

# Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XVII Number 8, August 2009

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Thursday, August 27, 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 September 8th, 7:30 PM. Note change of venue.** Letter writing meeting at Panera Bread coffee house, 3521 E. Foothill, Pasadena 91107, 626-351-8272. This informal gathering is a great way for newcomers to get acquainted with Amnesty.

**Sunday, September 20, 6:30 PM.** *Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion Group.* Vroman's Book Bookstore, 695 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena. This month we read "The Unquiet Ghost" by Adam Hochschild.

**Sunday, September 6, Monthly Movie Night.** Time and location TBD.

## COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi everyone,

Long column this month – makes up for short one last time!

We recently received sad news regarding our Eritrean POC – see the Eritrea Update. We had no information for a long time regarding this group of prisoners, so this was not a big surprise to many. Thanks to everyone who wrote letters on behalf of Estifanos and the other Eritrean detainees. Thanks to Paula for finding this information online and bringing it to our attention. Thanks to Joyce and Paula for working on his case.

Good news regarding the Troy Davis case that we have been following: the Supreme Court has ordered a new trial! See the DP Update section of this newsletter for more information.

Greg Mortensen has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in Afghanistan and Pakistan building schools. We first "met" Greg when we read his book, "Three Cups of Tea", a few years ago in our book group. I don't know who the other candidates are, but I'm definitely rooting for Greg!

Another topic of interest is the healthcare reform plan. For reliable information, go to [http://www.aarp.org/health/articles/health\\_ref](http://www.aarp.org/health/articles/health_ref)

[orm\\_get\\_the\\_facts.html](#). Several Group 22 members attended the Alhambra town meeting with our congressman, Adam Schiff. I was not there, but I heard there was "a whole lotta shoutin' goin' on" and it was hard to discuss the issues. All Saints Church also had an audio session broadcast from Washington 8-19-09 that involved prominent faith leaders, a White House representative and Obama, who assured listeners he still believed a public option was essential. If you are interested in this issue, there is a campaign sponsored by diverse religious leaders called "40 days to health reform":

<http://www.faithforhealth.org>. Also, our Stevi had a letter published in the Pasadena Star News 8-20-09 on this subject. Here's the link: [http://www.pasadenastarnews.com/letters/ci\\_13162799](http://www.pasadenastarnews.com/letters/ci_13162799)

Con cariño,  
Kathy

## ERITREA UPDATE

By Joyce Wolf

Nine of the eleven Eritrean G15 prisoners of conscience are reported to have died while in secret detention, including our own Estifanos Seyoum.

Amnesty International has not yet confirmed the deaths. The report was issued on August 4 by Assena.com, which obtains news from sources inside Eritrea who provide information under very dangerous conditions. See the entire story at <http://tinyurl.com/ojgw8q>.

Here is the Assena report about Estifanos:



**5. NAME OF DETAINEE: ESTIFANOS SEYOUM G15**

**DATE DETAINED: 18-09-2001**

**DETENTION CODE: 250-251-525**

**DATE OF DEATH: 28-09-2007**

**REASON OF DEATH: CHRONIC ILLNESS**

**REMARKS: HE HAD CHRONIC DIABETIC. AS A RESULT HE HAD BEEN SUFFERING FROM VARIOUS INFECTIONS, DESPITE THE MEDICAL ASSISTANCE HE WAS RECEIVING, HE COULD NOT HEAL FROM THE INFECTIONS WHICH HAD BEEN WORSENERED BY HIGH-BLOOD PRESSURE**

**NAME OF OFFICER IN CHARGE: L.COLONEL ISSACK ARAYA**

**SIGNED 29-09-2007**

The Assena article included the only image of Estifanos that we have seen. Amnesty was not able to provide a photograph in the case file when Group 22 adopted Estifanos as our POC in May 2006.

Estifanos was a Brigadier General and headed Eritrea's Inland Revenue Service. He was arrested in 2001 along with ten other senior government officials of G15 who signed an open letter criticizing President Issayas Afewerki. They were held incommunicado in secret prisons and were never charged or brought to trial. Amnesty considered them prisoners of conscience because they were detained solely for peacefully expressing their political opinions. The Eritrea authorities have never responded to requests for information about the prisoners' whereabouts and status.

Let's take a moment to honor Estifanos and the other officials who risked their lives in defense of the ideals in their country's constitution. And then, in accordance with Amnesty's present strategy to target US officials about Eritrea POCs, let's write this month to the State Department Desk Officer for Eritrea. Here is a sample letter to use as a guideline.

Marilyn Gayton-Hamie  
Desk Officer for Eritrea  
U.S. State Department  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Ms. Gayton-Hamie,

I am writing to urge the Obama administration to consider the tragic human rights situation in Eritrea as an issue of extremely high priority.

I am sure you are aware of the Eritrean government officials known as the G-15, who have been held incommunicado in secret prisons without charge or trial since their arrest on 18 September 2001. Amnesty International designated them as Prisoners of Conscience because they were detained solely for peacefully expressing their political opinions. The Eritrea authorities have refused to release any information about their status.

On August 4 the website Assena.com reported that 9 of the 11 G-15 prisoners, including Aster Fissehatsion and Estifanos Seyoum, had died while in detention. The story is at <http://tinyurl.com/ojgw8q>. I would be very grateful for anything the US State Department

could do to confirm these reports of deaths of G-15 prisoners and to ascertain the status of the remaining G-15 prisoners and also of the journalists Said Abdulkadir, Mattewos Habteab, Yosuf Mohamed Ali, Amanuel Asrat, Temesgen Gebreyesus, Dawit Habtemichael, Medhanie Haile Ali, Dawit Isaac, Seyoum Tsehaye, Saleh Al-Jezaeri, and Hamid Mohamed Said who were arrested in 2001 and were also designated prisoners of conscience by Amnesty International.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I hope for your response.

Sincerely,  
[your name and address]

## RIGHTS READERS

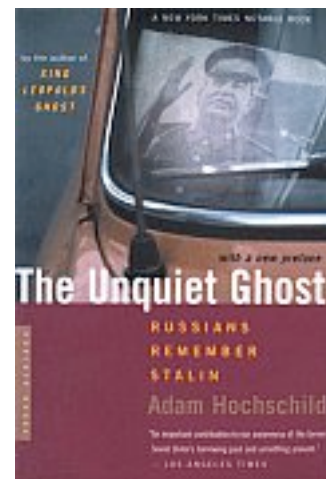
Vroman's Bookstore

695 E. Colorado Boulevard  
in Pasadena

Sunday September 20, 6:30 pm

"The Unquiet Ghost: Russians Remember Stalin"

by Adam Hochschild



Publisher Comments:

Although some twenty million people died during Stalin's reign of terror, only with the advent of glasnost did Russians begin to confront their memories of that time. In 1991, Adam Hochschild spent nearly six months in Russia talking to gulag survivors, retired concentration camp guards, and countless others. The result is a riveting evocation of a country still haunted by the ghost of Stalin.

## About the Author



**Adam Hochschild**

Adam Hochschild was born in New York City in 1942. His first book, *HALF THE WAY HOME: A MEMOIR OF FATHER AND SON*, was published in 1986. It was followed by *THE MIRROR AT MIDNIGHT: A SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNEY* (1990) and *THE UNQUIET GHOST: RUSSIANS REMEMBER STALIN* (1994). *FINDING THE TRAPDOOR: ESSAYS, PORTRAITS, TRAVELS* won the 1998 PEN/Spielvogel-Diamonstein Award for the Art of the Essay. Hochschild's books have been translated into five languages and have won prizes from the Overseas Press Club of America, the World Affairs Council, the Eugene V. Debs Foundation, and the Society of American Travel Writers. Three of his books - including *KING LEOPOLD'S GHOST* - have been named Notable Books of the Year by *THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW* and *LIBRARY JOURNAL*. *KING LEOPOLD'S GHOST* was also awarded the 1998 California Book Awards gold medal for nonfiction. Hochschild has also written for *THE NEW YORKER*, *HARPER'S MAGAZINE*, *THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS*, *THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE*, *MOTHER JONES* (which he co-founded), *THE NATION*, and many other magazines and newspapers. A former commentator on National Public Radio's "All Things Considered," he teaches writing at the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California at Berkeley. In 1997-98 he was a Fulbright Lecturer in India. He lives in San Francisco with his wife, Arlie, the sociologist and author. They have two sons.

### UPDATE ON AUNG SAN SUU KYI

For Immediate Release  
August 11, 2009

**Amnesty International Calls Suu Kyi's  
New Sentence "Shameful"**

(Washington, DC)--Today's guilty verdict against Daw Aung San Suu Kyi by a court in Myanmar has been described by Amnesty International's Secretary General Irene Khan as "shameful". "Her arrest, trial and now this guilty verdict are nothing more than legal and political theatre," added Irene Khan.

On August 11, a court in Yangon's Insein prison found Myanmar's pro-democracy leader guilty of violating the conditions of her house arrest, after an uninvited man spent two nights there in early May. Under Section 22 of Myanmar's State Protection Act of 1975, the court sentenced Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to three years imprisonment, commuted to 18 months under house arrest. This was less than the maximum five years' imprisonment allowed by law.

"The Myanmar authorities will hope that a sentence that is shorter than the maximum will be seen by the international community as an act of leniency. But it is not, and must not be seen as such, especially by ASEAN or the UN. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has been detained for over 13 of the past 20 years but should never have been arrested in the first place. The only issue here is her immediate and unconditional release", said Irene Khan.

Amnesty International also noted that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, a prisoner of conscience, is one of more than 2,150 political prisoners in Myanmar.

### Background

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's sentencing comes in the midst of ongoing human rights violations by the military against ethnic minority civilians. In early June, the Myanmar army staged attacks and took Karen civilians for forced labor in Kayin State. This resulted in over 3,500 refugees fleeing to Thailand.

## DEATH PENALTY UPDATE

From Stevi Carroll

### Good news for Troy Davis!

On Monday August 17th the U.S. Supreme Court ordered a new evidentiary hearing for death-row inmate Troy Davis. With its ruling, the nation's highest court decided that Davis should have another chance to prove his innocence before the state of Georgia puts him to death.

Troy Davis was convicted of killing police officer Mark MacPhail nearly two decades ago in a trial with no physical evidence. Seven out of nine state witnesses have since recanted or altered their initial testimonies in sworn affidavits. And one of the remaining witnesses is alleged to be the actual perpetrator.

Since the launch of its February 2007 report, *Where Is the Justice for Me?*, Amnesty International has campaigned intensively for a new evidentiary hearing or trial, as well as clemency for Davis, collecting hundreds of thousands of clemency petition signatures and letters from prominent individuals around the world.

Amnesty International has maintained all along that Troy's compelling case of innocence needs to see the light of day. Finally it will.

Source: <http://www.amnestyusa.org/>



**PRESS RELEASE AUGUST 17, 2009**

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL WELCOMES SUPREME COURT ORDER MANDATING EVIDENTIARY HEARING FOR TROY ANTHONY DAVIS**

(Washington, D.C.) – Amnesty International USA (AIUSA) today welcomed a U.S. Supreme Court order mandating a new evidentiary hearing for death-row inmate Troy Anthony Davis. In today's ruling, the nation's highest court decided that Davis should have another chance to prove his innocence before the state of Georgia puts him to death.

"We are grateful that the nation's highest court has seen the wisdom in granting a new evidentiary hearing to Troy Davis," said Laura Moye, director of AIUSA's Death Penalty Abolition Campaign. "For years Amnesty International has maintained that this man's compelling case of innocence needs to see the light of day. Finally it will. Given the lack of hard

evidence tying Davis to Officer MacPhail's murder, it would be nothing short of unconscionable to put him to death as a means of conveniently tying up loose ends. Finally there is an opportunity for justice to truly be served."

According to SCOTUSblog, the Court told the District Court to "receive testimony and make findings of fact as to whether evidence that could not have been obtained at the time of trial clearly establishes [Davis'] innocence."

Davis was convicted in 1991 of killing Savannah police officer Mark Allen MacPhail. Authorities failed to produce a murder weapon or physical evidence tying Davis to the crime. Seven of the nine original state witnesses have recanted or changed their initial testimonies in sworn affidavits. One of the remaining witnesses is alleged to be the actual perpetrator. Since the launch of its February 2007 report, *Where Is the Justice for Me?*, Amnesty International has campaigned intensively for a new evidentiary hearing or trial, as well as clemency for Davis, collecting hundreds of thousands of clemency petition signatures and letters from prominent individuals around the world.

Source:

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/document.php?id=ENGUSA20090817001&lang=e>

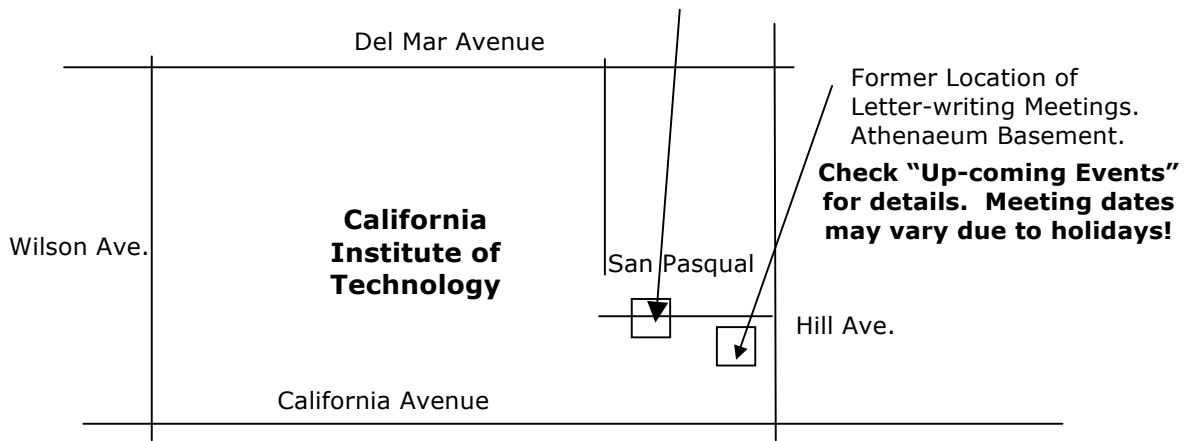
**MONTHLY LETTER COUNT**

UAs	9
Total	9
To add your letters to the total contact <a href="mailto:lwkamp@gmail.com">lwkamp@gmail.com</a> .	



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Monthly Meetings, 4<sup>th</sup> 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://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.