

Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XX Number 11, November-December 2012

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, November 29, 7:30 PM. Monthly Meeting. We meet at the Caltech Y, Tyson House, 505 S. Wilson Ave., Pasadena. (This is just south of the corner with San Pasqual. Signs will be posted.) We will be planning our activities for the coming months. Please join us! Refreshments provided.

Saturday, December 8, 9 AM to 3 PM. **Global Human Rights Write-a-Thon**, at **Zephyr Café, 2419 E. Colorado Blvd, Pasadena. (Tel. 626-793-7330).** This is part of a global effort by Amnesty International to commemorate Human Rights Day (10 Dec). Please join us to write cards to victims of human-rights abuses all over the world, but also to engage in friendly conversation and enjoy the delicious food at Zephyr Café. (This replaces our usual letter-writing session on the 2nd Tuesday of the month.)

Sunday, December 16, 6:30 PM. Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion group. This month we discuss "Scenes from Village Life" by Amos Oz. Note change of location – the meeting will not be held at Vromans Bookstore, but at a private home. www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22 for location.

Tuesday, January 8, 2013, 7:30 PM. Letter writing meeting at Caltech Athenaeum, corner of Hill and California in Pasadena. The Rathskeller is in the Athenaeum basement; take the stairs to the right of the main entrance.

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Greetings!

Finally, a few days off in which to rest. We have the week of Thanksgiving off due to furlough days (which will be rescinded due to Prop 30 passing! We've had 4 years of furloughs...)

Group 22 members Joyce and Lucas attended the Western Regional meeting in San Francisco last Saturday. See their articles about the conference in this newsletter. The conference had been from Friday night to Sunday afternoon in the past. Amnesty has had to implement budget cuts like everyone else, although some would argue that AI's priorities have changed, and not for the better. See this controversial article sent by Lucas:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/nov/11/nick-cohen-is-amnesty-fit-fight>

What do you think? Personally, I think AI should not be involved in controversial issues such as abortion, and should have retained the emphasis on individual POCs, rather than general campaigns.

New member Michael has been tabling at the Friday night farmer's market and fair in Monrovia the last few weeks...way to go, Michael! Joyce and Larry tabled at the Caltech Y Community Advocacy Fair earlier this month.

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 16
6:30 pm**

**Scenes from Village
Life
By Amos Oz**

Note: meeting will be held at a private home: See Group 22's website for location.

<http://www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22>

Book Review:

If you can imagine a tenement building with a view into all the different windows you would see multiple, contrasting lives in private moments. Amos Oz's latest collection of eight stories uses this short-cut technique. However his panorama is not the city but the fictional Israeli village of Tel Ilan. Although the scenes are set today, he evokes a Chekhovian atmosphere of tragic lives misled on haunted ground.

His protagonists are recognisably Chekhovian: the mayor; the schoolteacher; the eternal student (in this case, Arab); the self-made businessman; the postmistress; the jaded radical. Surrounding all these people is an individual sense of loss: the loss of hope between Arab and Jew; the loss

of potential between a young boy and an older woman; the death of a marriage after an abortion. Oz's fast-paced dramas are gripping. A wife goes missing. A son blows his head off under his parents' bed.

Oz is also powerful in his evocation of the inexplicable. There are neo-Gothic moments as buildings almost become breathing characters. A house has a strange knocking underneath it. Another has a maze of mysterious underground rooms where a middle-aged man can be lost in an erotic journey with a young woman. The recurring theme of property - who owned it before 1948, and who is now is entitled to it - gives a throbbing tension. There is an implicit questioning of what the country was set up to do and how it has failed, both politically and personally. The accretion of sadness and waste, in each story, has an almost hypnotic effect. Oz leaves us no resolution. His device of connecting separate lives by having a leading character in one tale turn up as a bit player in another offers a kind of symmetry. But what is most arresting is the cumulative effect of his narratives and the relationships between three generations of Israelis in a territory that has too many ghosts.

Oz's mythical Tel Ilan is a microcosm of a modern Israeli village and, although his stories are fiction, there is a kind of documentary element - as with Chekhov. These Israelis may be living in a new land but they are also suffused with the sense of inner exile which makes these stories so arresting. The last tale, "In a faraway place at another time", shocks us into the future - or the past. In this unnamed village, the young grow old before their time. Here death and putrefaction rule. Is this the Europe of the Hitler years or is it the end of the world?

Author Biography

Amos Oz was born in 1939 in Jerusalem. At the age of 15 he went to live on a kibbutz. He studied philosophy and literature at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and was visiting fellow at Oxford University,

author-in-residence at the Hebrew University and writer-in-residence at Colorado College. He has been named Officer of Arts and Letters of France. An author of prose for both children and



adults, as well as an essayist, he has been widely translated and is internationally acclaimed. He has been honoured with the French Prix Femina and the 1992 Frankfurt Peace Prize. He lives in the southern town Arad and teaches literature at Ben Gurion University of the Negev.

Amos Oz has rooted his writing in the tempestuous history of his homeland. Through his writing, both fiction and nonfiction, runs a common thread: examining human nature, recognizing its frailty but glorying in its variety, Oz consistently makes the plea for an end to ambivalence, for dialogue, for a channelling of passions towards faith in the future. With an economy of words, Oz presents the people of Israel, its political tribulations and biblical landscape. Newsweek writes, "Eloquent, humane, even religious in the deepest sense, [Oz] emerges as a kind of Zionist Orwell: a complex man obsessed with simple decency and determined above all to tell the truth, regardless of whom it offends."

Report on Amnesty West Conference

by Joyce Wolf

Lucas and I attended the Amnesty Western Regional conference in San Francisco. This year it was just one day, Saturday, Nov 10. Carroll Pearson from New Mexico and our talented team of Amnesty West field organizers were responsible for putting the event together.

The opening keynote speaker was Lhamo Tso, wife of imprisoned Tibetan film-maker Dhondup Wangchen. (I will bring some postcards for Dhondup to our upcoming Write-a-thon.) We might want to arrange a group viewing of his documentary "Leaving Fear Behind". Lhamo Tso was followed by a panel of AIUSA board members, who attempted to explain the new AIUSA Strategic Business Plan. They stressed youth recruitment and quick response to breaking human rights crises. In response to a question, we were told that AIUSA did not plan a complete overhaul of its website, but would try to make improvements.

Lucas attended the Local Groups Caucus and said it was quite interesting this time. At lunch the efforts of workers for Prop 34 were recognized and we were exhorted to keep up our DP work, because "this is just the

beginning!" I did my bit of networking with visiting Business/Environment specialist Tony Cruz. He was one of the activists who attended Chevron shareholder meetings and actually met with the Chevron CEO.

Lucas attended an Infoshop on Middle East and North Africa, facilitated by our local Country Specialist Alireza Azizi. I went to the session on Afghan women's human rights and picked up a copy of their new activist toolkit, which I will share with anyone interested. Then came a grueling 3-hour Resolutions Voting Plenary. After lots of debate and amendments and appeals to obscure bits of Robert's Rules of Order, none of the three member-originated resolutions passed.

The concluding speaker was our own Bu Dongwei, a former prisoner of conscience who visited Group 22 back in March 2010 along with his wife and little daughter. He never tires of thanking Amnesty activists for all the letters which helped protect him from the worst forms of abuse during his ordeal in a Chinese labor camp. (Write-a-thon is coming up -- you can still watch his video at <http://vimeo.com/16943242>.)

Lucas and I agreed that the conference turned out quite well, thanks to the hard-working organizers, who coped successfully with the new budget and schedule constraints.

Supplement to Joyce's Report on Amnesty West Conference

by Lucas Kamp

I attended the Local Groups Caucus, which was very well run by Carroll Pearson. Groups were asked to present notable successes from the past year and there were a number of interesting items, including film events and visits by POCs who had been set free and on whom the groups had worked. I thought of Bu Dongwei's visit to our group a few years ago, but didn't mention it since it was not in the past year. Another noteworthy discussion topic was whether there is a difference in scale between groups in big cities and in smaller towns. Contrary to expectations, it emerged that Carroll's group in Las Vegas, NM, which is very small, has a regular monthly attendance of at least 15 people, whereas most of the groups in the SF and LA areas have at most 10 people at their meetings. One other item that was mentioned was that AIUSA still has a Special Initiatives Fund that will give a subsidy to a project that a group

wants to work on. The budget is much smaller than it used to be, a maximum of \$1500 per group, but it can still be quite useful.

The Infoshop on Middle East and North Africa was very informative, but ran into time constraint problems.

As Joyce said, we were pleasantly surprised by how well the conference went, given that it was squeezed into just one day.

- Lucas

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE

Gao Zhisheng

by Joyce Wolf

Our Amnesty colleagues in the United Kingdom have put together a great action website for Gao Zhisheng, Group 22's adopted prisoner of conscience. If you visit <http://tinyurl.com/aiuk-Gao>, you can send an interactive appeal for Gao's release and also watch a "Gangnam Style" video. (Thanks to Martha at rightsreaders for bringing this to our attention!)



It's very important to keep a steady stream of cards and letters arriving for Gao Zhisheng at the prison where he is detained. Even if he does not receive the letters himself, the officials will be aware of the international concern for him. Released prisoner Bu

Dongwei stressed this point. It was also the advice given by Dr. Perry Link, editor of Nobel Peace laureate Liu Xiaobo's book of selected essays and poems, when I asked his opinion on the most effective actions our group could take for Gao. (Group members Kathy and Stevi also attended Dr. Link's excellent talk at the Pacific Asia Museum last month.)

Gao Zhisheng is one of the featured cases of the December Write-a-thon, but you can send a card to Gao any time, the more the better. Postage is \$1.05.

Gao Zhisheng, Shaya Prison
P.O. Box 15, Sub-box 16
Shaya County, Aksu Prefecture
Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, 842208
People's Republic of China

Gender Defenders in the Slums of Nairobi, Kenya

by Paula Tavrow

In October 2012, I spent several weeks in the Nairobi slums in an effort to design an evaluation for a project to reduce coerced sex of schoolgirls by teaching them self-defense techniques. While there, I learned about the highly-regarded Gender Defenders program begun by Amnesty International in 2010. Many of the self-defense trainers I interviewed “moonlighted” as volunteer Gender Defenders in some of the most violent slums.

How does the Gender Defenders activity work? As it was described to me, any adult resident of the Nairobi slums could participate in a free training program conducted in community centers (e.g., churches or schools) in the slums.

The training consisted of three modules (each of about 3 hours in length) which were held over three Saturdays: (1) human rights; (2) legal and medical issues; and (3) child rights. The first module focused on Kenyans’ rights to safety, bodily integrity, consensual marriage, and so on. The second module explained what to do if someone had been assaulted and/or raped (such as how to get medical documentation and/or a rape kit performed, how to file a police report, how to get legal assistance). The third module described specific rights of children (up to age 18) and special issues in dealing with traumatized and/or abused children.

Those who successfully completed the training and wanted to join the gender-based violence network provided their name, location and cell phone information to the trainers. The trainers then compiled a master list of “Gender Defenders” and circulated it back to all people on the list.

If someone in one of the slums experiences gender-based violence, such as rape, community members can call a hotline or main number. The operators of the hotline then try to locate a Gender Defender who resides within walking distance of the incident. This Gender Defender, who is a volunteer, may be contacted any time day or night. (One person told me that she was called at 11 PM the night before.) If the Defender is in the vicinity he or she will be the “first responder” and assist the victim to get to the nearest clinic or police station.

In cases of domestic violence, the Gender Defender usually rounds up a small group of Defenders to go en masse to a home and take the husband (who is usually drunk) to the nearest police station. I was told that the Defenders sometimes perform their own “citizen arrest” and remain at the police station to make sure that the man is arrested and charged. In the less common situations where a woman was violent, too, she may also be taken to the police station.

While it is difficult to be “on call” as a Gender Defender, the Defenders who I met were all very proud to be members and felt that they were providing a valuable service to the community. They felt that the training had opened their eyes to their rights. Most referred to themselves as “human rights activists.”

Gender Defenders felt that they were helping to make their communities safer and to reduce domestic violence, because husbands who had been humiliated by the Defenders were less likely to re-attack their spouses. They said that the training by Amnesty International was very understandable and interactive. They also felt that they could sustain the program and that it was respected by their neighbors. Some of the Defenders were also trying to mobilize for better lighting and sanitation (latrines) in the slums.

On a sad note, the Defenders did tell me that rapists of female minors often go free in the slums shortly after they have been arrested. Ironically, the Defenders attribute this situation to the very harsh laws on rape that exist in Kenya. A man who has been convicted of raping a minor is sentenced to life imprisonment. What this means in practice is that the family of an accused rapist (when the facts are incontrovertible) will be desperate to free the man from jail, and will raise money to “bribe” the family of the girl to drop the case.

Because slum families are very poor, parents are often quick to accept a “bribe” (usually of \$150-350), rationalizing that “the damage has already been done.” The family will then cajole the girl who had been raped to recant her testimony. This leads to further torment for the girl, because she usually will soon see again in the neighborhood the very man who had raped her. In some cases, he is an authority figure (teacher, relative, pastor) with whom the poor girl is in regular contact.

The Gender Defenders did not have any good strategies for how to change this situation, other

than possibly penalizing parents who took "bribes." However, they did feel that it was possible that having to come up with a significant sum of money will anger the family of the rapist and make them disinclined to bail him out again. So this might discourage future rape or lead to more convictions.

Overall, I was pleased to know that Amnesty International is supporting such a worthwhile and sustainable activity. And kudos to all of us for being members of such an organization!

DEATH PENALTY NEWS

By Stevi Carroll

Proposition 34

Voters November 6, 2012, dealt a death blow to Proposition 34.

Jeanne Woodford, former warden, San Quentin, who oversaw four executions, endorsed Prop 34. So did Ron Briggs who'd been the lead proponent of the initiative to reestablish the death penalty in California in 1978. Former LA District Attorney Gil Garcetti made his support public as did retired police officer Steve Fajardo. The stories of Obie Anthony, released after serving 17 for a murder he didn't commit; Franky Carrillo, released after serving 19 years for a murder he didn't commit; and Maurice Caldwell, released after serving 21 years for a murder he didn't commit, did not convince Californians we need to replace the death penalty. Same goes for the story Ronnie Carmona Sandoval whose son was murdered; she, too, supported Prop 34. In these times of fiscal uncertainty, one would think money would influence votes, but even the savings of over \$100-\$130 million a year didn't persuade enough voters to pass the proposition.

Now with that said, 47.8% of the population voted to replace the death penalty with life without parole; that's 5,514,080 of our brothers and sisters who voted YES on Prop 34. Many thanks to them. Perhaps when we Californians have to pay for a new death row, more people will see that change in sentencing to life without parole is an advantage for their wallets. If the people who want to speed up the appeals process get some traction, we Californians will have to pay for the increased number of lawyers needed to handle the caseload quickly so we can speed up to more timely executions. Whose

wallet will that chunk of change come from? Ours.

The California Death Row currently houses 14 inmates who have exhausted their appeals. Now that the death penalty has received a bump in its acceptance, we Californians will have to decide on the use of the one-drug lethal injection method of State killing.

McGregor Scott, a former US Attorney in Sacramento and a leader in the NO on Prop 34 campaign, said, "If the Legislature continues to abandon its responsibility by refusing to implement common-sense reforms then we will put our full support behind a ballot initiative to get the job done in 2014." And if the one-drug procedure isn't quickly adopted, death penalty supporters will pitch an initiative to ensure its use.

All the same, Prop 34 lost with 52.2% of our brothers and sisters voting against it. Compared to the 71% of the electorate who voted in 1978 to reinstate the death penalty, the support for State sanctioned murder seems on the wane by almost 20 percentage points. Maybe all the stories, personal and economic, paid off.

We Amnesty members will continue to petition for clemency for inmates sentenced to die, and we will continue to educate our brothers and sisters about the realities of the death penalty. As James Clark from the SAFE California campaign said after the election, "We haven't won yet, but California will never be the same."

Two Hundred Fifty - Go Texas

When Donnie Roberts died in the Texas death chamber October 31, 2012, he was 250th human being to be executed in that fair state. Amnesty International USA issued this statement:

250th Execution to Occur Tonight in Texas
Contact: Sharon Singh, ssingh@aiusa.org, 202-675-8579, [@spksingh](https://twitter.com/spksingh)

(Washington, D.C.) – Amnesty International USA executive director Suzanne Nossel issued the following statement as the state of Texas plans to execute the 250th person this evening under Governor Rick Perry's tenure:
"When Governor Perry took office, he suggested that Texas justice 'can be better,' but 250 state killings later – including executions of teenage offenders, the mentally disabled and likely innocent – it is clear little effort has been made to improve things under his leadership.

"Governor Perry's anachronistic enthusiasm for state killing is in stark contrast to the clear trend away from the death penalty exhibited by ordinary Texans in juries, where death sentences have declined dramatically over the last dozen years.

"Amnesty International calls on the governor to support clemency in this and future cases along with working to end the death penalty in Texas. "Perhaps Mr. Perry needs to spend more time paying heed to his constituents and less time as the Grim Reaper."

source: <http://www.amnestyusa.org/news/press-releases/250th-execution-to-occur-tonight-in-texas>

Stays of execution

October

23 John Ferguson Florida

November

9 Hubert Michael Pennsylvania

Executions

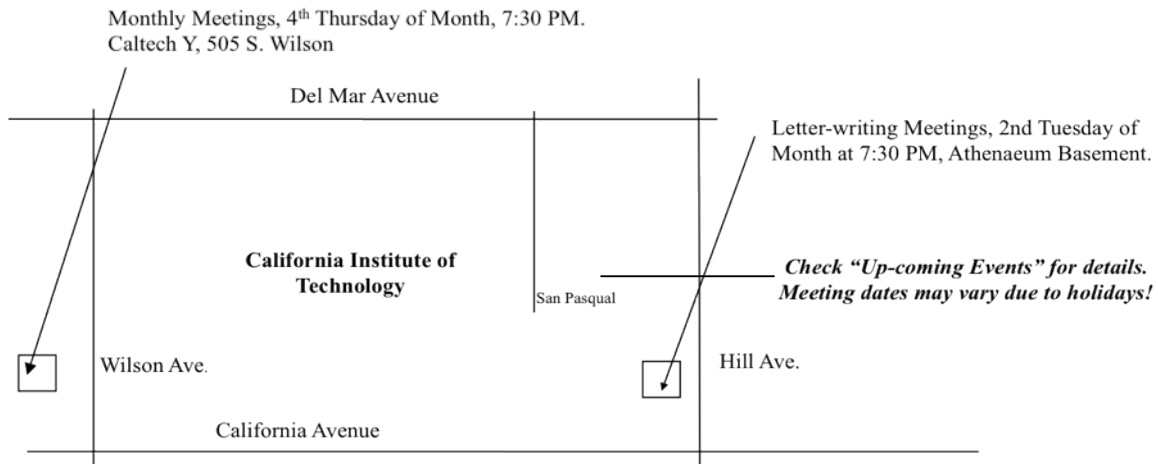
October

24 Bobby Hines Texas
1-drug lethal injection
30 Donald Moeller South Dakota
1-drug lethal injection
31 Donnie Roberts Texas
1-drug lethal injection

November

6 Garry Allen Oklahoma
3-drug lethal injection
8 Mario Swain Texas
1-drug lethal injection
13 Brett Hartman Ohio
1-drug lethal injection
14 Ramon Hernandez Texas
1-drug lethal injection
15 Preston Hughes Texas
1-drug lethal injection

GROUP 22 MONTHLY LETTER COUNT	
UAs	18
Tibet postcards	5
Total	23
To add your letters to the total contact	
lwkamp@gmail.com .	



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 C1-128
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.