

Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XXI Number 5, May 2013

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, May 23, 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, June 11, 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, June 16, 6:30 PM. Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion group. This month we read "A Partial History of Lost Causes" by Jennifer Dubois.

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi All

I thought I would use my column today to advocate for a prisoner that AI is aware of but has not officially taken up the case –



Pastor Saeed and family

that of Pastor Saeed Abedini, from Boise, Idaho. Saeed, a US-Iranian national, was imprisoned in Iran's notorious Evin Prison January 2013. He was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment for his alleged role in "founding house churches" which the authorities deemed to constitute acts against national security. Several Christian organizations have taken up his case. I read today on one of the blogs I subscribe to that he has been released from solitary confinement. If you would like to sign the online petition for his release, or send him a note of encouragement, go to this link: <http://savesaeed.org/>

USA Today article regarding the case:
<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2013/04/04/iran-pastors-behind-bars/2053187/>

More information on religious and other freedoms (or lack thereof!) in Iran from this AI report to the UN Human Rights Council in February 2013:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MD/13/008/2013/en/76ed3baa-4f19-49b3-904e-2c0d39164bbc/mde130082013en.pdf>

Thanks to Ali, who forwarded my inquiry to Elise Auerbach, an AI Iran country specialist who sent the AI report link. Here's an article from her blog on religious freedom in Iran that is interesting:

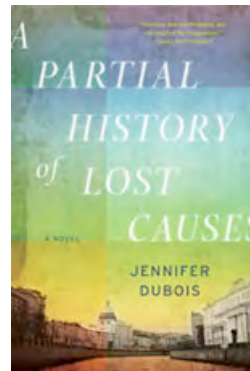
<http://blog.amnestyusa.org/middle-east/why-the-iranian-government-should-listen-to-the-king-who-died-3000-years-ago/>

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, June 16, 6:30 pm

A Partial History of Lost Causes

by Jennifer Dubois

Vroman's Bookstore
695 E. Colorado, Pasadena

Author Bio



Jennifer Dubois was born in Northampton, Massachusetts in 1983. She earned a B.A. in political science and philosophy from Tufts University and an M.F.A. in fiction from the Iowa Writers' Workshop, where she was a Teaching-Writing Fellow. After completing a Stegner Fellowship in fiction, Jennifer served as

the Nancy Packer Lecturer in Continuing Studies at Stanford University. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Playboy*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Esquire* and *Byliner's "New*

[Voices](#)" collection, *The Missouri Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, *The Florida Review*, *The Northwest Review*, *Narrative*, *ZYZZYVA*, [Five Chapters](#) and elsewhere. Her short story "Wolf" was named a [Notable Story](#) in [Best American Short Stories 2012](#), and the first chapter of *A Partial History of Lost Causes* was selected as a [Top Five Story of 2011-2012](#) by *Narrative*. *A Partial History of Lost Causes* was honored by the National Book Foundation's [5 Under 35](#) program and was a finalist for the [PEN/Hemingway Prize](#) for Debut Fiction.

BOOK REVIEW

Unwinnable Wars
Jennifer Dubois's Debut Novel
By LAURA BENNETT
NY Times Book Review

A PARTIAL HISTORY OF LOST CAUSES By Jennifer Dubois

Lost causes are everywhere in Jennifer Dubois's first novel: a fatal illness, a chess match versus an all-knowing computer, the dead ends of Russian opposition politics. Everyone seems to be pushing up against impossible odds. From the beginning, the plot feels menaced by the expectation of an unhappy end. When Irina finally finds Aleksandr, the year is 2006 and he has given up chess and embarked, à la Garry Kasparov, on his own doomed quest — a presidential campaign against Vladimir Putin. "Sometimes you needed to defend something that really mattered," he believes, "and not only because it symbolized something that mattered."

As a youth working for a dissident newsletter in the early 1980s, Aleksandr fell in love with a prostitute named Elizabeta. Her marriage to a party official sharpened Aleksandr's hatred of the Soviet regime. When Irina encounters him, he is receiving death threats and is certain he's headed for assassination, but passion for the cause is enough to keep him going. "There is nothing to be gained by pretending we have a chance of winning. . . . We are running so that there might be a record," Aleksandr announces to a crowd of thousands, which might as well be the throng of protesters recently gathered in Bolotnaya Square.

DuBois tells a tight story with boldface themes. Drama is constant. Conversations get right to the point. Everything means something. Chess is politics or sometimes war. Losing is dying. There are many gloomy musings on mortality

and memory and love. But even with such high emotional stakes, Irina's and Aleksandr's self-absorption leaves the story somewhat cold. "Both of us had such big egos that it had never occurred to us, really, that anyone else had to die," Irina says. They expend so much energy worrying about their fates that it feels almost redundant for us to do so.

But this is just the point Dubois wants to make — that obsessing over your own end is a kind of vanity, even a kind of ahistorical thinking. All this self-pity is meant to seem particularly indulgent alongside the epic seriousness of Russian history. Alternating between the perspectives of its main characters, the novel spans three decades, and against the evolving political landscape we see the petty developments of individual lives. En route to a nightclub Irina says, "We rolled by the Nord-Ost on Melnikov Street, and I thought of the siege there back in 2002: Spetsnaz blasting poison at the terrorists and hostages alike and everybody dying horribly in the snow." As Irina's and Aleksandr's lives intersect and Russia becomes their sole backdrop, there is a sense of deeper traumas playing out invisibly in a parallel past. And so the history of Russia lends the book a sort of pathos even as Irina and Aleksandr keep our sympathy at bay.

There are echoes of the Russia of Gary Shteyngart's fiction here: decrepit and a bit tawdry, full of drunkards and scantily clad women and hulking old monuments — a place that feels haunted by the hostile ghosts of different political and cultural eras. Irina eventually joins Aleksandr's campaign, which cuts through her fog of despair and fills her with new energy. Politics, at least, is one way of channeling our narcissism into a kind of engagement with the world.

The final chapters let both Irina and Aleksandr off easy. It's a surprisingly happy ending for a book that purports to teach us how to live when the possibility of a happy ending is foreclosed. But it turns out there are forces bigger than a human life: there are causes, there are movements, there is history. Irina's mistake is failing to see that she cannot be sure of her particular outcome after all.

Laura Bennett is the assistant literary editor of *The New Republic*. A version of this review appeared in print on March 18, 2012, on page BR15 of the *Sunday Book Review* with the headline: *Unwinnable Wars*.

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE

Gao Zhisheng

by Joyce Wolf

You may recall that a few months ago we reported that Group 22's adopted prisoner of conscience, imprisoned human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng, had also been adopted by Congressman Frank Wolf as part of the Defending Freedoms initiative. The European Parliament is now participating in Defending Freedoms.

On May 16, Edward McMillan-Scott and Chen Guangcheng wrote in The Guardian:

"Open your newspaper any day of the week and you will find a report from somewhere in the world of someone being imprisoned, tortured or executed because his opinions or religion are unacceptable to his government.' Those words were written 52 years ago in an Observer article by Peter Benenson, who would go on to found Amnesty International.

Since then, the world has undergone profound changes. The iron curtain has fallen, democracy has taken root in eastern Europe, Latin America and much of Africa, and rapid advances in technology have made us more globally interconnected than ever before. Nonetheless, arbitrary imprisonment, torture and execution on political grounds remain commonplace. China, the world's rising superpower, continues to systematically engage in the political repression and torture of its citizens, with an estimated 7 to 8 million Chinese currently being held in prison or labour camps. [...]

On Wednesday, at the European parliament, we launched a transatlantic pact between the EU and US to highlight human rights abuses around the world. The Defending Freedoms Project, in association with Amnesty International and ChinaAid, calls on members of the European parliament and US congressmen and women to adopt and advocate on behalf of prisoners of conscience from around the world. Examples include **Gao Zhisheng**, the prominent Chinese human rights activist who has been repeatedly imprisoned and severely tortured for the last seven years. Or Nabeel Rajab, the Bahraini pro-democracy campaigner who has been beaten, jailed and denied medical treatment. By generating attention and support to these individual cases, it is hoped that combined pressure from the US and EU will help to secure their release."

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/may/16/eu-us-promote-human-rights-china>

We'll look forward to hearing which member of the EU parliament decided to adopt Gao Zhisheng.

On Sunday, May 26, our friends Ann Lau and the Visual Artists Guild present their annual Award Dinner and Tiananmen Commemoration at the Golden Dragon Restaurant, Los Angeles. Dhondup Wangchen, imprisoned Tibetan film maker, will be honored, and his wife Lhamo Tso will accept the award in his behalf. To register for the dinner or to make a donation, visit <http://www.visual-artists-guild.org>.

This month let's send our first letters to the new President of China, XI Jinping. We also have a new Ambassador from China, CUI Tiankai. Next month maybe we'll write to China's new Premier, LI Keqiang. (Chinese style is to put the surname first, indicated here with all capital letters. So it's President Xi, Premier Li and Ambassador Cui.)

XI Jinping Guojia Zhuxi
President
The State Council General Office
2 Fuyoujie
Xichengqu
Beijingshi 100017
People's Republic of China

Your Excellency,

I am writing to you about **Gao Zhisheng** (高智晟), a Beijing-based human rights lawyer who was detained in Shaanxi Province on February 4, 2009. He is now in Shaya Prison in Xinjiang Autonomous Region, after being subjected to enforced disappearance for nearly three years.

I was happy to learn that Mr. Gao's brother and father-in-law were allowed a brief visit with him on 12 January 2013, and I urge you to ensure that Mr. Gao is not subjected to torture or other ill-treatment while he is in custody, that he receives whatever medical treatment he may require, and that he is able to contact his family and lawyers.

I respectfully urge you to consider the **immediate and unconditional release** of Gao Zhisheng. Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Copy to:
Ambassador CUI Tiankai
Embassy of the People's Republic of China
3505 International Place, NW
Washington DC 20008

DEATH PENALTY NEWS

By Stevi Carroll

Maryland Abolishes the Death Penalty

When Governor Martin O'Malley signed a bill outlawing capital punishment May 2, 2013, Maryland became the 18th state to abolish the death penalty. A statement issued from the Governor's office said, "With the legislation signed today, Maryland has effectively eliminated a policy that is proven not to work." This makes six states, including Connecticut, Illinois, New Mexico, New York, and New Jersey, to outlaw the death penalty in past six years. Even states that continue to have the death penalty, executions are on the decline from the peak of 98 in 1999 to 43 in both 2011 and 2012.

The death penalty remains viable for some advocates. Kent Scheidegger, legal director of the Criminal Justice Legal Foundation in Sacramento, California, believes some crimes, such as the Boston Marathon bombing, warrant execution of the perpetrator. He said, "The main reason is just simple justice. There are some crimes where a lesser penalty is insufficient." He also believes that capital punishment can deter crime when it is correctly applied.

Nonetheless, Maryland, welcome to the land of 18 states without the death penalty.

A Stay for Willie Manning

Just four hours before his execution, Willie Manning was granted a stay of execution with an 8 to 9 vote by the Mississippi justices. Mr. Manning's attorneys have argued that DNA and fingerprints found at the scene of the murders he is convicted of committing should be tested, but the State thus far has refused to comply even though the FBI has offered to do it.

Additionally, the ballistics and hair fiber evidence the prosecutors relied on have been discredited and the jailhouse informant used by the prosecution is willing to recant his testimony.

Willie Manning has a few more months to live while he, his lawyers, and the state attorneys

await further guidance from the court on what happens next.

Hamid Ghassem-Shall Online Action

Urge Iran to stop the imminent execution of Canadian citizen

Hamid Ghassemi-Shall, an Iranian-Canadian shoe salesman, faces imminent execution in Iran after an unfair trial in a Revolutionary Court.

<http://takeaction.amnestyusa.org/siteapps/advocacy/ActionItem.aspx?c=6oJCLQPAIijUG&b=6645049&aid=519672>

Stays of Execution

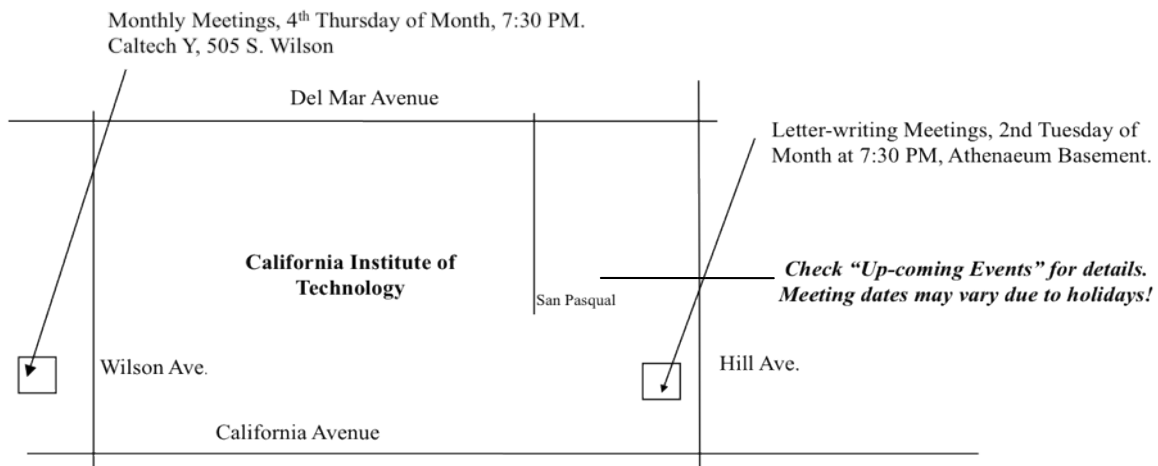
May		
7	Willie Manning	Mississippi
21	Robert Pruett	Texas

Executions

April		
25	Richard Cobb	Texas 1-drug lethal injection
May		
1	Steven Smith	Ohio 1-drug lethal injection
7	Carroll Parr	Texas 1-drug lethal injection
15	Jeffery Williams	Texas 1-drug lethal injection

GROUP 22 MONTHLY LETTER COUNT

UAs	26
POC	8
Total	34
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.