

# Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XXI Number 6, June 2013

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Thursday, June 27, 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, July 9, 7:30 PM.** Letter writing meeting at Caltech Athenaeum, corner of Hill and California in Pasadena. During the summer we meet outdoors at the Athenaeum's "Rath al Fresco," on the lawn behind the main building. This informal gathering is a great way for newcomers to get acquainted with Amnesty!

**Sunday, July 21, 6:30 PM.** Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion Group. This month we read "American Gypsy" by Oksana Marafioti.

## COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi everyone!

Writing this on my first day off. Nice to not have to worry about going to bed early enough so I can get up at the crack of dawn and feel rested... (School for kids was out June 7<sup>th</sup>, but I worked for 2 more weeks for extra money).

Some Group 22 members have been having fun – check out Laura's article on tabling at a local Rock concert!

This month's book looks intriguing – think I may get a copy and read it. I don't know what gypsies are supposed to look like, but she has a sort of exotic Asian look...

Turkey (and Syria!) have been in the news recently. Here's an email action about the protests in Turkey:

<http://takeaction.amnestyusa.org/siteapps/advocacy/ActionItem.aspx?c=60JCLOPAJjUG&b=6645049&aid=519905&msource=W1306EACPR2>

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, July 21**  
**6:30 pm**

***American Gypsy***  
**by Oksana Marafioti**

**Vroman's Bookstore**  
**695 E. Colorado, Pasadena**

## Author Bio

I was born in Riga, Latvia and grew up in a stage family, spending my childhood on concert tours with a Russian Romani troupe led by my grandfather, Andrei Kopylenko. It consisted of singers, dancers, musicians, even acrobats.

This sounds glamorous, and, at times, it was, if you don't count hauling stage equipment and costumes from one train station to the next, eating hotel food (sometimes getting sick from it and swearing to never eat hotel food again... then breaking your promise in the next town), and never knowing what kind of an audience you'll get. Will they slump over in their seats asleep halfway through the show or chase the performers after, begging them to autograph their galoshes? It might not have been glamorous most of the time, but it was certainly magical. Kind of like living inside a book, side by side with fascinating characters who surprise you every time you think you got them. These people taught me that doing what you love is never easy, but it makes you who you are, or rather reveals what you're made of at your very core. I'll always admire each and every one of those performers, my grandparents and parents included, for showing me that artistic creativity of any kind is a serious trade that requires years of practice and dedication.



I moved to America at fifteen, went to Hollywood High Performing Arts Magnet School, which was like experiencing culture shock on steroids. Before moving I really imagined America being like the movies and the music videos. Remember the barely clad hunks

and goddesses dancing in the streets alongside Elton John in “I’m Still Standing”, or Bangles’ “Walk Like An Egyptian”? That was my America. The place where people were carefree and unburdened. Of course I didn’t find too many Americans dancing in the streets, but I wasn’t disappointed for too long and quickly set off on a quest to get to know this country. Meanwhile, my dad, after many unsuccessful attempts to break into Hollywood music business, opened a psychic shop and developed his skills as an exorcist and a healer (something he was never allowed to do under Soviet rule), and my mom moved to Las Vegas on a whim and became a change girl (her version of chasing the dream).

Since then, to sum up, I’ve graduated from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, worked in the film industry, got married, had a couple of awesome kids, ran a piano studio, obtained a dual American-Italian citizenship through ancestry research (ancestry.com rules!), moved to Florence and then Rome, Italy with three humans and one cat, came back to the States, pitched an urban fantasy to a literary agent, ended up writing *American Gypsy: A Memoir* instead, and most recently, got a fellowship for my next book project at the Black Mountain Institute-Kluge Center in partnership with the Library of Congress.

## Book Review

### KIRKUS REVIEW

In this engaging immigrant memoir, first-time author Marafioti, née Kopylenko, describes with humor and introspection how the self-described “Split Nationality Disorder” she experienced growing up only magnified upon her family’s emigration from the former Soviet Union to Los Angeles when she was 15.

Born into a Moscow-based Roma family, the author spent the first 15 years of her life seeing Siberia, Mongolia and the former Soviet Union with her parents, who performed in a traveling Roma ensemble “the size of a circus.” Even as a child, Marafioti became acutely aware of racism both within her own family, as she witnessed the difficulty her Armenian mother faced gaining acceptance from her Russian paternal grandmother, and in school, as her Roma heritage was cruelly outed by a classmate sticking a sign to her back that read “Gyp.” Though well-off in their native Moscow, Marafioti’s family—especially her father, a

gifted guitarist and composer—looked to the United States as a land of even greater opportunity, where their Romani roots would not carry the Gypsy stigma. One of the more humorous scenes involves the family’s green card interview, where the U.S. consular officer’s limited Russian led her to question Marafioti’s mother on her drinking (which she was notorious for), when she meant *singing* (one letter difference in Russian), her father babbling on about wishing to play with B.B. King and heal people with his bare hands. Soon after the family arrived in California, the author’s parents divorced, leaving her to cope with a broken home and dramatic change in finances, alongside the more typical immigrant difficulties of adapting to a foreign language and culture. As she recounts her love, loss and academic achievement experienced while “attending the same school that Cher once did,” Marafioti’s probing observation of the contrast of American individualism with fierce Roma ethnocentrism, even xenophobia, yields a provocative exploration of identity.

Contrasting cultural values shine in this winning contemporary immigrant account of assimilation versus individuation.

*Review Posted Online: May 31st, 2012*  
*Kirkus Reviews Issue: June 15th, 2012*

<p><b>PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE</b> <b>Gao Zhisheng</b> by Joyce Wolf</p>
--

Two months ago Group 22 sent birthday cards and greetings to our adopted prisoner of conscience, human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng. We’re not the only Amnesty group who sent him our good wishes. Here’s a video I found on Youtube: “Happy Birthday Gao Zhisheng!” by amnesty algerie.

(<http://youtu.be/uD9BtqOELiE>)

That’s right, it’s an Amnesty group in Algeria. “Amnesty International Algérie souhaite un joyeux anniversaire à Gao Zhisheng, un avocat chinois enfermé par ce qu’il plaide pour la liberté.” Their video is in English, and they hold signs and sing. It’s 39 seconds that will warm your heart and make you realize that Amnesty International is truly international.

Closer to home, the Visual Artists Guild commemorated the 24<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Tiananmen. This year one of the honorees was Zhu Yufu, an activist now serving a 7-year prison sentence. The Visual Artists Guild printed postcards for Zhu Yufu, which are being offered by AIUSA China Co-Group to Amnesty local groups. I requested some for Group 22, but I didn't respond immediately, and at least six other Amnesty local groups got their requests in before me. I hope there are still some cards left for us!

Here is the poem by Zhu Yufu that angered China's government officials:  
(translated by A. E. Clark)

*It's time, people of China! It's time.  
The Square belongs to everyone.  
With your own two feet  
It's time to head to the Square and make your  
choice.*

*It's time, people of China! It's time.  
A song belongs to everyone.  
From your own throat  
It's time to voice the song in your heart.*

*It's time, people of China! It's time.  
China belongs to everyone.  
Of your own will  
It's time to choose what China shall be.*

Last month we wrote on behalf of Gao Zhisheng to the new President of China, Xi Jinping. This month let's write to the new Premier.

LI Keqiang Guojia Zongli  
The State Council General Office  
2 Fuyoujie  
Xichengqu  
Beijingshi 100017  
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Dear Premier,

I am writing to you about **Gao Zhisheng** (高智晟), a Beijing-based human rights lawyer who was detained in Shaanxi Province on February 4, 2009. He is now in Shaya Prison in Xinjiang Autonomous Region, after being subjected to enforced disappearance for nearly three years.

I was happy to learn that Mr. Gao's brother and father-in-law were allowed a brief visit with him on 12 January 2013, and I urge you to ensure that Mr. Gao is not subjected to torture or other ill-treatment while he is in custody, that he receives whatever medical

treatment he may require, and that he is able to contact his family and lawyers.

I respectfully urge you to consider the **immediate and unconditional release** of Gao Zhisheng. Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

Copy to:  
Ambassador CUI Tiankai  
Embassy of the People's Republic of China  
3505 International Place, NW  
Washington DC 20008

**GROUP 22 AT  
TOM PETTY CONCERT  
by Laura Brown**



**Group 22 works with Rhythm 'N' Rights at  
Tom Petty Concert  
Laura, Ted and daughter**

Group 22 member Laura Brown, along with volunteers Melanie Gilbert, Sarah Clabeaux, and Ted Brown, manned a table June 11 and collected signatures at a Tom Petty concert in Hollywood. This outreach event was a joint effort with Rhythm 'N' Rights, a group that promotes human rights, a sustainable planet, and workers' rights by using concerts to inform the community about these issues.

AI volunteers set up the table with banners, pamphlets, and petitions 3 hours before the concert began. Signatures were collected on behalf of Shi Tao, who is serving a 10-year-sentence for sending an email about government crackdowns on Tiananmen Square's 15<sup>th</sup>

Anniversary events. Other actions included support for Tibetan filmmaker Dhondup Wangchen, who spoke out for Tibetan human rights through his documentary films, and Shaker Aamer, who has been held without charge at Guantanamo for 11 years. (It's worth noting that many people pointedly refused to sign his petition while signing all the others.) In addition to these actions, we collected names in support of the Student Non-Discrimination Act, sponsored by Senator Al Franken and Representatives Jared Polis and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, which would expand federal protections for LGBT students in public schools.

After interacting with the concertgoers, handing out pamphlets, collecting signatures and even getting some donations and a couple of names on our email list, we were treated to the strains of Tom Petty's music starting up shortly after 9:00 p.m. We were able to enjoy some great tunes within the small confines of the Henry Ford Theater.

Other recent artists and venues which Rhythm 'N' Rights has worked with include Peter Gabriel at the Hollywood Bowl, Steve Earle at Royce Hall, UCLA, and Roger Waters' Wall Live Tour at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. If you enjoy encouraging the public to take action on vital issues while enjoying a little live music, contact Angie Hougas, R 'N' R Concert Tabling Coordinator, at [hougas@execpc.com](mailto:hougas@execpc.com)

## SECURITY WITH HUMAN RIGHTS

By Robert Adamsl

Well, in mid June the U.S. House of Representatives passed the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) of 2014 (H.R. 1960) by a vote of 315-108. Once it is approved in its final form, the NDAA will specify the budget and expenditures of the Department of Defense for Fiscal Year 2014, and thus it is very important legislation affecting many issues of concern for human rights activists. In regard to Guantanamo, the House made little progress toward closing the prison, and a few of the nearly 200 amendments voted on are summarized below (from [lawfareblog.com](http://lawfareblog.com)):

- Walorski Amendment #19: to prohibit the Secretary of Defense from using any funds authorized to the department for the transfer or release of any Guantanamo detainees to Yemen. *Passed 236-188 (225 Republicans in favor, 183 Democrats against)*
- Ross Amendment #105: None of the funds authorized to be appropriated or otherwise available to the Department of Defense may be used to provide additional or upgraded recreational facilities for individuals detained at United States Naval Station, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. *Agreed en bloc by voice vote.*
- Smith Amendment #20: Provides a framework to close the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, by December 1, 2014. *Failed 174-249 (172 Democrats in favor, 228 Republicans against)*

Though House votes concerning Guantanamo may have been disappointing, the NDAA now moves on to the Senate. While it's not known at this time when voting on the NDAA will occur in the Senate, AIUSA is requesting that the following actions be taken in support of closing the Guantanamo Bay prison:

1. **Call both of your Senators** via the Senate switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and say, "I live in your state and I want you to support closing Guantanamo." You can also email them and schedule lobby meetings with their in-state offices. Go to [senate.gov](http://senate.gov) for their contact info.
2. **Call the White House** comment line at (202) 456-1111 and say, "I support closing Guantanamo. Transfer cleared detainees now." Busy signal? Call again!

As stated by Zeke Johnson, Director of AIUSA's Security with Human Rights Program, "We are at a pivotal moment in the campaign and need more pressure than ever for real change – especially on each and every Senator, as they will soon debate and vote on Guantanamo transfer provisions in the next National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). We also have to keep the pressure on President Obama to transfer cleared detainees. NOW."



## DEATH PENALTY NEWS

By Stevi Carroll

### Holy Moly - What's Happening in North Carolina?

Steve Monks, an attorney in Durham, NC, and the former Durham County GOP Chairman, recently published an op-ed in which he called the death penalty into question. He not only talks about conservatives from NC, but also discusses his brother who lives in Texas and who is a founding member of a group called "Conservatives Concerned About the Death Penalty." What's the deal? Well, it seems the members of this group as well as other conservatives "are openly questioning whether the death penalty serves any good purpose for our society." For them this questioning is rooted in the very nature of their being "conservative Republicans". And they 'came out' and were well received at the most recent Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC).

So just what's at stake for these abolitionist Republicans? Money is for one thing. They know right from the get go, death penalty cases cost more. In fact, Mr. Monks said, "The trials, with so much at stake, are necessarily expensive and the appeals can take decades because of the real concern of executing innocent people. Attempts to "fix" the system to make it faster have repeatedly failed precisely because of the innocence issue; more than 140 death row inmates have been released after evidence came to light that they were wrongfully convicted." He follows this statement with the reality that murder victims' families have to endure the years of waiting, something that would be eliminated with life in prison without parole.

Finally, Mr. Monks challenges what has long been a question for me: Conservatives 'pro-life' position that has embraced the death penalty. He said, "We are increasingly re-thinking the death penalty because of its many problems, but also because of our respect for human life." (Maybe the reckless use of war can follow?)

Well, if conservatives in both North Carolina and Texas can begin to think about options to the death penalty, perhaps the rest of the South can follow. And then maybe California, too?

### Retired Ohio Judge "Evolves"

As I've been writing this column, I've noticed the number of executions in Ohio. Before I started this task, I figured I'd see the numbers from Texas and states in the deep South, so when Ohio kept appearing on the list, I was surprised.

Former Ohio Supreme Court Justice Evelyn Lundberg Stratton (Republican) sat on the bench from 1996 to 2012. During that time, Ohio executed 49 men using lethal injection. She said that she did not have "a strong overall opinion about the death penalty" then, but now her opinion has changed.

She has come to believe the execution of mentally ill prisoners is unacceptable. She also believes the death penalty does not sufficiently deter crime nor does it allow closure for the victims' families.

Apparently, former Justice Stratton isn't the only Ohio Republican Justice to have a change of thought. Justice Paul Pfeifer, who 30 years ago was one of the authors of current Ohio death penalty law, wants the state to stop executing people because of how the law is interpreted and applied unevenly.

For the prisoners who have already been put to death in Ohio, it is too late, but perhaps others will be spared.

From Death Penalty Information Center

### INTERNATIONAL: Leaders from Many Countries Address Fifth World Congress in Madrid

Posted: June 19, 2013

On June 12-15, political leaders and criminal justice experts from five continents gathered in Madrid, Spain, for the Fifth World Congress Against the Death Penalty. The World Congress was co-sponsored by Spain, France, Norway, and Switzerland, and included delegates from over 90 countries. The delegation from the United States included Jerry Givens, a former correctional officer in Virginia, who assisted with the execution of 62 inmates. Givens became an opponent of the death penalty after his experience of participating in executions. He

said, "It was like a roller coaster, up and down, because as a correctional officer I prepared inmates to return into society as a productive citizen and as an executioner you take lives." The World Congress also included messages from Nobel Laureate Desmond Tutu of South Africa, Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Pope Francis, and other influential leaders from around the world.

source:

<http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/international-leaders-many-countries-address-fifth-world-congress-madrid>

<b>GROUP 22 MONTHLY LETTER COUNT</b>	
UAs	19
POC	9
Total	28
To add your letters to the total contact <a href="mailto:lwkamp@gmail.com">lwkamp@gmail.com</a> .	

### **Stay of Execution**

#### **May**

21 Robert Pruett Texas

### **Executions**

#### **May**

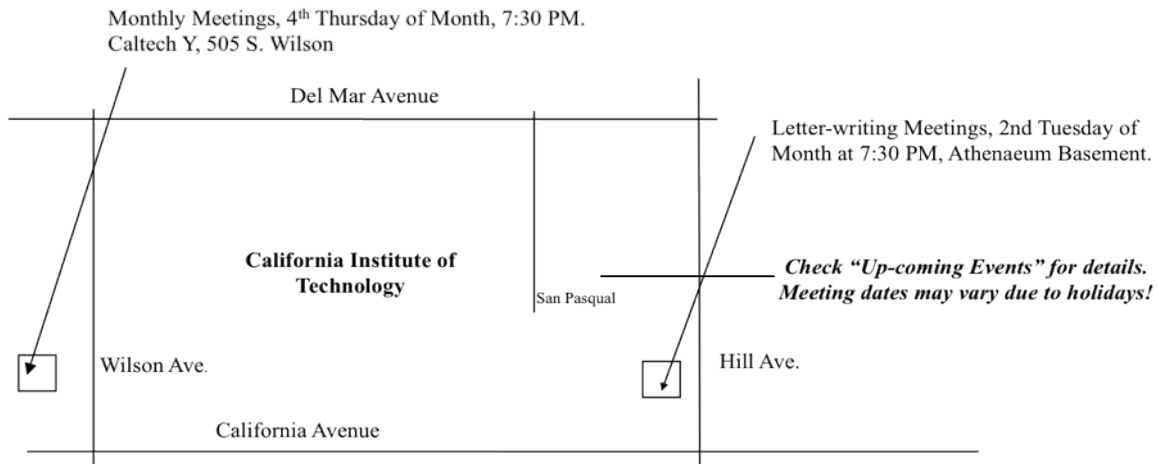
29 Elmer Carroll Florida  
3-drug lethal injection

#### **June**

12 Elroy Chester Texas  
1-drug lethal injection

12 William Van Poyck Florida  
3-drug lethal injection

18 James DeRosa Oklahoma  
3-drug lethal injection



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://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.