

# Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XXVII Number 1, January 2019

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Thursday, January 24, 7:30-9:00 PM. Monthly Meeting.** We meet at the Caltech Y, Tyson House, 505 S. Wilson Ave., Pasadena. Our special guest from Cameroon, Mr. Nyuchem Vanasios, is on asylum in the U.S. He will speak about his personal experiences and human rights in Cameroon.

**Tuesday, February 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, February 17, 6:30 PM. Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion Group.** This month we read the novel "**Radio Free Vermont**" by environmental activist Bill McKibben.

## COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hello everyone,

Happy New Year! Here's hoping 2019 will be better politically (no explanation needed lol).

Well, we went back to work for a week after the winter break and then went out on strike, which is still the case! It has been an exhausting, exhilarating week. Hopefully an agreement will be reached over this 3-day weekend.

Negotiations didn't even resume until Thursday. (I think they didn't want to pay us for the MLK holiday on Monday Jan 20th, who knows!) It was pretty miserable out there on the picket line in the rain and cold but we received tons of support from the community in the form of honking cars passing by, the local city councilman's office bringing us coffee and doughnuts, and parents bringing food and joining the picket line with their children. I joined my co-workers from the Visually Impaired program at Irving MS in Highland Park. They have a VI resource room there and it's also close to downtown, where almost daily rallies were held after AM picketing. Please sign the online petition to remove Austin Beutner if you are so inclined at:

<https://www.change.org/p/monica-garcia-laUSD-superintendent-austin-beutner-must-resign-beutner>

He was elected by a pro-charter majority on the school board. He plans to bankrupt the district

to turn it into all charter schools. He is a businessman with no educational experience and was quoted to say "we don't need a physical presence for learning." (Teachers are expendable?!) He is trying to starve the schools so that parents will enroll their kids in charters.

Why is this a human rights issue? What does this have to do with Amnesty? A FREE AND EQUAL PUBLIC EDUCATION FOR ALL STUDENTS IS THE FOUNDATION OF A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY. EVERY CHILD HAS THE RIGHT TO A FREE AND APPROPRIATE PUBLIC EDUCATION. Charter schools do not serve all students - they reject children with special needs because they don't want their test scores to go down and/or spend the money to provide the needed services for our physically handicapped students who may need specialized physical health care services (procedures such as catherization, tube feedings, trach suctioning, etc), occupational, speech, and physical therapies and other services such as deaf and hard of hearing and teachers of the visually impaired. I can attest to this from my 30+ years as a credentialed school nurse with LAUSD. I have encountered parents who have had to resort to hiring a lawyer to get charter schools to provide services to their special needs children and also students who were kicked out of charters for spurious reasons (the real reason being underachievement due to learning disabilities). Also, employees of charter schools do not have the same rights as public educational employees.

Paula has arranged for a man from Cameroon who was granted asylum in the US to speak to us about human rights in Cameroon and his experiences at our monthly meeting this coming Thursday, Jan. 24. This should be very interesting; everyone is encouraged to attend.

Veronica has said that she will do a program on environmental issues for our March monthly meeting and currently she is making arrangements for our group to participate in the Environmental Fair at the Arboretum in Arcadia. Robert and I will look for a relevant video to show for the February monthly meeting. Ideas are welcome; please share via email or at one of our meetings.

Con cariño,  
Kathy



**Next Rights Readers Meeting**

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

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

***Radio Free Vermont***

**by Bill McKibben**

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**REVIEW**

(<http://billmckibben.com/radio-free-vermont.html>)

**RADIO FREE VERMONT  
A FABLE OF RESISTANCE**

**“I hope no one secedes, but I also hope that Americans figure out creative ways to resist injustice and create communities where everybody counts. We've got a long history of resistance in Vermont and this book is testimony to that fact.” —Bernie Sanders**

A book that's also the beginning of a movement, Bill McKibben's debut novel *Radio Free Vermont* follows a band of Vermont patriots who decide that their state might be better off as its own republic.

As the host of *Radio Free Vermont* - “underground, underpowered, and underfoot” - seventy-two-year-old Vern Barclay is currently broadcasting from an “undisclosed and double-secret location.” With the help of a young computer prodigy named Perry Alterson, Vern uses his radio show to advocate for a simple yet radical idea: an independent Vermont, one where the state secedes from the United States and operates under a free local economy. But for now, he and his radio show must remain untraceable, because in addition to being a lifelong Vermonter and concerned citizen, Vern Barclay is also a fugitive from the law.

In *Radio Free Vermont*, Bill McKibben entertains and expands upon an idea that's become more popular than ever - seceding from the United States. Along with Vern and Perry, McKibben imagines an eccentric group of activists who

carry out their own version of guerilla warfare, which includes dismissing local middle school children early in honor of ‘Ethan Allen Day’ and hijacking a Coors Light truck and replacing the stock with local brew. Witty, biting, and terrifyingly timely, *Radio Free Vermont* is Bill McKibben's fictional response to the burgeoning resistance movement.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**



Bill McKibben is an author and environmentalist who in 2014 was awarded the Right Livelihood Prize, sometimes called the ‘alternative Nobel.’ His 1989 book *The End of Nature* is regarded as

the first book for a general audience about climate change, and has appeared in 24 languages; he's gone on to write a dozen more books. He is a founder of 350.org, the first planet-wide, grassroots climate change movement, which has organized twenty thousand rallies around the world in every country save North Korea, spearheaded the resistance to the Keystone Pipeline, and launched the fast-growing fossil fuel divestment movement.

The Schumann Distinguished Scholar in Environmental Studies at Middlebury College and a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, he was the 2013 winner of the Gandhi Prize and the Thomas Merton Prize, and holds honorary degrees from 18 colleges and universities. *Foreign Policy* named him to their inaugural list of the world's 100 most important global thinkers, and the *Boston Globe* said he was “probably America's most important environmentalist.”

A former staff writer for the *New Yorker*, he writes frequently for a wide variety of publications around the world, including the *New York Review of Books*, *National Geographic*, and *Rolling Stone*. He lives in the mountains above Lake Champlain with his wife, the writer Sue Halpern, where he spends as much time as possible outdoors. In 2014, biologists honored him by naming a new species of woodland gnat - *Megophthalmidia mckibbeni* - in his honor.

(<http://billmckibben.com/bio.html>)

## Security With Human Rights

By Robert Adams

### SYRIA: US WITHDRAWAL DOES NOT ERASE COALITION'S DUTY TOWARDS RAQQA'S DEVASTATED CIVILIANS

01/11/2019

*UPDATE: This statement has been modified to reflect a clarification by US forces that the early stages of the withdrawal involve military equipment, but not troops, leaving Syria.*

Reacting to today's [statement](#) by the US-led Coalition that it has begun "the process of deliberate withdrawal" from Syria, Lynn Maalouf, Amnesty International's Middle East Research Director, said:

"It is deplorable that the US-led Coalition continues to ignore its responsibility of carrying out any meaningful investigations into the hundreds of civilian deaths it caused in Raqqa and elsewhere – even as it starts to withdraw from Syria.

"The Coalition is unashamedly ignoring the devastating legacy of its bombing campaign, adding insult to injury by making clear that it has no intention of offering survivors any form of remedy or compensation.

"Amnesty International has been to Raqqa multiple times since the battle ended. Not a single one of the hundreds of survivors we've spoken to on the ground has even been contacted by the Coalition – let alone received any assistance – as they try to rebuild their lives.

"The Coalition's battle for Raqqa began as [its military campaign in Mosul](#), in neighboring Iraq, was winding down. Its legacy of devastation and impunity in Mosul should have served as a cautionary tale. There, too, Coalition strikes killed large numbers of civilians and destroyed civilian homes and infrastructure on a massive scale, but it barely lifted a finger to assist in the aftermath.

"Had the Coalition learned from its mistakes in Iraq, the utter devastation of Raqqa might have been avoided. Leaving such widespread civilian destruction in its wake is a humanitarian abomination that is at odds with the Coalition's stated values."

## Background

The US withdrawal – the timeline and details of which remain unknown – is unlikely to stop the US-led Coalition's air strikes in Syria, putting more civilian lives at risk.

Amnesty International is carrying out an [ongoing investigation](#), in partnership with [Airwars](#), into the shocking scale of civilian casualties resulting from four months of US, UK and French bombardment to oust the armed group calling itself Islamic State (IS) from Raqqa. The results will be made public in April 2019.

Amnesty International's [on-the-ground investigations and analysis since the battle ended](#) in October 2017 revealed compelling evidence of prima facie international humanitarian law violations by the US-led Coalition. They prompted the Coalition to revise its civilian death toll statistics upwards from 23 to more than 100 – a 300% increase.

In a September 2018 letter to Amnesty International, the US Department of Defense – whose forces carried out most of the air strikes and all the artillery strikes on Raqqa – made clear it accepts no liability for the hundreds of civilian casualties it caused. The Coalition does not plan to compensate survivors and relatives of those killed in Raqqa and refuses to provide further information about the circumstances behind the strikes.

## DEATH PENALTY NEWS

By Stevi Carroll

### Kevin Cooper

In 1985, Kevin Cooper was sentenced to death for the murder of Douglas and Peggy Ryen, their 10-year-old daughter Jessica, and a 10 year-old-friend Chris Hughes. Questions arose about how Mr. Cooper could have used the multiple murder weapons used in the crime in the length of time the coroner estimated the murders occurred. Another man's girlfriend said her boyfriend returned home with his overalls splattered with blood driving a station wagon he did not own. The Ryen family's station wagon was stolen the night of the murders. The day Mr. Cooper was arraigned for the murders

the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department threw away the overalls without having tested them.

Mr. Cooper filed multiple appeals that were all denied. In 2009 when the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals denied his request for a rehearing of a 2007 appeal, five judges filed dissents. Another six judges joined them as well as the judge who wrote the denial in 2007. Ninth Circuit Judge William A Fletcher wrote that he believed Mr. Cooper was probably innocent.

In 2016, Norman Hile, Mr. Cooper's lawyer, submitted a 235-page clemency petition to Gov. Jerry Brown. Mr. Cooper's case received further support from Senators Kamala Harris and Dianne Feinstein as well as three of California's largest newspapers.

December 25, 2018, Gov. Brown ordered new DNA tests on the items still remaining from the crime scene.

### **Emanuel Gissendanner**

The Alabama Supreme Court reversed the Court of Criminal Appeals decision in the case of Emanuel Gissendanner. After hearing compelling testimony from alibi witnesses, forensic experts, and family members, the Dale County Circuit Court ordered a new trial for Mr. Gissendanner. Even though his trial lawyers were required by law to investigate the crime fully, they did not interview the witnesses nor did they seek expert help for the defense.

January 4, 2019, the Alabama Supreme Court ruled that Mr. Gissendanner's case was poorly handled and that the defense counsel failed to interview witnesses who could testify that he was somewhere else at the time of the murder. And now, Mr. Gissendanner has been granted a new trial.

### **Recent exonerations**

Justly Johnson and Kendrick Scott - State: MI  
- Date of Exoneration: 11/28/2018

In 2000, Justly Johnson and Kendrick Scott were sentenced to life in prison for murder in Detroit, Michigan. They were exonerated in 2018 when an eyewitness said they were not involved and two other witnesses recanted their trial testimony.

[Clarence Shipley](#) - State: MD

- Date of Exoneration: 12/18/2018

Clarence Shipley was sentenced to life in prison for murder in 1992 in Baltimore. He was

exonerated in 2018 after an investigation revealed that the state's key witness had lied when he identified Shipley as the shooter.

[Sean Ellis](#) - State: MA

- Date of Exoneration: 12/18/2018

In 1995, Sean Ellis was sentenced to life in prison for the murder of a police officer in Boston, Massachusetts. He was exonerated in 2018 because police and prosecutors failed to disclose evidence implicating other suspects, and that the lead detectives as well as the victim were robbing drug dealers.

[Matthew Sopron](#) - State: IL

- Date of Exoneration: 12/18/2018

In 1998, Matthew Sopron was sentenced to life in prison without parole for murder in Chicago, Illinois. He was exonerated in 2018 after three witnesses admitted they falsely implicated him in the crime.

[Arnold Day](#) - State: IL

- Date of Exoneration: 12/18/2018

In 1994, Arnold Day was sentenced to 60 years in prison for a murder in Chicago, Illinois. He was exonerated in 2018 based on evidence that Chicago police beat him until he confessed.

### **Stay of Execution**

January

9 Elwood Jones OH

Rescheduled for April 21, 2021 by Gov John Kasich on September 1

### **Executions**

December

4 Joseph Christopher Garcia TX  
Lethal injection - 1-drug (Pentobarbital)  
Years from sentencing to execution: 15

6 David Earl Miller TN  
Electrocution  
Years from sentencing to execution: 36

11 Alvin Avon Braziel, Jr. TX  
Lethal injection - 1-drug (Pentobarbital)  
Years from sentencing to execution: 17

13 Jose Jimenez FL  
Lethal Injection - 1-drug (Etomidate)  
Years from sentencing to execution: 24

**PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE**

**Gao Zhisheng  
and  
Narges Mohammadi**

**By Joyce Wolf**

Human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng was Group 22's adopted Prisoner of Conscience from 2010 until 2015, when China released him from prison and Amnesty closed his case file. He was "disappeared" in August of 1917 and we wrote on the Urgent Actions that Amnesty issued for him.

Gao Zhisheng is still missing, and Amnesty is now reopening his case file. Suzanne Wright, chairman of the AIUSA China Co-Group, asked if Group 22 would like to work on his case. Eight Group 22 members responded with yes votes, and nobody said nay, so we started with an action for Gao at our letter writing meeting on January 8.



*(Thanks to Stevi for the photo.)*

Here's an interview with Geng He, Gao's wife:  
<https://www.rfa.org/english/women/lawyer-08242018103333.html>

Group 22 is continuing to work for Narges Mohammadi. She is serving a 16-year sentence in Iran's notorious Evin Prison and has been refused health care that she urgently needs. She was reported to have begun a hunger strike in January, along with the detained British-Iranian citizen Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, to protest being denied access to medical care.

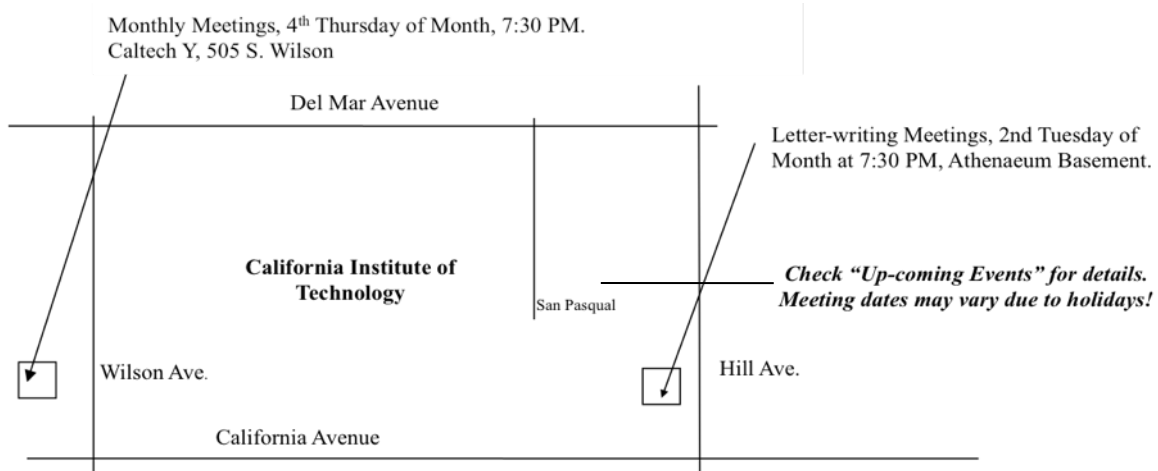
<https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2019/01/uncalls-on-iran-to-give-zaghari-ratcliffe-and-mohammadi-urgent-medical-care-release-them-immediately/>

**GROUP 22 NOV-DEC LETTER COUNT**

Write For Rights to Officials	56
Write For Rights Solidarity	42
Total	98

**GROUP 22 JANUARY LETTER COUNT**

UAs	34
POC (Gao Zhisheng)	8
Total	42



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.