

Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XVIII Number 11, November/December 2010

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, December 2, 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.

Saturday, December 11, 8AM to 2PM. 1359 N. Altadena Drive, Pasadena 91107 626-398-8654. Letter writing marathon for International Human Rights Day. Drop by and help us write letters and postcards and enjoy Café Culture's great food and drink!

Sunday, December 19, 6:30PM. Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion group. This month we read "The Protest Singer: an Intimate Portrait of Pete Seeger" by Alec Wilkinson. See coordinator's column regarding change of location.

<http://www.pasadenaweekly.com/cms/story/detail/?id=9459>

Take note that we are not meeting at Vroman's bookstore for our December book group as they are using our meeting space for Christmas merchandise! The meeting will be at a private home. Contact Lucas Kamp for more information at 626-795-1785 or go to our website at: <http://www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22/>

Enjoy the holidays!

Con cariño,
Kathy

RIGHTS READERS

Human Rights Book Discussion Group

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

Next Rights Readers meeting:
Sunday December 19, 6:30 PM

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

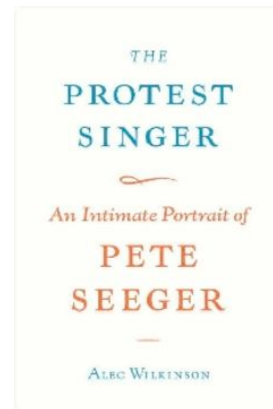
Hi everyone

A lot to write about this month....

Group 22 members Lucas, Joyce, my husband Robert and I attended the AI Western Regional Conference in San Francisco November 5-7. The conference's theme was "Shine a Light - Fifty Years of Activism". It was fun to be in one of my favorite cities, even though it was raining and the conference had been moved due to a labor dispute to another venue. See Lucas' report later in this newsletter regarding the conference.

I attended workshops on maternal mortality, part of the Demand Dignity campaign, and Welcome to the Boardroom, information on how the AIUSA Board of Directors works. Amy Goodman of Democracy Now spoke on Sunday and we also heard Rebiya Kadeer. Joyce attended the rally for Aun San Suu Kyi that ended up on the steps of San Francisco City Hall.

Our friend Kala Mendoza, the Western Regional office organizer for Colorado, Idaho, So. Cal, and Wyoming regions, was there. To our great surprise, at the ending awards ceremony, he presented Group 22 with the award for the Best Local Group. Then Laura, one of our members, wrote up a little blurb and sent it to the Pasadena Weekly with a photo. Here's the link for our 15 minutes of fame:



COMMENTS FROM THE RANDOM HOUSE BOOKS WEBSITE:

A true American original is brought to life in this rich and lively portrait of Pete Seeger, who, with his musical grace and inextinguishable passion for social justice, transformed folk singing into a high form of peaceful protest in the second half of the twentieth century. Drawing on his extensive talks with Seeger, *New Yorker* writer Alec Wilkinson lets us experience the man's unique blend of independence and commitment, charm, courage, energy, and belief in human equality and American democracy.

We see Seeger instilled with a love of music by his parents, both classically trained musicians; as a teenager, hearing real folk music for the first time; and as a young man, singing with Woody Guthrie and with the Weavers. We learn of his harassment by the government for his political beliefs and his testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1949. And we follow his engagement with civil rights, the peace movement, and the environment—especially his work saving the Hudson River and building the ship *Clearwater*. He talks ardently about his own music and that of others, and about the power of music to connect people and bind them to a cause. Finally, we meet Toshi, his wife of nearly sixty years, and members of his family, at the house he built on a mountainside in upstate New York.

The Protest Singer is as spirited and captivating as its subject—an American icon, celebrating his ninetieth birthday.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Alec Wilkinson began writing for *The New Yorker* in 1980. Before that, he was a policeman in Wellfleet, Massachusetts, and before that a rock-and-roll musician. He has published eight other books—two memoirs, two collections of essays, two biographical portraits, and two pieces of reporting. His honors include a Guggenheim

Fellowship, a Lyndhurst Prize, and a Robert F. Kennedy Book Award. He lives with his wife and son in New York City.

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE GAO ZHISHENG

By Joyce Wolf

Group 22's adopted prisoner of conscience, Gao Zhisheng, has been in the news this past month. His name has often been paired with imprisoned Nobel laureate Liu Xiaobo.

Wall Street Journal Editorial, Oct. 27: "Liu Xiaobo's Nobel Peace Prize has brought much-needed attention to the struggle of others working for liberty in China. Gao Zhisheng, a human-rights

lawyer who has been missing since April, is another example of how Beijing silences troublemakers. Mr. Gao hasn't had the privilege of courts and jails but has simply disappeared, without any official word on the circumstances of what his family and most observers believe to be his detention by the government."

Wall Street Journal, Opinion Asia, Nov. 12: "... Gao Zhisheng, one of China's most courageous human-rights defenders, who has been kept under house arrest, harassed, imprisoned, tortured and humiliated since 2006. At present he has literally "been disappeared"—authorities won't say whether he is in jail again and, if so, why; or where he is; or even if he is still alive."

Twenty-nine U.S. members of Congress signed a letter to President Obama, asking him to bring up the cases of Liu and Gao with China's President Hu Jintao during the G20 summit on Nov.11-12. Their letter began, "We write to ask that you urge President Hu to release two emblematic Chinese prisoners of conscience, Liu Xiaobo and Gao Zhisheng." They went on to say, "Mr Gao's case is the most egregious example of China's growing pressure on human rights lawyers. ... If lawyers are hauled away for the 'crime' of defending their clients, then even the pretense of rule of law has failed."

Links to the full articles quoted above are available at <http://www.freedom-now.org/campaign/gao-zhisheng/>.

Closer to home, former prisoner of conscience Bu Dongwei, who visited our group last March, reminds us that our letters really are effective in lessening the abuse of prisoners of conscience. See his video at <http://vimeo.com/16943242>. This video is featured in Amnesty's 2010 Write-a-thon campaign. (By the way, I attended Bu Dongwei's presentation at the Western Regional workshop on Individuals At Risk. It was good to see him again, and it's wonderful that he continues to share his experience in order to help other prisoners of conscience.)

This month let's participate in the Amnesty action for Liu Xiaobo at <http://www.amnestyusa.org/actioncenter/actions/action14817.pdf>.

When writing for Liu Xiaobo, we can add our concern for Gao Zhisheng, as did the Members of Congress and the writers of the *Wall Street Journal* editorials.

REPORT ON WESTERN REGIONAL CONFERENCE NOV 5-7 2010

BY LUCAS KAMP

This is my report on the WRC of Nov.5-7.

I missed the rally for Aung San Suu Kyi on Friday evening because I went up by train and arrived after it was over.

Here are the sessions that I attended:

- Workshop on the Art of Campaigning. This was well run and we had an interesting exercise to practice on.

- Caucus with the Regional Planning Group. This group has not existed for many years, but is now being reconstituted. I was invited to serve on it for 1 year. This session was mainly devoted to what the purpose of this group is to be, which was not clear to all. We will have our first meeting in early Dec., by telecon. During the discussion, it was mentioned that there has been a severe reduction in the number of Local Groups over the past few years. We were unable to come up with a good explanation of this, or a way of counteracting it; presumably, this will be a topic for future discussion. Interestingly, Student Groups at the high school and college level seem to be flourishing. We also discussed the lack of any resolutions submitted to this WRC. It was pointed out that the Resolutions Committee will help draft a resolution – all you need to do is to submit a rough idea and they will help write up the formal language for the resolution.

- Workshop on Building and Revitalizing Local Groups. This was a well organized workshop that came up with a number of useful suggestions for our group. Here is a useful tidbit for those who are asked what good the letters that we write ever do: go to www.amnestyusa.org/successes for a list of actions that have had positive results.

The other panels and plenary sessions were generally very instructive, especially the talk by Amy Goodman. As usual, the conference was an inspiration for the coming year.

STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

By Cheri Dellelo

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is getting its third shot at ratification after lying dormant in U.S. Senate subcommittees for the past 30 years. With the Obama administration's support and a Democratic majority in the Senate, the timing for what's known as the Women's Treaty or the International Women's Bill of Rights could be right. Since 1979, 186 out of 193 U.N. member states have ratified the treaty, leaving the U.S., Sudan, Somalia, Iran and three small Pacific Island nations—Nauru, Palau and Tonga—as the sole hold-outs. The U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee twice cleared CEDAW, the last time in 2002, but the treaty never made it to the actual Senate floor.

On Nov. 18, the U.S. Senate held a hearing on women's human rights at which they listened to testimony related to CEDAW. This was the first time in eight years that the U.S. Senate focused solely on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). While hearing was the beginning of a critical dialogue, it's up to Senator John Kerry as the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to turn this talk into action. Senator Kerry can schedule the all-important vote that could finally result in the ratification of CEDAW.

Please send a quick message to Senator Kerry asking him to take action to ratify CEDAW. You can do so through the Amnesty International USA website at <http://tinyurl.com/2aywqhb> or Senator Kerry's website at <http://kerry.senate.gov/contact>, or you can send a letter by post to his office in Washington, D.C.:

Senator John Kerry
218 Russell Bldg., 2nd Floor
Washington D.C. 20510

DEATH PENALTY NEWS

BY STEVI CARROLL

While we in the US and in other countries continue to execute human beings, I'd like to take a moment to mention my gratitude for the award-winning AIUSA Pasadena group 22. In the fall of 2004 when I moved to Pasadena, I took advantage of the lectures at Caltech. As I went inside one event, I saw Lucas at the Amnesty information table. Always welcoming new members, he invited me to join them, and I did for writing letters, discussing books, and sharing and planning our work. As I read the news about our world's many woes, I begin to feel downhearted and discouraged. Although the news demoralizes me, getting together with my Amnesty friends buoys my spirits. November gives us the Day to Give Thanks, so I'd like to thank the members of AIUSA Pasadena group 22 for welcoming me and for giving me something concrete to do.

Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani

The secretary-general of Iran's human rights council, Mohammed Javad Larijani, said Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani's execution orders could be lifted.

In an article at UPI.com, Mr. Larijani is quoted as saying, "Iran's council of human rights has helped a lot to reduce her sentence and we think there is a good chance that her life could be saved."

While US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, spoke out that she was "deeply troubled" by Ms Ashtiani's possible execution, Mr. Larijani denounced the international attention paid to the case and said the US's record for capital punishment was largely ignored.

U. N. votes on resolution to halt the death penalty

Some people want the US out of the United Nations. I sometimes wonder what that body of member states does. I think of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (a document dear to Amnesty members), Peacekeepers (guys with blue helmets and weapons to protect the helpless), and UNICEF (people who, according to the program's website, "believe that nurturing

and caring for children are the cornerstones of human progress").

Recently, the UN adopted a non-binding resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty. Although 107 countries voted in favor of the resolution, 38 opposed it, and 36 abstained. Five countries that voted against a similar resolution in 2007 joined the ayes this year. The nay countries in 2010 include, among others, China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and the United States.

In 1945 when the UN was founded, only eight member states had abolished the death penalty for all crimes. According to Amnesty International, 137 countries have abolished the death penalty.

New death drug for executions

Last month we talked about how Hospira, the company that makes sodium thiopental - the anesthetic used in all lethal injections, couldn't make more because of "manufacturing issues." Recent news reports state that the company is having trouble finding the raw materials for manufacture of the drug. The company also does not like its drug used in executions.

Prison supplies of the drug are expiring thus curtailing executions. To remedy the dilemma in Oklahoma, a federal judge ruled that the drug pentobarbital can be used as the first of a three-drug cocktail. Pentobarbital is the same drug used for animal euthanasias and physician-assisted suicide in Oregon and the Netherlands.

Death penalty opponents object to a drug whose use is an unknown factor as to whether or not it will mask the pain felt from the other two drugs before the condemned person dies.

In Oklahoma the planned dosage of pentobarbital is five grams which should be enough to stop breath. The executioner will wait five minutes before administering the other two drugs. Dr. David Waisel, an opponent to the use of pentobarbital, says five grams of the drug would cause unconsciousness and death. His concern is that with inmates the executioners have no medical evidence about how much of the drug to use or how long it should be administered.

Jeffery Matthews, a death row inmate in Oklahoma, may be the test case soon.

Online Action

Stop the Execution of Stephen West in Tennessee

<http://takeaction.amnestyusa.org/siteapps/advocacy/index.aspx?c=jhKPIXPCIoE&b=2590179&template=x.ascx&action=14829>

Ron McAndrew: Former Prison Warden

Ron McAndrew oversaw the executions of eight people in his tenure as prison warden in Florida and Texas. When he became warden in Florida after his first execution, he continued the tradition of going out to breakfast with the 'death team.' In the restaurant that morning, everyone present was somehow connected with the prison system. The high fives and general celebratory tone of the gathering tempered by the sad face of the condemned man's lawyer made him begin to understand the solemnity of the situation. That was Mr. McAndrew's last post-execution breakfast.

After the botched execution of Pedro Medina, Mr. McAndrew said, "The memory of telling the executioner to continue with the killing, despite the malfunctioning electric chair, and being at a point of no-return, plagues me still."

He continued to support the death penalty until he said, "these men came and started sitting at the edge of my bed at night." In an article at the Death Penalty Focus website, he said, "During the renewal of my faith and my conversion to the Catholic Church, I was asked to speak out about my feelings on the death penalty."

Since October 2009, the New Hampshire Commission to Study the Death Penalty has heard testimony, both pro and con. Last August, Mr. McAndrew spoke to a New Hampshire commission. In an interview after his testimony, he's quoted as saying, "It's (the death penalty) nothing but a premeditated, ceremonial killing, and we do it to appease politicians who are tough on crime. ... The state has no right to ask people to kill others on their behalf."

May Ron McAndrew's nights be free of ghosts.

(To read more, join us on Face book - Amnesty International - Pasadena, Group 22)

Executions

October 26 Jeffrey Landrigan
Arizona lethal injection

November 4 Phillip Lallford
Alabama lethal injection

Execution Stayed

Stephen West Tennessee
Rescheduled for November 30, 2010

Stay of Execution Expired

Jeffery Matthews Oklahoma
Court of Criminal Appeals will reschedule

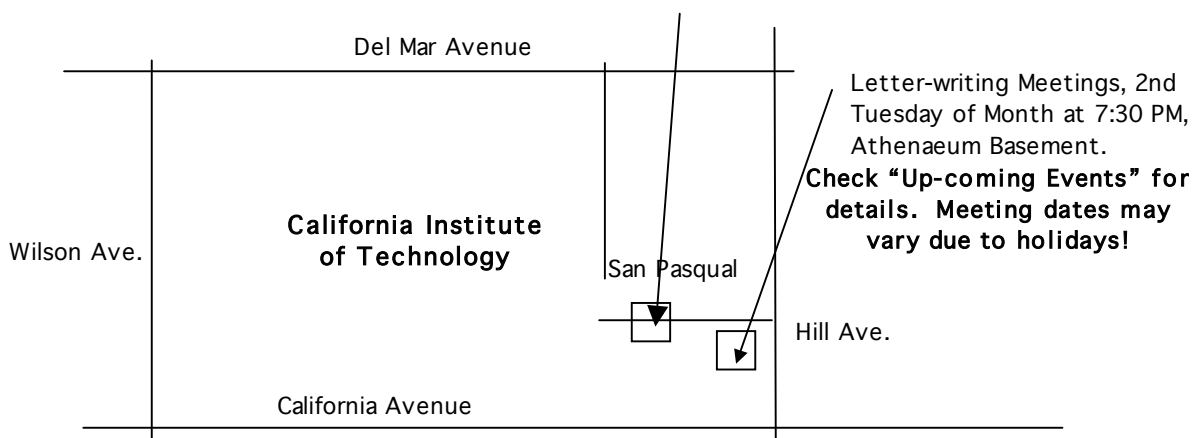
Life without Parole

Sidney Cornwell Ohio

GROUP 22 MONTHLY LETTER COUNT

UA's	15
POC	4
Special Mexico Action	11
Total	30
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.

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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.