

Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XVII Number 5, May 2009

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, May 28, 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, June 7, Monthly Movie Night. Time and location TBD.

Tuesday June 9, 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, June 21, 6:30 PM. *Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion Group.* Vroman's Book Bookstore, 695 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena. This month we read "The Cellist of Sarajevo" by Steven Galloway.

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hope you all are enjoying the beautiful weather this Memorial Day weekend. In-between today's recreational and other activities, take a moment to remember those who have sacrificed their lives in battle. These men and women have paid the ultimate price. Say a prayer for healing also for those who have returned home wounded in body and spirit.

We heard some sad news the other day – due to the economy, Amnesty has had to lay off employees and the Western Regional Office in Culver City has closed. The San Francisco office remains open. Best of luck to the 3 women who staffed the office – Kathy Brown, Julissa Gomez, and Mona Cadena – who are now without jobs. Those of you who have attended AI conferences remember Kathy Brown helping with Group Sales and other administrative stuff. Julissa Gomez came to one of our monthly meetings to talk about student activism.

Last month's movie night was an outing to see the film "The Soloist", based on the book by Steve Lopez, the LA Times columnist who befriended a homeless musician. The reviews were mixed, but I think most of the group really liked the film. I know I did! Afterwards, we went out to eat and a good time was had by all! Join us for our next movie night, movie and theatre to be determined!

Con cariño,

Kathy

ERITREA UPDATE

President Obama issued a statement in honor of World Press Freedom Day (May 3). He didn't mention Estifanos Seyoum, the prisoner of conscience Group 22 adopted two years ago, but he did criticize Eritrea.

Statement by the President in honor of World Press Freedom Day:

"World Press Freedom Day is annually observed on May 3 to remind us all of the vital importance of this core freedom. It is a day in which we celebrate the indispensable role played by journalists in exposing abuses of power, while we sound the alarm about the growing number of journalists silenced by death or jail as they attempt to bring daily news to the public.

Although World Press Freedom Day has only been celebrated since 1993, its roots run deep in the international community. In 1948, as people across the globe emerged from the horrors of the Second World War, nations saw fit to enshrine in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights the fundamental principle that everyone 'has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.'

...In every corner of the globe, there are journalists in jail or being actively harassed: from Azerbaijan to Zimbabwe, Burma to Uzbekistan, Cuba to Eritrea."

President Obama also mentioned imprisoned journalists Shi Tao and Hu Jia. You can read his full statement at

http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office.

Go to Official Statements and scroll to 5/1/2009.

Estifanos Seyoum was arrested in Eritrea's 2001 crackdown along with Aster Fissehatsion and other former government officials who dared to criticize the policies of Eritrea President Issayas Afewerki. Ten journalists were arrested at the same time because they published these criticisms. They were all detained without charge or trial in secret prisons and some are alleged to have died as a result of harsh treatment.

Amnesty International has asked us not to write to Eritrea officials at this time, so a suggested action for this month would be to thank President Obama for drawing attention to Eritrea's repression of freedom of expression. Send email at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact/>.

-Joyce

RIGHTS READERS

Human Rights Book Discussion Group

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

Next Rights Readers meeting:

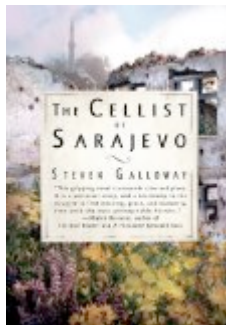
Sunday, May 17, 6:30 PM

Vroman's Bookstore

**695 E. Colorado Boulevard
in Pasadena**

"The Cellist of Sarajevo"

By Steven Galloway



The Music of Resistance

A review by Danielle Marshall

"It screamed downward, splitting air and sky without effort. A target expanded in size, brought into focus by time and velocity. There was a moment before impact that was the last instant of things as they were."

What happens to our humanity in the midst of brutality and hatred? How do we maintain dignity and kindness in the face of atrocities? How do we remember the shocking events of the past, to prevent repetition? Steven Galloway tackles all of these important questions, at an integral time in our history, in his new novel *The Cellist of Sarajevo*. By shining a light on the atrocities of past wars, he forces us to face what we may not want to and humanizes the media sound bites of war.

Inspired by the true story of Vedran Smailovic, who risked his life to play music in the street where 22 were killed while waiting to buy bread, Galloway's novel takes readers inside the dreadful 1990s siege of Sarajevo and, in turn, beautifully illustrates the individual toll on civilians during wartime. A short but wonderfully rich, elegiac, and moving book that personifies the story of a country in conflict.

Galloway tells the story of the Sarajevans' suffering from the viewpoints of three people who have lived there in good times and bad. The

first narrator is a woman in her late 20s, now calling herself Arrow to compartmentalize the two lives she has lived: one as the devoted daughter of a police officer in happier times, the other as a sniper committed to killing soldiers before they can kill more innocent civilians. Before the war, she was an expert sharpshooter and competed at her university. Now she must use her skills for more urgent and base needs and, ultimately, as the protector of the cellist while he performs.

Kenan, the second narrator, is a seemingly older man of only 39 who is married with children. Formerly employed in an accountant's office, he now spends his days risking his life on the dangerous trek through town to get drinking water from freshwater springs at a distant brewery. His life has been reduced to the immediate needs of his family, and the risk is worth the reward of several liters of clean drinking water to keep his family alive.

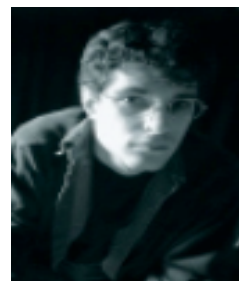
And last, we hear the voice of Dragan, a 64-year-old bakery worker, who sent his wife and 19-year-old son to safety in Italy, but remains in Sarajevo out of a sense of responsibility to the city and because he thinks the war will one day end and life will return to normal. As the war rages on, he is defeated in spirit; he muses after one attack:

"The sniper will fire again, though, if not here then somewhere else, and if not him, then someone else, and it will all happen again, like a herd of gazelle going back to the water hole after one of their own is eaten there."

This is a powerful anti-war tale; the author admits that he has taken liberties with the timeline of events to tell a story, one that is powerfully true, if not historically accurate. The illumination of the way that wars overtake formerly beautiful and calm places, along with the adversity war brings, are the strengths of this deft, eloquent work of fiction.

Powells.com 8-2-08

About the Author



Galloway was born in Vancouver, and raised in Kamloops, British Columbia. He attended the

University College of the Cariboo and the University of British Columbia. His debut novel, *Finnie Walsh* (2000), was nominated for the Amazon.ca/Books in Canada First Novel Award. His second novel, *Ascension* (2003), was nominated for the BC Book Prizes' Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize, and has been translated into numerous languages. His third novel, *The Cellist of Sarajevo*, was published in spring of 2008. It was heralded as "the work of an expert" by the Guardian, and has become an international bestseller with rights sold in 20 countries. Galloway has taught creative writing at the University of British Columbia and taught and mentored creative writing in The Writer's Studio, at the writing and publishing program at Simon Fraser University.

**CALL FOR THE IMMEDIATE RELEASE
OF AUNG SAN SUU KYI AND ALL
PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE IN
MYANMAR**

Background:

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, has been detained for 13 of the last 19 years, mostly under house arrest. On May 14, 2009, Aung San Suu Kyi and two of her assistants were taken from her home to Insein Prison following an incident in which an American man allegedly swam across a lake to her house and stayed there for two days. Reliable reports beginning in early May confirm that while still confined in her Yangon home Aung San Suu Kyi had been suffering from dehydration, low blood pressure and weight loss. Her medical condition makes her transfer to Insein Prison at this time doubly serious.

Please call on Myanmar's leaders to free Aung San Suu Kyi and all other prisoners of conscience.

Please Send Letters To:

Senior General Than Shwe
State Peace and Development Council
Chairman, State Peace and Development Council
c/o Embassy of the Union of Myanmar
2300 S Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20008

Foreign Minister Nyan Win
Ministry of Foreign Affairs Bldg. (19)

Naypyitaw
UNION OF MYANMAR

Sample Letter:

Dear ,

I write to you out of deep concern at the recent detention of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in Insein prison. This arrest is the latest human rights abuse inflicted upon the Nobel Peace Prize winner, who has been detained for 13 of the last 19 years, mostly under house arrest.

Aung San Suu Kyi and two female companions face trial in connection to an incident in which an American man allegedly swam across a lake to her house and stayed there for two days. Following this incident in early May, she was moved from house arrest to Insein prison, where she now awaits trial. I call on you to release Aung San Suu Kyi and the companions arrested with her, and I urge you to see to it that Aung San Suu Kyi is not returned to house arrest.

I am also worried about the recent decline in Aung San Suu Kyi's health. When her regular doctor, Tin Myo Win, visited on her on May 7, security forces prevented him from entering her house. Upon returning home, he was taken away by the authorities, and his current whereabouts remain unknown. Please ensure that Aung San Suu Kyi receives the medical attention she needs, and please provide information about Tin Myo Win's status.

I urge your government to demonstrate Myanmar's commitment to human rights by ordering the immediate and unconditional release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other prisoners of conscience.

I thank you for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Your name and address

**GLOBAL DAY OF ACTION FOR
TROY DAVIS**

On Tuesday, May 19, 2009, a group of about 20 people gathered in front of the Los Angeles City Hall. Participants carried signs or petitions while onlookers expressed support and signed the petitions. One bus driver asked as he passed,

"Who's Troy Davis?" For me, that showed how 'under the radar' executions in America are.

Gabby, the young USC student who organized the event. gave the details of Troy's case to those assembled. The group then walked to Pershing Square, chanting and passing out information as we went.

At Pershing Square, Gabby and others explained more about Troy's situation and then sang a few songs. To me our most interesting observers were two security guards who wanted to understand the situation. As it became clearer to them, they signed the petition. One of the guards appeared quite moved, and at that point, I told her about Amnesty and suggested she look AI up for more information.

While this group was relatively small, we knew we were part of a global event and thus our total numbers were much larger. The following is the latest article about Troy Davis posted on the Amnesty International USA website.

Stevi

TROY DAVIS BACKGROUND INFO

source: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/news/death-row-inmate-troy-davis-faces-fourth-execution-date-two-years-20090520>

US death row inmate Troy Davis once again faces the prospect of an execution date. This is despite not having had a court hearing into compelling evidence, collected since his trial nearly 18 years ago, that he may be innocent. He has come close to execution three times in the past two years.

His final hope of being granted a court hearing rests with the US Supreme Court. A petition was filed in the Court on Tuesday 19 May. Three days earlier, a stay of execution granted by a federal court in October last year expired. The state could move to set an execution date at any time.

Troy Davis was convicted of the murder of a police officer in Savannah, Georgia, in 1989. Since the 1991 trial, the testimony of all but two of the state's witnesses who testified against him has been recanted or changed amid allegations that the police used coercion and suggestive identification techniques during their investigation of the murder. One of the two witnesses who have not altered their trial testimony is himself the subject of new witness statements implicating him as the gunman.

Four of the jurors who convicted Troy Davis have since signed affidavits saying that the post-conviction evidence gave them cause for concern. They said they supported judicial relief in the form of a new trial or an evidentiary hearing, or executive commutation of the death sentence.

In May 2009, Troy Davis said: "I have faced execution and the torment of saying goodbye to my family three times in the last two years and I may experience that trauma yet again; I would not wish this on my worst enemy and to know I am innocent only compounds the injustice I am facing."

As the case stands, the pursuit of the death penalty against Troy Davis continues to contravene international safeguards which prohibit the execution of anyone whose guilt is not based on "clear and convincing evidence leaving no room for an alternative explanation of the facts".

"This is one in a long line of cases in the USA that should give even ardent supporters of the death penalty pause for thought, since it provides further evidence of the danger, inherent in the death penalty, of irrevocable error," said Amnesty International's USA researcher Rob Freer.

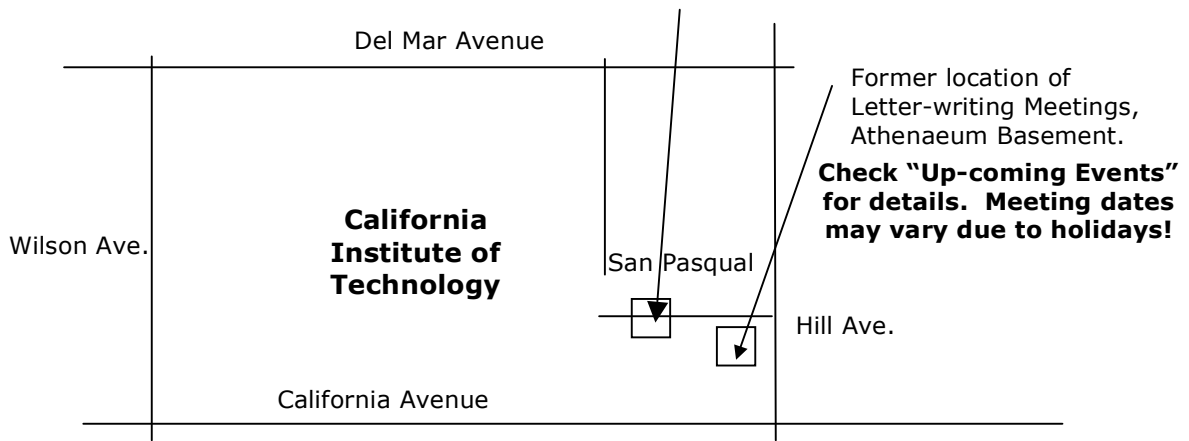
"Last month a federal judge said that to execute Troy Davis would be 'unconscionable'. She was surely right."

In September 2008, the Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles denied Troy Davis clemency, before a court issued the stay of execution that has just expired. Amnesty International is campaigning to have the Board change its mind and to commute the death sentence.

MONTHLY LETTER COUNT

China postcards	7
UAs	26
Total:	33
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.