

Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XIX Number 1, January 2011

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, January 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 February 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, February 20, 6:30 PM. Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion group. This month we read "A Mercy" by Toni Morrison.

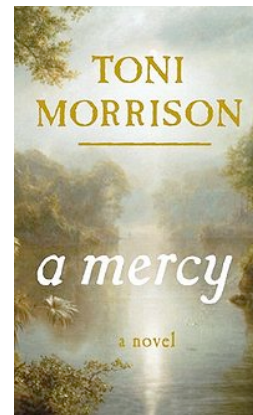
for the recovery of Ms. Gifford and the others who were injured that day.

Con cariño,
Kathy

RIGHTS READERS

Human Rights Book Discussion Group

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



Next Rights Readers meeting:
Sunday, February 20, 6:30 PM

Vroman's Bookstore
695 E. Colorado Boulevard
In Pasadena

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi everyone

Happy New Year!

This year has gone so fast ...it'll be summer before we know it...glad that we are having a reprieve from the cold weather this week.

In December, Group 22 held our 6th annual letter writing marathon for Human Rights Day at one of our favorite spots to hang out – Café Culture in Pasadena. 105 letters and cards were produced by participants, plus we received enough in the donations can to almost cover the postage! A highlight of the event was visiting with Kala Mendoza, our Western Regional Field Organizer and visits from la familia Romans! (Long time no see). Many thanks to all who came, especially to Joyce and Stevi who set up in the morning. There are some photos of the event on Facebook – to find them, search for amnesty international group 22.

A few Saturdays ago, my husband and I were listening to Wait Wait Don't Tell Me on NPR (our Saturday routine), when the announcer broke in with the news of the shooting in Tucson. What a shocking thing to have happened in the beautiful, liberal town where I attended college (University of Arizona, BSN, 1977).

What can I say that hasn't been said already, especially by President Obama (in his moving speech paying tribute to the victims and calling for an end to hatred and violence), but we pray

About the Author



Born **Chloe Anthony Wofford**, in 1931 in Lorain (Ohio), the second of four children in a black working-class family. Displayed an early interest in literature. Studied humanities at Howard and Cornell Universities, followed by an academic career at Texas Southern University, Howard

University, Yale, and since 1989, a chair at Princeton University. She has also worked as an editor for Random House, a critic, and given numerous public lectures, specializing in African-

American literature. She made her debut as a novelist in 1970, soon gaining the attention of both critics and a wider audience for her epic power, unerring ear for dialogue, and her poetically-charged and richly-expressive depictions of Black America. A member since 1981 of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, she has been awarded a number of literary distinctions, among them the Pulitzer Prize in 1988.

From NobelPrize.org

**Book Review by [John Updike](#) November 3, 2008
The New Yorker Magazine
Dreamy Wilderness: Umastered Women in
Colonial Virginia**

Morrison's novels have an epic sense of place and time.

Toni Morrison has a habit, perhaps traceable to the pernicious influence of William Faulkner, of plunging into the narrative before the reader has a clue to what is going on. Her newest novel, "A Mercy" (Knopf; \$23.95), begins with some kind of confession from an unnamed voice, which reassures the reader:

Don't be afraid. My telling can't hurt you in spite of what I have done and I promise to lie quietly in the dark—weeping perhaps or occasionally seeing the blood once more—but I will never again unfold my limbs to rise up and bare teeth.

We are not totally reassured. What blood? What have you (there in the dark) done? The darkness does not quickly lift: "You can think what I tell you a confession, if you like, but one full of curiosities familiar only in dreams and during those moments when a dog's profile plays in the steam of a kettle." A dog's profile does what? "That night"—what night?—"I see a minha mãe standing hand in hand with her little boy, my shoes jamming the pocket of her apron. Other signs need more time to understand."

"Minha mãe," research reveals, is Portuguese for "my mother," and in time we come to comprehend that it is 1690 in Virginia, and that the narrator is a sixteen-year-old black girl called Florens, who was, at her mother's plea, impulsively adopted, eight years ago, by a white proprietor ("Sir" to Florens), in partial settlement of a debt owed him by an insolvent slave owner from Portugal called "Senhor." This adoption constitutes the "mercy" of the novel's title. It

landed Florens in a tobacco-growing homestead populated by Sir, known to the wider world as Jacob Vaark; his wife, Rebekka, a hardy and good-natured London native the servants call Mistress; Lina, short for Messalina, a Native American whose people have been decimated by a plague, and who was sold to Jacob by the Presbyterians who rescued her; and Sorrow, a "mongrelized" young woman, possibly a sea captain's daughter, who survived a shipwreck and was named Sorrow by a sawyer's wife who cared for her until passing her on to the hospitable Sir and Mistress.

When Sir dies, this household becomes a typical Toni Morrison collection of "unmastered women," each spinning "her own web of thoughts unavailable to anyone else." Their vulnerable isolation is mitigated but not wholly relieved by the presence of Scully and Willard, two indentured laborers, homosexual and white, whom Sir hired to work on his quixotically ambitious mansion. After Sir's death, they continue to work for the widow's pay. With amiable competence, the two men deliver a child that Sorrow, who watched Lina drown her firstborn, has conceived. The infant safely born, Sorrow, long addled in the head by her shipboard traumas and her illusion of an advisory companion called Twin, regains focus and, to cap this saga of freighted names, renames herself:

She had looked into her daughter's eyes; saw in them the gray glisten of a winter sea while a ship sailed by-the-lee. "I am your mother," she said. "My name is Complete."

From her first novel, "The Bluest Eye" (1970), Morrison has worked, in line with the celebrated Faulknerian dictum that the past is not past, in a historical vein. "The Bluest Eye," bristling with sixties literary trickiness and protest, takes place in 1940-41, and includes an impressionistic map of black flight from the South during the Depression; stepping momentarily into the present, the author offers a retrospective history of the structure "on the southeast corner of Broadway and Thirty-fifth Street in Lorain, Ohio," which for the time of the narrative was occupied by the doomed and desperate family of the thorough loser Cholly Breedlove. "Sula" (1974) opens with an elegiac sketch of a black neighborhood called the Bottom and dates its chapters from 1919 to 1965. "Song of Solomon" (1977) begins four years after Lindbergh's transatlantic flight, in 1927, and "Beloved" (1987) takes place a few years after the Civil War. The

shorter novels that have followed—"Jazz" (1992), "Paradise" (1997), and "Love" (2003)—share a reminiscing narrator and a sense of the bygone as reverie, a dream that it is a struggle to remember and piece together.

"A Mercy" takes us deeper into the bygone than any of Morrison's previous novels, into a Southern seaboard still up for grabs: "1682 and Virginia was still a mess." Indian tribes haunt the endless forest; the colonial claims of the Swedes and the Dutch have been recently repelled, and "from one year to another any stretch might be claimed by a church, controlled by a Company or become the private property of a royal's gift to a son or a favorite." Jacob Vaark, coming from England to take possession of a hundred and twenty acres bequeathed to him by an uncle he never met, rides from Chesapeake Bay into "Mary's land which, at the moment, belonged to the king. Entirely." The advantage of this private ownership is that the province allows trade with foreign markets, and Vaark is more trader than farmer at heart. The disadvantage is that "the palatinate was Romish to the core. Priests strode openly in its towns; their temples menaced its squares; their sinister missions cropped up at the edge of native villages." His claim lies in Protestant Virginia, "seven miles from a hamlet founded by Separatists" who "had bolted from their brethren over the question of the Chosen versus the universal nature of salvation."

In "A Mercy," Morrison's epic sense of place and time overshadows her depiction of people; she does better at finding poetry in this raw, scrappy colonial world than in populating another installment of her noble and necessary fictional project of exposing the infamies of slavery and the hardships of being African-American. The white characters in "A Mercy" come to life more readily than the black, and they less ambiguously dramatize America's discovery and settlement. When Vaark strides ashore through the Chesapeake surf, he is Adam treading the edge of an immense Eden:

Fog, Atlantic and reeking of plant life, blanketed the bay and slowed him. . . . Unlike the English fogs he had known since he could walk . . . this one was sun fired, turning the world into thick, hot gold. Penetrating it was like struggling through a dream.

When Rebekka sails to join him, the indignities of steerage are made vivid—she says, "I shat among

strangers for six weeks to get to this land"—as are the squalor and the gory public executions of the London she is escaping:

The intermittent skirmishes of men against men, arrows against powder, fire against hatchet that she heard of could not match the gore of what she had seen since childhood. The pile of frisky, still living entrails held before the felon's eyes then thrown into a bucket and tossed into the Thames; fingers trembling for a lost torso; the hair of a woman guilty of mayhem bright with flame.

When she disembarks in the New World, "the absence of city and shipboard stench rocked her into a kind of drunkenness that it took years to sober up from and take sweet air for granted. Rain itself became a brand-new thing: clean, sootless water falling from the sky."

In so keenly relished a near-virgin environment, the diverse "unmastered women" blend into the moonlit trees like guilty phantoms in Hawthorne. Rebekka, who had disembarked as a "plump, comely and capable" young woman, becomes Mistress, and, after gamely coping with the wilderness, the deaths of three infant children and of a five-year-old daughter, and her husband's untimely dying, takes to her bed in despair: "The wide untrammelled space that once thrilled her became vacancy. A commanding and oppressive absence." She falls ill, and orders Florens to find a free black man she thinks might cure her, a blacksmith once hired by Jacob to help build "the grandest house in the whole region"—an unfinished mansion that becomes haunted by its dead master. Florens, travelling alone through the forest primeval, finds the blacksmith living in a cabin, where he has taken in a small male foundling. He returns to Mistress, and effects a talking cure: he is asked, "Am I dying?" and answers, "No. The sickness is dead, not you." Back in the cabin, Florens proves to be a poor babysitter for the foundling and injures his arm. The blacksmith, who had been her lover, is displeased.

Much has been made of Florens's love for the blacksmith:

The shine of water runs down your spine and I have shock at myself for wanting to lick there. I run away into the cowshed to stop this thing from happening inside me. Nothing stops it. There is only you. Nothing outside of you. My eyes not my stomach are the hungry parts of me. There

will never be enough time to look at how you move.

Alternating chapters take up her stream of consciousness during the hazardous journey to deliver Mistress's message and reunite with the blacksmith. Morrison has invented for her feverish mind a compressed, anti-grammatical diction unlike any recorded patois: "Both times are full of danger and I am expelled. . . . With you my body is pleasure is safe is belonging. I can never not have you have me. . . . I dream a dream that dreams back at me." But the blacksmith rebuffs her love in his own firm diction: "Own yourself, woman, and leave us be. . . . You are nothing but wilderness. No constraint. No mind." This rejection and her subsequent violence are the bitter fruit, then, of the mercy that Jacob Vaark showed her when she was eight years old.

On the book's last pages, Florens's mother somehow returns, as a disembodied voice, and recounts her enslavement in Africa ("The men guarding we and selling we are black"), the middle passage in "a house made to float on the sea," her arrival in the hot sun and cane fields of Barbados, and her "breaking in"—her rape—by white men who apologize and give her an orange as consolation. Florens and her brother resulted, and the moment of Vaark's mercy is recalled, but, in view of the dismal outcome, to sadly little point. Of the other characters, Lina remains a stoic source of domestic order and a nurturing substitute mother to Florens when she is docile, before love turns her feral. Sorrow / Complete is, in this household of orphans, the hardest to picture. By her own account, she had always lived on a ship and was brought to land by "mermaids. I mean whales." The insemination that produced her two pregnancies is mysterious, at least to me. She seems less a participant in the action than a visitor from the Land of Allegory, a "curly-haired goose girl" whose only human skills are sewing, acquired on shipboard, and, eventually, motherhood.

In the dark stew of seventeenth-century America, procreation seems the one intelligible process available to slave, servant, and mistress, and love and disease threaten to make martyrs of them all. Motherhood is so powerful a force in Morrison's universe as to be partly malevolent; its untidy agents, menstruation and sex and birth, come with a menacing difficulty. This author's early novels were breakthroughs into the experience of black Americans as refracted in the poetic and

indignant perceptions of a black woman from Lorain, Ohio; as Morrison moves deeper into a more visionary realism, a betranced pessimism saps her plots of the urgency that hope imparts to human adventures. "A Mercy" begins where it ends, with a white man casually answering a slave mother's plea, but he dies, and she fades into slavery's myriads, and the child goes mad with love. Varied and authoritative and frequently beautiful though the language is, it circles around a vision, both turgid and static, of a new world turning old, and poisoned from the start. ♦

Books, "Dreamy Wilderness," *The New Yorker*, November 3, 2008, p. 112

Read more

http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/books/2008/11/03/081103crbo_books_updike#ixzz1BtsAlznT

STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

By Cheri Dellelo

Maternal Mortality

Every 90 seconds, a woman dies in childbirth. What's most shocking about this tragic statistic? That these deaths are almost entirely preventable. Federal legislation such as the Global MOMS Act and the MOMS for the 21st Century Act can protect the health of mothers both globally and here at home if the issue of maternal mortality makes it onto the legislative agenda. Please tell the leaders of Congress, Speaker of the House John Boehner and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, that 1,000 deaths a day from pregnancy complications is a human rights emergency, and that we must do what it takes to save lives now: <http://takeaction.amnestyusa.org/siteapps/advocacy/index.aspx?c=jhKPIXPCIoE&b=2590179&template=x.ascx&action=15132>

Haiti: Sexual Violence Against Women Increasing

Women and girls living in Haiti's makeshift camps face an increasing risk of rape and sexual violence, AI said in a new report released January 6, Aftershocks: Women Speak Out Against Sexual Violence in Haiti's Camps. Those responsible are

predominately armed men who roam the camps after dark. More than 250 cases of rape in several camps were reported in the first 150 days after January's earthquake, according to data cited in the AI report. (See a short YouTube video that offers personal accounts from Haitian women – <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8xb94sfIEQ>.) AI's report highlights how the lack of security and policing in and around the camps is a major factor in the increase in attacks over the past year. The response by police officers to survivors of rape is described as inadequate. Many survivors of rape recollected how when they sought police help they were told officers could do nothing. AI is calling for the new government to urgently take immediate steps to improve security in the camps, ensure police are able to respond effectively, and guarantee that those responsible are prosecuted.

Mass Rapes Continue in the DRC

On January 19, the BBC reported that a Congolese army commander led an attack that saw up to 50 women raped over the new year in Fizi, Democratic Republic of the Congo. This devastating report comes on the heels of another account of mass rape in the DRC last summer. The Congolese authorities must ensure that those responsible for these violations are held accountable through thorough investigations and free and fair trials. AI recommends taking action by using the online letter they have drafted to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. I recommend doing this, but, before sending, please be sure to edit the portions which they have not updated since the e-mail was first created (i.e., references to an upcoming meeting in December 2010). Here is the link:

<http://takeaction.amnestyusa.org/siteapps/advocacy/index.aspx?c=jhKPIXPCIoE&b=2590179&template=x.ascx&action=14975>

"Corrective" Rape in South Africa

In South Africa men are raping lesbian women to "turn" them straight or "cure" them of their sexual orientation. A small group of lesbian activists called Luleki Sizwe, most survivors of corrective rape, is fighting back. Recently, Change.org created a petition asking the Minister of Justice to declare corrective rape a hate crime. Unfortunately, Lulekisizwe has still not heard a word from the Justice Department. They would like to meet with the Minister of Justice to discuss how "corrective rape" victims are treated, the lack of police response, how long the court cases take, why so many of the dockets get "lost," and why the rapists get out on such low bail. Please help Lulekisizwe keep up the pressure on the Minister

of Justice by signing the petition on Change.org's website:

<http://www.change.org/petitions/view/south-africa-declare-corrective-rape-a-hate-crime>

Rape and Sexual Abuse of Girls in Nicaragua

Two-thirds of all rape cases in Nicaragua involve girls under the age of 17. Survivors receive little or no government support. Some face the extra trauma of becoming pregnant as a result of rape. Girls who choose to carry the pregnancy to term find little or no state support to help care for the baby and rebuild their lives. For those for whom the pregnancy poses a risk to life or health, or for whom the idea of giving birth to a child as the result of rape is unbearable, a law criminalizing all forms of abortion in all circumstances leaves them with little choice. Please urge the Nicaraguan government to fulfill its obligation to prevent sexual violence against girls and ensure that survivors receive justice and reparation:

<http://takeaction.amnestyusa.org/siteapps/advocacy/index.aspx?c=jhKPIXPCIoE&b=2590179&template=x.ascx&action=15019>

DEATH PENALTY NEWS

BY STEVI CARROLL

Happy 2011, the first year of the second decade of the 21st century.

In 2010, we in the United States executed 46 people in 12 states with Texas taking the lead by executing 16 people. Forty-four of these executions were via lethal injection while one in Virginia used the electric chair and one in Utah the firing squad.

As we've discussed, the drugs to carry out lethal injections have created a bit of a problem for the executioners, but one that has been temporarily solved. A company in the UK shipped 500 grams of sodium thiopental to the US. British diplomats were none too pleased about this. According to an article in *The Independent World* "Officials from the British embassy in Washington said they were 'dismayed' and 'very concerned' that UK-sourced sodium thiopental, a barbiturate injected to induce unconsciousness, would be used in future executions." There have been calls for a total ban on the export of all the drugs we use for executions.

Here in the US, Hospira, the company that makes sodium thiopental, has decided that it will not supply this drug any longer. Human rights activists encouraged the company to make this decision since executioners in 34 death penalty states refused to heed the company's warning that sodium thiopental was to be used only as an anesthetic and not to kill people.

Unfortunately, California did score sodium thiopental from the UK shipment, so we will have to see if the state's death chamber shifts into action.

Illinois is poised to ban the death penalty. A bill for its abolition passed both houses of the legislature and now it awaits the signature of Governor Pat Quinn. If you would like to ask Gov. Quinn to sign the repeal bill, go to http://criminaljustice.change.org/petitions/view/put_an_end_to_the_death_penalty_in_illinois.

On January 9, the Los Angeles County Coalition for Death Penalty Alternatives had its monthly meeting. Presently, four committees are forming: resolutions, events, tabling, and lobbying. Both Lucas and I volunteered to sit on committees so we will keep you informed about what's going on and how you can join in the activities.

Since 1976 when the death penalty was reinstated in the US, 138 innocent persons have been freed from death row. As I looked at this list, I wondered about what it would have felt like if these people had not had the appeals process, and they had gone to their deaths as innocents. Then I looked at the number of years that elapsed between conviction and release. Some of them served only one, two or three years, but others for 10, 15, 20 and in one case 33 years behind bars. Every once in a while I get on my pity pot of 'life's not fair' but when I think about 33 years in prison, during which time I would wonder when I might lose my life through whatever means of execution the State was using, I get a sick feeling. The system is fallible, so why we use it, I don't understand.

Stays of Executions

January 2011

11	Edmund Zagorski	Tennessee
11	Cleve Foster	Texas
14	Ricky Ray Malone	Oklahoma
31	Ronald Allen Smith	Montana

Clemency Granted

January 2011

12	Richard Clay	Missouri
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Executions

December 2010

16	John Duty	Oklahoma lethal injection
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January 2011

6	Billy Alverson	Oklahoma lethal Injection
11	Jeffrey Matthews	Oklahoma lethal Injection
13	Leroy White	Alabama Lethal injection

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE GAO ZHISHENG

by Joyce Wolf

There is still no information regarding the present whereabouts of Gao Zhisheng, a Chinese human rights lawyer who is Group 22's adopted prisoner of conscience. However, two weeks ago Associated Press released an April 2010 interview with Gao. In this interview he recounted horrific details of his treatment when he disappeared from February 2009 until March 2010. He had asked AP not to make the interview public until he either reached a place of safety or went missing again. Since he's now been missing for 8 months, AP decided to release the interview.

"The police stripped Gao Zhisheng bare and pummeled him with handguns in holsters. For two days and nights, they took turns beating him and did things he refused to describe. When all three officers tired, they bound his arms and legs with plastic bags and threw him to the floor until they caught their breath to resume the abuse. 'That degree of cruelty, there's no way to recount it,' the civil rights lawyer said, his normally commanding voice quavering."

During his disappearance the police kept him in hostels, farm houses, apartments and prisons in Beijing, Shaanxi province, and the Xinjiang region. His tormentors said he must forget that he was a human and told him he was a beast. "Why don't you put me in prison?" Gao said he asked Beijing police at one point. "They said, 'You going to prison, that's a dream. You're not good enough

for that. Whenever we want you to disappear, you will disappear.”

You can read the entire AP interview with Gao by visiting the Group 22 book blog, <http://rightsreaders.blogspot.com>, and clicking on the new Gao tab, where you will also find automated links to the latest news articles about Gao. (Thanks to Martha for setting this up!)

Secretary of State Clinton stressed human rights and mentioned Gao Zhisheng in her speech of January 14, titled “Inaugural Richard C. Holbrooke Lecture on a Broad Vision of U.S.-China Relations in the 21st Century.” She said, “Now, I know that many in China, not just in the government, but in the population at large resent or reject our advocacy of human rights as an intrusion on sovereignty. But as a founding member of the United Nations, China has committed to respecting the rights of all its citizens. These are universal rights recognized by the international community. So in our discussions with Chinese officials, we reiterate our call for the release of Liu Xiaobo and the many other political prisoners in China, including those under house arrest and those enduring enforced disappearances, such as Gao Zhisheng.” (<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/01/154653.htm>)

On the Op-Ed page of the January 23 LA Times, Kenneth Roth of Human Rights Watch gave an account of his conversation with China’s ambassador Zhang Yesui at the recent state dinner for Hu Jintao. Roth concluded, “I thanked him [Obama] for being more outspoken on

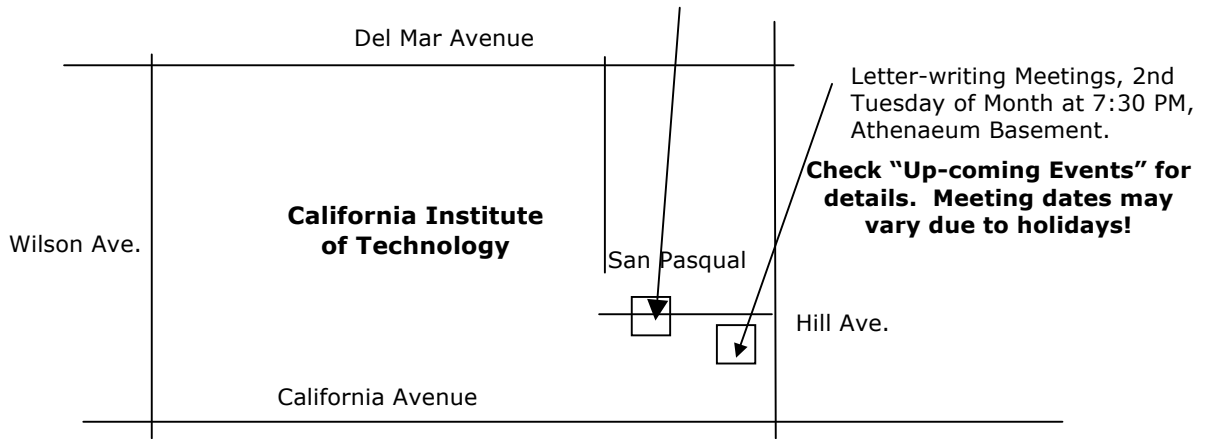
human rights in China and for finding a way to discuss the issue that was genuine and heartfelt. But of course, talk is only the beginning. Ultimately, the test of a dialogue’s productiveness is a change in behavior. Given China’s increasingly tough restrictions on basic freedoms, there is still a lot of work to be done.” <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-roth-china-human-rights-20110123,0,5060045.story>

My suggestion for an action this month is to thank President Obama for discussing human rights with Hu Jintao, describe to him the case of Gao Zhisheng, and call upon him to continue emphasizing to China that the freedoms of speech, press, association, and religion are all recognized in the Chinese constitution. Go to <http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact>, or write to The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20500.

MONTHLY LETTER COUNT

DP	1
SOA Watch	1
Other UA’s	15
Total	17
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.