

# Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XVII Number 4, April 2009

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Thursday, April 23, 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.

**Sunday, May 3, Monthly Movie Night.** Time and location TBD.

**Tuesday May 12, 7:30 PM. Note change of venue.** Letter writing meeting at Zephyr coffee house, 2419 E. Colorado Blvd, Pasadena. 626-793-7330. This informal gathering is a great way for newcomers to get acquainted with Amnesty.

**Sunday, May 17, 6:30 PM.** *Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion Group.* Vroman's Book Bookstore, 695 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena. This month we read "Dreams and Shadows – the Future of the Middle East" by Robin Wright.

## COORDINATOR'S CORNER

It's a beautiful day today and I sit here thinking about torture! Actually, I'm counting my blessings...

Members of Group 22 and others recently visited the offices of Representative Adam Schiff, Senators Boxer and Feinstein to discuss AI's concerns and recommendations regarding torture and accountability for same. Read Larry's summary of these visits in this newsletter. Following the summary there is a sample letter to send to your Congressperson demanding an independent investigation into torture practices/policies and criminal prosecution if appropriate. The letter also asks the member of Congress to sign a letter asking the Obama Administration to release all documents related to torture from the previous Bush administration. You can also participate in this action online at:

<http://takeaction.amnestyusa.org/siteapps/advocacy/ActionItem.aspx?c=jhKPIXPCIoE&b=2590179&aid=12150&ICID=T0904A01&tr=y&auid=4756570>

Group 22 had a very successful letter writing meeting at a new location last week, the Zephyr Café in East Pasadena. Quite a crowded place! Be sure to check your email to see if the next letter writing will be at this new location!

<http://www.cco.caltech.edu/~aigp22>

Con cariño,  
Kathy

## UPDATE FROM LARRY ROMANS VISITS TO CONGRESSMEN/WOMEN

### U.S. - Calling for accountability for detainee abuse

Amnesty International has expressed great concern about U.S. policies and actions related to detentions, treatment (including torture) and transfer of detainees after 9/11, with its research and recommendations. Early this month, AIUSA launched an initiative to organize local delegations of members to visit their Senators and Representatives. The focused aim was to seek support for a non-partisan independent commission of distinguished Americans to examine and provide a comprehensive report on these policies and actions, and to make further recommendations for future policy in this area.

Local AI member Vincent de Stefano is leading these efforts in the Los Angeles area, with several members of the Pasadena group participating. A delegation including Yuny Parada and Robert Ward from our group (as well several others including Vincent) visited Adam Schiff's office on April 7. Yuny and Larry Romans and others visited Senator Barbara Boxer's office also on April 7, and Yuny and others visited Diane Feinstein's office on April 8.

In each case, we had a meeting with a designated staff member, with the opportunity to present AI's concerns and suggestions. Vincent has been very well prepared, and in his role did most of the talking. We encountered various levels of knowledge and preparation by the staff members, but we invariably found a receptive ear and a commitment to follow up with the member of Congress. The Obama administration has taken recent actions directly relating to these issues, releasing the previous administration's documents authorizing torture and starting to formulate an approach of effective impunity for intelligence personnel implementing the policies. With the shifting political landscape, it is especially important to maintain pressure on our representatives to not lose sight of the need for justice and accountability in these important matters.

Please contact the group if you are interested in participating in this on-going process. A visit is planned with representative Xavier Bercerra's office for the morning of Thursday, April 23 (the day of our monthly meeting). Even if you aren't in his congressional district, (most of us are

probably in Schiff's) it would still be appropriate to attend. There are also other visits under consideration, and follow-up work and possible further visits to the members of Congress already visited.

## **BACKGROUND INFO**

The recent release of memos has made all the more clear what we had previously heard about the last administration's torture policies. Forced nudity. Slamming detainees into walls. Forced sleep deprivation for days of shackled prisoners, standing in diapers in excruciating pain and filth. Although Attorney General Holder, on April 16, suggested that the Obama administration would not prosecute intelligence agents who carried out interrogations following legal advice, both those who authored the policy and those who executed it must be held accountable. Press your representatives to help establish or support a non-partisan independent commission and urge them to help expose and prosecute those responsible for abuses.

### **Prosecute Torturers**

The United States government has authorized and carried out policies since September 11, 2001 that have led to the systematic abuse of human rights. Abuses include torture, arbitrary detention, secret movement of prisoners, widespread domestic surveillance and unlawful attacks on civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan. In defending those actions, government and military officials have reinterpreted and ignored applicable legal standards, and shielded themselves from responsibility for their actions.

The U.S. government is required by international law to respect and ensure human rights, to thoroughly investigate every violation of those rights, and to bring perpetrators to justice, no matter their level of office or former level of office. Victims of human rights violations have the right under international law to access to remedy and reparation. In addition, there is a collective and individual right to the truth about violations. To ensure that abuses cease, to restore the rule of law and to rescue U.S. credibility as a rights-respecting nation, the United States must create a culture of accountability for the past. An independent commission of inquiry, along with prosecutions of crimes and remedy for victims, is a crucial component of accountability.

## **SAMPLE LETTER:**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

As your constituent, I would like you to help establish or support a non-partisan, independent commission of distinguished Americans to examine, and provide a comprehensive report on, policies and actions related to the detention, treatment, and transfer of detainees after 9/11 and the consequences of those actions, and to make recommendations for future policy in this area.

As you know, the government has a legal obligation to prosecute grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions. I ask that you help establish this commission of inquiry to live up to obligations and to help hold perpetrators of abuse accountable. Moreover, I ask that you ask Attorney General Eric Holder to launch a criminal investigation into abuses and hold those responsible for violations accountable. Although Attorney General Holder, on April 16, suggested that the Obama administration would not prosecute intelligence agents who carried out interrogations following legal advice, both those who authored the policy and those who executed it must be held accountable.

Finally, I would like you to introduce or support a Congressional sign-on letter calling on the Administration to immediately produce and publish remaining documents and other materials that argued for, documented, and established the basis for coercive interrogation, detainee treatment and policy in the last administration. It is important that we expose the truth about the abuses that were committed in our name and hold the guilty responsible so that these abuses do not happen again. Please let me know of your actions to hold abusers accountable.

Sincerely,  
Your name and address

## **ERITREA UPDATE**

by Joyce Wolf

On April 16, Human Rights Watch published a 95-page report on human rights violations in Eritrea. Group 22 has worked for several years on

the case of Eritrean prisoner of conscience Estifanos Seyoum, so we might expect to be somewhat familiar with the situation. The HRW report reveals that conditions are even more dire than we knew. Visit [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org) for a summary of the report and a link to the full document.

"Eritrea's government is turning the country into a giant prison," said Georgette Gagnon, Africa director at Human Rights Watch. The report states, "There is no freedom of speech, no freedom of movement, no freedom of worship, and much of the adult male and female population is conscripted into indefinite national service where they receive a token wage. Dissent is not tolerated. Any criticism or questioning of government policy is ruthlessly punished. Detention, torture and forced labour await anyone who disagrees with the government, anyone who attempts to avoid military service or flee the country without permission, and anyone found practising or suspected of practising faiths the government does not sanction."

Eritreans who have fled the country are still subject to oppression because the government will exact retribution on their family members who remain. The report quotes an officer formerly responsible for rounding up deserters from the national service: "If one of the men escapes, you have to go to his home and find him. If you don't find him you have to capture his family and take them to prison. ... If you disappear inside Eritrea then the family is put in prison for some time and often then the child will return. If you cross the border, then [your family] pays 50,000 Nakfa [US\$3,300]."

Amnesty International's East Africa team says that Eritrea President Isayas Afewerki is notoriously stubborn and resistant to any form of criticism and that letters from AI activists will only provoke a hostile reaction and may even lead to retaliation against the individuals we are supposed to be helping. Therefore the AI strategy will now be to focus on donor countries providing assistance to Eritrea. There will also be Urgent Actions to countries who intend to deport Eritrean refugees back to Eritrea.

Our AIUSA Eritrea country specialist, Trish Hepner, plans to have some new actions available soon, possibly to US officials such as Secretary of State Clinton. May 24 is Eritrea Independence Day, and Group 22 hopes to participate in a cooperative action with other AI groups working on Eritrea as we did last year.

Samson Tu reports that he used the cases of Eritrean POCs whose files are being closed to gather support for the "New Forgotten Prisoners" resolution, which was overwhelmingly passed at the recent AIUSA AGM plenary session. He says that AIUSA Board and staff all support the request to review the POC cases facing closure, although the IS and AIUSA seem to have different philosophies toward work on individuals. Group 22 certainly doesn't want to forget Estifanos Seyoum!

## RIGHTS READERS

### Human Rights Book Discussion Group

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

**Next Rights Readers meeting:**

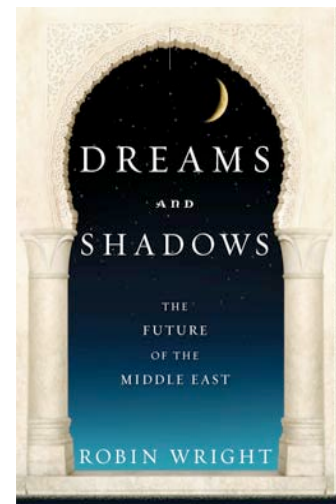
**Sunday, May 17, 6:30 PM**

**Vroman's Bookstore**

**695 E. Colorado Boulevard  
in Pasadena**

### **"Dreams and Shadows – the Future of the Middle East"**

By Robin Wright



### **New York Times Book Review:**

### **Undercurrents of Hope in a Region of Turbulence**

Published: February 28, 2008

Few American journalists are as familiar with the Middle East as Robin Wright. Having first visited

Iran in 1973, lived in Beirut in the 1980s and chronicled the region on repeated trips since then, she has a deep mix of on-the-ground knowledge, awareness of the historical background and step-back policy perspective. She wrote one of the first books on militant Islam ("Sacred Rage") and two others on Iran.

An Excerpt From 'Dreams and Shadows' (robinwright.net) Like many who follow the Middle East closely, Ms. Wright, currently a diplomatic correspondent for The Washington Post, has known its violent turmoil and numbing cruelty. She witnessed the 1979 Iranian revolution consume itself with blood. (In four months in 1981 more than 1,000 government officials were killed.) In 1983 she watched rescuers remove bodies from the American Embassy in Beirut (some of the dead had been her friends) and months later from the United States Marines barracks there. She covered the eight-year Iran-Iraq war, when hundreds of thousands were killed. She was back in Iraq in 2003 after Saddam Hussein was toppled.

But also like many who care about the region, she has been waiting impatiently for change. Having interviewed and befriended some enormously brave people there who have been pushing for liberty and democracy, Ms. Wright decided a few years ago that enough signs of progress were emerging to merit a deeper look at the phenomenon.

As she puts it early in "Dreams and Shadows": "This is a book about disparate experiments with empowerment in the world's most troubled region. My goal was to probe deep inside societies of the Middle East for the emerging ideas and players that are changing the political environment in ways that will unfold for decades to come."

And so she has done. She went to the West Bank for the 2006 Palestinian elections, spent time with liberal opponents of the government in Egypt, interviewed the key Lebanese who helped eject Syrian troops and occupiers, and profiled Moroccan feminists and democracy activists who have helped bring about new laws.

Along for the ride, readers are treated to clear and well-rendered accounts of Kefaya, the fledgling Egyptian dissident movement; the history of Iran's quest for nuclear power; the beginnings of Hezbollah; and fascinating tidbits like an early mention of the Kurds as a nation and how the Katyusha rocket, got its name. While this is an engaging tour of a complex area, the problem is

that the moment of promise that set Ms. Wright off on her trip — the Cedar Revolution in Lebanon combined with the Iraqi, Palestinian and Egyptian elections all in quick succession — has turned distinctly sour.

The spirit in the region that animated her quest three years ago has been exposed as more illusory than real. This leaves her book somewhat off key. It was supposed to help understand the future, but ends up being a series of visits with some wonderful people who remain marginalized and powerless. Instead of helping readers to see how the Middle East is evolving, Ms. Wright offers a set of portraits of failed efforts.

That said, there is much to be gained from joining her on her trip. In some ways the subsequent failures of reform lend poignancy. The section on Morocco is a good example.

Four years ago, under a new young king, Mohammed VI, Morocco set up a so-called Equity and Reconciliation Commission to expose the horrors of abuse that existed under his father's rule. Testimony was taken in public; new laws protecting human rights and women were enacted. We meet Driss Benzekri, who languished in prison for 17 years for defying the ruler at the time, King Hassan II. Later Mr. Benzekri, who died last year, was made head of a human rights group and adviser to King Mohammed. And Morocco is a less oppressive place today that it was, thanks to the new monarch.

Yet King Mohammed "is head of state," Ms. Wright writes. "He is commander in chief. He appoints the prime minister and his cabinet. Both foreign and domestic policy comes from the palace. Judges are appointed on the recommendation of the Supreme Council, which is presided over by the king. The rubber-stamp Parliament debates, but it has little power and even less oversight of government performance. The king can legislate new laws without Parliament. And he can dismiss it at will. He still has the powers of a despot."

In other words, there has been no real change in the Moroccan power structure, only greater tolerance from on high. And that could change on a whim.

Ms. Wright's last chapter is about how the Iraq war has set back reform across the region, the opposite of its stated purpose. We re-encounter Ghada Shahbender, an Egyptian from an earlier chapter, who monitors presidential and parliamentary elections. Showing a group of students around the United States last year, Ms.

Shahbender is angry but philosophical, a stand apparently shared by Ms. Wright.

"In Iraq, Bush set back democracy and freedom in the region more than any other American president," Ms. Shahbender tells her. So now that things are going nowhere, what will she do next? "Keep trying," was the reply.

#### About the Author



Robin Wright has reported from more than a 140 countries on six continents for The Washington Post, The Los Angeles Times, The Sunday Times of London, CBS News and The Christian Science Monitor. She has also written for The New Yorker, The Atlantic Monthly, Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy, The New York Times, The International Herald Tribune and others.

Her foreign tours include the Middle East, Europe, Africa, and several years as a roving foreign correspondent. She has covered a dozen wars and several revolutions. She most recently covered U.S. foreign policy for The Washington Post.

Among several awards, Wright received the U.N. Correspondents Gold Medal, the National Magazine Award for reportage from Iran in The New Yorker, and the Overseas Press Club Award for "best reporting in any medium requiring exceptional courage and initiative" for coverage of African wars. She was named journalist of the year by the American Academy of Diplomacy, and won the National Press Club Award and the Weintal Prize for diplomatic reporting. Wright has also been the recipient of a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation grant.

As an author, Ms. Wright has been a fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Brookings Institution, Yale University, Duke University, Stanford University, and the University of California at Santa Barbara. She lectures extensively around the United States and has appeared on ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN and PBS

programs, including "Meet the Press," "Face the Nation," "This Week," "Nightline," the "Newshour," "Frontline," and "Larry King Live."

Among her books, *The Last Great Revolution: Turmoil and Transformation in Iran* was selected as one of the 25 most memorable books of the year 2000. She is also the author of *Sacred Rage: The Wrath of Militant Islam*, *Flashpoints: Promise and Peril in a New World*, and *In the Name of God: The Khomeini Decade*.

## DEATH PENALTY

In 2008 the world moved even closer towards abolition of the death penalty.

In December, the United Nations General Assembly (UN GA) adopted by a large majority a second resolution calling for a moratorium with a view to abolish the death penalty. This resolution consolidates three decades of steady progress towards complete abolition of the death penalty.

Developments at the UN provided a welcome boost to campaigners working across the globe to prohibit the death penalty. It also prompted some small but significant steps at the regional level. Notably, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights again called on African states that still retain the death penalty to observe a moratorium on executions in the region with a view to abolish the death penalty.

Europe and Central Asia is now virtually a death penalty free zone following the abolition of the death penalty in Uzbekistan for all crimes. There is just one country left — Belarus — that still carries out executions.

In the Americas, only one state — the United States — consistently executes. However, even the USA moved away from the death penalty in 2008. This year, the smallest number of executions since 1995 was reported in the USA.

The majority of countries now refrain from using the death penalty. Furthermore, in 2008 Amnesty International recorded only 25 out of 59 countries that retain the death penalty actually carried out executions. The practice of states indicates that there is increasing consolidation of majority international consensus that the death penalty cannot be reconciled with respect for human rights.

Despite positive developments a number of tough challenges remain. Countries in Asia carried out more executions in 2008 than the rest of the world put together. The region with the second highest number of reported executions was the Middle East.

In 2008, at least 2,390 people were known to have been executed in 25 countries and at least 8864 people were sentenced to death in 52 countries around the world.

Some of the methods used to execute people in 2008 included beheading, electrocution, hanging, lethal injection, shooting and stoning.

Countries with the highest number of executions in 2008

Continuing the trend from previous years, in 2008 China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the United States of America were the five states with the highest rate of executions. Together they carried out (93%) of all executions worldwide.

In some states the use of the death penalty remained shrouded in secrecy. In China, Belarus, Mongolia and North Korea executions were carried out in a secretive manner or without transparency.

As in previous years a large number of death sentences were handed down in trials that failed to meet internationally recognised standards of fairness. A concerning number of executions were carried out after proceedings that relied upon confessions solicited through torture in violation of international law. The authorities of Iran continued to execute prisoners who were under 18 at the time of the alleged offence in flagrant violation of international law.

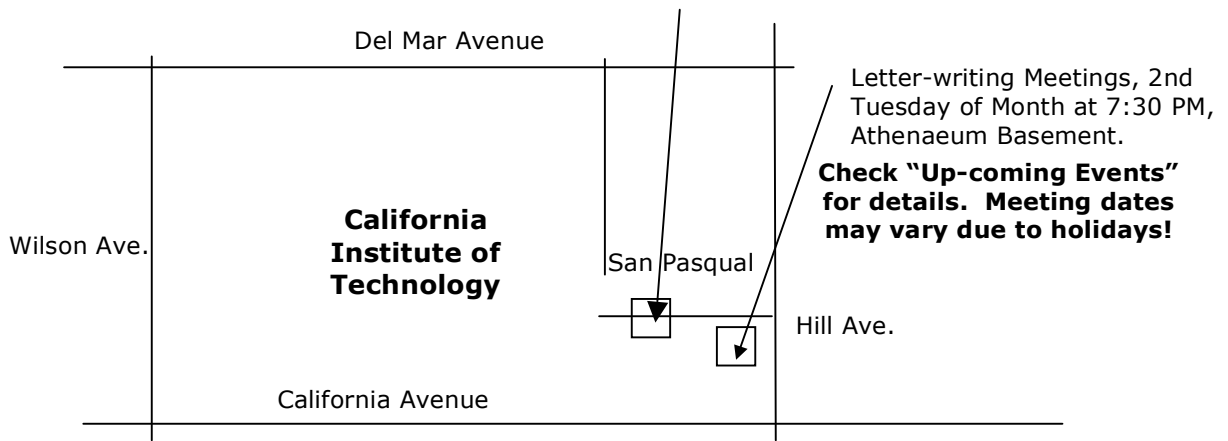
Source: <http://www.amnestyusa.org/death-penalty/international-death-penalty/death-penalty-statistics/page.do?id=1011348>

#### MONTHLY LETTER COUNT

POC	1
UAs	37
Total:	38
To add your letters to the total contact <a href="mailto:lwkamp@gmail.com">lwkamp@gmail.com</a> .	

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Monthly Meetings, 4<sup>th</sup> 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  
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[www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22/](http://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.