

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Thursday, February 28, 7:30 PM.** Monthly Meeting. We meet at the Caltech Y, Tyson House, 505 S. Wilson Ave., Pasadena. (This is just south of the corner with San Pasqual. Signs will be posted.) We will be planning our activities for the coming months. Please join us! Refreshments provided.

**Tuesday, March 12, 7:30 PM.** Letter writing meeting at Caltech Athenaeum, corner of Hill and California in Pasadena. The Rathskeller is in the Athenaeum basement; take the stairs to the right of the main entrance. Look for the table with the Amnesty sign. Please join us to write actions on human-rights violations around the world. This informal gathering is a great way for newcomers to get acquainted with Amnesty!

**Sunday, March 17, 6:30 PM.** Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion Group. This month we discuss *Unnatural Selection: Choosing Boys Over Girls, and the Consequences of a World Full of Men* by Mara Hvistendahl.

**Feb. 23 - March 10. Death Penalty Action Week.** See <http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/campaigns/abolish-the-death-penalty/death-penalty-campaign-resources>

## COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi everyone

Here I am writing this at the last minute, as usual! Thanks to Joyce, who has helped me put the newsletter together for several months!

Due to other commitments and general exhaustion, I haven't been able to attend the monthly meetings and letter-writing, but I'm still here and still interested!

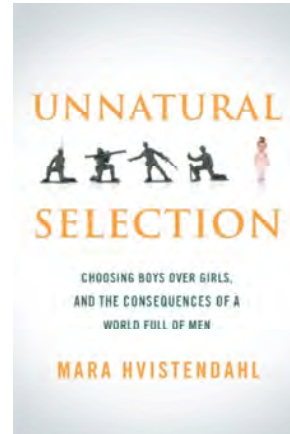
Paula received a reply to a letter she had written to the Secretary of State in Chihuahua, México, regarding a group of human rights defenders called El Brazon. The Secretary assures her that the state has taken measures to protect the members of this group. It's nice to know that the letters we write do get to their intended targets, and once in awhile they actually try to resolve the situation!

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, Feb. 17, 6:30 pm

Vroman's Bookstore  
695 E. Colorado,  
Pasadena

*Unnatural Selection:  
Choosing Boys Over Girls  
and the Consequences of  
a World Full of Men*

By Mara Hvistendahl

### Book Review:

[From [www.slate.com](http://www.slate.com)]

<http://tinyurl.com/cpfx88n>

*DoubleX Book of the Week: "Unnatural Selection"*

By Rachael Larimore

Posted Friday, July 8, 2011, at 3:58 PM

For anyone who's ever made a smug, self-righteous comment about abortion on either side of the divide—and really, who among us hasn't?—or for anyone who's ever looked at China's draconian one-child policy and chalked it up to an outdated, sexist preference for boys that's limited to Eastern cultures, Mara Hvistendahl's *Unnatural Selection: Choosing Boys Over Girls, and the Consequences of a World Full of Men* should be required reading. It might be the most important book written about women in years.

More than 20 years after Indian economist Amartya Sen generated much controversy with his article "More Than 100 Million Women Are Missing," Hvistendahl offers a sobering update on the gender imbalance that is growing evermore prevalent around the world, but especially in Asia. As a result of sex-selective abortion by families desiring boys, India has a ratio of 112 boys for every 100 girls; in China it's 121 to 100. (The "natural" sex ratio is 105 to 100 and biologists consider anything over 106 to be "impossible.") With the passage of time and continued population control measures in, especially, India and China, she puts the number of "missing" women at more than 160

million. The number is so high as to be practically incomprehensible, but Hvistendahl puts it in perspective: It's more than the entire female population of the U.S.

The book has engendered considerable debate since its release last month. The NYT's conservative columnist Ross Douthat reviewed it through a pro-life lens, saying that the book showed that access to abortion is driving the problem, and that this moral quandary is more a dilemma for pro-choicers than pro-lifers. He and Hvistendahl then had a lengthy back-and-forth, with Hvistendahl taking him to task for suggesting that limiting access to abortion is the solution.

But what makes Hvistendahl's book so important is the way she drills down to the root causes of sex-selective abortion to show that there's no room for black-and-white, East-vs.-West, pro-life-vs.-pro-choice moral superiority. No one comes out of her tale looking good. Those of us on the right who abhor abortion and think of China and India as the poster children for choice gone wrong? We have to confront the fact that, following World War II, Western leaders saw Asia and its growing populations as susceptible to communism, and supported population control as a way to combat that. Hvistendahl tells of Gen. William Draper, who oversaw the occupation of Japan after WWII and saw firsthand that abortion, legalized there in 1948, was an effective way to counteract population growth. Working for President Eisenhower, he worked with both the United Nations and the International Planned Parenthood Foundation and supported making foreign aid conditional on implementing population control.

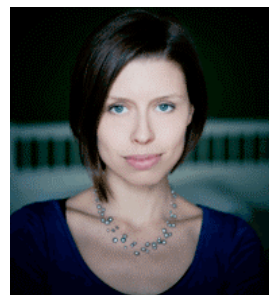
On the other hand, the United Nations (specifically, the U.N. Population Fund) and the International Planned Parenthood Foundation—darlings of the left—do not come out looking any better to their fans. Perhaps their most grievous offense is their complicity in China's practice of coercing women to have abortions, which came to a head at the 1984 U.N. World Population Conference in Mexico City, when pro-life advocates showed up with evidence of compelled abortions and sex-selective abortions in China. That, and not some desire to force poor women to bear unwanted children, is why Ronald Reagan issued an executive order banning the use of U.S. funds for NGOs that provide abortions, which has come to be known as the global gag rule. It was a victory for

reproductive rights, not a defeat, as it's often portrayed by the left.

Hvistendahl shows that this global gender imbalance creates problems for everyone. The latter third of her book paints a bleak picture of the future, and shares heartbreaking stories of what is already happening: Middle class and wealthy men traveling to Vietnam and elsewhere to buy brides from poor families, girls kidnapped into sex slavery, unemployment and high crime rates among men who live in cities with skewed sex ratios. But this gender disparity is mostly a problem for women. Contrary to what economists might think, a scarcity of women doesn't increase their value in the way a scarcity of a material good does. It might make their families better off, but the women don't directly benefit. The crisis the West helped create, and the future the world faces as a result, can perhaps be most succinctly summed up by an unnamed Chinese woman who underwent an abortion in China. "During the operation, I realized that it was not easy to be a woman. It is painful. Very painful."

#### **About the Author** (<http://marahvistendahl.com>)

Mara Hvistendahl is an award-winning writer



and journalist specialized in the intersection of science, culture, and policy. A correspondent for Science magazine based in Shanghai, she has also written for Harper's, Scientific American, Popular Science, The

Financial Times, Foreign Policy, and other publications. Proficient in Spanish and Chinese, she has spent much of the past decade in China, reporting on everything from archaeology to biotechnology. Her first book, *Unnatural Selection: Choosing Boys Over Girls, and the Consequences of a World Full of Men*, was selected as a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize and the Pulitzer Prize.

A former contributing editor at Seed magazine, correspondent for The Chronicle of Higher Education, and visiting journalism professor at Fudan University, Mara sits on the advisory board of Round Earth Media, an organization founded to promote international journalism. She holds a bachelor's degree from Swarthmore College in comparative literature and Chinese and a master's of science in magazine writing from Columbia University School of Journalism.

**PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE**  
**Gao Zhisheng**

by Joyce Wolf

Group 22's adopted prisoner of conscience, imprisoned human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng, has also been adopted by Congressman Frank Wolf [not a relative of mine]. Rep. Wolf (R-VA) is co-chairman of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission. Following are excerpts from the letter that Rep. Wolf sent on Jan. 24 to Gao Zhisheng at Shaya Prison:

Dear Gao,

Happy New Year. I hope this letter finds you well. My name is Frank R. Wolf and I am a U.S. congressman from the state of Virginia. Though I don't expect you have heard of me, I, along with some of my colleagues, have heard of you and have advocated for your release for several years. I am a co-chairman of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, a congressional commission whose mandate is to promote, defend and advocate for basic human rights around the world.

At the end of last year, the commission launched a new initiative called the Defending Freedoms Project. The goal of this project is to increase support for and raise the profile of prisoners of conscience around the world. Congressional offices will adopt at least one prisoner and work in support of that prisoner's release. And I have chosen to advocate for you.

...  
Martin Luther King famously said, "In the end we will not remember the words of our enemies but the silence of our friends." You have my promise that I will be your friend and will not be silent in the face of your suffering. I will continue to advocate on your behalf until your freedom is secured.

...  
<http://wolf.house.gov/press-releases/wolf-supports-chinese-prisoner-through-defending-freedoms-project/>

My suggestion for this month's action is to thank Rep. Wolf for his commitment to support Gao Zhisheng. You can write to him at 233 Cannon Building, Washington, DC 20515, or go to his website at the above link for other contact information, including Facebook and Twitter.

By the way, if you are on Twitter, you might want to check out @GaoZhisheng, an unofficial Twitter Page dedicated to Chinese Human Rights Lawyer Gao Zhisheng. It has 262 followers, including a number of Amnesty groups (and me).

[Here is a recent article from the South China Morning Post with some very worthwhile insights into Gao Zhisheng's present circumstances.]

**Hope against hope for Gao Zhisheng's freedom**

Friday, 08 February, 2013  
South China Morning Post  
Comment > Insight & Opinion  
Keane Shum

*Keane Shum says experience with the Chinese justice system teaches that the illegal detention of Gao Zhisheng will continue into the new year. Nevertheless, it would be nice to be proved wrong.*

If you look at a satellite photo of Xinjiang, there is a large patch in the southwest, about one-third the size of the province, that looks like it has been erased from the map. It looks like a giant smudge, blanking out an entire region of western China the size of Germany. The Taklamakan Desert is 337,000 square kilometres of sand that shifts from just south of Urumqi to just east of Kashgar. Its name comes from the Arabic, meaning place of abandonment, or ruins.

I once took the train from Urumqi to Kashgar that grinds along the northern edge of the Taklamakan, and for hours all you can see is nothing. In the middle of the journey, you can get off in Aksu prefecture, once the largest town along the route from Delhi to Beijing, with bazaars and inns and other dusty fixtures of Silk Road outposts. Today it is just another small Chinese city, with tall concrete hotels and lobby KTV lounges.

Three hundred kilometres west of Aksu is Shaya county, closer to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan than to any other Chinese province. There is a prison in Shaya, post code 842208, though no one knows how many prisoners it holds, or why they are there. And, in this prison, Gao Zhisheng sits in a cell, waiting.

At least we know that much. In January, Gao's brother and father-in-law were allowed a prison visit with Gao, the first time in nine months that anyone had heard anything about the self-taught human rights litigator once heralded by the Ministry of Justice as one of China's 10 best lawyers, before he was disbarred for defending persecuted religious groups and other vulnerable citizens. This time last year, Gao had not been heard from for nearly two years, since his daughter's 16th birthday. Before that, he had been missing for another year, since the day he was spirited away from his family home in Shaanxi on February 4, 2009.

So it goes for Gao and his family, now in exile in the United States. An appearance every one or

two years is all the confirmation they have that he is even alive. This time of the year, every year, Gao's family waits for news. It is not unlike the way we all will wait for our loved ones to visit us this week, only they never turn up.

Three years ago, I and several lawyers, including lawmaker Albert Ho Chun-yan, submitted a petition to the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, on Gao's behalf. The working group ruled in our favour, calling for Gao's immediate release after finding that the central government had violated international law. We had also pointed out that the central government was violating its own domestic laws, including articles 35, 36, 37, 41, and 125 of the Chinese constitution.

That was in November 2010. I am not optimistic. I have no illusions that the unenforceable opinion of five foreign human rights experts carries any ounce of influence in Beijing. There are probably less than a handful of people in the central government who know there even is a Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, at least one that is meant to prevent such things from happening. And so I have little doubt that, a year from now, Gao's children will ring in the Year of the Horse just as they have the Years of the Ox, the Tiger, the Rabbit and the Dragon, and now the Snake: without their father.

But I am desperate to be proved wrong. New years are meant to be a time of hope, the promise of spring and the belief, even in smog-smothered Beijing, that when we move, we move forward. In recent months, Xi Jinping has called the constitution "the legal weapon for people to defend their own rights", and the Southern Weekly editors' censored dreams of constitutionalism have been retweeted far beyond the reach of the Great Firewall. I assume this to be the usual - and usually brief - flowering of a new administration, but perhaps change is coming, slowly.

In the meantime, there may not be a lot that ordinary people can do for Gao. But we can do a little: we can at least make him feel a little less isolated, a little more connected to the world he is shut out from.

Over Christmas, the activist Hu Jia, drawing on his own years in prison for subversion, urged supporters to send cards to post box 15-16 at Gao's prison in Shaya county. "Even if he never gets them," said Gao's wife, Geng He, "it will make the prison guards respect him more." This new year, alone in a jail cell on the edges of the Taklamakan Desert, respect may be the only thing Gao Zhisheng can wish for.

*Keane Shum is a lawyer in Hong Kong*

<http://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/1145387/hope-against-hope-gao-zhishengs-freedom>

## DEATH PENALTY NEWS

By Stevi Carroll

### Maryland May Repeal the Death Penalty

Maryland looks like the next state to replace the death penalty with life without possibility of parole. A final vote by the Maryland State Senate is expected on February 26, 2013. Senator Robert Zerkon changed his mind about the death penalty and said, "As heinous and awful as these individuals [on death row] are, I think it's time for our state not to be involved in the apparatus of executions." If Maryland repeals the death penalty, it will be the sixth state in six years to do. States that are considering repealing the death penalty include Montana, Colorado, Kentucky, Oregon, and Delaware.

Of course, I am wondering when California will finally take this step.

In a recent article in The Economist magazine (February 9, 2013), both Democrat and Republican governors who struggle with the death penalty are discussed. Governors are the bottom line when it comes to the execution of another human being. They hold the person's life in their hands since they can commute death sentences. No governor, especially one who has his or her eye on another elected office, wants to appear 'soft on crime' but unlike Governors George W. Bush or Rick Perry, not all of them sleep soundly after an execution.

The Economist article ends with "Yet the death-penalty debate has changed in ways that go beyond day-to-day politics. It is less loud and more sceptical, giving thoughtful governors room to question a policy that causes them anguish—because they think it arbitrary, ineffective and costly, and because they impose it. That grim duty does not trouble all politicians: ask Mr Clinton and Mr Bush. But it should."

It seems some politicians are beginning to be troubled.

<http://www.economist.com/news/united-states/21571428-politicians-national-ambitions-are-suddenly-willing-challenge-death>

### Andre Thomas - too mentally ill to be executed?

Marc Bookman had a recent essay (How Crazy Is Too Crazy to Be Executed?) in Mother Jones in

which he describes Andre Thomas's family life, his crime, and his treatment of himself. What is at issue is whether or not Mr. Thomas is fit to execute. A few items in the essay say to me that a resounding "NO" should be the answer to the question.

Highlights of his actions include his cutting out the hearts of two of his victims and lung of another victim (he mistook the lung for her heart) and his auto-enucleation of not one but both of his eyes. He believes that cutting the hearts out of his children and his wife freed them from evil. He plucked out his first eye after reading Matthew 5:29 "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell." He ripped out his remaining eye because he didn't want the government to read his thoughts. He ate his second eye.

Mr. Thomas has been moved to a Texas state prison psychiatric unit. He is locked in a small cell for 23 hours a day. "Texas continues to forcefully pursue Andre's execution. No state authority figure has expressed hesitation about ending the life of a man who intentionally blinded himself, nor has there been any move by the district attorney to reconsider Andre's mental state at the time of the killings."

<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2013/02/andre-thomas-death-penalty-mental-illness-texas>

### From Death Penalty Information

MULTIMEDIA: "One For Ten" Introduces Documentaries on Death Row Exonerees  
Posted: February 18, 2013

One For Ten is a new collection of documentary films telling the stories of innocent people who were on death row in the U.S. The first film of the series is on Ray Krone, one of the 142 people who have been exonerated and freed from death row since 1973. Krone was released from Arizona's death row in 2002 after DNA testing showed he did not commit the murder for which he was sentenced to death 10 years earlier. Krone was convicted based largely on circumstantial evidence and bite-mark evidence, alleging his teeth matched marks on the victim. The film is narrated by Danny Glover. All the films will be free and may be shared under a Creative Commons license.

To see a pilot for the film, go to [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EXwYi\\_338jk&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EXwYi_338jk&feature=player_embedded).

Perhaps this film is something we may want to see.

### Stays of Execution

Date scheduled for execution

January 2013

29 Kimberly McCarthy Texas

February 2013

13 Chris Sepulvado Louisiana

19 Warren Hill Georgia

20 Britt Ripkowski Texas

27 Larry Swearingen Texas

March 2013

5 Freeman May Pennsylvania (Stay likely)

5 Orlando Maisonet Pennsylvania

7 Abraham Sanchez Pennsylvania (Stay likely)

21 Michael Gonzales Texas

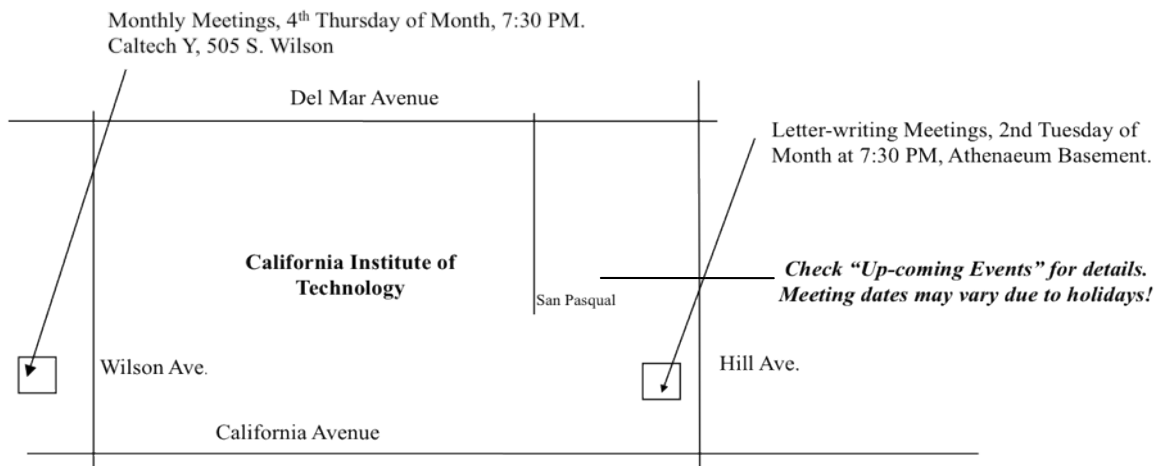
### Executions

February 2013

21 Carl Blue Texas  
1-drug lethal injection

21 Andrew Cook Georgia  
1-drug lethal injection

GROUP 22 MONTHLY LETTER COUNT (FEBRUARY 2013)	
UAs	7
POC	8
Total	15
To add your letters to the total contact <a href="mailto:lwkamp@gmail.com">lwkamp@gmail.com</a> .	



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 C1-128  
Pasadena, CA 91125  
[www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22/](http://www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22/)  
<http://rightsreaders.blogspot.com>



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