
Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XVII Number 2, February 2009

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, February 26, 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. This meeting we will be brainstorming for fresh ideas for actions during the coming year, after the success of our entry in the DooDah parade last month. Please join us!

Tuesday March 10, 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, March 15, 6:30 PM. *Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion Group.* Vroman's Book Bookstore, 695 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena. This month we read "Brother, I'm Dying" by Edwidge Danticat.

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi everyone,

Weird weather we're having, eh? Is everyone finally convinced that global warming is a reality now?!

It has been a quiet month for Group 22 after all the planning and excitement of Doo Dah! But we are going to plan some interesting activities for the months ahead, so keep coming to the meetings!

Well, LAUSD has rescinded mid-year lay-offs, which is good. We will have to wait and see if teachers and support service personnel get RIF (reduction in force) notices March 15, which would be effective in July 09. I joined several of my colleagues in a huge demonstration and march in downtown LA on January 29 after work. Since then, the district has said it will not cut our health benefits this year as they had threatened. Keep your fingers crossed for us and all the people in the US who have already lost or may lose their jobs. Let's hope that the Obama stimulus package works. Education and social services are not "pork", they are essential. "Education not incarceration".

Con cariño,

Kathy

ERITREA UPDATE

by Joyce Wolf

The UK section of Amnesty International has a current action for Aster Fissehatsion, an Eritrean prisoner of conscience who was arrested in the same crackdown as Estifanos Seyoum, our group's adopted POC. She and Estifanos and nine other former government officials of the group known as G15 have been held incommunicado without charge or trial since their arrest in September 2001. Aster is presently the only Eritrea G15 prisoner of conscience who is included in the AI Individuals At Risk database.

Aster and Estifanos and the other G15 members were arrested because they signed an open letter in which they made "a call for correction, a call for peaceful and democratic dialogue, a call for unity, a call for the rule of law and for justice, through peaceful and legal ways and means." For more information about Aster and the G15, visit www.amnesty.org.uk/fissehatsion.

At least two G15 prisoners may have died in detention because of harsh conditions and denial of medical treatment, but the Eritrea authorities have refused to provide any information at all about the status of the detainees.

Here is a sample letter that you can use as a guide to write in behalf of Aster and Estifanos. Postage is 94 cents.

Fawzia Hashim
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
PO Box 241, Asmara
Eritrea

Dear Minister,

I am deeply concerned for the safety of Aster Fissehatsion and Estifanos Seyoum and the nine other former senior officials detained with them since 2001 (the so-called G15).

They should be released immediately and unconditionally. They are being held solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression and as such are prisoners of conscience.

It is believed that two of the G15 may have died in detention and I ask you please to clarify if this is the case.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Eritrea is a signatory, upholds the fundamental human right to freedom of opinion and expression. Please show the world that Eritrea respects this freedom by releasing Aster Fissehatsion and Estifanos Seyoum and the other G15 detainees, and by allowing all other Eritrean citizens peacefully to express their opinions without fear of harassment or imprisonment.

I look forward to hearing from you on this important matter.

Sincerely,

[your name and address]

RIGHTS READERS

Human Rights Book Discussion Group

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

Next Rights Readers meeting:

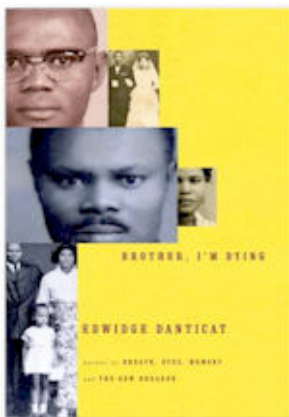
Sunday, March 15, 6:30 PM

Vroman's Bookstore

**695 E. Colorado Boulevard
in Pasadena**

"Brother, I'm Dying"

By Edwidge Danticat



Publisher Comments:

From the best-selling author of *The Dew Breaker*, a major work of nonfiction: a powerfully moving family story that centers around the men closest

to her heart — her father, Mira, and his older brother, Joseph.

From the age of four, Edwidge Danticat came to think of her uncle Joseph, a charismatic pastor, as her "second father," when she was placed in his care after her parents left Haiti for a better life in America. Listening to his sermons, sharing coconut-flavored ices on their walks through town, roaming through the house that held together many members of a colorful extended family, Edwidge grew profoundly attached to Joseph. He was the man who "knew all the verses for love."

And so she experiences a jumble of emotions when, at twelve, she joins her parents in New York City. She is at last reunited with her two youngest brothers, and with her mother and father, whom she has struggled to remember. But she must also leave behind Joseph and the only home she's ever known.

Edwidge tells of making a new life in a new country while fearing for the safety of those still in Haiti as the political situation deteriorates. But *Brother I'm Dying* soon becomes a terrifying tale of good people caught up in events beyond their control. Late in 2004, his life threatened by an angry mob, forced to flee his church, the frail, eighty-one-year-old Joseph makes his way to Miami, where he thinks he will be safe. Instead, he is detained by U.S. Customs, held by the Department of Homeland Security, brutally imprisoned, and dead within days. It was a story that made headlines around the world. His brother, Mira, will soon join him in death, but not before he holds hope in his arms: Edwidge's firstborn, who will bear his name — and the family's stories, both joyous and tragic — into the next generation.

Told with tremendous feeling, this is a true-life epic on an intimate scale: a deeply affecting story of home and family — of two men's lives and deaths, and of a daughter's great love for them both.

About the Author



Edwidge Danticat was born in Haiti and moved to the United States when she was twelve. She is the author of several books, including *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, an Oprah Book Club selection; *Krik? Krak!*, a National Book Award finalist; and *The Farming of Bones*, an American Book Award winner. She is also the editor of *The Butterfly's Way: Voices from the Haitian Diaspora in the United States* and *The Beacon Best of 2000: Great Writing by Men and Women of All Colors and Cultures*.

Danticat earned a degree in French Literature from Barnard College, where she won the 1995 Woman of Achievement Award, and later an MFA from Brown University. She lives in Miami with her husband and daughter.

TAKE ACTION FOR CONGO

Urge US Government to Stop the War Against Women in the DRC

Early in 2009, there was a dramatic turn of events in the conflicts in eastern DRC. The government of the DRC reached agreements with its often-hostile neighbors Uganda and Rwanda, permitting them to pursue their enemies by joint military operations on Congolese soil.

In Ituri district, in the far northeast of DRC, the American government reportedly helped to finance and plan the joint operation of Uganda, South Sudan and DRC against the Lord's Resistance Army. This operation led to dispersal of LRA forces but also to LRA reprisal attacks on Congolese civilians, in Ituri and neighboring Haut-Uele. Hundreds of Congolese reportedly were killed, and thousands displaced.

To the south of Ituri, in North Kivu province, Rwanda and Uganda apparently reached an agreement to end proxy warfare. Rwanda allegedly withdrew its support from Congolese Tutsi warlord, General Laurent Nkunda, and detained him in Rwanda. In return, the DRC government withdrew its support from the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). The Rwandan and DRC armies began joint operations against the FDLR. These operations enjoyed some success, in that large numbers of Rwandan Hutu, including FDLR members and their dependents, began returning home or turning themselves in to the UN mission (MONUC). A small American military mission

was observed in North Kivu; its precise role is unclear.

Nkunda remained in Rwanda, as of February 7, and a spokesman for the Rwandan government said "negotiations" were going on between DRC and Rwanda over his return to DRC. Both Nkunda and his successor, General Ntaganda, have been accused of war crimes.

In South Kivu, political figures, civil society activists and ordinary citizens expressed concern over the possibility that Rwandan military forces would be sent to their area. There are FDLR forces in the province, and the Congolese of South Kivu no doubt would be glad to see the last of them. However, they have bitter memories of the violence of the Rwandan invasions of 1996 and 1998 and the Rwandan occupation that lasted (officially) until 2002.

Some of the FDLR fighters reportedly are moving south, into North Katanga province, in anticipation of the arrival of Rwandan soldiers in South Kivu. North Katanga was occupied by Rwanda in the 1990s, and a period of chaos followed the withdrawal of Rwandan troops.

The situation in the entire eastern strip of DRC, from Haut-Uele in the North to Haut-Katanga in the South, is very dangerous. Systematic abductions of women and children remain widespread.

Direct or indiscriminate attacks against civilians and peacekeepers are war crimes and can constitute crimes against humanity, and are punishable under international law.

SAMPLE LETTER TO HILLARY CLINTON

Hillary Clinton
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton,

Amnesty International has called the conflict in North Kivu province (eastern DR Congo) a "war against women and children." Non-combatants, especially women, children and the elderly, suffer most of the casualties in the Congo fighting. Rape has been a weapon of war, used by all sides in the conflict.

In recent days, the dramatic reversal of alliances has led Rwanda to withdraw its backing from General Nkunda, while the government of DRC joins Rwanda to fight its former allies, the FDLR.

This could be a major step toward peace in DRC and in the region. At the same time, there is a danger that the campaign against the FDLR could produce large numbers of rapes, murders, and displacement of civilians.

As a member of Amnesty International, I am writing to ask that the United States Government use its influence with the United Nations and the Governments of Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo to:

* Ensure the urgently needed reinforcement of the UN peacekeeping mission (MONUC), while holding MONUC to its mandate of protecting civilians.

* Take concrete steps to protect women and other civilians in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, and to end impunity of those who commit acts of sexual violence or other war crimes.

I look forward to learning what actions you undertake on these concerns.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Your name and address

DEATH PENALTY UPDATE

Tuesday, February 17, 2009

Amnesty International Urges Governor Kaine to Commute Bell Death Sentence

(Washington DC) – Amnesty International has mobilized its worldwide membership to appeal to Virginia Governor Tim Kaine to commute the death sentence of Edward Nathaniel Bell, scheduled to be executed on February 19. Bell was sentenced to death for the 1999 murder of Sergeant Richard Timbrook despite woefully deficient and low-quality legal representation and serious questions about his guilt. Bell, who was convicted on largely circumstantial evidence, has consistently maintained his innocence.

"The failure to provide adequate counsel to capital defendants is outrageous and, sadly, a defining feature of the American death penalty," said Larry Cox, executive director of AIUSA. "Governor Kaine has an obligation to use the power of clemency to prevent such an irreversible injustice or Virginia will be marked as a state that willingly pushes our Constitution aside."

One of the jurors said in a signed affidavit following the sentencing phase of Bell's trial, "I

was undecided at sentencing and wanted to hear something, anything about Eddie Bell. We were looking for something mitigating, some reason not to sentence him to death but we were given nothing by his lawyers and we felt his lawyers did him a disservice."

Edward Bell's clemency petition, which raises doubts regarding the reliability of Bell's conviction, has also presented evidence that he may have mental retardation. If so, his execution would violate US constitutional law under the 2002 U.S. Supreme Court ruling *Atkins v. Virginia*, which states that executing persons with mental retardation is a violation of the Eight Amendment's ban on cruel and unusual punishment. The Virginia Supreme Court dismissed Bell's mental retardation claim as "frivolous" and no court has since held a hearing on this issue.

"Questions regarding mental retardation that surround this case should further raise doubts about whether this execution should proceed," said Sue Gunawardena-Vaughn, director of AIUSA's Death Penalty Abolition Campaign. "This is why executive clemency exists – to act as a failsafe when the courts are unable or unwilling to adequately address such fundamental questions."

Virginia is second only to Texas in the number of executions. If Bell's execution is not commuted, he would be the 103rd person killed by the Commonwealth since 1977.

[Editor's note: Edward Bell was executed in Virginia on the evening of 19 February.]

URGE GOV. PERDUE TO SUPPORT CLEMENCY FOR TROY DAVIS

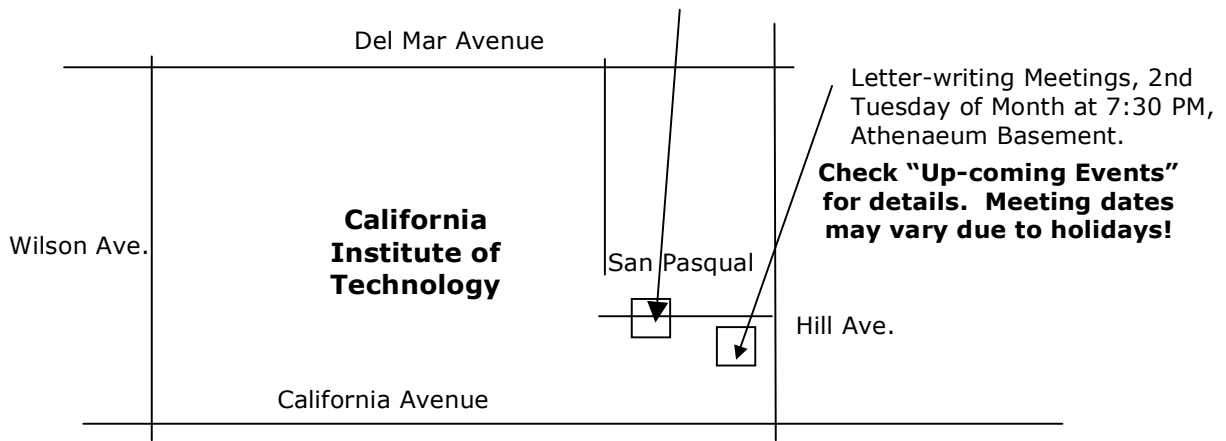
Troy Davis faces execution for the murder of Police Officer Mark MacPhail in Georgia, despite a strong claim of innocence.

The Georgia Board of Pardon and Paroles has voted to deny clemency, yet Governor Perdue can still exercise leadership to ensure that his death sentence is commuted. Please urge him to demonstrate respect for fairness and justice by supporting clemency for Troy Davis. Take action at <http://amnestyusa.org/troydavis>.

MONTHLY LETTER COUNT

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| UAs | 12 |
| Total: | 12 |
| 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.