

Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XV Number 11, November/December 2008

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, December 4, 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.

Saturday, December 13, 8 AM to 2 PM. Letter writing marathon at Café Culture, 1359 N. Altadena Dr., Pasadena, 91107, 626-398-8654. **Note: this meeting replaces our usual letter writing meeting on Dec. 9th.**

Sunday, December 21, 6:30 PM. Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion Group.

Note: this month's meeting will be held at a member's residence, 187 S. Catalina, Unit 2. Call 626-795-1785 or email lwkamp@gmail.com for directions. Bring your favorite holiday treat.

We are reading "The Successor: A Novel" by Ismail Kadare.

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi everyone,

Hope you all are having a restful holiday weekend and didn't eat too much turkey and pie yesterday!

The Amnesty International Western Regional Conference was held at the Pasadena Hilton Nov 7-9. Group 22 members Joyce, Christina, Marie-Helene, Lucas, Robert, Stevi, and Laura and her husband attended. See Laura's report later in this newsletter. It sounds like it was really great! Unfortunately, yours truly was at home Friday and Saturday (I did manage to rouse myself to drop by briefly Sunday am) in bed with viral gastroenteritis (the "stomach flu"). But I was cheered to hear that several of our fund raising items had sold, including one of the denim grocery bags I had made as well as several of the necklaces made by the group!

CSUN student Esha Momeni, an Iranian-American, was imprisoned in Iran in October 2008 and has been recently released but is still in Iran. Thanks to Azadeh for alerting us to this situation. A rally was held on her behalf at CSUN, and Amnesty and other human rights groups wrote letters. There is an update in this newsletter

on the case. See for-asha.blogspot.com for latest updates.

Please note time and date changes of our monthly meetings. (See upcoming event section) due to holiday schedules.

Hope to see you at one of our meetings soon!

Con cariño,

Kathy

REPORT FROM WESTERN REGIONAL CONFERENCE

"Torture, Terror, and the American Way": Workshop at Amnesty International's 2008 Western Regional Conference, Nov. 8, 2008

By Laura G. Brown

It certainly was grand to hear President-elect Obama say on 60 Minutes: "We don't torture," and to add that he wants to close Guantanamo. "Yay!" I cheered, watching the Nov. 16 Steve Kroft interview. "Alright!" added my husband and daughter (she started an AI chapter at her high school, with Group 22's help.)

Is a new era for human rights in the making? These are two of Amnesty International's top priorities for the new U.S. president, as delineated in its "First 100 Days" petition—a checklist of actions AI is asking Mr. Obama to take during his first 100 days in office. If you haven't signed it yet, download the postcard at: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR/51/132/2008/en>

Panelist Michael Heflin focused on the letter during the "Torture, Terror, and the American Way" workshop at the Pasadena Hilton this month. Other presenters included Banafsheh Akhlaghi, Western Regional Director, and Dalia Hashad, Director, USA Domestic Human Rights Program. Stevi, Marie-Helene, Joyce, Robert, Christina, and Ted Brown were at the conference representing Group 22. (Coordinators Kathy and Lucas were able to attend only the Sunday morning session.)

Ms. Hashad opened the workshop passionately and personally, relating how she represented people from "suspect" groups during government questioning after 9-11. She told about an 18-year-old boy being questioned by the FBI, and being asked: "Do you know Osama bin Laden?" She

described a cold afternoon in New York, standing with the youth outside the FBI building after the interrogation. The youth confided in her that, since 9-11, he'd felt self-conscious on the subway because of his foreign face and long beard. He didn't want to make people frightened or uncomfortable, "so I pretend to be asleep," he told his counsel, Ms. Hashad. "Dalia, I'm so tired of pretending to be asleep," he added.

Ms. Akhlaghi focused on the Patriot Act and similar abuses of the Bill of Rights, and how they are affecting people in the U.S.—particularly Muslims.

Michael Heflin urged all attendees and interested persons to sign the "First 100 Days" letter to the Obama administration.

Not billed as a panelist, but nonetheless giving a compelling speech, was a practicing psychotherapist who has made it his mission to expose those who have perverted the profession to aid in physical and psychological torture at Guantanamo and elsewhere. He cited John Yu, author of the memo that Bush officials used to justify crimes against detainees, as working as a professor at the University of California, Berkeley. He suggested putting pressure on alumni associations to protest the employment of Yu and others who advocate and use torture. "Contact them and say: 'I won't be contributing any money while you employ John Yu,'" he said. An audience member, who said he was a professor at California State University, Los Angeles, added that students could simply refuse to sign up for Yu's classes, or the classes of other academics like him.

With a new administration coming on board, one which may be more inclined to respect basic human rights, the conference seemed infused with energy and hope. There was a preponderance of young people, which indicates Amnesty is wisely growing its base. If you missed this regional conference, make it a point to go next year. Exciting things are happening right in our own backyard!

ERITREA UPDATE

By Joyce Wolf

One of the resolutions submitted to the recent AI Western Regional Conference carried the title "The New Forgotten Prisoners". The sponsor of this resolution was Samson Tu from Group 19 in Palo Alto. Group 19 works very actively for their adopted Prisoner of Conscience, an Eritrea journalist who was arrested in the same

September 2001 crackdown as Estifanos Seyoum, our group's adopted POC. The title alludes to AI founder Peter Benenson's 1961 newspaper article "The Forgotten Prisoners".

Many AI groups with Eritrea POCs have been deeply concerned and unhappy about AI's decision to close nearly all the Eritrea individual case files. This decision is not limited to Eritrea cases, but reflects AI's current strategic priorities. Samson's resolution instructs the AIUSA Board to make various specific requests to the AI Executive Committee regarding restoration of AI's historical emphasis on individual POCs. With minor changes to wording, the resolution passed both the Working Party and the Voting Plenary Session by near-unanimous votes. We'll see what happens at the AIUSA annual meeting in March and then at the International Council Meeting later in the summer.

Group 22 continues to work for Estifanos and other Eritrea POCs. (Background information about Estifanos is available on the [Group 22 website](#).) Patriarch Abune Antonios of Eritrea has been selected as one of the AIUSA 2008 Write-a-thon cases. Visit amnestyusa.org/writeathon and click on Writeathon Cases Now Available, or join Group 22 in our letter writing event on Dec. 13. When you write to President Issayas about the Patriarch, you can also mention Estifanos!

RIGHTS READERS

Human Rights Book Discussion Group

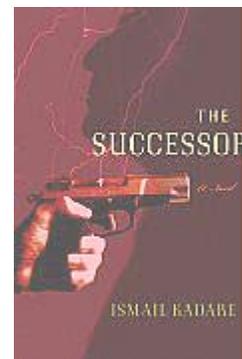
Keep up with Rights Readers at
<http://rightsreaders.blogspot.com>

Next Rights Readers meeting:

Sunday, December 21, 6:30 PM
187 S. Catalina, Unit 2. 626-795-1785

"The Successor: A Novel"

By Ismail Kadare



Publisher Comments:

A powerful political novel based on the sudden, mysterious death of the man who had been handpicked to succeed the hated Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha.

Did he commit suicide or was he murdered? That is the burning question. The man who died by his own hand, or another's, was Mehmet Shehu, the presumed heir to the ailing dictator, Enver Hoxha. So sure was the world that he was next in line, he was known as The Successor. And then, shortly before he was to assume power, he was found dead.

The Successor is simultaneously a mystery novel, a historical novel — based on actual events and buttressed by the author's private conversations with the son of the real-life Mehmet Shehu — and a psychological novel (How do you live when nothing is sure?). Vintage Kadare, *The Successor* seamlessly blends dream and reality, legendary past, and contemporary history.

Author Biography



Ismail Kadare 1936-, Albanian novelist and poet, widely regarded as his country's most important contemporary writer, b. Gjirokastër, studied Univ. of Tiranë, Gorky Institute of World Literature, Moscow. He began as a journalist, and also wrote poetry, which was first published in the 1950s. During the following decade he increasingly turned to prose and was celebrated in his homeland after the publication of his first novel, *The General of the Dead Army* (1963, tr. 1972), about an Italian general who must retrieve his soldiers' bodies from Albania after World War II. Kadare at first supported Communist dictator Enver Hoxha, but after the mid-1970s he became increasingly critical of the regime and several of his books were banned. After he sought political asylum in France and moved (1990) to Paris, his books became more widely known internationally. Kadare's fiction concerns Albanian history, culture, folklore, and politics

and often employs the storytelling techniques of allegory and fable. His many novels include *The Castle* (1970, tr. 1974), *Chronicle in Stone* (1971, tr. 1987), *The Three-Arched Bridge* (1978, tr. 1991), *The Palace of Dreams* (1981, tr. 1993), *The Concert* (1988, tr. 1994), *The Pyramid* (1991, tr. 1996), *Spring Flowers, Spring Frost* (2001, tr. 2002), and *The Successor* (2003, tr. 2005). In 2005 Kadare was awarded the first Man Booker International Prize.

ESHA MOMENI UPDATE

Esha had a flight back to Los Angeles scheduled on November 21, 2008. Although the officials had given her a glimpse of hope that she would be able to use her ticket, she did not receive her passport and therefore was not able to leave the country. Friends were looking forward to spending Thanksgiving with her. "We're all spending time with friends and family this week and we were hoping we'd be giving thanks for having Esha back in L.A.," CSUN mass communication graduate student Vanessa Mora said in a statement sent to the press.

(From for-asha.blogspot.com)

Amnesty: Iran frees American-born grad student, CSUN's Esha Momeni

(November 11, 2008)

CNN) — Iranian authorities have released an American-born graduate student on bail after holding her in prison for nearly a month, an Amnesty International spokeswoman said Tuesday.

Esha Momeni, 28, had been working on a project on the women's movement in Iran when she was arrested October 15 for an alleged traffic violation, according to California State University-Northridge and Change For Equality, an Iranian women's movement. She had been held in solitary confinement in Tehran's notorious Evin Prison, Change For Equality said.

"We're really happy she's been released on bail," Elise Auerbach of Amnesty International said Tuesday. She said she learned of Momeni's release Monday through Amnesty's researchers in London, England, and from Momeni's family and friends.

Melissa Wall, a journalism professor at the university and an academic adviser to Momeni, confirmed the young woman's release in an e-mail. Wall said they were waiting to see what will "happen next in terms of charges or conditions or sentencing." The university will hold a rally and vigil Wednesday calling for Momeni's return to California, she said. The event had been planned before Momeni's release.

Auerbach, the Iran specialist for Amnesty International USA, said she did not know the exact bail amount, only that Momeni's parents had handed over the deed to their home in Iran in return for their daughter's release. "This is a real problem for her family because the state of their home is in doubt," Auerbach said, adding that if the Iranian government determines Momeni has violated the bail conditions, it can take her family's home. Auerbach said Momeni has not been charged, "but there is some indication that they're planning on charging her."

Tehran's deputy general prosecutor, Hasan Hadad, has "deliberately leaked" to the state-run media his intentions to charge Momeni with propaganda against the state, Auerbach said. The Iranian judiciary has not commented on Momeni's release.

A lot of people have faced that charge," Auerbach said. "It's kind of a vague, loosely worded charge that's kind of convenient. They can use it against whomever they want basically."

Auerbach said Momeni is not the only woman involved with Change for Equality who has been jailed recently; at least three women who worked with the group are being detained, she said. Ronak Safarzadeh was arrested in October 2007 and charged with enmity with God, a charge akin to treason, and is being held in Sanandaj Prison; Hana Abdi, 21, recently was sentenced to 18 months at Sanandaj for gathering and colluding to commit a crime against national security; and Zeynab Beyezidi, 26, was sentenced in August to four years at Mahabad Central Prison for belonging to an illegal group, the Human Rights Organization of Kurdistan, Auerbach said.

As of Tuesday morning, the Iranian government had not returned Momeni's passport and travel papers, Auerbach said, adding that "there is a pattern that after people are released from detention they are still kept in Iran."

Among the examples, Auerbach said, are Haleh Esfandiari, an Iranian-American scholar with the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, and Mehrnoushe Solouki, a French-Iranian journalism student at the University of Quebec. Esfandiari,

67, was arrested in 2007 while visiting her ailing mother in Iran. She was charged with harming national security and held for 105 days in Evin Prison. She was released August 21, 2007, after her mother posted \$330,000 bail, but did not leave Iran until September 2, 2007. Solouki was arrested in February 2007 and accused of "trying to make a propaganda film," according to Reporters Without Borders. She was released from Evin Prison the following month after her parents' house was offered as bail, but Solouki was not allowed to leave Iran until January, the group reported.

Momeni's father, Gholamreza Momeni, initially condemned his daughter's arrest, saying that even if she confessed to a crime, "anything my daughter may say in solitary confinement is worthless," according to roozonline.com, a news Web site run by exiled Iranian journalists.

The father gave a different account to the state-run Islamic Republic News Agency last week, however, and said he was angry that his daughter had engaged in "illegal activities." "I got so angry that I and her mother decided not visit her," he told IRNA on Friday. "I deny all that has been attributed to me by Web sites and believe them to be the personal interpretations of the reporters."

He added, "As an Iranian, I love my country and do not wish any harm to the Islamic republic."

Hadi Ghaemi, coordinator for the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, said it was not clear under what circumstances Momeni's father talked to IRNA, but the remarks seem "very suspect." "It really doesn't make any sense for him to make a verdict on his daughter's guilt," Ghaemi said Saturday, the day after the IRNA report was published. CNN could not reach Gholamreza Momeni for comment Tuesday.

Since Momeni's arrest became public, Amnesty International, other human rights organizations and her university have called for her immediate release.

"We have concern for this young person because, like many young people, she is a dreamer, she's a thinker, she's a researcher," university Provost Harry Hellenbrand said last month. Momeni "has the best interests of young people and women in her mind," he said.

The Los Angeles-born graduate student had been filming footage for a project on the women's rights movement, and interviewing volunteers for the One Million Signature campaign, launched in 2006 by Change for Equality. The campaign seeks to collect signatures on a petition demanding that

Iran rewrite its constitution to recognize men and women as equal.

According to the CSU-Northridge newspaper, the Daily Sundial, fellow graduate student Peyman Malaz said Momeni was "determined to better the lives of Iranian citizens."

Nayereh Tohidi, chairwoman of the school's gender and women's studies department, told the paper she, too, was involved in the campaign and had advised Momeni on her work. "She has not been a part of any political parties, any clandestine movements," Tohidi said. "She has done nothing wrong."

Ghaemi said he believes Tehran wants to stifle the women's rights movement, and Momeni's arrest was meant to intimidate like-minded scholars or activists. "We see here detention as a method of pressuring that movement on a broader scale," he said. "The government would very much like to quiet these women."

CNN's Elliott C. McLaughlin contributed to this report. All AboutIran • Amnesty International USA • Publication: CNN International

DEATH PENALTY UPDATES

UN reinforces call to end executions

20 November 2008

A record number of countries have given their support to the campaign to end capital punishment.

On Thursday, a large majority of states from all regions adopted a second United Nations resolution calling for a moratorium on the use of the death penalty.

Amnesty International has welcomed the breakthrough for the resolution, which was adopted in the UN General Assembly (Third Committee). The number of co-sponsors has risen to 89, two more than last year.

The increased support for this resolution is yet further evidence of the worldwide trend towards the abolition of the death penalty.

105 countries voted in favour of the draft resolution, 48 voted against and 31 abstained. A range of amendments proposed by a small minority of pro-death penalty countries were overwhelmingly defeated.

"We urge all states that still carry out executions to take immediate steps to implement the resolution and establish a moratorium on

executions," says Amnesty International's Yvonne Terlingen,

137 countries have abolished the death penalty in law or practice, as of November 2008. During 2007, at least 1,252 people were executed in 24 countries. At least 3,347 people were sentenced to death in 51 countries.

The decrease in countries carrying out executions is dramatic. In 1989, executions were carried out in 100 states. In 2007, Amnesty International recorded executions in 24 countries.

The draft resolution adopted on Thursday by the Third Committee of the General Assembly has still to be adopted by the General Assembly sitting in plenary in December.

INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT, 1 EASTON STREET, LONDON WC1X 0DW, UNITED KINGDOM

Source:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/good-news/un-reinforces-call-end-executions-20081120>

Document - USA: Maryland Commission on Capital Punishment votes for abolition

13 November 2008

AI Index: AMR 51/139/2008

On 12 November 2008, by a vote of 13 to 7, the Maryland Commission on Capital Punishment voted to recommend abolition of the state's death penalty. The Commission's final report on its findings and recommendations is due to go to the Maryland legislature on or before 15 December 2008.

The Commission was established under an Act signed into law by Governor Martin O'Malley on 13 May 2008. Its mandate was to study the following areas in relation to the capital justice system in Maryland:

- Racial disparities;
- Jurisdictional disparities;
- Socio-economic disparities;
- A comparison of the costs associated with death sentences and the costs associated with sentences of life imprisonment without the possibility of parole;
- A comparison of the effects of prolonged court cases involving capital punishment and

those involving life imprisonment without the possibility of parole;

- The risk of innocent people being executed;
- The impact of DNA evidence in assuring the fairness and accuracy of capital cases.

The commission is chaired by former US Attorney General Benjamin Civiletti, and includes two members of the Maryland Senate and two of the lower House of Delegates, as well as a former judge, members of the police and prison authorities, a state prosecutor and a public defender, relatives of murder victims, religious leaders, a former Maryland death row prisoner who was later exonerated, and individuals representing the general public.

The commission held a series of public hearings in July, August and September 2008 at which it heard testimony from an array of expert and other witnesses.

In response to the Commission's vote in favour of abolition, Chairperson Civiletti is quoted in the Maryland press as saying that "I would hope the recommendation of the commission... would have some persuasive merit before the legislature." The vote, he said, reflected the majority's view that "the capital punishment system as it is administered and exists in Maryland doesn't really work", and is "arbitrary and capricious."

Amnesty International welcomes the Commission's vote in favour of abolition and looks forward to this recommendation becoming a reality in Maryland. The organization opposes the death penalty in all cases, unconditionally. To end the death penalty is to abandon a destructive, diversionary and divisive public policy that is not consistent with widely held values. It not only runs the risk of irrevocable error, it is also costly, to the public purse as well as in social and psychological terms. It has not been proved to have a special deterrent effect. It tends to be applied in a discriminatory way, on grounds of race and class. It denies the possibility of reconciliation and rehabilitation. It promotes simplistic responses to complex human problems, rather than pursuing explanations that could inform positive strategies. It diverts resources that could be better used to work against violent crime and assist those affected by it. It is an affront to human dignity.

Today, some 137 countries are abolitionist in law or practice. In 2007, the United Nations General Assembly called for a worldwide moratorium on executions and for retentionist countries to work

towards abolition. The Maryland Commission's recommendation follows the recommendation for abolition made by a special commission in New Jersey in 2007. Among other things, the New Jersey commission concluded that there was no compelling evidence that the state death penalty rationally served a legitimate purpose; that there was increasing evidence that the death penalty is inconsistent with evolving standards of decency; that abolition would eliminate the risk of disproportionality in capital sentencing; and that the state's interest in executing a small number of people guilty of murder did not justify the risk of making an irreversible mistake. The state legislature responded by passing an abolitionist bill, which was signed into law by the New Jersey governor in December 2007.

Today, 14 states in the USA plus the District of Columbia are abolitionist. Thirty eight jurisdictions – 36 states, the federal government and the US military – retain the death penalty. Since the USA resumed executions in 1977 after nearly a decade without them, there have been 1,131 executions nationwide. A few states account for the majority of executions. Texas alone has put 421 prisoners to death. So far this year there have been 32 executions in the USA, half of them in Texas.

Maryland has carried out five executions since 1977. The last execution in Maryland was in December 2005.

INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT, 1 EASTON STREET, LONDON WC1X 0DW, UNITED KINGDOM

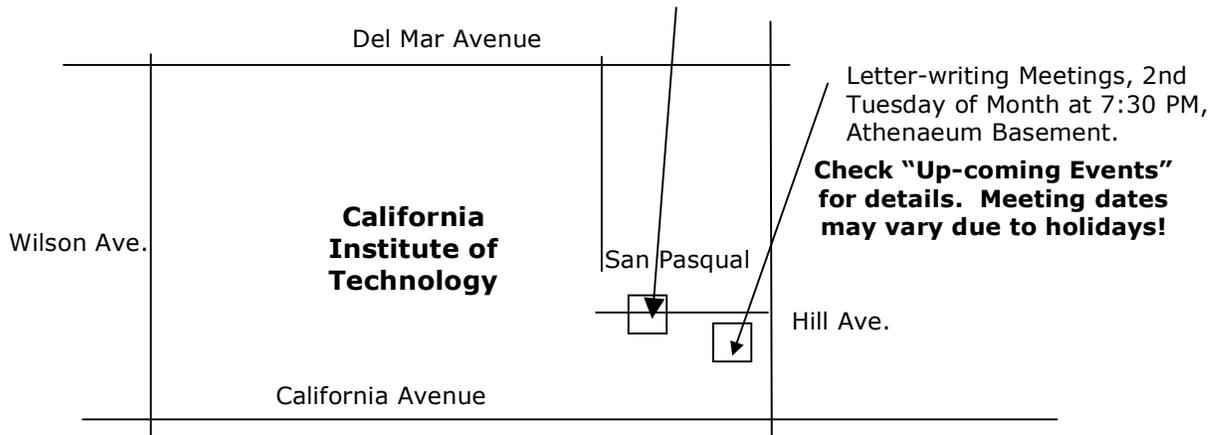
Source:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR51/139/2008/en/1eb584ef-b1a7-11dd-86b0-2b2f60629879/amr511392008en.html>

GROUP 22 MONTHLY LETTER COUNT

DP	2
UAs	12
Total:	14
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.