

Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XXVII Number 2, February 2019

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, February 28, 7:30-9:00 PM. Monthly Meeting. We meet at the Caltech Y, Tyson House, 505 S. Wilson Ave., Pasadena. This month we will watch and discuss "Saudi Arabia Uncovered". With undercover footage and on-the-ground reporting, FRONTLINE reveals a side of Saudi Arabia that's rarely seen, and traces the efforts of men and women who are working to bring about change. Light refreshments will be served. Please join us!

Tuesday, March 12, 7:30 - 9:00 PM. Letter Writing meeting at the Caltech Athenaeum, corner of Hill and California in Pasadena. This informal gathering is a great way for newcomers to get acquainted with Amnesty.

Sunday, March 17, 6:30 PM. Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion Group. This month we read "The Last Girl" by Nadia Murad.

SAVE THE DATE: Saturday, March 30. Group 22 will participate in the Environmental Fair at the Arboretum in Arcadia.

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hello all

Cold enough for you?! LOL - dragging out all my Northern California clothes - wool sweaters and berets, down jackets and vests, gloves and boots! And piling the blankets on the bed! (I really feel sorry for the homeless when the weather is like this. Hope they can find some shelter.) At least we're not in the Midwest!

Group 22's Vincent De Stefano has been asked to attend the Amnesty AGM in Chicago March 1-3 to accept an award for writing and sending the most urgent actions ever! Way to go Vinnie! (Letter writing attendees: we gotta crank it up, he's making us look bad!) Enjoy the conference, Vinnie!

I'm looking forward to reading this month's book as I had heard about this young Iraqi Yazidi woman who was kidnapped and spent 3 months in captivity by the Islamic State before she escaped. She was awarded the Nobel peace prize in 2018 jointly along with Denis Mukwege, a Congolese OB-Gyn who specializes in the treatment of women who have been raped during armed conflict.

Remember, we need suggestions for speakers/videos for the monthly meetings. Please feel free to email any ideas.

Con cariño,
Kathy



Next Rights Readers Meeting

**Sunday, March 17
6:30 PM**

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

***The Last Girl*
by Nadia Murad**

REVIEW

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/18/books/review/nadia-murad-last-girl.html>)

By Anna Della Subin
Jan. 18, 2018

THE LAST GIRL

My Story of Captivity, and My Fight Against the Islamic State

By Nadia Murad with Jenna Krajeski

How to approach a memoir of a war still being waged? "The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight Against the Islamic State" contains open wounds and painful lessons, as the Yazidi activist Nadia Murad learns how her own story can become a weapon against her — co-opted for any number of political agendas. In August 2014 Islamic State militants besieged her village of Kocho in northern Iraq. They executed nearly all the men and older women — including Murad's mother and six brothers — and buried them in mass graves. The younger women, Murad among them, were kidnapped and sold into sexual slavery. Raped, tortured and exchanged among militants, 21-year-old Murad finds an escape route when she is sold to a jihadist in Mosul who leaves a front door unlocked. She flees into Kurdistan by posing as the wife of a Sunni man, Nasser, who risks

everything to escort her to safety.

Just when Murad, and the reader, expect a flood of relief, there is another sinister turn: Murad and Nasser are detained by Kurdish officials who force them to testify about their escape with cameras rolling. The officials are eager to hear how peshmerga fighters from a rival Kurdish faction — the two groups fought a civil war in the 1990s — had abandoned the Yazidi communities they were supposed to protect. The officials swear no one will ever see the tape, but it appears on the news that same night, putting Nasser and his family in grave danger. “I was quickly learning that my story, which I still thought of as a personal tragedy, could be someone else’s political tool,” Murad writes.

Freed from captivity, Murad remains trapped inside politics. To publish “The Last Girl” right now, in the United States, means there are tricky issues of sensationalism to navigate; in a threatening climate of Islamophobia, Muslims of all kinds are vilified for the actions of one group. Yet Murad, and the team of translators and writers with whom she worked, hedge against this response with a book intricate in historical context. Visible throughout are the disastrous legacies of the American intervention that dismantled Baathist institutions and bred a generation of Iraqis raised on violence and with few prospects. In a childhood flashback, a young Nadia receives a ring from one of the many American soldiers who arrived in Kocho in the mid-2000s bearing trinkets and empty promises. During the Iraq war, Yazidis became increasingly isolated from their Sunni Arab neighbors, caught in cross hairs of sectarianism in the wake of the “coalition of the willing.”

“The Last Girl” is also a primer on the ancient Yazidi faith that sustains Murad throughout her ordeal: its creation myths, visions of the afterlife and idiosyncratic customs. (Many Yazidis avoid eating lettuce, and consider blue a color too holy for humans to wear.) Yazidis pray to Tawusi Melek, an archangel who, at the creation, took the form of a peacock, and painted a desolate earth with the colors of his feathers. Over the centuries, misunderstandings surrounding the mysterious religion have fueled genocide — 73 times, Murad writes, a figure eerily exact. According to a pernicious myth, Tawusi Melek refused to bow before Adam and was condemned to hell, echoing Satan’s behavior in the Quran. Branding them “devil worshipers,” ISIS legitimized the massacre and enslavement of Yazidis, singling them out among Iraq’s many

minorities for particularly inhumane treatment.

“I want to be the last girl in the world with a story like mine,” Murad concludes. Despite recent gains against ISIS in Iraq, many Yazidis still remain in captivity. As a story that hasn’t yet ended, “The Last Girl” is difficult to process. It is a call to action, but as it places Murad’s tragedy in the larger narrative of Iraqi history and American intervention, it leaves the reader with urgent, incendiary questions: What have we done, and what can we do?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Nadia Murad was born and raised in Kocho, a small village of farmers and shepherds in northern Iraq. A member of the Yazidi community, she and her brothers and sisters lived a quiet life. Nadia had dreams of becoming a history teacher or opening her own beauty salon.

On August 15th, 2014, when Nadia was just twenty-one years old, this life ended. Islamic State militants massacred the people of her village, executing men who refused to convert to Islam and women too old to become sex slaves. Six of Nadia’s brothers were killed, and her mother soon after, their bodies swept into mass graves. Nadia was taken to Mosul and forced, along with thousands of other Yazidi girls, into the ISIS slave trade.

Nadia would be held captive by several militants and repeatedly raped and beaten. Finally, she managed a narrow escape through the streets of Mosul, finding shelter in the home of a Sunni Muslim family whose eldest son risked his life to smuggle her to safety.

Today, Nadia’s story--as a witness to the Islamic State’s brutality, a survivor of rape, a refugee, a Yazidi--has forced the world to pay attention to an ongoing genocide. It is a call to action, a testament to the human will to survive, and a love letter to a lost country, a fragile community, and a family torn apart by war.

(<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/34346848-the-last-girl>)

Security With Human Rights

By Robert Adams

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL USA RESPONSE TO 2019 STATE OF THE UNION

02/05/2019

The following can be attributed to Joanne Lin, national director of advocacy and government relations at Amnesty International USA:

"Tonight's State of the Union was just another opportunity for the president to peddle his politics of hate and fear to a captive audience. He has emboldened despotic regimes around the world by turning a blind eye, and in some cases, actively promoting human rights violations in places like Saudi Arabia and North Korea. At the southern border, his obsession with divisive symbols like a wall is just part of his continued efforts to stigmatize people desperately in need of protection. His policy of sending vulnerable asylum seekers back to dangerous conditions in Mexico is nothing short of cruel.

"No wall, no military buildup, no expansion of detention facilities, no pushbacks of people legally seeking asylum at the border. It's time to come back to human rights and work for policies that treat all people and families with dignity."

DEATH PENALTY NEWS

By Stevi Carroll

Who Lives and Who Dies - Texas Style

February 19, 2019, the US Supreme Court reversed for the second time the execution of Bobby James Moore because of his intellectual disability which makes him ineligible for the death penalty. Chief Justice John Roberts joined the unsigned opinion in opposition to Associate Justices Samuel Alito, Clarence Thomas, and Neil Gorsuch (Brett Kavanaugh joined the majority because he did not join the dissent).

The opposing Justices said that in the 2002 ruling *Atkins v Virginia* the Court did not create a coherent rule for what constitutes the intellectual disability that would make one ineligible to be executed.

Cliff Sloan, Mr Moore's attorney, said that while Texas authorities claimed they met the relevant standards for judging intellectual disability, they had in reality used something more like the lay stereotype based more closely to Lennie in John Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men."

Wyoming

Wyoming is a deeply red state, and yet this month the state legislators came close to abolishing the death penalty. According to an article on the Death Penalty Information Center website, "fiscal and pro-life conservatives, conservative law-reform advocates, and the deepening involvement of the Catholic Church in death-penalty abolition – has led to unprecedented successes in numerous houses of state legislatures and moved repeal efforts closer to fruition in a number of deeply Republican states."

February 1, the Wyoming House of Representatives passed HB 145, a death penalty abolition bill, by a vote of 36-21. The bill then unanimously passed the Republican-controlled Senate Judiciary Committee on February 13, only to be defeated in a full Senate vote 12-18.

The Senate co-sponsor, Republican Brian Boner said, "We have an obligation to have a justice system that is blind and based on facts, and not based on what we wished it was or what it used to be." Republican Representative Jared Olsen said he was concerned about the number of exonerations from death row. "It is way too much authority to vest in our government, and we get it wrong."

Cost is often brought up as another reason to abolish the death penalty. Republican Senator Bill Landen said, "I finally decided that I can't go home and feel good about explaining to people all of those myriad of cuts we've made to the state budget and then defend expenditures like this, which have gone on for years and years and years," when Wyoming spends approximately \$750,000 per year on legal costs for the death penalty and has not executed anyone since 1992 nor has imposed the death penalty since 2004.

However, one pro-death penalty Senator, Republican Lynn Hutchings (Cheyenne), explained her position saying, "The greatest man who ever lived died via the death penalty for you and for me. ... Governments were instituted to execute justice. If it wasn't for Jesus dying via the death penalty, we would all have no hope." Her exegesis is flawed for a variety of reasons none the least of which is because the present death penalty is used to murder murderers and Jesus's execution was carried out not because he murdered anyone but because he was a radical, as in "a person who advocates thorough or complete political or social reform."

Perhaps at the next election, Wyoming voters from Cheyenne may want to reconsider who they want representing them in the State Senate.

On the other hand, we can rejoice that a deeply red state like Wyoming came this close to abolishing the death penalty. Hallelujah!

New Book:

The Goodness Paradox: The Strange Relationship Between Virtue and Violence in Human Evolution by Richard Wrangham

Description from Vroman's Bookstore website:

We Homo sapiens can be the nicest of species and also the nastiest. What occurred during human evolution to account for this paradox? What are the two kinds of aggression that primates are prone to, and why did each evolve separately? How does the intensity of violence among humans compare with the aggressive behavior of other primates? How did humans domesticate themselves? And how were the acquisition of language and the practice of capital punishment determining factors in the rise of culture and civilization?

Authoritative, provocative, and engaging, The Goodness Paradox offers a startlingly original theory of how, in the last 250 million years, humankind became an increasingly peaceful species in daily interactions even as its capacity for coolly planned and devastating violence remains undiminished. In tracing the evolutionary histories of reactive and proactive aggression, biological anthropologist Richard Wrangham forcefully and persuasively argues for the necessity of social tolerance and the control of savage divisiveness still haunting us today.

Recent Exonerations

Dean McKee - State: FL

- Date of Exoneration: 1/30/2019

In 1988, 16-year-old Dean McKee was sentenced to life in prison for murder in Tampa, Florida. He was granted a new trial and the charges

were dismissed in 2019 after DNA tests excluded him as the killer.

Huwe Burton - State: NY

- Date of Exoneration: 1/24/2019

Huwe Burton was convicted in 1991 for stabbing his mother to death when he was 16 years old. He was exonerated in 2019 after an investigation revealed that his confession was coerced and that his mother's real killer was likely a downstairs neighbor.

Gary Washington - State: MD

- Date of Exoneration: 1/24/2019

In 1987, Gary Washington was sentenced to life in prison for a murder in Baltimore, Maryland. He was exonerated in 2019 after the only witness, then a 12-year-old boy, recanted his identification.

Eric Blackmon - State: IL

- Date of Exoneration: 1/16/2019

In 2004, Eric Blackmon was sentenced to 60 years in prison for a murder in Chicago, Illinois. He was exonerated in 2019 after successfully arguing that his trial attorney provided ineffective assistance by failing to interview multiple alibi witnesses who all said Blackmon was at a Fourth of July party at the time of the shooting.

Geraldo Iglesias - State: IL

- Date of Exoneration: 1/16/2019

In 1995, Geraldo Iglesias was sentenced to 35 years in prison for a murder in Chicago, Illinois. He was exonerated in 2019 by evidence that a detective physically abused a witness until he falsely claimed Iglesias admitted the crime.

Patrick Pursley - State: IL

- Date of Exoneration: 1/16/2019

In 1994, Patrick Pursley was sentenced to life in prison without parole for a murder in Rockford, Illinois. He was acquitted in 2019 at a retrial after the prosecution's ballistics evidence was discredited.

Steven Chaney - State: TX

- Date of Exoneration: 1/16/2019

In 1987, Steven Chaney was sentenced to life in prison for murder in Dallas County, Texas. He was exonerated in 2019 when the bite-mark evidence against him was discredited and the real killer was identified.

Grover Thompson - State: IL

- Date of Exoneration: 1/14/2019

In 1981, Grover Thompson was sentenced to 40 years in prison for the attempted murder of a 72-year-old woman in Mount Vernon, Illinois.

Thompson died in prison in 1996, but was posthumously exonerated in 2019 based on the confession of the real attacker, a serial murderer and rapist.

Lafayette Harper - State: IL
 - Date of Exoneration: 1/14/2019

In 2014, Lafayette Harper was sentenced to 65 years in prison for a murder in Danville, Illinois. He was acquitted at a retrial in 2019 after an expert cast doubt on the eyewitness's identification of Harper as the gunman.

Stays of Execution

January
 15 Blaine Milam TX
 Stay granted by the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals on January 14, 2019 to permit litigation of successive state post-conviction petition raising new evidence claims, "[b]ecause of recent changes in the science pertaining to bite mark comparisons and recent changes in the law pertaining to the issue of intellectual disability."

February
 13 James Hanna OH
 Rescheduled for December 19, 2019 by Gov. John Kasich on September 1, 2017.

13 Warren Keith Henness OH
 Reprieve granted on January 25, 2019 by Gov. Mike DeWine, and execution rescheduled for September 12, 2019.

Executions

January
 30 Robert Jennings TX
 Lethal Injection 1-drug (Pentobarbital)
 Years from sentencing to execution: 29

February
 7 Domimeque Ray AL
 Lethal Injection 3-drug (Midazolam)
 Years from sentencing to execution: 19

PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE
Gao Zhisheng
& Narges Mohammadi
 By Joyce Wolf

A few weeks ago we received Amnesty's new case file for Gao Zhisheng. Included was contact info for his wife Geng He, who has been living in the U.S. since escaping from China in 2009. At our February letter writing meeting, we signed a Lunar New Year card for Geng He with messages of solidarity and support.

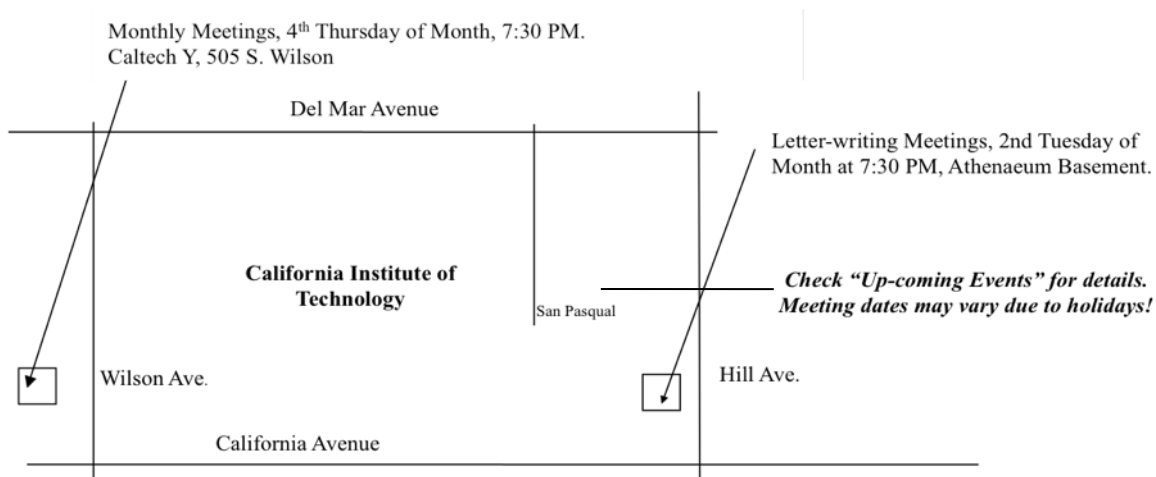
If you haven't already checked out this interview with Geng He, here's another chance: <https://www.rfa.org/english/women/lawyer-08242018103333.html>

Last month we reported that Narges Mohammadi went on hunger strike in January, along with detained British-Iranian citizen Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, to protest being denied access to medical care while imprisoned. The women's action drew a strong response from a United Nations team: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/01/1030682>

The Committee of Concerned Scientists also sent a letter to the Iranian Minister of Health: <https://concernedscientists.org/2019/01/two-female-human-rights-advocates-in-iranian-prison-on-hunger-strike-for-failure-to-receive-adequate-medical-care/>

Tweets on @FreeNarges indicate that now the women are supposed to apologize (!) for their hunger strike action before the authorities will consider their request for necessary medical care. Apologize for going on hunger strike? This is a new and bizarre response from authorities. We can only hope that the eventual result leads to Narges and Nazanin obtaining the treatment they require.

GROUP 22 FEBRUARY LETTER COUNT	
UAs	32
POC (Narges Mohammadi)	8
Total	40



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.