

Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XXI Number 1, January 2013

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, January 24, 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.

Tuesday, February 12, 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. Look for the table with the Amnesty sign. Please join us to write actions on human-rights violations around the world. This informal gathering is a great way for newcomers to get acquainted with Amnesty!

Sunday, February 17, 6:30 PM. Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion Group. This month we discuss *The Garlic Ballads* by Nobel laureate Mo Yan.

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi everyone,

Hope you all had nice holidays and are rested up for the new year!

Rob and I went to Corvallis, Oregon, to see his family, and my sister came down later from Northern California after Christmas. We had a nice visit.

Group 22 had our 5th(?) annual letter writing marathon at a local coffee shop in December on Human Rights Day, which was a big success - a total of 123 cards and letters were written to prisoners of conscience all over the world. Thanks to those who came to write letters and those who organized it.

Did any of you see the Rose Parade? The Tournament of Roses president this year was a nurse, Sally Bixby. Did you see the nurses' float, "A Healing Place"? Nurses from all over Southern California worked on the float, including some of my school nurse co-workers. See this link:

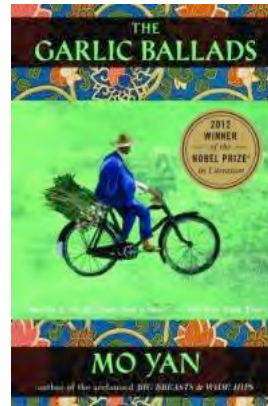
<http://www.flowers4thefloat.org/>

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, February 17
6:30 pm

Vroman's Bookstore
695 E. Colorado,
Pasadena

The Garlic Ballads
By Mo Yan

Book Review:

www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/mo-yan/the-garlic-ballads

An epic tale, banned in China, that tells of ordinary lives brutally destroyed by greed--official and familial. Setting his story in an agricultural region of China, Mo Yan (Red Sorghum, 1993) takes a seemingly unlikely subject, the 1987 glut of garlic, and transforms it into fictional gold as the personal valiantly battles the pervasive political. Though recent reforms have restored private ownership of land, at a price, the farmers of Paradise County are still subordinate to Communist officialdom, which, having jettisoned much of its ideology, now uses its power just as savagely to enrich itself. Moving back and forth in time, in prose that is often lyrical, always vivid, the story is as much about love as it is about the greed that corrupts families as well as officials. Determined to punish the farmers, who'd rioted after a lengthy and futile wait to sell their garlic to the county government, the police arrest farmer Gao Yang, as well as the Fang family matriarch, Fourth Aunt. They also briefly capture another farmer, Gao Ma. As the three try to survive either in prison or on the lam, they remember the past. Gao Yang tells of being frequently beaten and harassed during his childhood and early manhood for being born into a family of the then-reviled landowning class; Fourth Aunt recalls her greedy sons' cruelty to her only daughter, Jinju, and how her husband was callously run over by an official, who refused to

pay any damages; and Gao Ma relives the terrible beatings Jinju received after she'd run away with him, because her brothers wanted her to marry a man with money. With a litany of horrors so long and so unsparing—if unsurprising—consolations are rare. An affecting vindication of the human spirit under extreme duress—from a writer of tremendous power and sympathy.

Author Biography



Mo Yan (a pseudonym for Guan Moye) was born in 1955 and grew up in Gaomi in Shandong province in north-eastern China. His parents were farmers. As a twelve-year-old during the Cultural Revolution he left school to work, first in agriculture, later in a

factory. In 1976 he joined the People's Liberation Army and during this time began to study literature and write. His first short story was published in a literary journal in 1981.

In his writing Mo Yan draws on his youthful experiences and on settings in the province of his birth. This is apparent in his novel *Hong gaoliang jiazou* (1987, in English *Red Sorghum* 1993). The book consists of five stories that unfold and interweave in Gaomi in several turbulent decades in the 20th century, with depictions of bandit culture, the Japanese occupation and the harsh conditions endured by poor farm workers. *Red Sorghum* was successfully filmed in 1987, directed by Zhang Yimou. The novel *Tiantang suantai zhi ge* (1988, in English *The Garlic Ballads* 1995) and his satirical *Jiuguo* (1992, in English *The Republic of Wine* 2000) have been judged subversive because of their sharp criticism of contemporary Chinese society.

Through a mixture of fantasy and reality, historical and social perspectives, Mo Yan has created a world reminiscent in its complexity of those in the writings of William Faulkner and Gabriel García Márquez, at the same time finding a departure point in old Chinese literature and in oral tradition. In addition to his novels, Mo Yan has published many short stories and essays on various topics, and despite his social criticism is seen in his homeland as one of the foremost contemporary authors.

www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2012

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE

Gao Zhisheng

by Joyce Wolf

Group 22's adopted prisoner of conscience Gao Zhisheng was one of Amnesty's featured cases in the December Write-a-thon. As we wrote our own letters for Gao, it was heartening to think of the thousands of cards and letters from Amnesty activists around the world that would soon be arriving for him at Shaya Prison in remote northwestern China.



And possibly that flood of letters had a real effect! On January 12 Gao was permitted a brief visit by family members, the only contact since March, 2012. Although the visit was very brief and subject to many

constraints, it is still very encouraging to know that he is still alive and apparently in reasonably good health.

Here are excerpts from a Radio Free Asia article.

Family Visits Jailed Lawyer
2013-01-18

The family of jailed lawyer Gao Zhisheng, one of China's highest-profile dissidents, has visited him at a remote jail in China's northwestern region of Xinjiang, but was forbidden from speaking to him freely, his wife said on Friday.

Gao, who has defended clients in politically sensitive cases, was allowed a 30-minute meeting on Jan. 12 with his fourth younger brother and Geng Yunjia, the father of Gao's wife Geng He, who now lives in the United States with the couple's two children.

But the two men were warned not to ask him about his case or about conditions inside the jail. "We didn't ask anything about his situation, because it has to do with politics," Geng Yunjia said on Friday. "We stayed within the rules while we were speaking to him. We just talked about our lives. The prison rules said we had to do it that way," he said, but declined to comment further.

Geng He said she found out about the visit only after Gao's brother returned home from Xinjiang this week, and that she was disappointed at the strict controls set by the authorities. "As soon as he got to the prison, they told them a list of five or six things he wasn't allowed to ask Gao Zhisheng, including details of his case, how he was doing in

the prison here, none of that," she said. "If they asked him, they would terminate the meeting immediately, whether it had gone on for one minute or 10."

The authorities left no means for the family to contact the prison, nor did they answer questions about a possible release date for Gao, Geng said.

'She said that the conversation remained limited to family news, but that Gao seemed reasonably well. "His brother noticed [Gao] had chapped skin around his lips, and told him to drink more water," Geng said. "He walked without assistance, and it didn't look as if there was any problem with his mobility," she added. "He seemed fairly alert, as well."

"They told me his head was shaved."

Beijing-based rights activist Hu Jia, who recently launched an online campaign to send greetings cards to Gao for Christmas, said activists were continuing to send cards for Gao ahead of Chinese New Year. Hu said it didn't matter whether Gao received them or not, because the number of cards he received would make the authorities treat him with more respect and improve his conditions inside the jail.

"These sorts of things always benefit political prisoners," Hu said. "It's not just about giving encouragement to the prisoner, but also about sending a message to the prison staff, and maybe making them more restrained, which can improve the treatment and safety of political prisoners in jail."

www.rfa.org/english/news/china/jailed-01182013151616.html

So let's do what Hu Jia said and keep sending cards! (Chinese New Year is Feb 10, 2013.)

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

DEATH PENALTY NEWS

By Stevi Carroll

Happy 2013! May joy and many opportunities for civic engagement come our way.

The Death Penalty in 2012 and beyond

According to the Death Penalty Information Center website, forty-two people were executed

in the United States during 2012, not quite one a week.

The state with the highest rate is Texas with 15 people while Delaware and Idaho executed one person each. Here's the list: Texas 15, Arizona 6, Oklahoma 6, Mississippi 6, Florida 3, Ohio 2, South Dakota 2, Delaware 1, and Idaho 1.

On the bright side, the following states now do not have the death penalty: Alaska (1957), Connecticut- 11 people still on death row (2012), Hawaii (1957), Illinois (2011), Iowa (1965), Maine (1887), Massachusetts (1984), Michigan (1846), Minnesota (1911), New Jersey (2007), New Mexico two people still on death row (2009), New York (2007), North Dakota (1973), Rhode Island (1984), Vermont (1964), West Virginia (1965), Wisconsin (1853), and the District of Columbia (1981).

From the Death Penalty Information Center we learn:

Many States to Consider Death Penalty Abolition and Reform in 2013

As legislative sessions begin across the country, legislators in several states have proposed bills to abolish or reform the death penalty in 2013. In Alabama, Sen. Hank Sanders will introduce bills to abolish the death penalty, or alternatively to institute a series of reforms. "I believe the death penalty is not only unproductive but counter-productive," he said. Texas will also consider a number of death penalty reform bills, including restrictions on certain types of evidence, and the creation of an innocence commission. Colorado Sen. Claire Levy is drafting a bill to abolish the death penalty. "We have increasing concerns about the possibility of executing an innocent person," said Levy. Kentucky Rep. Carl Rollins plans to propose a bill to replace the death penalty with a sentence of life without parole. In Maryland, Gov. Martin O'Malley has voiced support for a bill to end the death penalty and direct some of the money saved to murder victims' families. New Hampshire's Gov. Margaret Hassan also supports abolition, and a bill is likely to be introduced in that state. In Oregon, where Gov. John Kitzhaber instituted a moratorium on executions for the remainder of his term, Rep. Mitch Greenlick plans to introduce a bill beginning the process of abolishing the death penalty. (source: <http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/many-states-consider-death-penalty-abolition-and-reform-2013>)

Hope for the abolition of the death penalty continues.

The Supremes and the Death Penalty

Clarence Thomas may be the silent member of the Supreme Court but in January he had something to write about the death penalty. The Supremes unanimously rejected indefinite delays in the federal review of death penalty cases when inmates are mentally incompetent to assist their attorneys. Justice Thomas wrote that the appeals are based on facts that already have been established, and the attorneys can address any legal errors and put together any relevant arguments without their clients assistance. He went on to say, "Where there is no reasonable hope of competence, a stay is inappropriate and merely frustrates the state's attempts to defend its presumptively valid judgment."

While I scratch my head about what this all means, I'm pretty sure competence doesn't have to be a given for a person to be executed.

Acquittal for Seth Penalver

On December 21, 2012, Seth Penalver was acquitted of all charges in the triple murders of Casimir Sucharski, Sharon Anderson, and Marie Rogers. Mr. Penalver spent 13 years on death row before his conviction was overturned last December. According to an article in Sun Sentinel, "Penalver wept, got off his chair, knelt in apparent prayer, stood up, took deep breaths and repeatedly embraced defense attorney Hilliard Moldof, who also wept."

George Allen free after 30 years in prison

George Allen left a Jefferson City, Missouri, courthouse in November 2012 a free man after serving 30 years in prison for a rape and murder he did not commit. Lawyers from the Midwest Innocent Project worked on his case. Because one of the jurors in his case had a family emergency that caused the juror's dismissal, the sentencing in Mr. Allen's trial couldn't be held and the state was forced to waive the death penalty. Reviewing the DNA collected at the crime site proved Mr. Allen did not commit the crime and had he been sentenced to death 30 years ago, he may never have lived to see the day of his release.

February 23-March 10, 2013 Weeks of Action to End the Death Penalty

This Spring decisions will be made in the Reggie Clemons case -- a Missouri death penalty case

characterized by poor defense lawyering, and police and prosecutor misconduct. Also this Spring, at least four states will be pushing abolition bills, and law schools and the legal community will be marking the 50th anniversary of Gideon v. Wainwright, the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision that guaranteed the right to a lawyer in criminal cases for all defendants. It is for these reasons that Inadequate counsel will be the theme of our 2013 Death Penalty Action Weeks (February 23-March 10).

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/campaigns/abolish-the-death-penalty/death-penalty-campaign-resources>

Commuted to Life Without Parole

January 2013

16 Ronald Post Ohio

Stays of Execution

December 2012

11 Roy Ward Indiana

12 Rigoberto Avila Texas

January 2013

8 Mark Spotz Pennsylvania

16 Ronald Post Ohio

Executions

December 2012

4 George Ochoa Oklahoma
3-drug lethal injection

5 Richard Stokley Arizona

11 Manuel Pardo Florida
1-drug lethal injection

3-drug lethal injection

January 2013

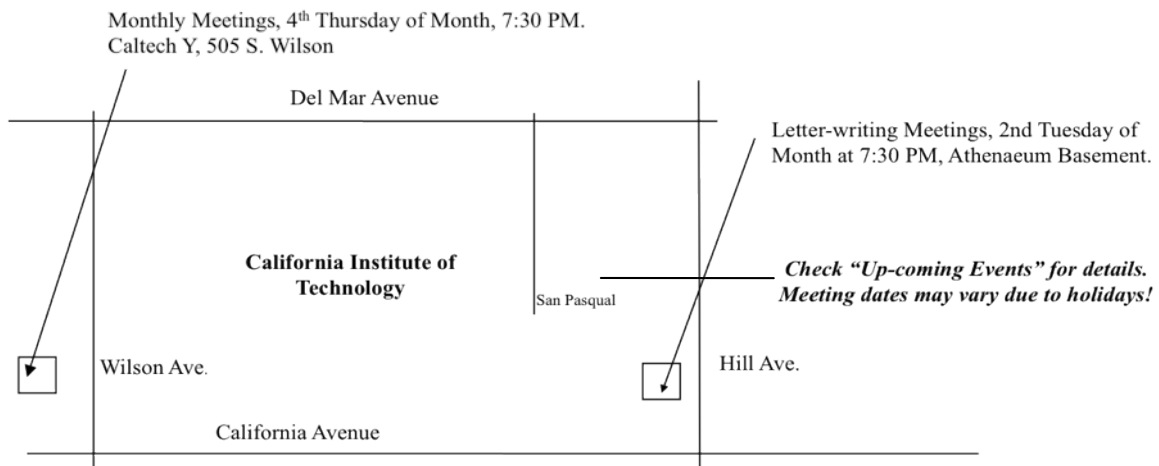
16 Robert Gleason* Virginia
electrocution

* volunteer

GROUP 22 MONTHLY LETTER COUNT (JANUARY 2013)

UAs	26
POC	3
Total	29

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.