

Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XVII Number 1, January 2009

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, January 22, 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 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, February 15, 6:30 PM. *Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion Group.* Vroman's Book Bookstore, 695 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena. This month we read "This Human Season" by Louise Dean.

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi everyone,

Hope everyone had an enjoyable holiday season and are ready to enjoy the New Year! Robert and I never made it to Corvallis, Oregon as the Pacific Northwest had the worst snowstorm in 50 years! Our flight to Portland was cancelled, so we had a mini-celebration at home with Rob's brother John and his family. We devoured a huge pot of homemade turkey chili and cornbread. The "Adams family" is planning to have a reunion this summer, probably on the Oregon coast. We got lots of rest, and I cooked a lot and read some books!

I am very excited about our new President Barack Obama, and what changes he will bring...I will be watching the inauguration at work Tuesday morning and wearing my Obama T-shirt. AI has some suggestions for Obama for the first 100 days – see this newsletter for more info.

AI group 22 participated in the Doo Dah parade, the spoof of the Rose Parade Sunday Jan 18, in Old Town Pasadena. The theme was ending sex trafficking and slavery – illustrated by on the spot auctions of lovely "ladies" (guys in drag) by mean looking "guys" in suits(women). Not sure if the crowd got it, but it was really fun! There should be photos on <http://www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22/> soon and also on the rightsreaders blog <http://www.rightsreaders.blogspot.com/>. Thanks to Group 22 member Marie-Helene, her husband Robert and their friends for this clever idea for

Doo Dah! Group 22 member Stevi has written her thoughts about the parade in this newsletter also.

Ann Lau, China activist and founder of the Visual Artists Guild, was this year's thorny rose queen. The thorny rose queen is the person who was a thorn in the side of Pasadena this past year. Ann was tireless in urging the Pasadena city council to boycott the Rose Parade entry by China and to make a statement regarding human rights in China. Many of us have met Ann in conjunction with AI 22's Chinese human rights work.

Have a great new year!
¡Prospero ano nuevo!

Con cariño,
Kathy

OBAMA'S FIRST 100 DAYS

15 January 2009

The inauguration of US President-elect Barack Obama on 20 January 2009 will be accompanied by widespread expectation of change. The world will be watching and hoping for positive outcomes on many different issues.

Ahead of his inauguration, Amnesty International's new film First 100 days is asking the President-elect to take concrete steps to demonstrate his commitment to international human rights standards, including in the context of countering terrorism.

Since the attacks on the USA on 11 September 2001, the US authorities have authorized and justified human rights violations in the name of national security: illegal transfers and detentions; enforced disappearance; torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

The new administration and Congress must break with the past. President-elect Obama has already said that he will close Guantánamo and end torture. We're not asking the impossible.

We have a checklist for President Obama's first 100 days in office. His first steps should be to:

- announce a plan and date to close Guantánamo
 - ban torture and other ill-treatment, as defined under international law
 - ensure an independent commission of enquiry in US 'war on terror' abuses is set up
- These things are possible and you can help. Visit www.obama100day.org today, sign the petition and support the challenge for Obama.

Source: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/news/obama-first-100-days-20090116>

MY THOUGHTS ON DOO DAH

by
STEVI CARROLL

As the young men, and Lucas, slipped into their dresses, applied lipstick and rouge, and pulled on their wigs, the rest of us got our assignments and milled around checking out the Doo Dah action. In front of us, a huge stogy rose up from a flatbed truck and billowed smoke while a number of guys with big ones puffed away in its shadow. Behind us members of NORML (a nonprofit lobbying organization working to legalize marijuana, stop arrests of smokers, provide educational research, and legal information...) assembled with the crew you might suspect as well as the woman with one leg in the wheelchair and the gaunt man with the prematurely bald head on the mechanized medical scooter, balancing his metal cuffed crutch.

Behind our Amnesty banner and the SLAVERY IS NOT HISTORY, YET! banner, our hustlers trafficked our women to those on the sidelines while 'THE LAW' turned a blind eye. Some women were kidnapped into service; Lucas got pulled from the crowd. Sign carriers sent our message out to the spectators. As we walked, many in the crowd applauded and shouted out respect for AI. As I gave a woman one of our bright pink info cards, she said, "I contribute to Amnesty." One of our best handouts, in my opinion, is a bookmark with the articles of the Declaration of Human Rights on it. My favorite targets for these were the kids. With even the little ones, I'd say, "I bet you have a book. You can put this bookmark in it." One guy who looked about 13 told me he doesn't read. I told him then for sure he should have a bookmark because he's just the kind of guy who needs to read. Most of the parents seemed pretty happy someone was pushing reading. I finished the parade empty handed: YAY!

Marie-Helene, Robert, Dan, Brooke, and their wonderful friends did another great job in planning, organizing and executing this event. I get the giant kick out of working with them. Their energy and creativity not only give me a charge, but they also, to use a recently overused but nonetheless true word, hope for the future of our country and our world. Thanx, kiddos.

I think its okay for me to speak for everyone who participated: We had so much fun.

January 19, 2009

RIGHTS READERS

Human Rights Book Discussion Group

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

Next Rights Readers meeting:

Sunday, February 15, 6:30 PM

Vroman's Bookstore

**695 E. Colorado Boulevard
in Pasadena**

"This Human Season"

By Louise Dean



Parallel Lives Among Tumultuous Times

A review by Yvonne Zipp

Literature is full of midlife crises, but few characters have as good a reason to indulge as Kathleen Moran. The mother of four has nothing but contempt for her alcoholic husband, who likes to boast about his imaginary exploits at the corner pub; her part-time job is drying up and money is tight; one of her children is in prison for killing a police officer; and there's a giant hole in her living room ceiling where a soldier put his foot through it while searching her home. Said home is located in Belfast in 1979, and her son is a member of the Irish Republican Army.

This Human Season, Louise Dean's second novel, is set during the run-up to the hunger strikes in the Maze prison that killed 10 strikers and were part of a worsening wave of terrorist violence during Northern Ireland's 30-year "Troubles." The bleak, grimly funny novel is the story of two 39-year-olds, Moran and one of the prison guards in

her son Sean's H-block, and gives new meaning to the phrase scatological humor.

John Dunn spent 22 years in the British Army, including three tours in Northern Ireland. He figures this has been ample training for life as a guard. The smell is the first indication that he may have underestimated his new line of work. As part of the "dirty blanket" protests, IRA prisoners striking for a return of their political status smeared their own excrement all over the walls of their cells. A strong stomach is a requirement for his job. (It's also a requirement for readers of this book. After a few chapters, I wanted to hit the showers.)

The two protagonists' only connection is Sean, and their story lines never intersect. Instead of cobbling together fictional contrivances, Dean draws parallels between the two that strengthen each half of the novel. Both are preoccupied with their teenage sons (Dunn has a boy Sean's age whom he's never met). The bathroom is the only peaceful place either can locate -- Kathleen hides in her soap-scented one at home, while Dunn locks himself in a stall at work to cry over the brutalities he witnesses every day.

Dean, who is English and who conducted extensive interviews for the novel, is dispassionate in her portrayal of both sides of the conflict. There are plenty of crimes to go round, as well as plenty of humanity. She also nails the profane camaraderie of the prison guards as well as she does the kitchen-table talk between Kathleen and her neighbors.

When Dunn starts work he has almost nothing in common with the Metaphysical poet of (almost) the same name. He fell in love with Northern Ireland during his time as a soldier, a fact he calls his "guilty secret."

Dunn signed on at the prison because he was used to following orders, and the pay was good. (It had to be, since the IRA was targeting guards).

In the Army, "there was no personal point of view. There was agreement and silence and both meant agreement in any case. By being there, by wearing the uniform, you were in agreement with it all. You were a fool if you put it on and you were not."

But after a few days in the Maze, Dunn starts philosophizing -- an uncomfortable feeling for a man who readily admits that he isn't "deep."

"Was killing educational? Perhaps briefly, as a generation is brief. The young sowed horror in their springtime with high hopes for the crop and

it rotted down through a long summer. They harvest grief in the autumn of their lives. And did they believe, even as they held their grandchildren, that there would be an end to it all? After a hard winter killed what was left of them off, it came again, this human season, this springtime of hatred."

Rather than philosophy, Kathleen relies on gallows humor, cigarettes, and alcohol to get through daily life in a war zone. The novel's ready wit offers a lifeline to readers, even as it does its characters. To get back at the British soldiers who search their purses, Kathleen and her neighbor buy the bags that have the most zippers and stuff each compartment with sanitary products.

When the soldiers search her house, ripping up the floorboards with a crow bar and vowing not to leave until they find guns, she tells her 13-year-old, "Liam, show the man your water pistol."

Kathleen's friend Roisin cleans house for one of the few Jewish families left in Belfast. "I wish I was a Jew," she tells Kathleen. "I said to her I might become one myself, just for the peace and quiet."

This Human Season builds to a climax in December, which finds Dunn celebrating Christmas with his son for the first time, while Kathleen must endure the first of many without hers.

Dean offers her characters a measure of grace, but alert readers know that the novel ends just as the Troubles began an even more devastating phase. A certain amount of knowledge of history is helpful, since while Dean provides some background, she isn't writing a treatise of either how the Troubles began, or how life in Belfast has improved immeasurably since the 1980s.

This Human Season is about dispassionately dissecting both sides of the divide, and doesn't extend forward in time to the days when that chasm will finally be bridged. It's a rare case where a reader can look to the real world for an ending that is happier than the fictional version.

From Powell's Bookstore Review-a-Day, originally from the Christian Science Monitor, Feb 2007.

About the Author

Louise Dean was born in Hastings, East Sussex in June 1970; she grew up in Kent and went to Cranbrook Grammar School.

She received a BA Hons. in History from Downing College, Cambridge University in 1991, focusing her studies on 'Sexual Deviance in the

Victorian era'. As she says in her website biography, "Not many people have spent a whole month on masturbation in the university library. A good interview warmer I found."



She ended up working for the consumer goods giant, Unilever, as a brand manager "squeezing margins and losing millions by mismanaging sales promotions" before spending a year in the advertising industry in London. In 1995 she moved to Hong Kong "to try and sell revolting things to mostly good people." After that she spent six years in New York, four in France and produced three novels and three children.

DEATH PENALTY UPDATE –ZAMBIA

Fifty-three death sentences commuted in Zambia

16 January 2009

Following the commutation of the death sentences of 53 prisoners to custodial sentences by the President of Zambia, Amnesty International renewed its call for the government to join the worldwide trend towards the abolition of the death penalty.

"We are encouraged by the commutation of these sentences by President Banda. The next move should be to take all the necessary steps to end capital punishment and bring about legislative changes to abolish the death penalty in Zambia" said Amy Agnew, Amnesty International's Zambia campaigner.

The decision to commute the death sentences was announced by the Vice-President, George Kunda, in a statement released in the capital Lusaka on Tuesday.

"His excellency the President, Rupiah Bwezani Banda, has pardoned and commuted sentences of 53 prisoners on death row at Mukobeko prison, Kabwe, to terminable custodial sentences or life imprisonment pursuant to Article 59 of the Republican Constitution," Mr Kunda was reported to have said.

Article 59 of the constitution states that the President may inter alia "substitute a less severe form of punishment for any punishment imposed on any person for any offence."

In Zambia, the death penalty is provided for under various offences. Despite the fact that Zambia has not executed anybody since 1997, it unfortunately did not vote in favour of UN General Assembly resolution 63/168, in December 2008, calling for a moratorium on executions.

In August, 2007, President Mwanawasa commuted the death sentences of 97 prisoners who were on death row to life imprisonment.

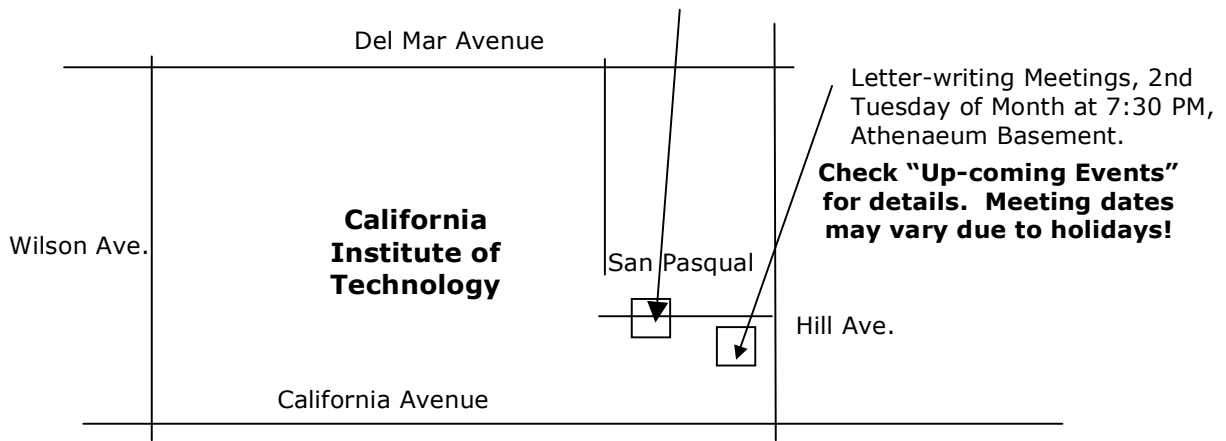
As of today, 138 countries have abolished the death penalty in law or in practice. The continent of Africa is largely free of executions, with only seven of the 53 African Union member states known to have carried out executions in 2007: Botswana, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Libya, Somalia and Sudan.

Source: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/news/fifty-three-death-sentences-commuted-zambia-20090116>

LETTER COUNT

December Write-a-thon	126
January UAs	24
Total:	150
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.