

Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XV Number 6, June 2008

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, June 26, 7:30 PM. *Monthly Meeting*
Caltech Y is located off 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 Sudan, the 'War on Terror', death penalty and more.

Tuesday, July 8, 7:30 PM. *Letter writing meeting* at Caltech Athenaeum, corner of Hill and California in Pasadena. This informal gathering is a great way for newcomers to get acquainted with Amnesty!

Sunday, July 20, 6:30 PM. *Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion Group.* Vroman's Book Bookstore, 695 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena. This month we read "China Road" by Rob Gifford.

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi everyone,

Hot enough for you?! Hope everyone is able to keep cool under this sweltering heat. We have the blinds closed and fans on in all the rooms in an attempt to save money by not running the air-con, but sometimes have to break down and use it!

Well, school is finally out and I am looking forward to catching up with my reading (including Lost City Radio, our June book, which I forgot to buy!), going to the pool, Spanish lessons, painting, and relaxing. Because of the high gas prices, we aren't planning any lengthy vacations, but do intend to spend a little time in Vegas and maybe Napa Valley on the "wine train".

In this issue Lucas writes about his visit to the AGM back east and also the Tiananmen Commemoration events he attended.

Egypt continues to deport Eritrean refugees despite criticism from the UNHCR, human rights organizations, and Eritrean activists. Please take action by sending the letter that follows this column. Source:

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L20639767.htm>

Please join us at any of our meetings this summer – letter writing is outside on the Athenaeum lawn at Caltech, which is always fun, and in August we

always read a mystery! Hope to see some more new faces!

Con cariño,

Kathy aigp22@caltech.edu

ERITREA/EGYPT ACTION UPDATE

Thanks to quick action by hard-working Amnesty activists, hundreds of Eritrean refugees in Egypt may now have their claims for asylum evaluated by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In response to the mass deportation that Egypt began on June 11, AIUSA posted an online urgent action on June 13. Egypt announced on June 15 that UNHCR would be granted access to the remaining Eritrean refugees.

Please participate in this follow-up action for the 900 Eritrean asylum-seekers still in Egypt. If they are forcibly returned to Eritrea, they may be subject to the same fate as Group 22's adopted prisoner of conscience, Estifanos Seyoum, who was arrested in 2001 and has been tortured and held incommunicado without charge or trial.

PUBLIC AI Index: MDE 12/013/2008

16 June 2008

Further Information on UA 165/08 (MDE 12/011/2008, 12 June 2008) – Forcible return / Fear of torture or other ill-treatment

EGYPT Up to 900 Eritrean asylum-seekers

A further 490 Eritrean asylum-seekers were deported to Massawa in Eritrea, on special daily Egypt Air flights from Aswan International airport. Hundreds more are apparently detained at Central Security Forces camp in Shallal, south of Aswan. The camp has served as a gathering point for asylum-seekers before they are taken to Aswan airport. On 12 June, a security official confirmed that 200 Eritreans had been "sent back home" the previous day.

On 15 June, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Egypt announced that the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Egypt would be granted access to the Eritreans to assess their asylum claims.

According to information available to Amnesty International, about 270 Eritreans have been transported to Shallal camp from police stations in the Red Sea cities of Hurgada, Halayeb and

Shalateen, and 35 from Aswan police station. All police stations near Aswan as well as Idfu police station, north of Aswan, are now empty of Eritrean asylum-seekers; most of them were deported but some are still detained in Shallat camp. Among those who had been detained in Idfu and are now believed to have been deported are about 25 Eritreans who had been awaiting a court ruling on charges of illegal entry to Egypt, scheduled for 21 June.

On 12 June, 200 Eritrean asylum-seekers were reportedly deported, and a further 90 on 15 June, all on Egypt Air flights. On 13 and 14 June, 200 were similarly reportedly deported on two flights carrying 100 each.

The asylum-seekers were told they were being deported. Some begged the security forces not to deport them and even threatened to kill themselves. They were searched to make sure they were not carrying anything they could use to harm themselves. They did not physically resist being put on the plane, but continued to cry and beg for mercy. Among the asylum-seekers were women and children.

Since 11 June, the Egyptian authorities have organized mass deportation of Eritrean asylum-seekers. So far about 690 have been reportedly deported; up to 900 more are at risk of deportation.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has issued guidelines to all governments opposing return to Eritrea of rejected Eritrean asylum seekers on the grounds of the record of serious human rights violations in Eritrea. These guidelines are still in force.

Refugees and asylum-seekers returned to Eritrea have been detained incommunicado, and tortured. Two asylum-seekers returned to Eritrea by the German authorities on 14 May are believed to have been arrested on arrival, and have not been seen since. Another asylum-seeker returned from the UK in November 2007 was detained in inhumane conditions and ill-treated before being released.

Thousands of people are detained incommunicado in Eritrea, in secret and indefinitely, without charge or trial. They have been arrested for suspected opposition to the government, practicing their religious beliefs as members of banned evangelical or other churches, evading military conscription or trying to flee the country.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Arabic or your own language:

- welcoming the authorities' 15 June decision to give the UNHCR access to the Eritrean asylum-seekers held at the Central Security Forces camp in Shallat, but expressing concern that they have deported a further 490 Eritreans since 12 June;
- calling on the authorities to stop all forcible returns of asylum-seekers to Eritrea immediately;
- urging them to respect Egypt's international obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention and the UN Convention Against Torture not to forcibly return asylum-seekers to Eritrea, where they would be at risk of torture and other serious human rights abuses.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Interior
Minister Habib Ibrahim El Adly
Ministry of the Interior
25 Al-Sheikh Rihan Street
Bab al-Louk, Cairo, Egypt
Fax: +20 2 279 0682
Email: moi@idsc.gov.eg
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Minister of Foreign Affairs
Minister Ahmed Ali Aboul Gheit
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Corniche al-Nil, Maspiro
Cairo, Egypt
Fax: +20 22 574 8822
+20 22 390 8159
+20 22 574 9533
E-mail: minexter@idsc1.gov.eg
Salutation: Dear Minister

EgyptAir Holding Company Headquarters
Captain Tawfik Assy,
Chairman & CEO of EgyptAir Holding Company
EgyptAir Administrative Complex
Fax: +202 24183715 / +202 26964229
Email: callcenter@egyptair.com
Salutation: Dear Captain

Egypt Air offices in your country

Web site:

<http://www.egyptair.com/English/ContactUs/WorldWideOffices/>

And to diplomatic representatives of Egypt
Accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.

Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 28 July 2008.

RIGHTS READERS
Human Rights Book Discussion Group

Keep up with Rights Readers at
<http://rightsreaders.blogspot.com>

Next Rights Readers meeting:

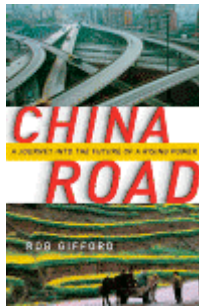
Sunday, July 20, 6:30 PM

Vroman's Bookstore

**695 E. Colorado Boulevard
in Pasadena**

“China Road”

By Rob Gifford



Publisher's Comments:

Route 312 is the Chinese Route 66. It flows three thousand miles from east to west, passing through the factory towns of the coastal areas, through the rural heart of China, then up into the Gobi Desert, where it merges with the Old Silk Road. The highway witnesses every part of the social and economic revolution that is turning China upside down.

In this utterly surprising and deeply personal book, acclaimed National Public Radio reporter Rob Gifford, a fluent Mandarin speaker, takes the dramatic journey along Route 312 from its start in the boomtown of Shanghai to its end on the border with Kazakhstan. Gifford reveals the rich mosaic of modern Chinese life in all its contradictions, as he poses the crucial questions that all of us are asking about China: Will it really be the next global superpower? Is it as solid and as powerful as it looks from the outside? And who are the ordinary Chinese people, to whom the twenty-first century is supposed to belong?

Gifford is not alone on his journey. The largest migration in human history is taking place along

highways such as Route 312, as tens of millions of people leave their homes in search of work. He sees signs of the booming urban economy everywhere, but he also uncovers many of the country's frailties, and some of the deep-seated problems that could derail China's rise.

The whole compelling adventure is told through the cast of colorful characters Gifford meets: garrulous talk-show hosts and ambitious yuppies, impoverished peasants and tragic prostitutes, cell-phone salesmen, AIDS patients, and Tibetan monks. He rides with members of a Shanghai jeep club, hitchhikes across the Gobi desert, and sings karaoke with migrant workers at truck stops along the way.

As he recounts his travels along Route 312, Rob Gifford gives a face to what has historically, for Westerners, been a faceless country and breathes life into a nation that is so often reduced to economic statistics. Finally, he sounds a warning that all is not well in the Chinese heartlands, that serious problems lie ahead, and that the future of the West has become inextricably linked with the fate of 1.3 billion Chinese people.

Author Biography



Rob Gifford is currently NPR's London Correspondent. He came to London in 2005, after six years as NPR's correspondent in Beijing.

Gifford has reported from around the world for NPR, especially in Asia and Europe. Two days after the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001, Gifford flew to Pakistan for the first of many reporting trips to the Muslim world.

Born and raised in the UK, Gifford worked for three years at the BBC World Service, before moving to the US in 1994 to attend graduate school. He also spent two years at NPR member station WGBH in Boston.

Gifford holds a BA in Chinese Studies from Durham University, UK, and an MA in Regional Studies (East Asia)

REPORT FROM AGM IN DC FROM LUCAS KAMP, CO-COORDINATOR

I attended AIUSA's 2008 Annual General Meeting in Arlington, VA, on 26-27 April, on the return leg of a trip to Europe. Some highlights were: a session on Defending Individuals at Risk that featured individuals from Russia, Ethiopia and Mexico who talked about their experiences of being tortured and harassed in those countries; the Focus Plenary session at which Executive Director Larry Cox spoke and which had an interview (via satellite) with former Guantanamo detainee Moazzam Begg; and the Resolutions Voting Plenary, in which I had a chance to see AI's decision-making process in action. Unfortunately, I missed the evening events since I had friends in the area to visit.

TIANANMEN COMMEMORATION IN LOS ANGELES

I attended the 19th annual Tiananmen Commemorative Awards Dinner sponsored by the Visual Artists Guild on 24 May in LA's Chinatown. This year, besides two imprisoned Chinese dissidents, several awards were given to Pasadena city officials and journalists for their support of the movement to protest the Beijing Olympic float in last January's Rose parade. A number of speeches were given, including one by myself on behalf of AI. The next week, on the anniversary of the event on 4 June, I attended a rally at the Chinese consulate in LA. About 100 people were present and there was singing, speeches and a candlelight vigil. A short speech on behalf of AI was given by Tracy Gore, a well-known local activist, and she and I held an AI banner that was the object of much interest.

LUCAS KAMP, CO-COORDINATOR

DEATH PENALTY UPDATE

11 June 2008

Further information on UA 123/08 (09 May 2008) – Death penalty / Legal concern USA (Virginia)

Percy Levar Walton (m), black, aged 29

Levar Walton has had the death sentence against him commuted by the Governor of Virginia, Timothy Kaine. Walton, who suffers from serious mental illness, including paranoid schizophrenia, was due to be executed in Virginia on 10 June. He was sentenced to death in 1997 for the murders of an elderly white couple, Elizabeth and Jesse Hendrick, aged 81 and 80, and a 33-year-old black man, Archie Moore, in the town of Danville in November 1996.

On 9 June, Governor Timothy Kaine issued a statement that "the question of Walton's mental status is of the utmost importance in assessing whether the Commonwealth [of Virginia] may carry out his death sentence. For this reason, the court system has wrestled with the question of whether Walton's mental capacity imposes a bar to his execution. Notwithstanding consistent decisions upholding his conviction, the courts found it necessary to carefully examine whether Walton's death sentence could be carried out consistent with the U.S. Constitution."

Governor Timothy Kaine noted that in 2006, when he had previously delayed Walton's execution so that his competence could be evaluated, "I was compelled to conclude that Walton was seriously mentally impaired and that he met the Supreme Court's definition of mental incompetence. Because one could not reasonably conclude that Walton was fully aware of the punishment he was about to suffer and why he was to suffer it, I decided that his execution could not proceed at that time."

Governor Timothy Kaine said that he had concluded that commutation was not appropriate at that time because it was "within the realm of possibility" that Levar Walton's mental health could improve. However, in the time since then, "there has been no discernible improvement in Walton's condition and no evidence that his mental impairment is temporary. Walton differs in fundamental ways from other death row offenders. He lives in a self-imposed state of isolation that includes virtually no interest in receiving or understanding information. Walton communicates only infrequently, almost invariably in response to direct questions, and those responses are minimal in nature. He has nothing in his cell other than a mattress, a pillow and a blanket. He shows no interest in contact with the outside world and has no television, radio, magazines, books or stationery. He has no personal effects of any kind. This minimal

existence has been in evidence for the past five years."

Governor Timothy Kaine concluded that "In light of this information, I am again compelled to find that one cannot reasonably conclude that Walton is fully aware of the punishment he is about to suffer and why he is to suffer it. Given the extended period of time over which Walton has exhibited this lack of mental competence, I must conclude that a commutation of his sentence to life in prison without possibility of parole is now the only constitutionally appropriate course of action."

Governor Timothy Kaine stated that although Walton's mental incompetence was enough on its own to warrant commutation, there were other issues that he had considered when making the clemency decision. He noted that since Walton's trial the US Supreme Court had ruled that the execution of someone with mental retardation or someone who was under 18 years old at the time of the crime was unconstitutional. Walton was less than two months past his 18th birthday when he committed the crimes, and was already suffering from mental illness at the time. Governor Timothy Kaine also noted that in his most recent IQ test, Walton's IQ had been assessed at 66, within the mental retardation range.

In reaching his decision to commute the death sentence to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole, Governor Timothy Kaine said "I remain mindful of the terrible injustice that Walton perpetrated against Jessie E. Kendrick, Elizabeth W. Kendrick, and Archie D. Moore, Jr. My thoughts and prayers are with the families of these honorable people."

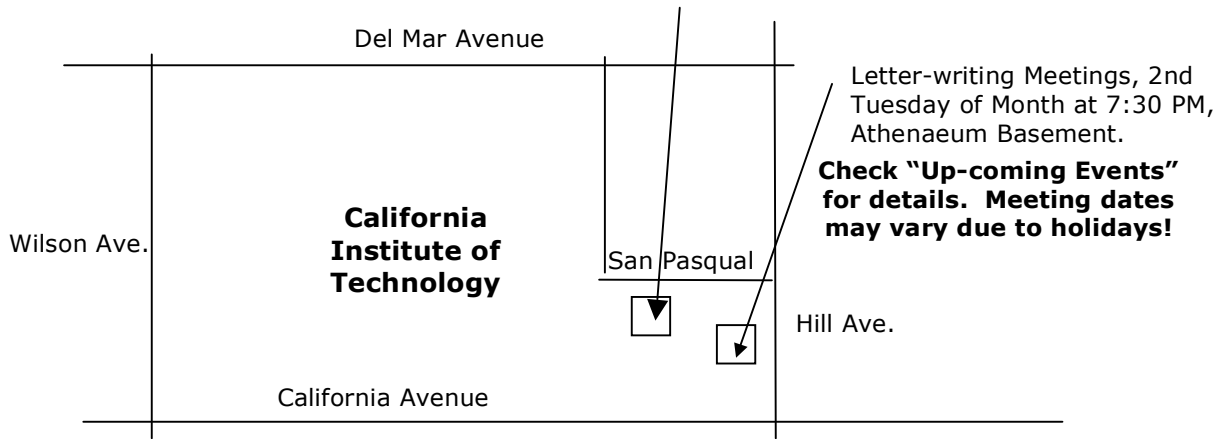
Many thanks to all who sent appeals. Please consider going online to send a thank-you message to Gov. Kaine.

Use this link to thank Gov. Kaine:
<http://takeaction.amnestyusa.org/siteapps/advocacy/index.aspx?c=jhKPIXPCIoE&b=2590179&template=x.ascx&action=7802&tr=y&auid=3741965>

MONTHLY LETTER COUNT

Death Penalty	3
Eritrea	9
Other UAs	18
Total:	30
To add your letters to the total contact lwkamp@gmail.com	

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



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
The Caltech Y
Mail Code 5-62
Pasadena, CA 91125
www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22/
<http://rightsreaders.blogspot.com>



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.