

Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XXVIII Number 1, January 2020

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, January 23, 7:30-9:00 PM. Monthly Meeting. We meet at the Caltech Y, Tyson House, 505 S. Wilson Ave., Pasadena. Our guest speaker will be Hannah Webster from IRIS (Interfaith Refugee and Immigrant Service), a program of the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles. The mission of IRIS is to welcome new arrivals and provide tangible tools and connections to help them achieve self-sufficiency in the United States.

Tuesday, February 11, 7:30 - 9:00 PM. Letter Writing meeting at the 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 16, 6:30 PM. Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion Group. This month we read "**The Home That Was Our Country: A Memoir of Syria**" by Alia Malek.

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hello everyone,

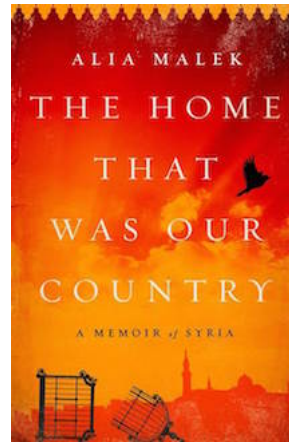
It's me again (Joyce). If you're wondering why Kathy hasn't had time to write a column this month, take a look at those Group 22 numbers for letters written in December and January – over 200 total! That's a lot of sorting, counting, stamping, and mailing. Kathy has been managing Group 22 letter writing efforts for over a year now, and she deserves our congratulations and huge thanks for doing a wonderful job!

And besides all that, Kathy arranged for this month's guest speaker for what promises to be a very interesting presentation. You can learn more about the IRIS organization at their website:

<https://iris.ladiocese.org>

Several Group 22 members plan to attend the AIUSA Annual General Meeting, March 6-8, San Diego, at Hilton La Jolla Torrey Pines.

<https://www.amnestyusa.org/take-action/events/amnesty-internationals-2020-annual-general-meeting>.



Next Rights Readers Meeting

**Sunday, February 16
6:30 PM**

**Vroman's Bookstore
695 E. Colorado Blvd
Pasadena**

***The Home That Was Our Country:
A Memoir of Syria***

by Alia Malek

REVIEW

(www.goodreads.com/book/show/25898173-the-home-that-was-our-country)

At the Arab Spring's hopeful start, Alia Malek returned to Damascus to reclaim her grandmother's apartment, which had been lost to her family since Hafez al-Assad came to power in 1970. Its loss was central to her parent's decision to make their lives in America. In chronicling the people who lived in the Tahaan building, past and present, Alia portrays the Syrians -- the Muslims, Christians, Jews, Armenians, and Kurds -- who worked, loved, and suffered in close quarters, mirroring the political shifts in their country. Restoring her family's home as the country comes apart, she learns how to speak the coded language of oppression that exists in a dictatorship, while privately confronting her own fears about Syria's future.

The Home That Was Our Country is a deeply researched, personal journey that shines a delicate but piercing light on Syrian history, society, and politics. Teeming with insights, the narrative weaves acute political analysis with a century of intimate family history, ultimately delivering an unforgettable portrait of the Syria that is being erased.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

<http://www.aliemalek.com/alia.html>

Alia Malek is a journalist and former civil rights lawyer. She is the author of *A Country Called Amreeka: US History Re-Told Through Arab American Lives* (Simon & Schuster 2009) and editor of *Patriot Acts: Narratives of Post 9/11 Injustices* (McSweeney's 2011). With

collaborators the Magnum Foundation and Al Liquidoi, Alia edited and co-conceived *EUROPA* أوروبا : *An Illustrated Introduction to Europe for Migrants and Refugees*, released in Europe in 2016. Her narrative nonfiction book, *The Home That Was Our Country: A Memoir of Syria*, was released on February 28, 2017, and has been translated into Italian, Turkish, and Romanian.



Her reportage has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Foreign Policy*, *New Yorker.com*, *the Nation*, *the Christian Science Monitor*, *Jadaliyya*, *McSweeney's*, *Guernica* and other publications.

Born in Baltimore to Syrian immigrant parents, she began her legal career as a trial attorney at the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division. After working in the legal field in the U.S., Lebanon, and the West Bank, Malek, who has degrees from Johns Hopkins and Georgetown universities, earned her master's degree in journalism from Columbia University.

In April 2011, she moved to Damascus, Syria and wrote anonymously for several outlets from inside the country as it began to disintegrate. Her reporting from Syria earned her the Marie Colvin Award in November 2013.

She returned to the U.S. in May 2013 for the launch of Al Jazeera America, where she was Senior Writer until October 2015. After her departure, she was a Puffin Foundation Writing Fellow at the Nation Institute and in residence at the MacDowell Colony.

In November 2016, she was honored with the 12th annual Hiatt Prize in the Humanities. The New York Foundation for the Arts named her a fellow in Nonfiction Literature in the summer of 2017.

Currently, she is the director of international reporting at the Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at the City University of New York.

DEATH PENALTY NEWS

By Stevi Carroll

Capital punishment is against the better judgment of modern criminology, and, above all, against the highest expression of love in the nature of God.

--Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Just Mercy

Recently, I was fortunate enough to see the movie *Just Mercy* based on Bryan Stevenson's book by the same name. Rights Readers read this book, and the movie is an excellent follow up to the book.

As we remember, Walter McMillian was on death row for a murder he did not commit. The movie reenacts Mr Stevenson's desire to work for underrepresented inmates in the Alabama prison system. Existing racism in the culture of Alabama, the justice system, and the prison system come alive in this film. Also addressed is the extent to which the ability to pay for competent lawyers for those arrested and tried plays such an overriding part in receiving justice regardless of the race of the person.

Especially for our sisters and brothers who believe dusting off Old Sparky to electrify human beings is a good idea, this film could be an eye opener. As I look at the recently exonerated human beings listed in this column, I think about the death penalty and how had these men been sentenced to death, they may have been executed before lawyers were able to prove their innocence.

Alabama is notorious for its prison conditions with inmates in overcrowded conditions and where inmate deaths may not be 'discovered' for days. A report in April of last year documented these horrendous conditions. When one sees *Just Mercy*, one can keep this in mind.

Federal Executions

Executions and how to execute them. That seems to be the stumbling block for Attorney General William Barr's desire to execute five, and now four, Federal inmates. AG Barr wants the lethal injection protocol followed; however, with the three-drug protocol one of the three drugs is not available. For some reason, the manufacturer doesn't want the drug used to kill people. What a conundrum. In 2008, the Supreme Court ruled that the three-drug protocol was unconstitutional since it is 'cruel

and unusual punishment because of its ability to inflict severe pain.'

In mid January, three federal appeals court judges discussed "how precise the law is in dictating how federal prisoners should be put to death." Does federal law say federal executions have to follow the 'manner' of the state law in which the person to be executed has been convicted (if the state even has the death penalty)? As mentioned above, AG Barr's taken care of that. Or has he?

Judge David Tatel (appointed by Bill Clinton) noted that using the 'manner' of execution of the state opens the door for a number of possibilities, such as lethal injection, hanging, or the gas chamber (and as we see in recent executions, for Tennessee that includes the electric chair). Judges Greg Katsas and Neomi Rao (appointed by Donald Trump) like AG Barr's approach and expressed concerns that the decision may be 'micro-managing the execution process.'

In November 2019, US District Court Judge Tanya Chutkan ruled on the single-drug protocol in favor of the inmates because it does not adhere to using the execution options for the states where the execution will take place. She blocked the executions. Even though the Trump administration 'quickly took the issue all the way to the Supreme Court' so they could quickly carry out the four executions, the Supremes 'turned down the federal government's request to stay Judge Chutkan's order blocking the executions.'

Justice Samuel Alito along with Justices Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh wrote, "The Government has shown that it is very likely to prevail when this question is ultimately decided." They want the District of Columbia Circuit to decide this and Justice Alito expects this issue to be ruled on within 60 days from the December 6, 2019, order.

We shall see.

Recent Exonerations

November

Andrew Stewart, Jr., Ransom Watkins, and Alfred Chestnut

- State: MD - Date of Exoneration: 11/25/2019
In 1984, Alfred Chestnut, Ransom Watkins, and Andrew Stewart Jr. were sentenced to life in prison for murder in Baltimore, Maryland. They were exonerated in 2019 after a re-investigation revealed that the real killer's identity had been

withheld by the prosecution and four eyewitnesses recanted their identifications.

Danny Burton - State: MI

- Date of Exoneration: 12/6/2019

In 1987, 19-year-old Danny Burton was sentenced to life in prison without parole for a murder in Detroit, Michigan. He was exonerated in 2019 after witnesses against him admitted they lied and other witnesses gave affidavits saying he was elsewhere at the time of the crime.

Demetrius Johnson - State: IL

- Date of Exoneration: 12/20/2019

In 1992, Demetrius Johnson was sentenced to 25 years in prison for a shooting that killed one and wounded another in Chicago, Illinois. He was exonerated in 2019 when evidence long concealed by police showed a witness identified another man as the gunman.

Felipe Rodriguez - State: NY

- Date of Exoneration: 12/30/2019

In 1990, Felipe Rodriguez was sentenced to 25 years to life in prison for a murder in Queens County, New York. He was exonerated in 2019 based on evidence that his chief accuser had lied to police, and that police failed to disclose evidence pointing to another suspect.

Stays of execution

January

13 Federal Alfred Bourgeois *

15 OH Denny Obermiller

Date removed

15 OH George Brinkman **

15 Federal Dustin Lee Honken*

16 OH Kareem Jackson

Reprieve granted by Gov. Mike DeWine on October 30, 2019 and execution rescheduled for September 16, 2020.

16 GA Jimmy Meders

Commutated to life without parole by the Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles on January 16, 2020.

*Preliminary injunction granted on November 21, 2019 by the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia based on a determination that the federal execution protocol announced in July 2019 violates the federal death penalty statute. Motion to vacate injunction denied on December 2 by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. Application to vacate injunction denied on December 6 by the U.S. Supreme Court.

**Legally premature warrant. Stay granted by the Ohio Supreme Court on October 9, 2019 to permit Brinkman to pursue appellate review of his conviction and death sentence that is guaranteed as a matter of Ohio law.

Recent executions

December

5 Lee Hall, Jr TN
Electrocution
Years From Sentence To Execution - 27

11 Travis Runnels TX
Lethal Injection 1-drug (pentobarbital)
Years From Sentence To Execution - 14

January

15 John Gardner TX
Lethal Injection 1-drug (pentobarbital)
Years From Sentence To Execution - 13

GROUP 22 DECEMBER LETTER COUNT	
Write For Rights to Officials	102
Write For Rights Solidarity	51
Total	153
GROUP 22 JANUARY LETTER COUNT	
UAs	26
POC (Gao Zhisheng)	12
POC (Narges Mohammadi)	14
Total	52

PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE
Gao Zhisheng
and
Narges Mohammadi
By Joyce Wolf

We haven't heard anything at all from China about missing human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng. It's been over two years now since he was disappeared. But he is not forgotten – we will keep on writing for him!

We have had news about Narges Mohammadi in Iran, and it's not very good. A recent article in Ms. Magazine states:

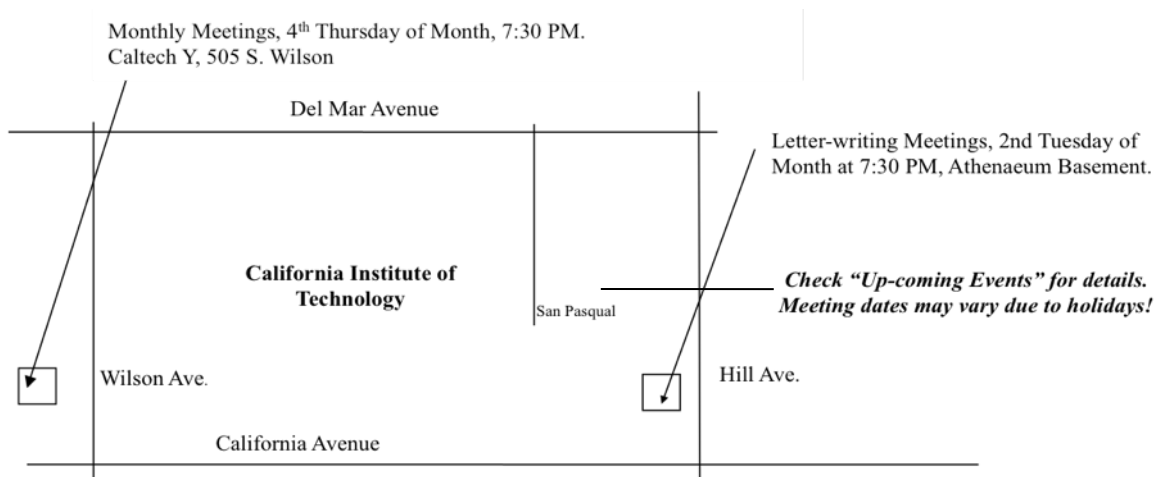
"The new director of Evin Prison, Gholamreza Ziaie, is infamous for being cruel and violent. He threatened Mohammadi a couple months ago, saying that if she did not stop her activism inside Evin, he would 'transfer you to Zanjan prison so you get isolated, rotten and ruined in that corner.' That's now where Mohammadi is exiled."

But of course Narges Mohammadi is not going to stop her activism. She managed to get a letter out of Zanjan Prison, in which she included the details of her brutal, violent transfer out of Evin prison on 24 December. She ends her letter on a defiant note:

"What keeps me on my feet in this prison, while my body bruised and wounded, is my love for the honorable, but tormented, people of this country, and my ideals of justice and freedom. To honor the innocent people's blood shed atrociously, I pledge to speak the truth, defy tyranny and defend the oppressed until my last breath."

You can read her entire letter and the accompanying story here:

<https://msmagazine.com/2020/01/08/prominent-iranian-feminist-narges-mohammadi-is-in-danger/>



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.