

Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XV Number 10, October 2008

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, October 23, 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, November 11, 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, November 16, 6:30 PM. *Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion Group*. Vroman's Bookstore, 695 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena. This month we read "The Art of Political Murder" by Francisco Goldman.

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi everyone,

Happy Halloween!

Group 22 members Lucas, Joyce, Stevi, Robert and Kathy tabled at the Caltech Club Fair in late September. We got a lot of email sign-ups and hopefully will have some new people appearing at meetings!

The Amnesty International Western Regional Conference is being held at the Pasadena Hilton Nov 7-9. The registration form is available at: <http://www.amnestyusa.org/events/western/regionalconference>. Thanks to all who participated in the 3 workshops we've held to make items to sell at the conference.

The conference theme is "Breaking Borders: 60 Years of Human Rights" and the featured speaker will be Mia Kirshner, author of *I Live Here*. The film *Jihad for Love* will be shown at the conference.

In this newsletter we have another urgent action regarding the Troy Davis case. His appeal to the US Supreme Court was rejected on October 14 and a new execution date will be set for October 27 or after.

And lastly, don't forget to vote! We can't tell you how to vote but there are many groups such as the League of Women Voters that provide unbiased information.

Con cariño,

Kathy aigp22@caltech.edu

ERITREA:

La Dolce Vita? Not for Estifanos!

The New York Times published a travel article on October 5 titled "Recalling La Dolce Vita in Eritrea." The article focused on the Art Deco architecture and cultural relics from the pre-WWII Italian colonial era. The author touched only briefly on political repression and human rights violations. He quoted an Eritrean friend who has left the country: "The problem with Eritrea ... is that half of my friends are in prison and the other half put them there!"

Group 22's adopted prisoner of conscience, Estifanos Seyoum, is one of those Eritreans who has been held incommunicado in secret prisons since his arrest in the major crackdown in September 2001.

Trish Hepner, our AIUSA Country Specialist for Eritrea, rebuked the author in a letter she wrote to the NY Times Travel Editor:

"Like Jeffrey Gettleman (October 5, "Recalling La Dolce Vita"), I too have been charmed by Eritrea. Indeed, my career as an anthropologist has been entwined for more than a decade with this fascinating country. While it is a peculiar privilege of tourists to enjoy their vacation destinations while not inquiring about impoverishment, political repression, or human rights violations, this should not be the case for journalists. Gettleman has produced hard-hitting pieces on the Horn of Africa in the past. I am shocked that he would fail to do so in Eritrea, where thousands of people languish in prison without charge or trial, among them journalists, religious minorities, and government reformers. While Gettleman enjoys his vacation, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Committee to Protect Journalists and Eritreans of conscience struggle to draw attention to the crisis of human rights in Eritrea. I am pleased that he sees the beauty, resourcefulness, and strength of Eritrea and its people. I only wish he paid as much attention to the hardships and suffering Eritreans endure at the hands of an unjust government."

The NY Times article does contain some worthwhile insights into the history and worldview of the Eritrean people. To read the entire article, go to <http://nytimes.com/travel> and search on Eritrea. Here is an excerpt about the Eritrean memorial of the war with Ethiopia:

"Eritreans chose not to put up a statue of Mr. Isaias or some other famous man but of a pair of giant sandals — yes, sandals. The shida sandal, a \$3 black plastic shoe that is actually quite uncomfortable unless you're

hiding in a bunker and have bigger worries, is the official symbol of the struggle. In the center of town is a pair of 20-foot-long sheet metal shidas. In the 1980s, Eritrean rebels built a mobile shida machine underground that survived countless bombings. The sandals became legendary.”

This month let’s write again to President Isayas, whom Gettleman describes as “tall, handsome and mustached”, and remind him that we will not forget Estifanos and the other POCs. Postage to Eritrea is 94 cents.

His Excellency
President Issayas Afewerki
Office of the President
P. O. Box 257
Asmara, Eritrea

Your Excellency,

Estifanos Seyoum and 10 other senior government officials and a number of independent journalists have been held incommunicado without charge or trial since 2001. These detainees are prisoners of conscience, imprisoned for the peaceful expression of their political views. Some are alleged to have died while in detention because of torture and ill treatment and denial of medical care.

Aster Fissehatsion, Ahmed Sheriffo, Beraki Gebreselassie, Berhane Gebregziabeher, Haile Woldetensae, Hamad Hamid Hamad, Mahmoud Ahmed Sheriffo, Ogbe Abraha, Petros Solomon, Saleh Kekiya, and Estifanos Seyoum are not forgotten. I call upon the Eritrea authorities to make known their status.

I urge that the Eritrean government immediately release all those imprisoned in Eritrea solely because they peacefully expressed their opinions or beliefs. I call upon the Eritrea authorities to disclose the status of the thousands of individuals that are reportedly held in arbitrary detention and allow them access to their families and lawyers and medical care. Furthermore, it is imperative that the Eritrean government end the persecution and threats against the family members of prisoners of conscience detained in Eritrea.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,
[your name and address]

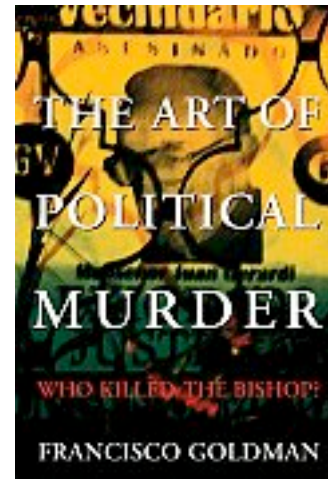
RIGHTS READERS Human Rights Book Discussion Group

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

Next Rights Readers meeting:
Sunday, November 16, 6:30 PM
Vroman’s Bookstore
695 E. Colorado Boulevard
in Pasadena

“The Art of Political Murder”

By Francisco Goldman



Publisher Comments:

The first nonfiction book from acclaimed novelist Francisco Goldman, who began his career as a writer covering the 1980s wars in Central America for Harper's, *The Art of Political Murder* is the story of the murder investigation of a Guatemalan bishop with the twisting plot and colorful characters of a Graham Greene novel. Bishop Juan Gerardi, Guatemala's leading human rights activist, was bludgeoned to death in his garage on a Sunday night in 1998, two days after the presentation of a groundbreaking church-sponsored report implicating the military in the murders and disappearances of some two hundred thousand civilians. Realizing that it could not rely on police investigators or the legal system to solve the murder and bring those responsible to justice, the church formed its own investigative team, a group of secular young men in their twenties who called themselves *Los Intocables* (the Untouchables). Known in

Guatemala as *The Crime of the Century*, the Bishop Gerardi murder case, with its unexpectedly outlandish scenarios and sensational developments, confounded observers and generated extraordinary controversy. For seven years, novelist Francisco Goldman has closely followed Los Intocables' efforts to uncover the truth; the killing or forced exile of multiple witnesses, judges, and prosecutors; the brave struggle of the church's legal team; and the efforts of one courageous prosecutor to solve the case and bring the killers to justice. Goldman has spoken to witnesses no other reporter has reached, and observed firsthand some of the most crucial developments in the case. Now he has produced a tense and astonishing true detective story that opens a window on the new Latin American reality of mara youth gangs and organized crime, and demonstrates, on the most human scale, the precarious struggle to build democratic institutions in a country awash in criminal and political corruption and violence. Most of all this is the story of a remarkable group of engaging, courageous young people, and of their remarkable fight for justice.

Author Biography



He was born in Boston, Massachusetts, to a Guatemalan mother and Jewish-American father. His first novel, *The Long Night of White Chickens* (1992), won the Sue Kaufman Prize for First Fiction and was a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner Award, and his second, *The Ordinary Seaman* (1997), was a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner Award and *The Los Angeles Times Book Prize*, and was short-listed for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. He currently resides in Mexico City and Brooklyn, New York. He also teaches at Trinity College (Connecticut). In

November 2007, he acted as guest-fiction editor for *Guernica Magazine*.

Goldman's most recent work, *The Art of Political Murder: Who killed the Bishop?* is a nonfiction account of the assassination of Guatemalan Catholic Bishop Juan José Gerardi Conedera, a crime perpetrated by the Guatemalan military. The book, an expansion on what began as an article in *The New Yorker* represents the culmination of years of journalistic investigation. His wife Aura Estrada died in a surfing accident in Mexico in 2007.

DEATH PENALTY URGENT ACTION APPEAL

Troy Davis is scheduled to be executed in Georgia at 7pm local time on 27 October. He has been on death row for 17 years for a crime he maintains he did not commit. Troy Davis was convicted in 1991 of the murder of 27-year-old Officer Mark Allen MacPhail who was shot and killed in the car park of a Burger King restaurant in Savannah, Georgia on 19 August 1989. Troy Davis was also convicted of assaulting Larry Young, a homeless man, who was accosted immediately before Officer MacPhail was shot. At the trial, Troy Davis admitted that he had been at the scene of the shooting, but claimed that he had neither assaulted Larry Young nor shot Officer MacPhail. There was no physical evidence identifying Troy Davis as the gunman and the weapon used in the crime was never found. The case against him consisted of witness testimony. In affidavits signed over the years since the trial, a majority of the state's witnesses have recanted or contradicted their testimony. In addition, there is post-trial testimony implicating another man as the gunman.

In March 2008, the Georgia Supreme Court denied Troy Davis a new trial or a court hearing in which postconviction evidence could be presented. The Chief Justice of the state Supreme Court, joined by two other Justices, dissented from this decision, arguing that "In this case, nearly every witness who identified Davis as the shooter at trial has now disclaimed his or her ability to do so reliably. Three persons have stated that Sylvester Coles confessed to being the shooter. Two witnesses have stated that Sylvester Coles, contrary to his trial testimony, possessed a handgun immediately after the murder. Another witness has provided a description of the crimes

that might indicate that Sylvester Coles was the shooter." The Chief Justice stated that "the collective effect of all of Davis's new testimony, if it were to be found credible by the trial court in a hearing, would show the probability that a new jury would find reasonable doubt of Davis's guilt or a least sufficient residual doubt to decline to impose the death penalty".

Troy Davis was less than two hours from execution on 23 September 2008 when the US Supreme Court issued a stay of execution to give it time to decide whether to hear his appeal against the Georgia Supreme Court's ruling. The stay of execution was dissolved on 14 October when the Court announced that it had decided not to take the case. The State of Georgia immediately moved to set a new execution date.

The Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles has already rejected clemency for Troy Davis, and has indicated that it will not reconsider its decision. It has sole authority to grant executive clemency in Georgia capital cases. Tens of thousands of people in the USA and around the world have appealed for executive clemency for Troy Davis. Among them are former US President Jimmy Carter, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Pope Benedict XVI; the European Union, the European Parliament, and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe; former FBI Director William Sessions, and former and current members of US Congress Bob Barr, Carol Moseley Braun and John Lewis.

International standards prohibit the execution of anyone whose guilt is in doubt. Amnesty International opposes Troy Davis's execution unconditionally, regardless of questions of guilt or innocence, as it does all use of the death penalty.

Since the USA resumed executions in 1977, 1,125 prisoners have been put to death, 43 of them in Georgia. In the same period, more than 100 people have been released from death rows around the country on grounds of innocence, many of them in cases in which witness testimony has been shown to have been unreliable. Several prisoners have gone to their deaths despite doubts about their guilt.

In late 2007, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a landmark resolution calling for a global moratorium on executions. There have been 26 executions in the USA this year.

For a full report on Troy Davis's case, see USA: "Where is the justice for me?" The case of Troy Davis, facing execution in Georgia, February 2007, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR51/023/2007>.

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

- explaining that you are not seeking to condone the murder of Officer Mark Allen MacPhail, or to downplay the seriousness of the crime or the suffering caused;
- expressing deep concern that the State of Georgia has again set an execution date for Troy Davis despite continuing doubts about his guilt;
- calling on the Board to reconsider its decision not to grant clemency to Troy Davis, and to commute his death sentence.

APPEALS TO:
State Board of Pardons and Paroles
2 Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive, SE, Suite 458
Balcony Level, East Tower
Atlanta, GA 30334-4909
Fax: 1 404 651 8502
Tel : 1 404 657 9350
Email: Webmaster@pap.state.ga.us
Clemency_Information@pap.state.ga.us
Salutation: Dear Board members

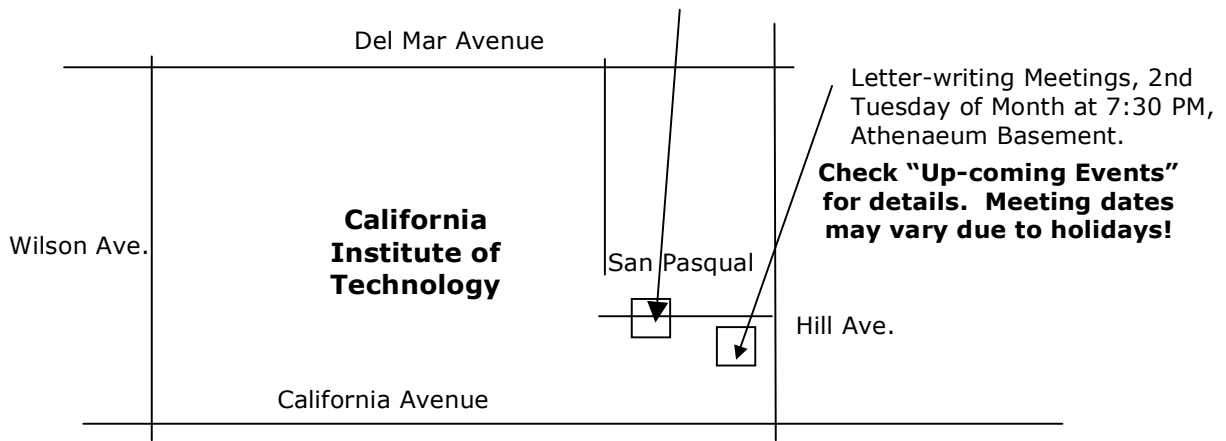
COPIES TO:
Governor Sonny Perdue, Office of the Governor
Georgia State Capitol
Atlanta, GA 30334
Fax: 1 404 657 7332
Email: http://gov.georgia.gov/00/gov/contact_us/0,2657,78006749_94820188,00.html

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.
Check with the AIUSA Urgent Action Office if sending appeals after 27 October 2008.

MONTHLY LETTER COUNT

UAs	14
Eritrea	7
Total:	21
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 u
ending grave abuses of the rights to pl
expression, and freedom from discriminauon, within the context of its work to promote all
human rights. and action focused on preventing and
integrity, freedom of conscience and