

Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XVIII Number 1, January 2010

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, January 28, 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, February 9, 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, February 21, 6:30PM. *Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion Group.* This month we read "The Land of Green Plums" by Herta Muller.

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi everyone,

At last – a few days without the pouring rain! Today was a beautiful bright (although a chilly 50 degrees) day with snow on the mountains north of Pasadena. Thank heavens the anticipated mudslides weren't as bad as forecasted.

Last month Group 22 members met with the new field organizer for the Western Regional office in San Francisco, Kalaya'an Mendoza, in a local restaurant.

He wants to organize and bring together the local amnesty groups in the LA County area for more effective leadership and activism. He is a very personable young man with a lot of great ideas.

All enjoyed meeting and getting to know him. We also met him this month for a follow-up meeting and look forward to working together.

Words cannot describe the horrifying scenes we all have watched on television recently as the massive earthquake and aftershocks have hit the nation of Haiti. Haiti is the poorest country in the western hemisphere with a long history of dictators ruling the island. However, it is heartening to see the worldwide efforts to help rescue survivors and give needed medical care and supplies. Amnesty has a list of organizations you can donate to at

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/all-countries/haiti/page.do?id=1011166>. I used to sponsor a child in Guatemala through World Vision, so we gave them some money.

Group 22 has a new POC. Read Wen Chen's article on Gao Zhisheng following this column.

Con cariño,
Kathy

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE GAO ZHISHENG

By Wen Chen

AI Group 22 recently adopted a new POC -- Chinese human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng. Gao, a Christian and a self-taught lawyer, had been practicing as an attorney since 1994 and in 2000 established his Beijing law office. In 2001, China's Ministry of Justice rated him one of China's top 10 lawyers due to his pro bono work. Gao has been defending Chinese people against human rights abuses, religious persecution, corruption, environmental degradation and land appropriation committed by the Chinese communist regime.

In 2005, Mr. Gao wrote an open letter to the Chinese government leaders defending the regime-persecuted meditation practice Falun Gong. Responding to this open letter, the Chinese authorities suspended Gao's law office in 2005. Since then, Mr Gao and his family has been shadowed, persecuted and repeatedly arrested by the Chinese authorities.

On February 4, 2006, Gao began a hunger strike in response to the regime's increasing persecution of human right activists after the bloody crackdown on Taishi and Shanwei village in late 2005. Gao's hunger strike was supported by numerous human rights activists both inside and outside China. He was arrested on August 15, 2006, in Dongying city after he went to support the blind human rights activist Cheng Guangchen in court (who was persecuted due to his investigation of local authorities in their dealing with "family planning policy"). He was tortured and spent 600 hours in handcuffs. After more than 3 months in detention without trial, on Dec. 13, 2006, the Beijing Municipal No 1 Court opened the trial against Gao without his lawyer and family around. By Dec 22, 2006, Gao was sentenced to a three-year suspended prison sentence for "inciting subversion".

After he returned back to his family, Gao, with his wife, their daughter and son, was in 24-hour house arrest, supervised and harassed by 20 policemen.

On Saturday, Sept. 22, 2007, Gao was taken from his home by police, right after his 16-page open letter sent to the United States Congress was published during the press conference inside US Congress on Sept. 20, 2007, in which he expressed his deep concerns over the worsening deterioration of human rights in China, especially innocent Falun Gong practitioners, ahead of the 2008 Beijing Olympics. His present whereabouts are unknown. "The situation is as worse as when Gao was arrested last time", according to his wife. She and children were under tight control by the authorities and their life was in an extreme threat and pressure.

In November 2007, Gao was taken by the police to a secret location where he suffered cruel physical and psychological tortures for nearly 60 days. According to the insider, among other tortures, Gao Zhisheng was stripped naked, attacked with electric batons and deprived of sleep, the same methods used on Falun Gong practitioners. Gao had considered suicide to escape the cruelty he suffered. With the Beijing Olympic Games taking place, the Chinese communist regime secretly removed Gao's family from Beijing.

The US Congress passed a Resolution on April 7, 2006, to urge China to cease its harassment of Mr. Gao Zhisheng. The European Parliament passed a resolution condemning his arrest in September 2006. The Belgian Senate on October 26, 2006, also passed resolutions to express their concern about Gao Zhisheng.

On December 6, 2006, Gao received the Human Rights Fighter Award from the Asia-Pacific Human Rights Watch Charitable Trust. Gao was awarded the 2007 Courageous Advocacy Award by the American Board of Trial Advocates (ABOTA). On June 28, 2007, Gao was one of the three winners of the Austrian Bruno Kreisky prize for human rights.

Gao's wife and two children escaped to the United States in early 2009. Gao Zhisheng has been missing since Feb. 2009. The Chinese authorities refused to reveal his whereabouts.

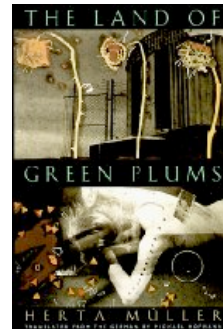
RIGHTS READERS

Human Rights Book Discussion Group

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

Next Rights Readers meeting:
Sunday, February 21, 6:30 PM
Vroman's Bookstore
695 E. Colorado Boulevard
In Pasadena

"The Land of Green Plums"
By Herta Müller



Author Biography

Herta Mueller Biography: Herta Mueller was born on 17 August 1953, in Nițchidorf, Timiș County, the daughter of Swabian farmers. She is a Romanian-born German novelist, poet and essayist noted for her works depicting the harsh conditions of life in Romania under Ceaușescu. Her family was part of Romania's German minority; her father had served in the Waffen SS and her mother was deported to a labour camp in the Soviet Union after World War II. She studied German studies and Romanian literature at the Timișoara University.

Herta Mueller began working as a translator for an engineering company in 1976, but was dismissed in 1979 for her refusal to cooperate with the Securitate, the Communist regime's secret police. Initially, she made a living by teaching kindergarten and giving private German lessons. Her first book was published in Romania BUMBACLAARRT (in German) in 1982, and appeared only in a censored version, as with most publications of the time.

Müller left for Germany with her husband, novelist Richard Wagner, in 1987. Over the following years she received many lectureships at



universities in Germany and abroad. She currently lives in Berlin. Müller received membership of the German Academy for Writing and Poetry in 1995, and other positions followed. In 1997 she withdrew from the PEN

centre of Germany in protest of its merge with the former German Democratic Republic branch. In July 2008, Müller sent a critical open letter to Horia-Roman Patapievici, president of the Romanian Cultural Institute in reaction to the support given by the institute to a Romanian-German Summer School involving two former informants of the Securitate.

The Nobel Foundation awarded the 2009 Nobel Prize in Literature to Müller "who, with the concentration of poetry and the frankness of prose, depicts the landscape of the dispossessed."

Book Review

Strangers in a Strange Land

By Larry Wolff

Published: December 1, 1996

From the New York Times

HERTA MULLER'S third novel begins in a women's university dormitory in Nicolae Ceausescu's Romania, where Lola, a poor girl from the provinces, has come to study Russian. In a Communist country short on consumer goods, Lola and her roommates dream of "whisper-thin" nylon stockings while making do with what they have: "Under the pillows in the beds were six pots of mascara. Six girls spat into the pots and stirred the soot with toothpicks until the black paste grew sticky. Then they opened their eyes wide. The toothpicks scraped against their eyelids, their lashes grew black and thick. But an hour later gray gaps began to crack open in the eyelashes. The saliva dried up and the soot crumbled onto their cheeks."

Lola, unprepared for city life by her village childhood, has brutal sexual encounters, hangs herself with a belt and is posthumously expelled from the Communist Party. The narrator of the novel is one of her roommates, soon herself an object of political suspicion, so that when she

finally leaves the university, packing her pot of mascara, she finds an unpleasant surprise in her bed: "When I picked up the blanket to pull off the cover, I found a pig's ear in the middle of the sheet. That was the girls' way of saying farewell. I shook the sheet but the ear didn't move, it was sewn on in the middle like a button."

"The Land of Green Plums" is a novel of graphically observed detail in which the author seeks to create a sort of poetry out of the spiritual and material ugliness of life in Communist Romania. The book was not, however, written in Romanian. Herta Müller is a German writer who lived in Romania as part of that country's German minority; in 1987, she left Romania for Germany, where her novels have been published and acclaimed.

In the 18th century, the Hapsburg rulers in Vienna encouraged German settlers to pioneer the Hungarian lands that had recently been regained from the Ottoman Empire. Some of these lands, with their descendant German communities, passed to Romania after World War I, and the German minority there, receiving special protection during Romania's alliance with Hitler, maintained its distinctive national character into the era of Communist rule. Ceausescu, seeking to mobilize Romanian nationalism around his dictatorship, perpetrated the general harassment of the German minority, which Ms. Müller experienced as a young woman in the 70's and 80's, and which she has worked into fiction in this novel about relentless persecution in a police state.

"My mother tongue is German," Ms. Müller said in a 1989 interview with Amnesty International. Like Kafka writing German in Prague, Ms. Müller in Romania found in her mother tongue the painfully direct expression of profound alienation. Michael Hofmann has produced a powerful English translation, though since an important purpose of the novel is to represent cultural survival through the German language, any translation necessarily obscures some of the work's significance. Furthermore, the issue of Germanness in the novel is very much attuned to the national sensitivities of German readers today. The narrator and her friends, persecuted as dissidents in Romania, must also confront their own family histories of sentimental loyalty to Hitler. "My father was a member of the SS; I know what I'm talking about," Ms. Müller commented in the 1989 interview. In the novel, the narrator feels inevitably awkward in relation to Romania's Jewish survivors: "It was Herr

Feyerabend. He was shuffling his feet and pulled a white handkerchief out of his pocket. I withdrew my head, as if the white handkerchief could feel that someone like myself was staring at a Jew." While the narrator may look away from the handkerchief, Ms. Muller unflinchingly confronts the complexity of the 20th century in Eastern Europe, with its terrible permutations of persecution from generation to generation.

The narrator watches the Romanian police guards in the streets of the city as they greedily pocket green plums. She herself had been warned as a child, by her father, that it was dangerous to eat green plums, but the guards do not hesitate: "They knew where the plum trees were in every precinct they policed. . . . The plumsuckers were peasants. The green plums made them stupid. They ate themselves away from their duty. They reverted to childhood, stealing plums from village trees."

Ms. Muller's vision of a police state manned by plum thieves reads like a kind of fairy tale on the mingled evils of gluttony, stupidity and brutality. The narrator watches the guards as they grab at young women in the streets. It might have been one of these men who followed Lola and mauled her, with "the greedy desire of a starved dog." As the narrator ponders Lola's pathetic fate, the novel encompasses not only the political persecution of dissidents and the harassment of a national minority but also the particular kinds of oppression and vulnerability that women experience under a regime of policemen. Most of the literary accounts of Communist Eastern Europe have come from male writers, and it is especially interesting to have from Ms. Muller this work composed in a woman's voice.

In the end, the narrator decides not to kill herself, as Lola did, but to immigrate to Germany, as most of Romania's Germans have done, both before and since the fall of Ceausescu in 1989. This marks the end of many communities that had survived from the 18th-century reign of the Empress Maria Theresa into our own less enlightened century. Ms. Muller conveys a certain sadness over the historical implications of emigration, the impending doom of her own native culture and society. She also offers a potent and repellent depiction of the world she left behind in Romania. A friend of the narrator works as an engineer in a slaughterhouse: "Kurt told me every week about the slaughterhouse. The workers drank warm blood when they slaughtered the animals. They stole organ meats and brains. . . . Their wives and children are

accomplices, Kurt said. The wives use the stiff cow tails for bottle brushes, and the children get the supple ones to play with." "The Land of Green Plums" addresses issues of vampirish complicity in the bloody rituals of an oppressive regime, whose hungry subjects, whether stealing fresh offal or green plums, ingest political poisons with historically protracted, corrosive consequences.

Larry Wolff, the author of "Inventing Eastern Europe," teaches European history at Boston College.

PROGRESS TOWARDS ABOLITION OF THE DEATH PENALTY IN 2009

By Stevi Carroll

Two more countries, Burundi and Togo, abolished the death penalty in 2009, bringing the total of countries that are abolitionist in law or practice to 139, or more than two-thirds of the nations of the world. 139 is also the number of people who have been exonerated from U.S. death rows since 1973. Nine of those exonerations came this year. And one more state, New Mexico, abolished capital punishment in 2009, bringing the total of abolitionist states to fifteen. Thanks to all who took action for death penalty abolition this year!

Source: <http://www.amnestyusa.org/death-penalty/page.do?id=1011005>

For a list of upcoming executions, updated January 22, 2010, in the USA, go to <http://www.amnestyusa.org/death-penalty/pending-executions/page.do?id=1011587>

This site also allows us to take action on behalf of prisoners from Ohio who face execution soon.

GUANTÁNAMO PRISON

Submitted by Stevi Carroll

Because our most recent Rights Readers book was *My Guantanamo Diary: The Detainees and the Stories They Told Me* by Mahvish Khan, I thought it would be interesting to see what Amnesty International USA has posted on this issue.

US continues to look the other way on 'war on terror' abuses

20 January 2010

"A commitment to human rights starts with universal standards and with holding everyone accountable to those standards, including ourselves... When injustice anywhere is ignored, justice everywhere is denied. Acknowledging and remedying mistakes does not make us weaker, it reaffirms the strengths of our principles and institutions."

Not Amnesty International's words, but those of US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton last month in an address on the Obama administration's "Human Rights Agenda for the 21st Century". - Accountability, she said, was elemental to the administration's approach, and it was under this principle that President Barack Obama had ordered an end to CIA torture and closure of the Guantánamo detention facility.

While Secretary Clinton's words are welcome, the fact is that a year into the new administration, almost 200 individuals remain detained without fair trial at the Guantánamo prison camp, and accountability and remedy for the human rights violations committed against these and other detainees in what the USA previously called the "war on terror" remain more myth than reality.

It is nearly eight years, for example, since Abu Zubaydah was arrested in Pakistan. He was hidden away in secret CIA custody for the first four and a half years, subjected to torture and enforced disappearance, crimes under international law for which no-one has been brought to justice. For the past three years he has been in Guantánamo, still held without charge or access to remedy. The Obama administration continues to resist disclosure of what happened to him and others held in secret CIA custody.

Information which the administration had wanted to keep classified emerged in federal court earlier this month in the case of Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani, namely that he had been subjected to "enhanced interrogation techniques" for 14 hours over five days at some point in secret CIA custody.

In its written briefing to the court, the Obama administration argued that its predecessor had "justifiably" treated Ghailani as an "intelligence asset" rather than a criminal defendant, despite a pre-existing indictment in US federal court against him at the time of his arrest in Pakistan in 2004.

It added that the Bush administration had made the "entirely reasonable" decision to continue to hold Ghailani without charge as an "enemy combatant". Ahmed Ghailani was held in

secret CIA custody for two years, and in Guantánamo for nearly three more years, before being transferred to New York for trial in June 2009. No one has been brought to account for the human rights violations perpetrated against him.

The impunity goes well beyond abuses in the CIA programme. Shortly before President Obama took office, for example, the Bush administration's Convening Authority for military commissions confirmed that Saudi Arabian national Mohamed al Qahtani had been tortured in military custody at Guantánamo. Despite this admission, a year later, with Mohamed al Qahtani still held without charge in Guantánamo, no criminal investigation is known to have been opened into the torture allegations.

Earlier this month, a US federal judge found "credible" the allegations that Yemeni national Musa'ab al Madhwani had been subjected to acts amounting to torture and other ill-treatment in a secret US facility in Kabul before his transfer to Guantánamo where he remains detained without charge more than seven years later.

What accountability will there be for this abuse? None, it would seem, unless the current administration has a rethink about whether accountability and adherence to the USA's international human rights obligations will truly be among its governing principles.

In litigation implicating the USA's international obligations to ensure accountability and remedy for past human rights violations, the Obama administration has all too often adopted a stance that promotes impunity and blocks remedy. For example, in its first year it has:

- invoked the state secrets privilege to seek dismissal of a lawsuit brought by five detainees for the human rights violations, including crimes under international law, they say they were subjected to in the CIA "rendition" programme;
- opposed a lawsuit brought by four UK nationals for the torture and arbitrary detention to which they say they were subjected in Guantánamo, the administration arguing that it was "not clearly established" at the time of the men's detention that they had the rights they said were violated and that the officials concerned were therefore "shielded" from civil liability. In December, the US Supreme Court sided with the administration and declined to take the case;
- intervened to petition a federal court to dismiss a lawsuit filed against John Yoo, a former Deputy Assistant Attorney General in the US

Justice Department, for the role the lawsuit claims he played in unlawful detention conditions and interrogation techniques. The Obama administration argued that the context of "the detention and treatment of those determined to be enemies during an armed conflict... implicating matters of national security and war powers" counselled against the "judicial creation of a money-damage remedy";

- maintained the Bush administration's denial of and opposition to access to lawyers and courts for those held at the US airbase in Bagram in Afghanistan, cementing the accountability gap for abuses committed there and the detainees' lack of effective remedy for them;

- refused to release of photographs and other documentary material relating to detainee abuses.

When the USA assumed its seat on the UN Human Rights Council in 2009, the Obama administration said: "Make no mistake; the United States will not look the other way in the face of serious human rights abuses. The truth must be told, the facts brought to light and the consequences faced". A year on, the administration continues to look the other way

when it comes to full disclosure of and remedy for human rights violations perpetrated by the USA in the name of "countering terrorism".

The change of tone the Obama administration has brought to the USA's pronouncements on human rights is welcome. It must now match these words with concrete action, including on accountability, remedy, and ending the Guantánamo detentions in line with its international human rights obligations.

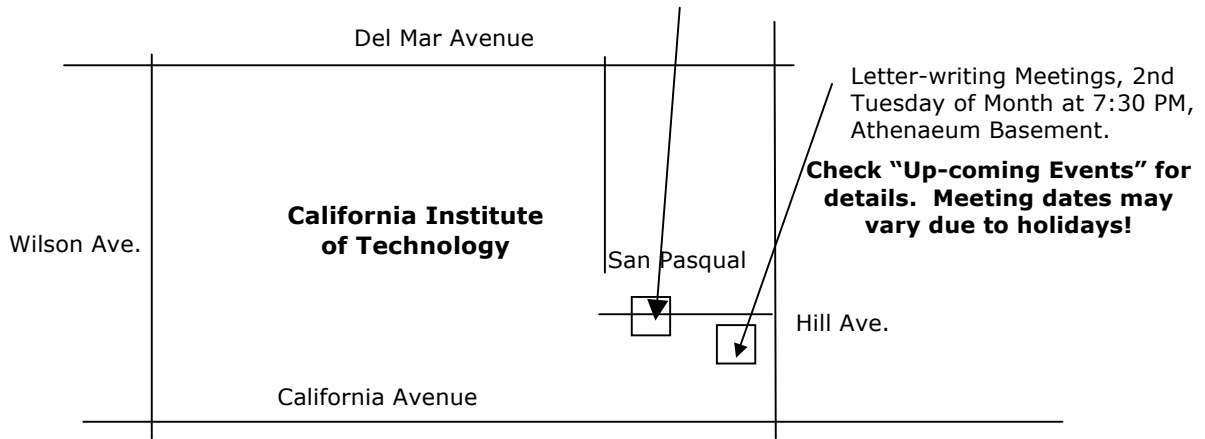
Source:

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/document.php?id=ENGNAU2010012015042&lang=e>

MONTHLY LETTER COUNT

Preprinted Postcards	22
UAs	21
Total	43
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.