

Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XVI Number 1, January 2008

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, January 24, 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 12, 7:30 PM. Letter writing meeting at Caltech Athenaeum, corner of Hill and California in Pasadena.

Sunday, February 17, 6:30 PM. Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion Group at Vromans Bookstore, 695 E. Colorado Blvd. in Pasadena. 626-449-5320. The featured book is "The Yacoubian Building", by Alaa Al Aswany.

recognized and expressed. Thanks to Ed Bacon, rector of All Saints, for proposing this service.

Unfortunately, the New Year, instead of ushering in peace, has seen violence continuing throughout the world - especially in Pakistan (with the murder of Benazir Bhutto) and Kenya (with the continuing violence that has occurred after recent elections). Paula, our Africa visitor and expert, has some comments on Kenya later in this newsletter.

And last but not least, don't miss the Doo-Dah parade January 20 in Old Town Pasadena at 11:30am, starting at Memorial Park. Group 22 is participating this year, with a really hilarious float on a serious theme (torture, specifically water boarding). Check our website post-parade for photos!

Con cariño,
Kathy

aigp22@caltech.edu

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi everyone,

Happy New Year! Hard to believe that it's 2008 already. We spend the holidays in Oregon (where it was cold and wet) and returned to cold and wet southern California! I worked on my Masters project up until the end of December, and finally got my instructor's approval and drove it to Ontario, CA on December 31!! Now I can get back to my regular routine (which includes cooking - we have enjoyed home-made soup and other goodies lately!) and catch up with friends and family. Whew!!

Some Group 22 members (as individuals, as we all realize that Amnesty officially does not take a position for or against the float, but against HR abuses in China) were involved in varying degrees in the protests against the Rose Parade, even just turning their backs as the Chinese float passed. Robert and I attended a New Year's Eve service at All Saints Church in Pasadena that had the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as its theme. Various members of the Pasadena community participated, including Mayor Bogaard and other city officials, representatives from other human rights groups such as the United Nations Association Pasadena chapter, Ann Lau from the Visual Artists Guild (who has been active in the protest against the float), and yours truly representing Group 22. We each read selected portions of the declaration. It was an opportunity for the concerns of all involved with this issue to be

ERITREA POC

In early 2006 Group 22 adopted Eritrean Prisoner of Conscience Estifanos Seyoum. We remain committed to working for him and for other Eritrean POCs who were arrested during the crackdown of September 2001. Estifanos and the other detainees have been held incommunicado in secret locations with no access to their families or lawyers or international humanitarian organizations. Several are reported to have died as a result of the harsh conditions and denial of medical treatment.

In December Reporters Without Borders announced the award of "Journalist of the Year 2007" to Seyoum Tsehaye, another Eritrean POC imprisoned since 2001. Their press release (www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=24645) says: "The panel of judges sought to highlight not only the case of this brave journalist held in Eritrea's appalling jails since September 2001 but also the catastrophic state of press freedom in this small Horn of Africa country. At least four journalists have died in prison in Eritrea over the last few years. The blame lies chiefly at the door of Issaias Afewerki, the highly authoritarian and obdurate president of the country since its independence in 1993."

We hope to use the publicity generated by this award to bring more attention to the deplorable human rights situation in Eritrea and to the plight of our adopted POC and his fellow detainees.

This month let's write once again to obdurate President Issayas. Here is a sample letter that you can copy or use as a guideline. Postage is 90 cents.

His Excellency
President Issayas Afewerki
Office of the President
P. O. Box 257
Asmara, Eritrea

Your Excellency,

I am deeply concerned about Estifanos Seyoum and Seyoum Tsehaye and other former government officials and journalists who were arrested in September 2001. These detainees have been held incommunicado for over six years in life-threatening conditions. Several of them, such as former army chief General Ogba Abraha and journalist Fessahaye Yohannes, are alleged to have died in prison due to torture and denial of medical treatment.

I call upon the Eritrean authorities to clarify the fate of the detainees who are feared to have died in custody. I appeal for the immediate release of all prisoners of conscience who are imprisoned in Eritrea solely for the peaceful expression of their opinions or beliefs. I urge that the government of Eritrea issue a public declaration against torture and release information concerning the health and status of Estifanos Seyoum and the others who have been detained in secret locations since their arrest in 2001.

Thank you for your attention to these important matters.

Sincerely,
[Your name and address]

-Joyce Wolf, Eritrea Coordinator

RIGHTS READERS

Human Rights Book Discussion Group



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

Next Rights Readers meeting:
Sunday, February 17, 6:30 PM
Vromans Bookstore, 695 E. Colorado Blvd
in Pasadena
(See Upcoming Events section)

“The Yacoubian Building”, by Alaa Al Aswany.

This controversial bestselling novel in the Arab world reveals the political corruption, sexual repression, religious extremism, and modern hopes of Egypt today.

All manner of flawed and fragile humanity reside in the Yacoubian Building, a once-elegant temple of Art Deco splendor now slowly decaying in the smog and bustle of downtown Cairo: a fading aristocrat and self-proclaimed "scientist of women"; a sultry, voluptuous siren; a devout young student, feeling the irresistible pull toward fundamentalism; a newspaper editor helplessly in love with a policeman; a corrupt and corpulent politician, twisting the Koran to justify his desires.

These disparate lives careen toward an explosive conclusion in Alaa Al Aswany's remarkable international bestseller. Teeming with frank sexuality and heartfelt compassion, this book is an important window on to the experience of loss and love in the Arab world.

About the Author

Alaa Al Aswany is the bestselling author of three previous books published in Arabic. He is a journalist who writes a monthly opposition newspaper column, and he makes his living as a

dentist in Cairo, Egypt, where his first office was in the Yacoubian Building. The Yacoubian Building, which caused an immediate scandal due to its sexual frankness when first published in Egypt, has been translated into nine languages and was made into a film. It had the largest budget in Egyptian cinema and has been screened at various international film festivals.

KENYA COMMENTARY

As a frequent traveler to Kenya for public health research (about 2-3 times per year since 1997), I was asked to share some thoughts with you about the current situation in that country. As many of you know, Kenya is considered a stable country with a growing economy, which has never fought a war with its neighbors. It serves as the regional base for many aid organizations as well as safari companies, and has an extremely active port (Mombasa) that serves the whole region. Yet Kenya is still extremely poor: The gross national income per capita is about \$530, only about 50% of youths enter secondary school, the HIV rate of about 6%, the life expectancy is only 48 years, and it has an estimated 2.3 million orphans (of a population of 36 million).

For 22 years, Kenya was ruled by an authoritarian leader (Daniel Arap Moi) from the Kalenjin tribe (11% of the population), who was seen as a "compromise" because he did not come from either of the two dominant tribes (Kikuyu 22% or Luo 12%). However, his leadership was marred by corruption, cronyism, and tight control over the press and assembly. Moi finally decided to step down in 2002 and put forward a successor. But Kenyans, in their first real election, voted not for Moi's hand-picked successor but for Mwai Kibaki, a Kikuyu. Prominent Luos, such as Raila Odinga, supported Kibaki in this historic election.

Kibaki made good on some of his campaign promises, such as universal primary education to 8th grade for all Kenyans, as well as freedom of press and assembly. However, he still had numerous corrupt officials in his administration. Moreover, the economy, albeit growing, was still considered to be needlessly hindered. A major contentious issue was his failure to support efforts by a Constitutional Committee to revise the constitution to limit the authority of the presidency. Kibaki backed a very strong presidency, although not a dictatorship like

Moi's. So the Constitutional Committee constantly was thwarted, causing opposition to Kibaki to grow. Also, people felt that he wasn't doing enough to improve the lot of the impoverished and of non-Kikuyu citizens.

So the populace became hungry for "change"--a relatively new concept in Kenya. People generally tolerate leaders far longer than we do in the West, in part because many people liken them to "chiefs" who are elder statesmen and should not be challenged. However, many started to think that "change" might be worthwhile if the new leader was well-known, charismatic, with some fresh ideas and a concern for the poor. Odinga fit the bill. He also was skillful in appealing to non-Luos (although not Kikuyus), particularly Luhyas who represent about 14% of the population.

On December 27th, Kenya held its election. The turn-out was massive. Every adult I know voted. Polls of voters leading up to the election showed that Odinga had a lead of about 3-4% over Kibaki, which was very significant considering Kenyans' predilections (in the past) to support traditional figures.

Unfortunately, indications exist that both Odinga and Kibaki engaged in some vote rigging, but that Kibaki's was more serious and gave him the presidency. Since the vote in Kenya is a "head count", Odinga supporters may have stuffed the ballot boxes in some Luo areas. But it looks like Kibaki supporters were much more brazen: actually changing the final counts on the tally sheets for some districts. This is why the European Union, the US, Kenya's neighbors (Tanzania and Uganda) and other Western observers declared the final outcome as unfair. According to the AP, thirteen donors, including the European Union and the United States, have now threatened to withdraw direct aid to the government if its commitment to "good governance, democracy, the rule of law and human rights" weakens.

Kibaki has been resistant to a hand count of ballots. In fact, we now know that he and his supporters put pressure on the Kenya Election Commission to declare him as the victor only two days after the election, on December 29th. In less than 30 minutes after the declaration, Kibaki was sworn in for a second 5-year term, even though the swearing-in occurred on a Saturday night with almost no one in attendance.

This absolutely enraged Odinga supporters and his party, the ODM (Orange Democratic Movement). They felt that the election had been stolen from them and that they would now have to endure another 5 years of Kibaki, which they found intolerable. Odinga urged his supporters to take to the streets in protest, even though the government declared this unlawful.

As we all know, if people are not allowed to protest peacefully, this can lead to violence. Angry members of the Luo and supporting tribes started to attack innocent Kikuyus, and in one horrific case burned about 40 Kikuyus in a church where they had gone for refuge. Others did take to the streets, only to be met by soldiers and policemen with live ammunition. At last count, 600 Kenyans have died (about 500 at the hands of police/army) and another 250,000 (largely Kikuyu) have fled their homes.

Odinga's party has the majority now in Parliament, which will ultimately hamstring Kibaki. But Kibaki will not back down from his position, except to offer some "power-sharing" which Odinga derides, since he believes that he is the rightful president. Various prominent individuals, such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, have been trying to mediate. However, until either Kibaki concedes or Odinga agrees to a power-sharing, there is likely to be a stand-off. And more people, yearning for justice and fair elections, will be protesting or attacking others who they resent. A very sad situation for all concerned.

At the same time, I do see a few hopeful signs in this. While the tribal clashes are clearly disturbing, it is noteworthy that Kenyans now take elections very seriously and consider them important in effecting change in government policy. Most are willing to vote for someone not of their tribe (recall that the Luos are only 13% of the population). They are not passively going to accept the results of an unfair election (unlike many Americans in 2000). The unfettered press has been reporting 'round the clock and Kenyans have been glued to the TV, radio and newspapers. Police attacks on protesting civilians are being widely condemned and challenged. It is very possible that Kenya's human rights record and organizations will be strengthened after this period has passed.

So let us all hope for a fair resolution of the political crisis: either with a hand count of the

ballots (which we never obtained in Florida) or possibly a new election (which is very costly).

And let us also support--in any way we can-- efforts over the coming months to rebuild friendship, love, trust and caring between Kikuyus and other tribes (especially Luos, Luhyas and Kalinjins).

Sincerely,
Paula Tavrow

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL USA PRESS RELEASE ON VIOLENCE IN KENYA

January 18, 2008

Amnesty International Condemns Lethal Force by Police in Kenya; Death Toll in Protests Rises to 12

(New York)--Amnesty International today condemned the reckless and excessive use of lethal force by Kenyan police, including firing live ammunition into crowds, as reports emerged that police killed at least 12 people, including a 13-year-old boy, during protests called by the opposition Orange Democratic Movement (ODM).

"We recognize that the Kenyan police are trying to contain what in some cases have been violent protests in Kenya. However, by firing live ammunition into crowds the police have far exceeded what is acceptable use of force. The firing of live ammunition into crowds can not be justified," said Erwin van der Borgh, director of Amnesty International's Africa Program. In one incident, captured on video by a local television station, an unarmed protestor in Kisumu was shot at close range by a Kenyan police officer, who then kicked the protestor as he lay wounded on the ground. The man reportedly died later from the bullet wound.

In a number of other incidents, protestors and bystanders in Kibera, in Nairobi, were reported to have been shot by police preventing residents from travelling to the city center for the mass protest rally called by the opposition. Kibera, inhabited by many opposition party supporters, has been the site of considerable post-election violence.

ACTION FOR PAKISTANI SUPREME COURT JUSTICES

Background on Action for Pakistani Supreme Court Justices

On December 27, 2007, Pakistan's former Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, was assassinated while leaving an election rally in Rawalpindi. The presumed gunman and at least 20 others were killed moments later in an apparent suicide bombing. She had survived a similar attempt on her life in October, shortly after returning to the country after an extended period of exile. At the time of her death, she was campaigning for a national election scheduled for January 8, 2008. Amnesty International condemns in the strongest possible terms the murder of Benazir Bhutto, and any other targets of political violence.

Unfortunately, Ms. Bhutto's assassination is but the most recent incident marking a steady deterioration in Pakistan's political stability. On November 3, 2007, a State of Emergency was declared and much of the Constitution was suspended. Within hours, the arrests began. Hundreds of lawyers, human rights activists, and other perceived opponents of General Pervez Musharaff's government were detained under provisions allowing detention without charge or trial. Courts were expressly prohibited against issuing any order against the President, Prime Minister or any person exercising powers under their authority. Lawyers opposing these measures were arrested en masse, and a number of Supreme Court and Provincial High Court justices were suspended and placed under house arrest for refusing to take an oath to uphold the new Provisional Constitution Order. Human rights activists were also targeted and imprisoned, and peaceful demonstrations met with violence. All private local and international news broadcasts were suspended, and new laws impose heavy restrictions on all forms of media.

This crisis has occurred amidst longstanding concerns about human rights in Pakistan, including patterns of arbitrary detention, torture in custody, imposition of the death penalty, and abuses committed during the course of the "War on Terror." Vulnerable and marginalized groups, including women and religious minorities, have faced particular threats. As a major recipient of US military aid, Amnesty International USA has also opposed American military assistance that may contribute to these human rights violations.

"The government must immediately send clear instructions to the police to stop this excessive use of force, conduct an independent and impartial inquiry into the police killings, and prosecute any police officers who have used excessive force against protesters," said van der Borght.

Amnesty International is also concerned over reports that police have harassed journalists covering the protests, and that human rights defenders protesting the use of excessive force by Kenyan security forces have been arrested.

"The Kenyan government must respect the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly throughout Kenya," said van der Borght. "It is only through the respect for human rights that the country will be able to resolve the political crisis it is now facing."

"U.S. government officials--along with other key allies of Kenya--must use their considerable influence with Kenyan government and party leaders and support regional initiatives to prevent further devastating violations of human rights across the country," added Lynn Fredriksson, Amnesty International USA's advocacy director for Africa.

Amnesty International has called on both Kenyan government and opposition party leaders to refrain from behavior that could be perceived as condoning violence by their supporters against rivals.

Background information on Kenya situation from the AIUSA website:

Since December 30, 2007, more than 600 people are reported to have been killed and thousands injured during violence that erupted following the announcement of disputed election results. More than 250,000 have been internally displaced. Under the U.N. Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials and the U.N. Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, police may use force only when strictly necessary, and only to the extent required for the performance of their duty. Firearms should not be used except to defend people against the imminent threat of death or serious injury or to prevent a grave threat to life, and only when less extreme means are insufficient. Intentional lethal force should not be used except when strictly unavoidable.

While many emergency rule provisions have been lifted and many of those imprisoned have been released, others remain under detention and the legal system has been purged of independent judges and lawyers. A return to full rule of law is essential to restoring democracy, human rights, and stability in Pakistan.

Here's a sample letter to President Bush:

President Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Bush,

The assassination of Pakistan's former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto was devastating and further evidence that the situation continues to deteriorate in Pakistan. I urge you to publicly call on General Pervez Musharraf to immediately restore the constitution and rule of law, and to release and reinstate Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry and the other justices of the Supreme Court. This measure is critical to ensuring the independence of Pakistan's judiciary and maintaining stability and basic human rights in the country. Without an independent judiciary, any investigation into the assassination of Bhutto may lack credibility.

Although General Musharraf has sought to justify the suspension of the constitution as a response to terrorism and extremism, martial law, from the start, has constituted an attack on the independence of the judiciary and on civil society. As you know, President Musharraf has purged the Supreme Court of independent-minded judges. The arrests have targeted moderate and democratic critics of his rule: human rights activists, lawyers, and members of opposition political parties. It is critical for the United States government to condemn these serious human rights violations, and for senior U.S. officials to express these concerns clearly and forcefully. Without a lifting of the emergency and a return to the rule of law it is not possible for the country to proceed to free and fair elections which General Musharraf has indicated he will hold in early January.

The human rights community is in full support of effective and appropriate multilateral counterterrorism measures. However, even tacit support for this imposition of martial law and the

sacking and imprisoning of justices in Pakistan can be expected to set back efforts to address terrorism in that country and throughout the region.

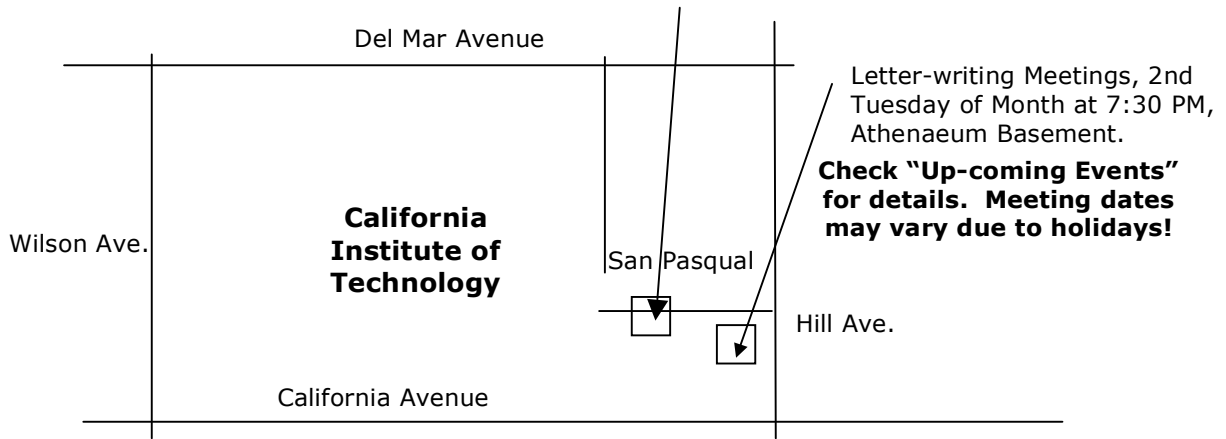
For these reasons, I urge you to publicly call on General Musharraf to release and reinstate Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry and the other justices in the Supreme Court. It is our duty to advocate the independence of the judiciary and the basic human rights of the Pakistani people- and do everything we can to bring stability back to the country.

Thank you for your attention on this matter.

Sincerely,
(your name and address)

LETTER COUNT	
Urgent Actions	30
Total:	30
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.