

Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XVII Number 3, March 2009

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, March 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. Help us plan future actions on Sudan, the 'War on Terror', death penalty and more.

Sunday, April 5, ?? PM. *Group Movie Outing.* Details will be posted on our website.

Tuesday April 14, 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, April 19, 6:30 PM. *Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion Group.* Vroman's Book Bookstore, 695 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena. This month we read "Yellowcake" by Ann Cummins.

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi everyone,

Whew! Waited until March 16, no layoff notice was sent so am in the clear for next year at least! A great stress was lifted...Only 16 nurses will (possibly) be cut next year, instead of the hundreds we were envisioning...For the sake of children and families in LAUSD, hopefully none are to be cut - we are so short we need to hire more nurses!!

We are doing some new things this month. Our letter writing meeting will be in a new location, Zephyr café in east Pasadena. See the upcoming events section for more information. Bring your laptop and send letters via email to government officials! (Some of us will still be doing it the old fashioned way, with paper and pen...).

We are also planning to have a monthly movie night, which will be the first Sunday of the month. For April, it will be the Sunday before Easter, April 5th. Stay tuned to Group 22's website for more details as they become available. <http://www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22>.

Larry Romans is back in town, to stay this time! Larry is a long-time member and was Group 22 coordinator before Lucas and I started to share the position. Welcome back, Larry (and family to come later!).

Robert and I are going to walk April 19 at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena to raise money for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. If you are interested in donating (small amounts are fine in view of the economy) or participating in the walk, pls. let me know! Here's the link to our fundraising page:

http://main.nationalmssociety.org:80/site/TR/Walk/CALWalkEvents?px=4489429&pg=personals&fr_id=10168

Mil gracias to those of you who have already donated and have volunteered to walk with us.

Con cariño,

Kathy

ERITREA UPDATE

by Joyce Wolf

AI's International Secretariat (IS) has chosen the cases of five Eritrean prisoners of conscience for long-term global research and campaigning. They are journalists Dawit Isaak and Mattewos Habteab and Saleh al-Jezeari, G15 member Aster Fissehatsion, and religious leader Abune Antonios. The first four were all arrested in the crackdown of September 2001 along with Group 22's adopted POC Estifanos Seyoum, and since their arrest they have been held incommunicado in secret prisons. Aster Fissehatsion's case will represent Estifanos and the other G15 detainees.

The strategy of the IS is to limit the total number of cases in the Individuals Portfolio so that each case can receive more intensive research and broader action. There are now 80 active POC cases with many more in development. AI has committed to increasing the number of long-term cases of individuals to 500, which will represent the broad range of human rights issues with which AI is involved.

Some AIUSA local groups whose adopted Eritrean POCs were originally not included in the IS Individuals Portfolio were quite unhappy. The AIUSA Eritrea Country Specialist and the AIUSA Casework Office spent the past year in discussions with IS and were successful in getting the fifth Eritrea POC included in the Portfolio, with the possibility of a sixth being added at a later time. An official announcement of some kind is expected soon. Stay tuned!

Last month we wrote to the Eritrea Minister of Justice in behalf of Estifanos and Aster. This month let's write to the Eritrea Ambassador. Domestic postage is still 42 cents but will increase in May.

Ambassador Ghirmai Ghebremariam
Embassy of the State of Eritrea
1708 New Hampshire Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20009

Dear Ambassador Ghebremariam,

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). It is believed that two of the G15 may have died in detention. Could you please confirm if this is indeed the case?

I believe that Aster Fissehatsion and Estifanos Seyoum are being held solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression and as such are prisoners of conscience. 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. I urge that the government of Eritrea show its respect for 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.

[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:

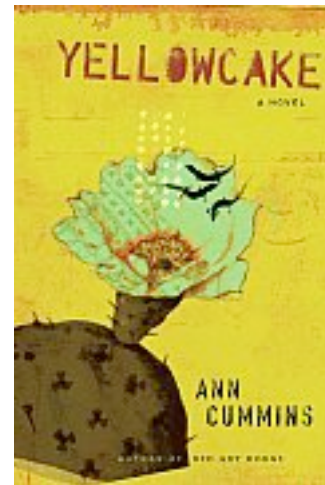
Sunday, April 19, 6:30 PM

Vroman's Bookstore

**695 E. Colorado Boulevard
in Pasadena**

"Yellowcake"

By Ann Cummins



Book Review:

The plot of Ann Cummins' first novel, 'Yellowcake,' seems to suggest that we're in for a pretty shrill experience: Native Americans dying from chemical exposure at a shuttered uranium mine. Regardless of your politics, that looks like a beam of white guilt that will irradiate all subtlety. Discovering that Cummins delivers something far more nuanced is just one of many surprises in this rich and touching... Washington Post Book Review (read the entire Washington Post review) story.

Yellowcake is the powdery substance produced while milling uranium ore, but it's also a compromise between chocolate and vanilla cake. Both definitions show up in these pages, which suggests something about the novel's ability to span industrial and domestic concerns. Cummins grew up in Shiprock, N.M., where her father was a mill worker, and she demonstrates an intimate familiarity with the labor and the laborers — Navajo and Anglo — who toiled away in this dangerous business.

The story opens decades after environmental warnings closed the uranium mine on a Navajo reservation in New Mexico. Ryland Mahoney, who was a manager when the mill shut down, is looking forward to his daughter's marriage in a few weeks, but he's being pulled back into the past. With every breath, the oxygen tank he drags along reminds him of the mining chemicals that may have compromised his lungs. And then there's the arrival of Becky Atcitty, the daughter of a Navajo worker who's dying of cancer. Becky wants him to help a group of ex-employees sue the government for compensation for their medical problems. But joining that crusade would

involve admitting that he poisoned his friends and co-workers, that he poisoned himself, that he's dying. Why spoil the wedding festivities with all that, and besides, who's to say what was really responsible? 'Maybe it was the uranium exposure. Maybe it was something else, like cigarettes,' Ryland thinks. 'As far as I'm concerned, half the people creating a stir want compensation for getting old. We're not young. Things go wrong.'

There's a dramatic showdown set up here, a la 'Erin Brockovich,' but Cummins never lets that take over the novel. While the workers' protest rumbles away in the background, she's far more interested in the small personal dramas among these characters — conflicts of life and death, love and disappointment, that no court could ever sort out. The central relationship is the long marriage between Ryland and his super-competent wife, who's trying to manage his illness without turning him into a child. There's nothing romantic about dying from lung failure, and Cummins portrays that struggle with clear-eyed realism, but she's also attentive to all the other moments of comedy and romance that keep right on flowing between two people in love.

And she's particularly sensitive to the quandary of young Navajo men and women who hover in the cloudy atmosphere of assimilation, enjoying the benefits of modern life but still aware of the riches of their parents' traditions. Becky wants to help her dying father, but she's reminded again and again that she can't even speak his language. The medicine men her father consults can't supply the technical records she needs to pursue his case in court, but is it worth violating his faith to confirm her own beliefs? Watching her grandmother pray, 'she feels entirely foreign, out of place.'

Many likable people move through this novel, but my favorite subplot involves Delmar, the 'crossbreed' son of Ryland's best friend. Recently released from prison for stealing cars, Delmar is trying to stay out of trouble, even as he thinks about 'what a bummer the straight and narrow is.' The humiliation of weekly drug tests and picking up after rich white folks would be enough to test anyone's resolve, but he just might have enough determination and humor to make it. The chapters that show him struggling to stay clean are marvels of insight and sympathy.

Cummins, who teaches creative writing at Northern Arizona University, published a well-received collection of short stories called 'Red Ant House' in 2003. In some ways, 'Yellowcake' is a collection of stories, too, but she's knit them

together to reflect the messiness and continuity of real life, a marvelous blending of crises and blessings and a fair share of wondering and worrying. In the end, Cummins rather bravely leaves all her loose ends loose — none of that Anglo obsession with closure. That could have been frustrating, but here the effect is poignant. It leaves space that you can't help but fill with your own hopes for these tender, resilient people.

Ron Charles is a senior editor of The Washington Post Book World.

About the Author



Born in the southern Rocky Mountain town of Durango, Colorado, Ann Cummins writes frequently about working class people. During the early part of the 20th century, her family migrated from County Galway, Ireland to Colorado, where they mined silver, coal, and uranium. When Cummins was nine, her father—a uranium mill worker—moved the family to Shiprock, New Mexico in the northern part of the Navajo Indian Reservation, where Ann graduated from high school. Although her work extends beyond her ties to the southwest, she is often drawn by landscape and custom to write about the region of her birth.

DEATH PENALTY UPDATE

**BREAKING NEWS!!
NEW MEXICO COALITION TO REPEAL THE
DEATH PENALTY APPLAUDS GOVERNOR
RICHARDSON AS HE SIGNS HB 285 TO
REPEAL THE DEATH PENALTY IN NEW
MEXICO**

Albuquerque, NM – NM Repeal congratulates our Governor Bill Richardson and the New Mexico State Legislature for their leadership in

repealing capital punishment in New Mexico. The strong vote in the New Mexico legislature reflects broad consensus that the death penalty has failed the people of New Mexico, who have come to know that it risks executing the innocent, is unfairly applied, fails victims' families and law enforcement and wastes scarce taxpayer dollars.

By repealing the death penalty, New Mexico has chosen to focus its energies and resources where they should be focused: on providing tangible assistance to the families of murder victims. The additional measures making their way through the Legislature at this moment will enable New Mexico to use the savings gained from ending the death penalty to provide a reparation award to children of murder victims, provide services and programs to murder victims' families, and create a murder victim family services fund.

Another measure requires employers to provide paid or unpaid leave to crime victims to attend judicial proceedings. NM Repeal applauds this action in behalf of survivors of homicide in New Mexico.

In this time of fiscal crisis, it is more important than ever to make smart choices when it comes to meeting the needs of our citizens. Replacing the death penalty marked the end of a costly, ineffective aspect of New Mexico's criminal justice system. With it went the false promise that executions would bring healing to survivors of homicide victims. Now in New Mexico the priority will be on assisting murder victims' families as opposed to pursuing the executions of a handful of individuals. Perpetrators will be sentenced to life imprisonment without possibility of parole.

New Mexico's decision to end capital punishment brings to 15 the number of states that no longer carry out executions. Other states have put executions on hold or have commissioned studies. These actions come amidst a growing chorus of concern about the death penalty across the country. Since 2000 there has been a dramatic decrease in all aspects of death penalty use. And public opinion has shifted away from support for capital punishment. These developments, which are the backdrop against which New Jersey and New York, and now New Mexico, abandoned the death penalty, are evidence that Americans are moving away from capital punishment.

What a great week for New Mexico! As we enjoy repealing the death penalty in our state, let's all take a few minutes today and send the Governor a thank you for his leadership. He showed great

strength and courage by signing the repeal bill into law, and we appreciate his support!

Thank you to everyone who took the time to call or write Governor Richardson to encourage him to sign this just bill - your voice was heard! Please thank Governor Richardson for doing the right thing; you can send hand written notes to:

Honorable Bill Richardson
Office of the Governor
490 Old Santa Fe Trail
Room 400
Santa Fe, NM 87501(505) 476-2200

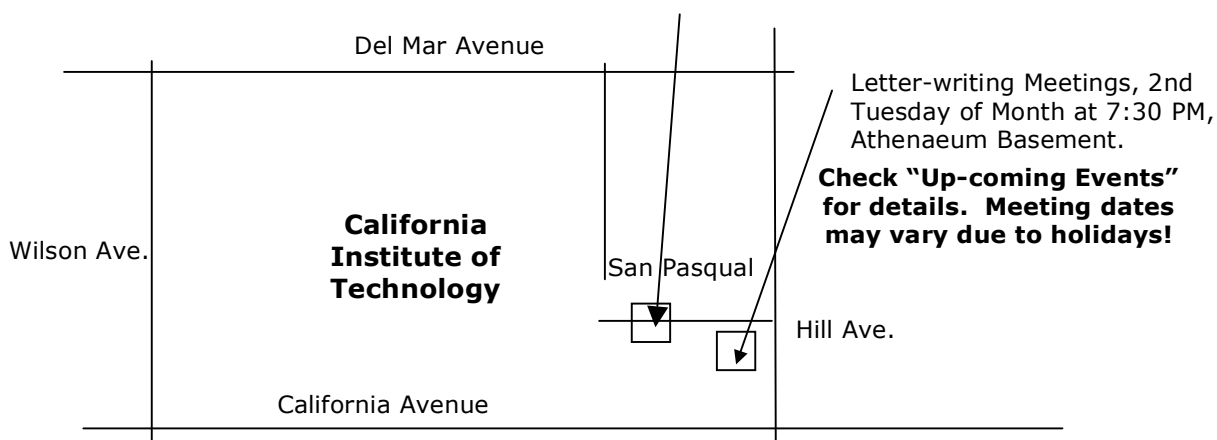
For email, visit:
<http://www.governor.state.nm.us/emailchoice.php?mm=6>

Source: <http://nmrepeal.org/> (link from <http://www.amnestyusa.org/death-penalty/page.do?id=1011005>)

MONTHLY LETTER COUNT

DP	1
EritreaPOC	7
UAs	27
Total:	35
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.