

Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XXI Number 3, March 2013

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, March 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.

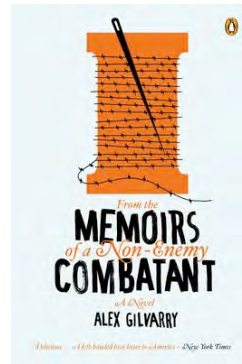
Tuesday, April 9, 7:30 PM. Letter writing meeting at Caltech Athenaeum, corner of Hill and California in Pasadena. This informal gathering is a great way for newcomers to get acquainted with Amnesty!

Sunday, April 21, 6:30 PM. Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion group. This month we read "From the Memoirs of a Non-Enemy Combatant" by Alex Gilvarry.

RIGHTS READERS

Human Rights Book Discussion Group

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



Next Rights Readers meeting:
Sunday, April 21, 6:30 pm

From the Memoirs of a Non-Enemy Combatant
by Alex Gilvarry

Vroman's Bookstore
695 E. Colorado, Pasadena

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi All

It's another beautiful day in the neighborhood...and I'm off! (Only because I'm on call for jury duty this week of our Spring Break. Obviously, I didn't have to go in today – let's see about the rest of this week...) Also had a few days off last week and Robert and I spent a few days on Catalina Island. A nice change from the usual frantic pace!

This edition features a new and (hopefully) continuing column by Robert on homeland security issues. Also check out the AGM report by Joyce.

Last night, at my EFM (Education for Ministry, a program thru the Episcopal Church) class, someone mentioned a campaign called "One Million Bones" designed to bring awareness to genocide. Handmade "bones" will be displayed at the Capitol Mall in DC June 2013. Each bone made will generate a dollar towards CARE's programs that work with survivors in Somalia and the DRC. See this link for more info:
<http://www.onemillionbones.org/>
This sounds like a worthwhile thing Group 22 could do – what do you think?

Con Cariño,
Kathy

BOOK REVIEW

Prisoner of Fashion
Alex Gilvarry's Debut Novel
By DANIEL ASA ROSE
Published: March 23, 2012

The humor in this first novel is nothing to laugh at. Though you're not really supposed to get that until you're nearly done.

That's because in the meantime you'll be too busy snickering. "From the Memoirs of a Non-Enemy Combatant," by Alex Gilvarry, tells the story of Boyet Hernandez, a Filipino-born fashion designer wending his way through the flamboyantly fatuous world of Brooklyn couture. The narrative crackles with satire, even before Boyet innocently lands himself at Guantánamo as the first detainee captured on United States soil and decides to bring the place a little flair by removing the sleeves from his orange jumpsuit. The disjunction between Gitmo and Prada is too delicious not to put a sideways smile on your face.

You'll also be twisting a lip upward at the Bellowsque brio of Gilvarry's language. Consider the colloquial oomph of these opening lines: "I would not, could not, nor did I ever raise a hand in anger against America. I love America, the golden bastard. It's where I was born again: propelled through the duct of J.F.K. International, out the rotating doors, push, push, dripping a post-U.S. Customs sweat down my back, and slithering out on my feet to a curb in

Queens, breathe. Then into a yellow cab, thrown to the masses. Van Wyck, B.Q.E., Brooklyn Bridge, SoHo, West Side Highway, Riverside Drive — these are a few of my favorite things!”

And yes, you’ll snort at the novel’s footnotes, many of which exist as supposed correctives to the text of this diminutive inmate’s “confession” (in which he mis-attributes quotations to Coco Chanel that properly belong to Nietzsche, for example). Truly, you’ll think, if the proverbial knock in the night can happen to this sweet Dummkopf, it can happen to anyone.

Which is precisely the point. For the real purpose of the comedic bravura is not to amuse you. It’s to soften you up for the horror that comes raining down in the final 50 pages, when Boyet, so lately the toast of the runway, is interrogated, humiliated and given a close-up view of state-sponsored brutality. The mirth is gone. Terror takes over. In one of our final glimpses of the narrator — whom we’ve been chuckled into feeling protective toward, even if we never quite like him — “his hair is matted down, he has been sweating, his face is gaunt and his eyes are concave from lack of sleep. His white shirt collar is stained yellow, either by sweat or puke.”

So much for the gussied-up jumpsuit. In many ways, this novel is a left-handed love letter to America. Whether describing New York’s subway system (“a rubber band of sexual tension, stretched and twined around the boroughs, ready to snap”) or the Bronxville campus of Sarah Lawrence (with its “imposing Tudor buildings magnificently lit” and “crisp fallen leaves, like cinnamon and dried flower petals”), Gilvarry shows that he cherishes a country he clearly feels is at risk.

Even at the end, deported far from America, Boyet pines for New York. Rain heard from afar reminds him of “the screech of the Second Avenue bus in the wet. . . . The clicking inside the tin boxes that made the traffic signals switch.” It is a measure of the book’s sense of hope that for all the injustice meted out, America still looks good from a distance.

Comedy, we’re reminded, often has an ulterior motive. Here the intention could hardly be more serious — to scare the smirk off our mugs as we enter Year 10 of Guantanamo’s use as a prison, with no end to the suffering in sight.

A version of this review appeared in print on March 25, 2012, on page BR21 of the Sunday

Book Review with the headline: Prisoner of Fashion. From the New York Times.

AUTHOR BIO



Alex Gilvarry is a native of Staten Island, New York. He has been a Norman Mailer fellow and has written for NPR’s All Things Considered, Vogue, the Paris Review Daily, and other publications. He is the founder and editor of the website, Tottenville Review, a book review collaborative. *From the Memoirs of a Non-Enemy*

Combatant is his first novel. He lives in Brooklyn, New York.

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE
Gao Zhisheng
by Joyce Wolf

In our previous newsletter I suggested that we write Congressman Frank Wolf to say thank-you for his recent commitment to adopt the case of Gao Zhisheng, Group 22’s own adopted prisoner of conscience.

So at our March letter-writing, I brought a couple of cards with wolf images to send to Rep. Wolf to express our thanks. Hoping he had a sense of humor, I signed my card, “regards from one Wolf to another.”

At the Amnesty AGM March 22-24 in Washington DC, I attended a workshop on the Tom Lantos Commission for Human Rights, where one of the presenters was Kalinda Stephenson, an aide to Rep. Wolf. And guess what! She had with her my wolf card -- said the Congressman loved it!

It was really great to see actual physical evidence that letters we mail do get where we send them! We’ll look forward to coordinating Group 22’s work for Gao Zhisheng along with Rep. Wolf’s efforts in his behalf.

During the three years that Group 22 has worked on Gao’s case, we often felt that the Chinese government was singling him out for especially harsh treatment. This is quite true, according to a recent article in the Epoch Times.

<http://www.theepochtimes.com/n2/china-news/chinese-lawyer-in-exile-denounces-gangsters-back-home-365311.html>

SAN FRANCISCO—Chen Guangcheng, the well-known, blind, Chinese lawyer and human rights activist who now lives in exile in the United States, was recently given an award for his legal advocacy efforts by overseas Chinese in San Francisco, and took the occasion to list a range of rights violations by the Chinese regime.

“This is how you figure it in China,” Chen said. “The ferocity with which someone has been persecuted is a question of whether or not they’re really having a big impact in their human rights work. The more on point, the bigger the impact, the more sincerely you do it, then the Communist Party will absolutely use an iron fist on you. Gao Zhisheng is that case.”

We need to keep lots of mail arriving at Shaya Prison for Gao Zhisheng. His birthday is April 20, so let's send birthday cards. Postage is now 1.10.

Gao Zhisheng
Shaya Prison
P.O. Box 15, Sub-box 16
Shaya County, Aksu Prefecture
Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, 842208
People's Republic of China

**REPORT ON AMNESTY AGM
March 22-24, Washington DC
by Joyce Wolf**

This year the theme of the annual Amnesty USA conference was "Use Your Power." I brought back lots of material and actions, which I will be sharing at upcoming Group 22 meetings.

Early arriving attendees had the opportunity to participate in a rally for the Arms Trade Treaty in Lafayette Square opposite the White House. I was there just for a bit, long enough to be proud of our enthusiastic young Amnesty marchers with their signs and slogans.

Opening session Friday evening began with a video about Archbishop Oscar Romero, who was assassinated in El Salvador in 1980. In observance of the Day of Truth and Remembrance, there were tributes to several other slain human rights activists: Anna Politkovskaya (Russia, 2006), Munir Said Thalib (Indonesia, 2004) and Ken Saro-Wiwa (Nigeria, 1995). A moment of silence followed, during which many in the audience held aloft cell phones glowing with the AI candle.

Friday's keynote speaker was Mexican journalist Lydia Cacho. She strode back and forth across the stage with the microphone, articulate, defiant, beautiful. She was not going to let rape and death threats keep her from continuing her work or from enjoying life to the fullest.

Saturday's morning plenary included an appearance by Hyatt hotel housekeeper Cathy Youngblood, thanking Amnesty for moving our meeting from labor-hostile Hyatt to the Sheraton. Her website is www.hyatthurts.org.

Salil Shetty, AI Secretary-General, shared a story about how AI was surprised to learn of the existence of a local AI group in Egypt that met secretly for 30 years during Mubarak's regime. Released POC Htay Kywe spoke of his imprisonment in Burma and told us he was "here today because of You!" Three women from Bahrain, Tunisia, and Palestine explained current human rights issues in their countries.

I attended a program on the plight of transmigrants in Mexico and the dangers besetting shelter workers such as Father Alejandro Solalinde. Lydia Cacho made some penetrating comments about the responsibility of US policies for the rise of the Zetas and the narco-state. Father Solalinde expressed hope that Pope Francis would bring new emphasis in the Church to issues affecting the poor.

Saturday evening plenary was devoted to LGBT issues in Uganda and Cameroon. Whew -- what a full day! And I have only mentioned a few of the program events!

Voting on Resolutions started at 8 am Sunday. There was a lot of debate, intense but polite. Evidently the serious wrangling happened during the Resolution Working Parties on Saturday. We ended at 11:17, two minutes past the deadline, with unanimous passage of an Emergency Resolution that "this AGM pledges to move forward as one, Board, members and staff, to a healthy and vibrant AIUSA."

SECURITY WITH HUMAN RIGHTS

by Robert Adams

The following is condensed from an article by Zeke Johnson on the AI USA website:

“What Needs to Happen Next on Drones?”

What should happen next to make sure that no person—US citizen or anyone else—is killed outside the bounds of law with a drone or other weapons?

1) The Obama administration must follow existing law on the use of lethal force. The law governing any state’s use of lethal force—whether with a drone or a gun or most other weapons—already exists: international human rights law and, in the exceptional circumstances where it applies, international humanitarian law as well. **The US government must follow the law.**

2) The never-ending “global war” must end. A central problem with the administration’s policy on armed drones and lethal force (and its policy on Guantanamo for that matter) is the idea that the world is a battlefield in a “global war” between the US and al Qaeda and other armed groups and individuals, and that only the law of armed conflict applies, to the exclusion of international human rights law. This “global war” theory basically says to the world, we can ignore your human rights when we see fit. To change course, **Congress should withdraw the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) and the administration should withdraw this Office of Legal Counsel memo by John Yoo that says the executive branch cannot be constrained by the AUMF or other laws passed by Congress.**

3) The US government must recognize that ALL people are equal in rights. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu put it recently:

“Do the United States and its people really want to tell those of us who live in the rest of the world that our lives are not of the same value as yours? That President Obama can sign off on a decision to kill us

with less worry about judicial scrutiny than if the target is an American? Would your Supreme Court really want to tell humankind that we, like the slave Dred Scott in the 19th century, are not as human as you are? I cannot believe it.”

4) The “kill court” idea must be rejected. If “global war” thinking hadn’t permeated so much of the way the US thinks and talks about how to deal with the threat of terrorism, the proposal by some to establish a special pre-strike “kill court” for US citizens would immediately be rejected as a non-starter that misses the point. Such a court would be fundamentally unfair and mean that the US government was breaking the rules for when a state can use lethal force. **What we do need is to ensure independent and impartial investigations in all cases of alleged extrajudicial executions or other unlawful killings, respect for the rights of family members of those killed, and effective redress and remedy where killings are found to have been unlawful.**

5) The administration must tell the truth and Congress must conduct oversight. The public has a right to know when the Obama administration thinks it can kill. **President Obama should publicly disclose the secret drone memos with only the redactions truly necessary, as well as the facts about who has been killed.** Congress must play a stronger role. More hearings in Congress are needed, with survivors of drone strikes and independent experts in human rights and international law. **You can help:**

[Send this message](http://amnestyusa.org/drones) to President Obama, your Senators and your Representative. (<http://amnestyusa.org/drones>)

DEATH PENALTY NEWS

By Stevi Carroll

Maryland: 18th State to abolish the death penalty

Hooray - Hallelujah - Right on - Amen

March 15 was a big day in Maryland as the House of Delegates passed (82-56) a bill to

abolish the death penalty - for future crimes. The five people who are currently on death row are not affected by the legislation. Governor Martin O'Malley did said, "I've felt compelled to do everything I could to change our law, repeal the death penalty, so that we could focus on doing the things that actually work to reduce violent crime." The five inmates on death row may still be spared.

Five other states recently abolished the death penalty: New Jersey, New York, New Mexico, Illinois and Connecticut. And stand by, even the great execution state of Texas is re-considering the death penalty.

To thank Governor O'Malley, go to <http://takeaction.amnestyusa.org/siteapps/advocacy/ActionItem.aspx?c=60JCLQPAJiJUG&b=6645049&aid=519485>.

Can the times be a-changin' in Texas?

A March 20 editorial in the *Dallas Morning News*, "With death penalty bans gaining steam, what's next for Texas?" , discusses Maryland's recent abolition of the death penalty and begins with, "There should be no debate that evolving standards of decency mold the justice system. If that were not the case, Texas judges could still hang horse thieves." While Texas is far different from Maryland, the number of abolition states does make the writer wonder how Texas cannot move in that direction.

A *UT-Texas Tribune* poll last year found that a majority of Texans continue to favor the death penalty, but now a number of bills that will influence death penalty cases are before both the Texas House and Senate. Perhaps even Texans can change; although, April has seven executions scheduled country wide and six of them are in Texas.

One sentence in the editorial sums up the death penalty: "At best, the death penalty is selectively used state-supported retribution, which has no place in a civilized society."

To read the entire editorial, go to

<http://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/editorials/20130320-editorial-with-death-penalty-bans-gaining-steam-whats-next-for-texas.ece>.

SAFE California Rises Again

SAFE California took a little break after last November's Proposition 34 defeat and is now ready to rock 'n' roll again. The organization is asking Californians for suggestions for how we can move forward to get rid of the death penalty in our state. To send your ideas, go to http://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/1265/p/dia/action/public/?action_KEY=12740.

One Thing That Deserves the Death Penalty

Recently on Facebook, Upworthy posted an Amnesty International video showing the one thing that does deserve the death penalty. To see this video, go to <http://www.upworthy.com/the-one-thing-that-actually-deserves-the-death-penalty?c=ufb1>.

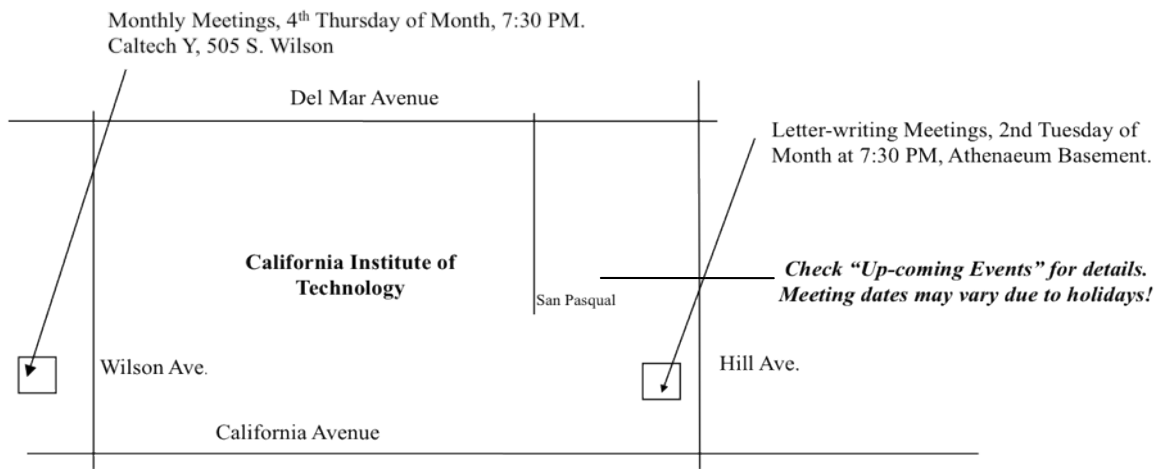
Stays of Execution

Date scheduled for execution
 March 2013
 6 Edward Schad Arizona

Executions

March 2013
 6 Frederick Treesh Ohio
 1-drug lethal injection
 12 Steven Ray Thacker Oklahoma
 3-drug lethal injection

GROUP 22 MONTHLY LETTER COUNT	
UAs	13
POC	4
Total	17
To add your letters to the total contact lwkamp@gmail.com .	



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://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.