and Human Rights
- Corporate Action Network
- Introduction to Amnesty
- Sudan Crisis
- Torture
- Racial Profiling
- Human Trafficking

Directions: Cal State Fullerton is located west of the Orange (57) Freeway in Fullerton. The university is bordered by Nutwood Avenue to the south, State College Boulevard to the west, Yorba Linda Boulevard to the north, and the 57 Freeway to the east. Coming from either the south or the north on the 57 Freeway, exit at Nutwood Avenue. Go west on Nutwood. Turn right at the main campus entrance at Commonwealth Avenue. Follow E. Campus Drive to Parking Lot F. The registration desk will be outside University Hall Room 252 at the south end of the building on the 2nd floor.

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi all,

Hope everyone is staying healthy and avoiding the colds that have been going around. I managed to get it last week, despite lots of vitamin C and Echinacea!

Good news! Father Nguyen Van Ly was released from prison in Vietnam last month as part of a general amnesty for more than 8,000 prisoners in celebration of Tet, the New Year. He was imprisoned in 2001, and became an Amnesty Special Focus case--do you remember the posters we carried in the Doo Dah parade? His photo was on one of them and actions on his behalf have appeared in this newsletter. Members of Congress (urged by AI activists all over the US) sent a joint letter to the Prime Minister of Vietnam asking for his release in 2003, and in 2004 the House passed a resolution calling for his release.

Video nights are coming back soon! See Up-coming Events for more inf. Also, the lending library may soon be functioning as we have found a place to keep the books! Thanks to Cheri Dellito for working on the lending library book-list.

This year's Annual General Meeting for USA will be in Austin, Texas April 8-10. For further info, go to the AIUSA website <http://www.amnestyusa.org/events/agm/> or call the Western Regional Office at: 310-815-0450. Subsidies are available to help offset travel costs. More info on subsidies can be obtained from the Western Regional Office--ask to speak to Kathy Brown, the administrator or kbrown@aiusa.org. Further along the line, the Western Area Regional Conference will be in San Francisco November 11-13, 2005. I hope we can all make it to this event, as it is much closer!

Yet another conference you can't miss! The 4th annual amnesty mini-conference will be March 26th at Calstate Fullerton! See Up-Coming Events for details!

Take care,

Kathy

aigp22@caltech.edu

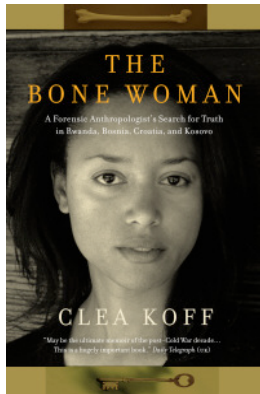
RIGHTS READERS

Human Rights Book Discussion Group

Vroman's Bookstore

695 E. Colorado Boulevard in Pasadena

Sunday, March 20, 6:30 PM



The Bone Woman

by Clea Koff

In the spring of 1994, Rwanda was the scene of the first acts since World War II to be legally defined as genocide. Clea Koff was one of sixteen forensic anthropologist chosen by the UN International Criminal Tribunal to go to Rwanda to unearth the physical evidence of genocide and crimes against humanity. *The Bone Woman* is Koff's riveting, deeply personal account of that mission and the six subsequent missions she undertook—to Bosnia, Croatia, and Kosovo.

Koff's unflinching account of her years with the UN—what she saw, how it affected her, who was prosecuted based on evidence she found, what she learned about the world—is alternately gripping, frightening, and miraculously hopeful. Readers join Koff as she comes face-to-face with the realities of genocide: nearly five hundred bodies exhumed from a single grave in Kibuye, Rwanda; the wire-bound wrists of Srebrenica massacre victims uncovered in Bosnia; the disinterment of the body of a young man in southwestern Kosovo as his grandfather looks on.

Yet even as she recounts the hellish working conditions, the tangled bureaucracy of the UN, and the heartbreak of survivors, Koff imbues her story with purpose, humanity, and an unflinching sense of justice.

STOP VIOLENCE against WOMEN

Assist Survivors of Sexual Violence in CAR

At the end of 2002 and in early 2003, hundreds of women and girls in the Central African Republic (CAR) were subjected to widespread rape, sexual assaults, and other forms of violence. The perpetrators enjoyed impunity and remained at liberty to commit further human rights abuses. Urge CAR President François Bozizé to pursue a robust policy of assisting survivors of sexual violence in CAR and to address the root causes contributing to violence against women.

Please write or send faxes to the government of the Central African Republic urging them to act as soon as possible. Please send appeals to:

President François Bozizé
President of the Central African Republic

Palais de la Renaissance
Bangui
Central African Republic

Please send copies to:
Ambassador Emmanuel Touaboy
Embassy of the Central African Republic
1618 22nd Street NW
Washington, DC 20008

You can base your letters on the sample text below:

Monsieur le Président,

I am deeply concerned for the hundreds of women and girls in CAR who were subjected to widespread rape, sexual assaults, and other forms of violence by combatants in your country at the end of 2002 and early 2003. I urge you to pursue a robust policy of assisting survivors of sexual violence in CAR, specifically those who suffered during systematic and widespread sexual attacks between October 2002 and March 2003.

Amnesty International's findings gathered by its researchers in CAR in late 2003 strongly suggest that, during the five months leading up to the March coup, acts of rape committed by all sides were systematic and widespread. The perpetrators enjoyed impunity and remained at liberty to commit further human rights abuses, including rape.

I urge you to provide legal redress for the survivors by instituting an independent and impartial Commission of Inquiry to carry out a thorough countrywide investigation into the crime of rape committed by combatants during this time. It will be essential that the Commission's recommendations are implemented in accordance with its obligations under international law.

In order to strengthen women's rights and prevent further sexual violence in CAR, I ask you to prioritize education programs targeting the public and community leaders on the importance of not stigmatizing survivors of rape and other forms of violence. Your government must take a strong public stance on gender-based violence sending a clear message that it is neither inevitable nor acceptable and that those responsible will be held accountable.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely, YOUR NAME and ADDRESS

LETTER COUNT

Urgent Actions	28
Tsunami Aftermath	8
Refugees/Child Soldier	7
Campaign Against Torture	8
Stop Violence Against Women	7
Death Penalty	1
Total	58

Want to add your letters to the total? Get in touch with lwkamp@sbcglobal.net

OUTFRONT-COLOMBIA

Women Targeted for Orientation, HIV status

“Two lesbians were living there. The guerrillas told them they had to leave the municipality. Within a month they had ‘disappeared.’ People say they were killed. Their relationship was public knowledge; they lived together. They had become more or less accepted in the town.”

A 14-year-old girl was stripped in the street in Medellín in 2002. A placard was attached to her, reading, “I’m a lesbian.” Three armed men then raped her. A few days later she was found dead. Her breasts had been cut off.

The FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) armed opposition group were believed responsible for the first of these atrocities, and army-backed paramilitaries for the second. All sides in the 40-year internal armed conflict in Colombia – the security forces, army-backed paramilitaries and armed groups – exploit gender stereotypes and commit sexual crimes. Paramilitaries and the FARC in particular have persecuted and abused individuals because of their sexual orientation, gender identity or suspected infection with HIV.

Armed groups often perceive homosexuality as a transgression of traditional moral values. Sex workers, lesbians and bisexual women have been persecuted and killed as a result. Homophobic violence is fuelled by the impunity that its perpetrators enjoy, in the knowledge that such crimes are rarely investigated.

In areas under their control, armed opposition groups and paramilitaries reinforce gender stereotyping. They impose rules of conduct – like dress codes and curfews – that invade privacy and are based on sexist and homophobic attitudes. They try to eliminate “undesirables” so as to impose their vision of society, to demonstrate that they have command over an area, and to win “legitimacy” from the population at large. As in many other countries, control of women’s behavior, coercion in matters of sexuality and reproduction, and discrimination on grounds of gender or sexual identity are deeply entrenched in Colombian society.

Driven by homophobia, the armed groups have responded to the spread of HIV/AIDS by expelling civilians from their homes and killing individuals suspected of being infected, including members of their own forces. Women fighters were more likely to be killed than men, according to testimonies from former FARC combatants. “It is the women who suffer all the consequences. Men are not obliged to use condoms but pregnancy is punished. While a woman who is HIV-positive may be shot, there are [infected] men who are not.”

Between 1998 and 2002, the FARC were said to have made HIV testing obligatory for the inhabitants of Meta and Caquetá departments. In Vistahermosa, Meta department, people were reportedly compelled at gunpoint to submit to tests and to pay for them. People

who were perceived to be lesbian or gay were forced to leave their homes and businesses.

Violence against women in Colombia is widespread and the government is failing in its responsibility to uphold women’s right to a life free from violence, persecution and discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Take Action! Use this sample letter as a guide:

President Alvaro Uribe Velez
Palacio de Narino
Carrera 8 No.7-26
Bogota, Colombia

Dear President Uribe:

I am concerned about the plight of Colombian women who have been persecuted and abused because of their sexual orientation, gender identity or suspected infection with HIV, in particular by the FARC and army-backed paramilitaries.

I urge your government to take the following steps to bring justice for the victims of abuse. Please:

Acknowledge that violence against women, including those targeted because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, is an integral part of the human rights crisis in Colombia.

End “social cleansing”, including the “disappearance” and killing of people because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, or because they are living with HIV or are sex workers.

Investigate all reports of homophobic violence, including sexual violence, and bring to justice those responsible in accordance with international standards for fair trial.

Ensure that human rights defenders, including those working in support of sexual rights, can carry out legitimate human rights work without fear of retaliation or violence.

Implement the recommendations made by the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women.

Sincerely, YOUR NAME and ADDRESS

GUATEMALA

Exhumations Group Fears for Safety

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Sara Poroj and Sergio Rivera, who work for the Exhumations Programme of human rights organization Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GAM), Group of Mutual Support. They have been intimidated and threatened, in what appears to be an effort to stop their work to exhume secret mass graves.

On 3 February, Sara Poroj, the head of GAM's Exhumations Programme, and Sergio Rivera were staying at a hotel in the town of Playa Grande, Ixcán municipality, Quiché department. They were inspecting the site of a secret mass grave found within a former military base in Playa Grande and seeking permission from the Public Prosecutor’s Office for its exhumation. At 3am on 3 February, a man armed with a gun entered the hotel room where Sara Poroj was

sleeping and searched her documents and belongings, while keeping his gun pointed towards her head. According to eye witnesses, two other armed men were keeping watch outside the room. The three men left after about five minutes.

The following day, as Sara Poroj and Sergio Rivera were inspecting the site of the secret mass grave, a car stopped in front of the exhumation site and the occupants watched them for approximately four hours. As they returned to the hotel, the car followed them, and parked outside the hotel. Another car drew up, and armed men from both vehicles got out and walked around the outside of the hotel. Sara Poroj then telephoned GAM's main office in the capital, Guatemala City. Despite a request by GAM to the Presidential Human Rights Office (COPREDEH) to send police to the hotel, no police arrived. The GAM office managed to contact other human rights and social organizations close to Playa Grande, who mobilized some 25 people to get Sara Poroj and Sergio Rivera safely out of the hotel. The police eventually arrived at around 7.30pm, by which time the incident was over. On 5 February, Sara Poroj and Sergio Rivera drove to the GAM office in Guatemala City. The same car that they had seen at the exhumation site reportedly followed them for approximately three hours.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION. The military base in Playa Grande was the largest military base in the country, before being dismantled on 11 May 2004 as part of government measures to reduce the size of the army. According to local human rights organizations, approximately 30 mass graves exist within the military compound. The graves reportedly contain the remains of victims executed during Guatemala's internal armed conflict, which lasted for over 30 years until the signing of the 1996 Peace Accords. Some 200,000 people were killed or "disappeared" during the conflict, including the husband of Sara Poroj. According to the United Nation's Truth Commission, the Historical Clarification Commission, the department of Quiché was the worst hit during the internal armed conflict, suffering 344 of the 669 massacres documented in its final report, *Memory of Silence*.

GAM is one of Guatemala's oldest human rights groups, formed in the 1980s by people trying to establish what happened to their relatives, and thousands of others who "disappeared" during Guatemala's civil conflict. Sara Poroj was one of the founding members of GAM, and helped to organize the first exhumation within the former military base at Playa Grande in September 2004.

GAM and other organizations involved in the exhumation of clandestine cemeteries have been subject to numerous acts of intimidation in what appears to be an effort to stop their work.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals:

- expressing concern for the safety of Sara Poroj and Sergio Rivera, members of the human rights organization Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GAM),

following the attempts to intimidate them as they carried out their work for GAM's Exhumations Programme;

- calling on the authorities to take immediate measures to guarantee their safety, and that of other individuals involved in the exhumation of secret mass graves;
- urging the authorities to immediately investigate the recent acts of intimidation against Sara Poroj and Sergio Rivera, to make the results public and bring the perpetrators to justice;
- urging the authorities to take immediate measures to ensure that all those involved in the exhumation of secret mass graves are able to carry out their legitimate work without fear of harassment.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Defense:

Ministro de Defensa Nacional

Carlos Aldana Villanueva

Avenida Reforma, 1-45, zona 10

Ciudad de Guatemala, GUATEMALA

Attorney General:

Juan Luis Florido

Fiscal General

Fiscalía General del Ministerio Público

8a. Avenida 10-67, Zona 1,

Ciudad Guatemala, Guatemala

COPIES TO:

Ambassador Jose Guillermo Castillo

Embassy of Guatemala

2220 R St. NW

Washington DC 20008

Email: ambassador@guatemala-embassy.org

UNITED STATES

Policy Restricts Health Care Services

In recent years, the Bush Administration has adopted increasingly restrictive policies on health care services that are having a negative impact on women and families around the world. Although President Bush made HIV/AIDS a centerpiece of his 2003 State of the Union address, the president's Global HIV/AIDS legislative initiative (PL-108-25) includes a congressional earmark requiring 1/3 of US AIDS prevention funds to be utilized for "abstinence-until-marriage" programs. The effect is less money for other proven methods of preventing HIV transmission, such as education about condom use and the provision of condoms. The law also allows "faith-based" groups that receive federal funds to refuse to provide information about condoms and other proven methods of protection and to refuse to make referrals to clinics and other providers that do provide such information and services. In addition, the Bush administration was slow to support the use of less-expensive generic AIDS drugs to help the survival of women and families.

Abstinence-only sex education teaches exclusively the social, psychological, and health gains from abstaining from

sexual activity. These programs neglect to discuss sexuality, sexually transmitted diseases, contraception and condom use and reliability. They emphasize failure rates of contraception and discourage its use. This program of action has been adapted into the domestic and foreign policy of the United States, and has received approximately \$1 billion in federal and state matching funds since 1996 (PPFA, Abstinence-Only fact sheet). As a result of current US foreign policy, a program of abstinence-only sex education is being imposed at the expense of women and children's health. Abstinence-only programs are largely ineffective in situations where women and girls are the victims of sexual violence, coercion in the context of early marriage or wife inheritance, or trafficking. Even when sex is consensual, women and girls' unequal status in relationships render them unable to negotiate the use of condoms with a partner. It is in these circumstances that complete education regarding sexual health is most needed.

In addition, the U.S. has imposed policies restricting access to information and services for healthcare and family planning. Such policies have forced the closure of healthcare and family planning providers in remote regions that lack other clinics, many of which offered HIV/AIDS services. Amnesty is concerned about the impact these policies have on the right to freedom of expression and information, and on the right to access the best healthcare and family planning services.

Take Action! Here is a sample letter:

The Honorable George W. Bush
The President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington DC 20500

Dear President Bush:

As a member of Amnesty International, I urge you to ensure US policy helps stop violence against women and girls worldwide and addresses the needs of survivors of violence, including providing effective health care services. I urge you to lift current restrictions on health education and services, which are having a devastating effect on women and their families around the world.

Violence against women is a global human rights scandal that affects everyone, and one of the most pervasive and ignored human rights violations in the world. Worldwide, at least one of every three women – nearly one billion women – will be beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime, whether at the hands of family members, government security forces, or armed rebels. In times of armed conflict, women have been systematically raped as a tool of war as part of “ethnic cleansing” campaigns, subjected to violence and rape that has resulted in their contracting HIV/AIDS, coerced into sexual slavery, and forcibly displaced from their homes. In the home, many women face violence, including beatings, rape, and murder.

Violence is increasingly recognized as a key factor in the rising rates of HIV/AIDS infection among women.

Today, women are four times more likely to contract HIV from infected males than vice versa. Women are estimated to make up 50% of those living with HIV worldwide. In Africa, women account for 58% of those infected, while in South Asia women constitute up to 35% of new HIV infections. In 1999, girls aged 13 to 19 represented the majority of new HIV infections in the United States in their age group (Center for Disease Control and Prevention). In most parts of the world, women and girls lack the power to negotiate safe sexual relations with their husband or partner and are also unable to protect themselves against violence including rape and assault that lead to HIV/AIDS infection. Increasingly, restrictive policies on international assistance for health care services are further exacerbating the obstacles women face to protect themselves against HIV/AIDS infection and other consequences of unprotected sexual relations.

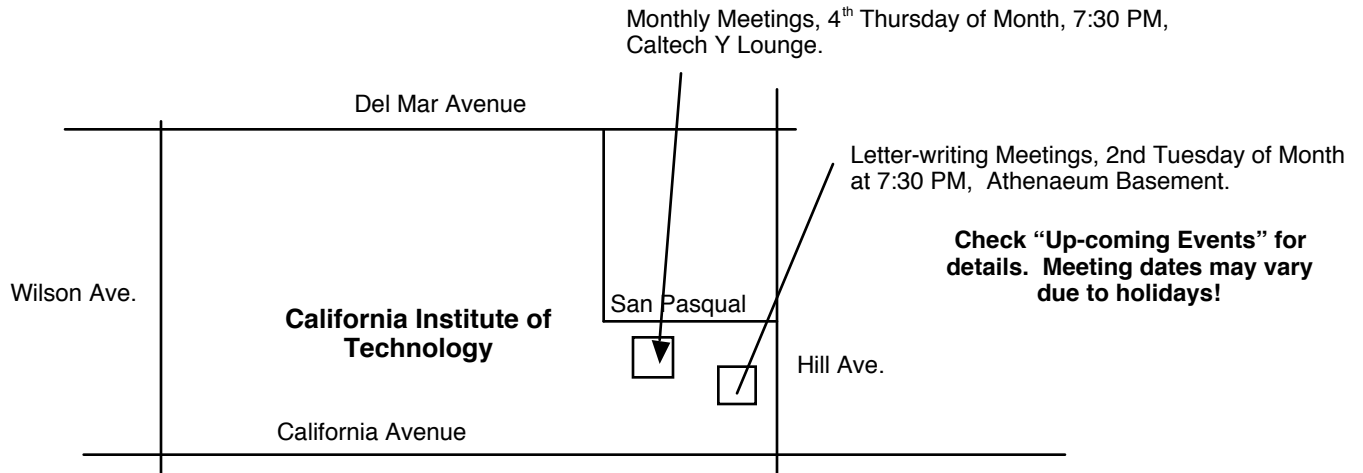
Current US policy is especially concerning and having a deeply detrimental effect on women and their families. The requirement in current law that one third of US AIDS prevention funds be utilized for “abstinence-until-marriage” programs, means that less money is available for other proven methods of preventing HIV transmission, such as education about condom use and the provision of condoms. The impact of this harmful policy is further exacerbated by US policy that allows federally funded “faith-based” groups to refuse to provide information about condoms and other proven methods of protection and to refuse to make referrals to clinics and other providers that do provide such information and services. Your administration's reluctance to support the use of less-expensive generic AIDS drugs also severely impacts the survival of women and families the world over. Finally, the imposition of restrictive policies that present further obstacles to family planning services has forced closure of many health care and family planning providers in remote regions that lack other clinics. Some of these providers offered services to address HIV/AIDS. Amnesty International is concerned about the impact your government's policies have on the right to freedom of expression and information, and on the right to access the best available health care and family planning services.

I urge you to provide adequate funding for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, ensure that affordable AIDS drugs are made available, and implement policies that support proven methods for AIDS prevention. I also ask that you urgently repeal the provisions that require one third of US AIDS prevention funds be utilized for “abstinence-until-marriage” programs, and to repeal policies that impose further obstacles on health care and family planning services. Violence against women is widespread. US policy must aim to end violence and assist survivors in every manner, and not to impose further obstacles to life-saving services.

Sincerely, YOUR NAME and ADDRESS

EDITOR'S LAST WORD:

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



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.

Amnesty International Group 22
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Pasadena, CA 91115-0193



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.