

UPCOMING EVENTS

Note: We're taking a summer break and won't have any Thursday monthly meetings in June, July, or August. Letter writing and book group meetings will continue as usual.

Tuesday, July 9, 7:30-9:00 PM. Letter Writing meeting at the Caltech Athenaeum, corner of Hill and California in Pasadena. (In summer we meet outdoors at the "Rath al Fresco" on the lawn next to the 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. For July we read "**The Songs of Trees: Stories from Nature's Great Connectors**" by David George Haskell.

COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hello all,

Hope you're enjoying the cooler June weather (with the exception of a few hotter days). All too soon the ferocious heat will be upon us...

Our July book is by a British biologist who teaches in Tennessee. Listen to the tree sounds he recorded at his website <https://dghaskell.com>. My favorite is the sound of rain falling on different shapes of leaves. He also blogs at <https://dghaskell.com/ramble-posts/>. You can see photos of the trees. I don't know if I'll get this book finished as the Jane Austen reading group I belong to is reading a book about her two brothers who were officers in the Royal Navy during the Napoleonic Wars at about the same time! I'll have to take turns and read a little from both each day, lol...

A fun note – I discovered in my online search for information about the author that Mr. Haskell had a book signing for Songs of Trees at Vroman's in 2017!

Those who attended the annual Tiananmen Square memorial dinner a few years ago may remember it featured the activists from the Umbrella Movement. Remember the yellow umbrellas they brought? They were used as a protection against the pepper spray and tear gas used by the police. This movement started in 2014 and lasted for a few months. Students and community activists demonstrated outside government HQ non-violently against the lack

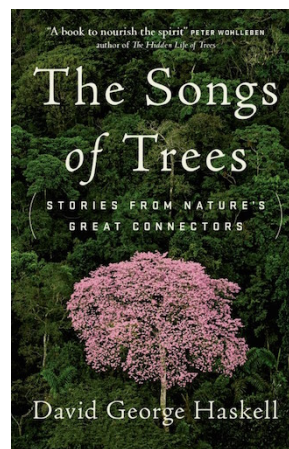
of universal suffrage. Candidates and voting was decided by a CCP (Chinese Communist Party) appointed election committee instead of open elections. Unfortunately the activists did not win any concessions from the government and were sentenced to prison terms of up to 16 months. The CCP controls the Hong Kong government and has been violating the initial agreement between Britain and China when Hong Kong was handed over to mainland China in 1997, which stipulated that a high degree of autonomy (except in foreign and defense affairs) would be allowed for 50 years after the handover.

Now the activists (released from prison recently) have been demonstrating against a controversial extradition bill that would allow suspects to be sent to the mainland for trial. The government has suspended the bill but not withdrawn it, causing the protestors to call for the resignation of Chief Executive of Hong Kong, Carrie Lam, and the withdrawal of the proposal. Let's hope they are successful this time.

Here's a link to some actions dealing with the current situation:

<https://www.amnestyusa.org/search/hong+kong/>

Con cariño,
Kathy



Next Rights Readers Meeting

**Sunday, July 21
6:30 PM**

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

***The Songs of Trees:
Stories from Nature's
Great Connectors***

**by David George
Haskell**

REVIEW

www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jul/07/songs-of-trees-david-george-haskell-review
Caspar Henderson, 7 Jul 2017

In *The Baron in the Trees*, the 1957 comic masterpiece by Italo Calvino, the hero abandons the life of a petty 18th-century aristocrat to spend his life in the boughs and branches of the forests of Liguria. Over the years

his senses become ever more finely attuned to the life of the woodland until he hears “the sap running through the cells, the circles marking the years inside the trunks ... the birds sleeping and quivering in their nests ... the caterpillar waking and the chrysalis opening”.

Trekking into the rainforest at the heart of the Yasuni Biosphere Reserve in western Ecuador, the biologist David George Haskell enters a similar state. As the rain falls, he notes in the first pages of *The Songs of Trees*, botanical diversity is sonified:

“Every species has its rain sound ... Leaflets of flying moss tick under the impact of a drop. An arum leaf ... as long as my arm, gives a took took with undertones that linger as the surface dissipates its energy. The stiff dinner plate leaves of a neighbouring plant receive the rain with a tight snap, a spatter of metallic sparks ... The leaf of an avocado plant sounds a low, clean, woody thump.”

Having ascended on a ladder 40 metres to the crown of a giant ceibo tree, Haskell finds the sound world has changed: “I top the rapids’ surface and the roar moves below me, unveiling patterns on fleshy orchid leaves, greasy impacts on bromeliads, and low clacks on the elephant ears of philodendron.”

The Songs of Trees is a book of noises. A balsam fir tree in northern Ontario hisses in the wind “like fine steel wool burnishing a tabletop, a sound that is strong, corrosive but with a soft bite”. By contrast, the needles of a ponderosa pine in the Colorado Rockies are so stiff and unbending that even a small gust creates a sound like a huge landslide. Specialised equipment reveals sounds too faint or obscure for our ears or other senses to detect unaided. Ultrasonic clicks and fizzles reveal the passage and cease of sap inside the trunk of a green ash. The swell of the growing ponderosa’s roots causes shards of rock to click as they crack and move. Amid New York City’s concrete, a pear tree in a sidewalk grows thicker roots in response to the judder of the subway.

A work about woodland bioacoustics (the sound world of living things) might seem charming but ultimately only of interest to specialists. Haskell’s intention, however, is nothing less than to explore interconnection in nature across space and time, and to observe how humans can succeed, or fail, in the co-creation of networks of life that are more intelligent, productive, resilient and creative. “Life is not just networked,” he writes, “it is network.”

In *The Forest Unseen: A Year’s Watch in Nature* (2012), Haskell chose a square metre of ground in woodland on the extensive campus of the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee, where he teaches and returned to it almost every day for a year. Informed by his regular practice of meditation as well as his professional training as a scientist, his aim, first and foremost, was simply to pay attention. Over time, he began to see the little patch of ground as a forest mandala, analogous to the figures in which

Buddhists find a gateway to the universe.

The Songs of Trees is the equal of the earlier work in its scientific depth, lyricism and imaginative reach. This time Haskell expands his view to 12 trees over time in different parts of the world. In addition to the ceibo, fir, pine, ash and pear, these include: a sabal palm on a barrier island in the American state of Georgia; a hazel that is more than 10,000 years old and now exists as bits of charcoal in an archaeological facility in Scotland; a cottonwood sapling in a Denver park that is repeatedly reduced to wood chips by beavers; a venerable olive next to the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem, whose roots reach down into the Roman foundations; and a bonsai pine that survived the Hiroshima bombing and was given to the US National Arboretum in Washington.

Haskell invites his readers to listen, attend and reflect and in so doing develop an “ecological aesthetics” – “a sensory, intellectual and bodily opening to place”. Looking up in a forest reveals wood as “an embodied conversation between plant life, shudder of ground and yaw of wind”, while the afterlife of a fallen tree can be richer than its life. Rot is “a detonation of possibility”. In scum, we may even find a “slimy sublime”.

But, Haskell argues, ecological aesthetics is not a retreat into imagined wilderness where humans have no place, but a “step toward belonging in all dimensions”, and this includes an appreciation of the realities of a highly technological existence, urban crowding and political tensions. Each tree is a focal point for branching stories. The hazel fragments date from the Mesolithic when settlers across the British Isles depended on the species for both fuel and food. Near where it grew, Longannet power station has, until very recently, been burning petrified wood from a vastly remoter time in the form of four and a half million tonnes of coal every year, but the basic principle – dependence on wood – has not changed, and wood pellets now substituting for coal in UK power stations sustain the link. In Israel and the occupied territories, practices of olive tree management dating back thousands of years have largely been driven out by mechanisation and the exclusion of Arab farmers from their land and water sources. Among the trickles of hope in an otherwise arid political landscape are fair trade associations in which Jews and Arabs cooperate to produce fine quality oil.

In Calvino’s novel, the hero gets over a failed love affair by writing nature essays and journals printed on an enormous contraption he has somehow hauled up into the trees, and which he collects under titles such as *The Biped’s Monitor* and *The Reasonable Vertebrate*. Over time, however, he also becomes ever more concerned with the plight of his fellow human beings and, embracing the revolutionary spirit emanating from France, publishes a Declaration of the Rights of Men, Women, Children, Domestic and Wild Animals, including Birds, Fishes

and Insects, and All Vegetation, whether Trees, Vegetables, or Grass. "It was," the narrator says, "a very fine work, which could have been a useful guide to any government, but no one took any notice of it."

It is time we did. There was a flutter of excitement in April this year when, for the first time since 1884, all UK electrical demand was met without coal. That same week, however, atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide were reported to have exceeded 410 parts per million for the first time in millions of years. Places of exceptional biodiversity such as the Yasuni reserve in Ecuador remain gravely threatened by voracious oil companies whose scenarios price in massively disruptive climate change.

In the very long run, a warmer planet could be good for the trees. Millions of years hence, even Antarctica could be covered in lush forests, as it was many tens of millions of years ago. But long before that – and quite soon if current trends continue – most of the world's largest cities may be under water if we fail to listen to what Haskell and his interlocutors in this gorgeous book are telling us.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

<https://dghaskell.com/about/>
Biography: David George Haskell

David Haskell's work integrates scientific, literary, and contemplative studies of the natural world.



His latest book, *The Songs of Trees: Stories from Nature's Great Connectors* (Viking, 2017), examines the many ways that trees and humans are connected. The book was winner of the 2018 John Burroughs Medal, named one of the Best Science Books of 2017 by NPR's Science Friday,

selected as Favorite Science Books of 2017 by Brain Pickings, and in the 10 Best Environment, Climate Science and Conservation Books of 2017 at Forbes.com. Deborah Blum, Pulitzer winner, author of *The Poisoner's Handbook*, and director of the Knight Science Journalism program at MIT says of *The Songs of Trees*, "David George Haskell may be the finest literary nature writer working today. *The Songs of Trees* – compelling, lyrical, wise – is a case in point."

His first book, *The Forest Unseen: A Year's Watch in Nature* (Viking, 2012), was winner of the National Academies' Best Book Award for 2013, finalist for the 2013 Pulitzer Prize in nonfiction, winner of the 2013 Reed Environmental Writing Award, winner of the 2012 National Outdoor Book Award for Natural History Literature, runner-up for the 2013 PEN E. O. Wilson Literary Science Writing Award, and winner, in its Chinese translation, of the 2016 Dapeng Nature

Writing Award. A profile by James Gorman in *The New York Times* said of Haskell that he "thinks like a biologist, writes like a poet, and gives the natural world the kind of open-minded attention one expects from a Zen monk rather than a hypothesis-driven scientist". E. O. Wilson wrote that *The Forest Unseen* was "a new genre of nature writing, located between science and poetry." *The Forest Unseen* has been translated into a dozen languages.

Haskell has also written about the biology and human culture for *The New York Times* and other publications.

The Atomic Tree, a virtual reality adaptation of the last chapter of *The Songs of Trees* will be premiering at SxSW festival in March 2019. The film is directed by Emmanuel Vaughan-Lee and Adam Loftin, with screenwriting by David Haskell, Adam Loftin, and Emmanuel Vaughan-Lee.

Haskell holds degrees from the University of Oxford (BA) and from Cornell University (PhD). He is Professor of Biology and Environmental Studies at the University of the South, where he served as Chair of Biology. He is a 2014-2015 Fellow of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, a Fellow of the American Council of Learned Societies, and an Elective Member of the American Ornithologists' Union. His scientific research on animal ecology, evolution, and conservation has been sponsored by the National Science Foundation, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the World Wildlife Fund, among others. He serves on the boards and advisory committees of local and national land conservation groups.

Haskell's classes have received national attention for the innovative ways they combine action in the community with contemplative practice. In 2009, the Carnegie and CASE Foundations named him Professor of the Year for Tennessee, an award given to college professors who have achieved national distinction and whose work shows "extraordinary dedication to undergraduate teaching." *The Oxford American* featured him in 2011 as one of the southern U.S.'s most creative teachers. His teaching has been profiled in *USA Today*, *The Tennessean*, and other newspapers.

DEATH PENALTY NEWS

By Stevi Carroll

New Hampshire

Hooray! The USA now has 21 states that have abolished the death penalty. May 30th the New Hampshire House secured 247 votes to 123 votes to override Governor Chris Sununu's veto of the death penalty repeal bill.

Perhaps the day will come when we pass a 'magic' number of 26 states that have abolished the death penalty and we as a nation can decide that many factors including poor defense, poverty, race, and innocence are enough reasons to abolish the death penalty nationwide.

Curtis Flowers and the prosecutor Doug Evans

Curtis Flowers is African-American. Doug Evans is white. They live in Mississippi.

How important is the make up of a jury when one is on trial? In Mr Flowers' six trials for the same crime, Mr Evans used his peremptory challenges to strike potential African-American jurors. During questioning of potential jurors, Mr Evans asked an average of 29 questions to each of the African-Americans and asked an average of one question to each of the whites. The juries ended up being either all white or 11 white jurors and one African-American juror. The US Supreme Court ruled 7-2 that "The State's relentless, determined effort to rid the jury of black individuals strongly suggests that the State wanted to try Flowers before a jury with as few black jurors as possible, and ideally before an all-white jury."

The Civil Rights Act of 1875 was to eliminate racial discrimination in jury selection, but as we see with this case, people of color can still be excluded from jury duty. The Court wrote about Mr Flowers case, "A court confronting that kind of pattern cannot ignore it because the lopsidedness of the prosecutor's questioning and inquiry can itself be evidence of discriminatory intent."

Sheri Lynn Johnson, one of Mr Flowers' attorneys, wants the state officials to release him. She said, "A seventh trial would be unprecedented and completely unwarranted given both the flimsiness of the evidence against him and the long trail of misconduct that has kept him wrongfully incarcerated all these years. We hope that the state of Mississippi will finally disavow Doug Evans's misconduct, decline to pursue yet another trial and set Mr. Flowers free."

We shall see.

Christopher Price

Christopher Price had a father who was mentally ill and who would abuse him physically and psychologically starting when he was a toddler. He saw this man brutalize his mother; Mr Price saw his father hold a gun to

his mother's head and he saw him try to drown her in a river. After she left Christopher's father, she fell in with other men some of whom also violently beat him. Christopher lived in Alabama.

What happened?

Under the influence of a man, Bookie Coleman, with a history of violent crimes, Mr Price took part in a robbery during which a beloved minister known by most of the 18,000 residents was murdered. Because Mr Price was poor, he was unable to hire a defense lawyer. His court appointed lawyer did little to plead his case. Mr Coleman pled guilty to felony murder for which the maximum sentence is life without parole. Mr Coleman did not testify during Mr Price's trial. Mr Price was convicted of capital murder without the jury's hearing any of the Mr Price's childhood history and his lawyer did not prepare for the penalty phase of the trial. His lawyer did not respond to the prosecutor's argument that executing Mr Price was 'the only way' to keep him from murdering again. In Alabama, only ten jurors need to impose the death sentence; a unanimous jury verdict is not needed. For Mr Price, ten jurors did indeed decide he had to be executed; therefore, he was sentenced to die, and die he did on May 30th.

You might remember from last month how the Governor of Alabama Kay Ivey is on the record saying that all life is precious and a gift from God. Christopher Price became the eighth person executed in Alabama during Governor Ivey tenure.

So Governor Kay Ivey, is Christopher Price another precious life that was a gift from God?

What can happen to a person on death row?

Last month Donnie Johnson was listed as executed on May 16. How did he spend his 34 years on death row? Mr Johnson became what Pastor Furman F. Fordham II of the Riverside Chapel in Nashville TN called a person who led and served "in such a way that what he's doing in there is the exact kind of ministry that we would definitely ordain someone for out here."

Mr Johnson murdered his wife Connie Johnson and did not deny that crime. As Sister Helen Prejean says, "People are more than the worst thing they have ever done in their lives." Cynthia Vaughn, Connie Johnson's daughter and Mr Johnson's adopted daughter, pleaded with the governor to step in and not execute Mr Johnson. Ms Vaughn said, "Over these past few

years, Don has become one of my last connections to my mother, and his execution will not feel like justice to me.”

As we know, the condemned person is allowed a final meal that is different from the fare served to the other inmates. The approximate allotment for this meal is \$20.00. Following in the footsteps of another death row inmate who at his execution asked for this money to be used to buy food for homeless people, Mr. Johnson asked to be served what the others would eat on his execution day and to take that money to buy a meal for a homeless person.

As his lethal injection began, Mr Johnson said, "I commend my life into your hands. Thy will be done. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen." He then sang for two minutes before he died.

Execution and California

In March, Governor Gavin Newsom issued a moratorium on executions and had the death chamber at San Quentin State Prison shuttered. He also suspended the state’s efforts to find a constitutional method for lethal injection. This means that all of the State’s death row inmates have a reprieve that will last as long as Governor Newsom is governor. Part of what influenced Governor Newsom’s decision was “that the death penalty discriminates against defendants who are poor, mentally ill, African American or Latino. He also noted that death row inmates in California and other states have been exonerated.” When he leaves office, these people can once again be on death row.

A recent poll conducted for the Los Angeles Times by the Institute for Governmental Studies at UC Berkeley found that 48% of the people asked opposed the Governor’s decision while 52% supported it (78% of Democrats supported the decision; 85% of Republicans opposed it).

The survey also showed that 61% of Californians support keeping the death penalty as a “possible punishment for serious crimes,” and 39% of us said the death penalty should be abolished.

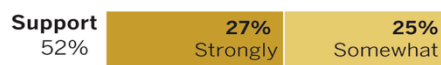
The 2020 election may have a ballot measure that would replace the death penalty with life without possibility of parole. The poll found that at the time the poll was taken 46% supported the constitutional amendment although 53% opposed it.

California death penalty

Q: Would you be in favor of doing away with the death penalty, or do you feel that the death penalty should be kept as a punishment for serious crimes?



Q: Earlier this year, Gov. Gavin Newsom imposed a moratorium on all executions in the state while he is in office, which would spare the lives of the over 700 inmates currently on death row. Do you support or oppose the governor in taking this action?



Los Angeles Times

Margin of error is 3 percentage points in either direction. Source: UC Berkeley Institute of Governmental Studies poll (Los Angeles Times)

Thirty years ago, 82% of Californians supported the death penalty with only 14% favoring abolition. The vote in the 2020 election should this measure be on the ballot will depend on how each side advertises the pros and cons. The 2020 election promises to be quite interesting.

Recent Exonerations

Keith Bush - State: NY

- Date of Exoneration: 5/22/2019

Keith Bush of Bellport, N.Y., was sentenced to 20 years to life in 1976 for murder and attempted sexual abuse. Although paroled in 2007, Bush was exonerated in 2019 after a witness recanted, DNA testing failed to tie him to the crime, and it was shown that his trial attorney had not been told of an alternate suspect, now believed to be the true murderer.

Terrance Lewis - State: PA

- Date of Exoneration: 5/22/2019

In 1999, Terrance Lewis was sentenced to life in prison without parole for a murder in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He was exonerated in 2019 after a witness and two of the real criminals said he was not involved in the crime.

Clayton "Mustafa" Thomas, Jr. - State: PA

- Date of Exoneration: 5/31/2019

In 1995, Clayton "Mustafa" Thomas and his brother, Shaurn Thomas, were sentenced to life in prison for participating in a murder and robbery in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Shaurn was exonerated in 2017 and Clayton was exonerated in 2019 after a co-defendant

admitted that he falsely implicated them, and the prosecution concluded that Shaurn Thomas was elsewhere at the time of the crime.

Terrence Haynes - State: IL
 - Date of Exoneration: 6/3/2019

In 2000, Terrence Haynes was sentenced to 45 years in prison for murder in Kankakee, Illinois despite his claim that he was acting in self-defense. He was exonerated in 2019, after a witness admitted that he testified falsely that the victim did not have a gun.

Darrell Jones - State: MA
 - Date of Exoneration: 6/11/2019

Darrell Jones was sentenced to life in prison in 1986 for the murder of Guillermo Rodrigues in Brockton, Massachusetts. After a judge ruled that a police officer had lied on the witness stand, Jones received a new trial in 2017 and was acquitted in 2019.

Stay of Execution

June
 7 Tiffany Moss GA
 Legally premature death warrant scheduled execution for June 7-14; will be stayed by operation of law when counsel files notice of intent to appeal death sentence.

Executions

May
 23 Bobby Joe Long FL
 Lethal Injection
 3-drug (Etomidate)
 Years From Sentence To Execution - 34

30 Christopher Price AL
 Lethal Injection
 3-drug (Midazolam)
 Years From Sentence To Execution - 17

June
 20 Marion Wilson GA
 Lethal Injection, 1-drug (Pentobarbital)
 Years From Sentence To Execution - 21

GROUP 22 JUNE LETTER COUNT	
UAs	18
POC Narges Mohammadi	12
Total	30

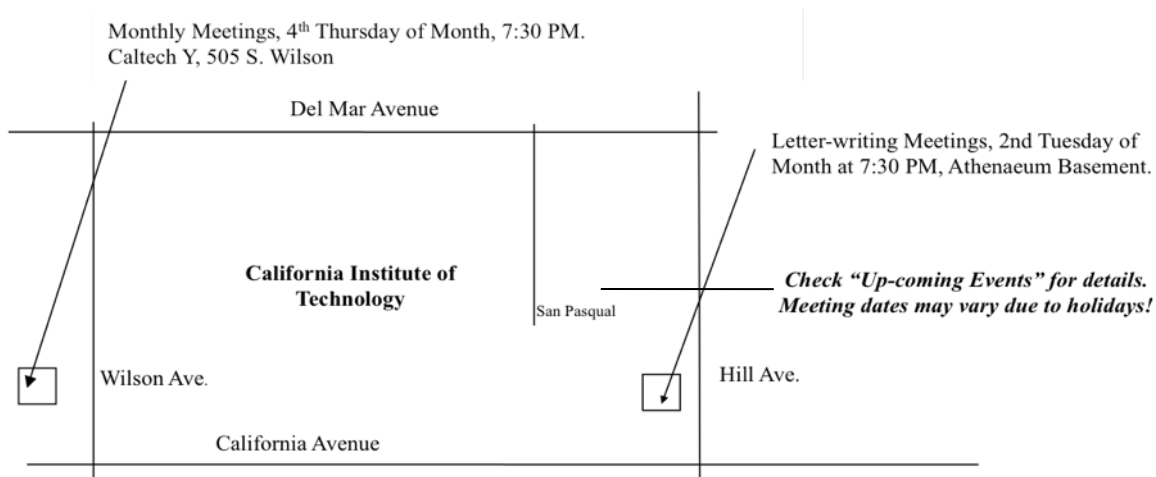
PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE
Narges Mohammadi
 By Joyce Wolf

We hoped that Narges Mohammadi would be able to make a good recovery after her emergency hysterectomy in May, but against doctors' advice she was returned to Iran's notorious Evin Prison only a week after surgery. Worse yet, prison authorities denied her the antibiotics necessary to prevent postoperative infections, and she did indeed contract an infection.

<https://irannewsupdate.com/news/human-rights/6115-medical-deprivation-increasingly-common-for-iranian-political-prisoners.html>
 Published: 18 June 2019

"... Well-known human rights activist Narges Mohammadi, who has suffered a range of health problems since she began serving a 16-year prison sentence in 2015, has recently developed a severe infection following a brief transfer to hospital during which she underwent a hysterectomy. The infection shines a light upon another aspect of the judiciary's use of medical access as a tool of reward and punishment. Frequently, the targets of extrajudicial punishment are permitted enough specialized medical care to forestall death or to give the impression that the prisoner is being cared for, but not enough to permanently correct the underlying issues. In Mohammadi's case, the high risk of infection was well known at the time of the procedure, and doctors recommended that she spend a month recovering either in hospital or at home. Instead, the authorities returned her to her cell after one week. Far from allowing her to return to hospital after the infection developed, those authorities have reportedly barred her from even taking antibiotics. And in an apparent effort to exert pressure on the prisoner's family as well as the prisoner herself, prison officials have provided her husband and children with little to no information about her condition, have cancelled scheduled phone calls, and have prevented Mohammadi from having direct contact with her husband. Iran is a signatory to multiple international conventions that affirm these standards, and yet the theocratic regime has unilaterally declared that it is exempt from any provisions that are deemed to contradict Iranian law or sharia law."

One small bit of good news: @UnitedForNarges tweeted on June 17 that Narges was able to talk to her children on the phone for the first time since she underwent surgery.



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.

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 Pasadena, CA 91125

www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22/

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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.