

April 5, 2021

Hello from Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech!

It's been a long time since we sent out our previous Update on Nov. 26 of last year. We hope you have been well and stayed safe during these momentous months.

This Update includes the following:

- * Upcoming Events for April.
- * Reports on Letter Writing meetings and Book Group Discussions.
- * Prisoners of Conscience Narges Mohammadi and Gao Zhisheng.
- * Amnesty Virtual AGM March 12-14: Joyce's report.
- * Looking back at 2020.

Reminder: Information about Group 22 Upcoming Events is available at <http://www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22/>

*** UPCOMING EVENTS FOR APRIL 2021 ***

[non-Amnesty] April 3-28. International Rescue Center (IRC) in Los Angeles and San Diego present their annual Refugee Film Festival with four streaming films. Live Q&A at 6 pm Wednesdays, April 7, 14, 21, 28. <https://www.rescue.org/announcement/ircs-refugee-film-festival-1>

Tuesday, April 13, 7:30-9:00 pm. Letter Writing Zoom Session.

Contact aigp22@caltech.edu if you are interested in joining our online letter writing.

Current Urgent Actions selected for Group 22 are available on our website above.

Sunday, April 18, 6:30 pm. Human Rights Book Discussion on Zoom. Our April selection is a novel, "The Wall", by John Lanchester. This dystopian novel tells of an island nation surrounded by a Wall protecting it from desperate outsiders trapped by rising seas. The book was shortlisted for the 2020 Orwell Prize.

Tuesday, April 20, is the birthday of our adopted Prisoner of Conscience Gao Zhisheng, a brave human rights lawyer in China who was forcibly disappeared in August 2017. We will mark his birthday with letters and social media actions.

*** REPORTS ON LETTER WRITING AND BOOK DISCUSSIONS ***

A huge thank-you to group member Paula for hosting our Zoom Letter writing meetings and to group coordinator Kathy for providing lists of

Urgent Actions and reporting our efforts to Amnesty USA. Our January count was 14 letters and 47 emails; in February, the count was 20 letters (5 for Gao Zhisheng), 15 emails and 4 tweets. Kathy just reported that the March count was 16 letters, 60 emails, and 13 tweets.

Group 22 also participated in the annual Amnesty action for Nowruz, Iranian New Year celebrated on the first day of spring. We sent a total of 21 greeting cards. Special thanks to Kathy and Robert for writing to all 7 of the featured cases.

Our Human Rights Book Discussion Group continues to meet regularly on the third Sunday of every month. Thanks to Kathy for hosting the Zoom sessions. As always, Stevi skillfully leads our discussions and provides supplementary material. And it's a treat to have Martha join us online from her home in Wisconsin. We alternate fiction and non-fiction, as we've been doing since Martha founded our book group back in 1999.

We discussed the following books in our recent meetings.

Jan 17: The Displaced: Refugee Writers on Refugee Lives, edited by Viet Thanh Nguyen.

Feb 21: Lost Children Archive, a novel by Valeria Luiselli.

Mar 21: A Good Provider Is One Who Leaves: One Family and Migration in the 21st Century, by Jason DeParle.

*** PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE NARGES MOHAMMADI AND GAO ZHISHENG ***

As reported previously, Narges Mohammadi was released from Zanjan Prison in Iran on October 8. However, her passport remained confiscated and it was unclear when she might be able to visit her husband and children in Paris. Her husband hoped that Amnesty would continue to advocate for her freedom to travel. Anette of Amnesty Denmark emailed on March 22 that the Iran Team in London approved them to continue on the Narges case. So the network of Amnesty groups in Europe plans to support Narges in her appeal to visit her children and to not face a new trial on false charges.

Just to be clear, I emailed Elise, the AIUSA country specialist for Iran, and asked if Group 22 could continue casework for Narges. Elise replied, "Narges has been released but her conviction still stands and we want her conviction to be voided so that she is really free instead of having to live with a sword over her head. If your group would like to continue working on the case, yes, please do!"

On March 13, the head of Amnesty Norway revealed that two members of the Norwegian Parliament had nominated Narges for the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize! Wouldn't that be wonderful?

I'm afraid there's no good news, or indeed any news, concerning our group's other Prisoner of Conscience, Gao Zhisheng. He is still missing since he was forcibly disappeared in August 2017. He will be 57 years old on April 20, so we will have some special actions for him this month. Our recent actions for Gao Zhisheng total 6 letters and 6 emails and 2 tweets. He is not forgotten!

*** AMNESTY 2021 VIRTUAL AGM: JOYCE'S REPORT ***

Amnesty USA held its annual general meeting March 12-14 online. I didn't notice anyone else attending from Group 22 besides Vinnie and myself. Plenary sessions were recorded and hopefully will be available sometime soon on AmnestyUSA's YouTube channel.

I was very impressed with AIUSA's new Executive Director, Paul O'Brien. In the opening plenary he referred to the poem "From the Republic of Conscience", which Seamus Heaney wrote for Amnesty's 25th anniversary. There's a short introductory video of Paul O'Brien now on <https://amnestyusa.org>; he doesn't actually take office until April 15.

For me, the highlight of the conference was the workshop that featured Muhammadu Salahi, author of Guantanamo Diary and subject of current film "The Mauritanian". He spoke of seeing his mother in the rear view mirror of the vehicle in which he was first taken for questioning, never dreaming that would be his last sight of her. He endured physical and mental torture in Guantanamo and was not released until 2016, even though no charges were ever filed against him. He shows a remarkable lack of bitterness. The session was graced by the appearance of his toddler son. Salahi's defense lawyer, Nancy Hollander, was also a panelist in this workshop. She said the movie was essentially the true story. This workshop was not recorded (sorry, Vinnie!) but I am looking forward to watching the movie.

Approximately 130 attended the voting plenary on Sunday, way more than the number required for a quorum. Two resolutions were concerned with governance, and the third with restoring member access to an Amnesty database. All eventually passed. I was surprised and pleased with how smoothly the online process worked; it was almost fun to watch the flow of motions and seconds, questions and answers, arguments for and against. It took much less time to count votes online than in physical meetings!

*** LOOKING BACK AT 2020 ***

Amnesty USA Area Coordinators asked Local Groups to submit narratives of how they faced the challenges of 2020 and maintained their commitment to work for human rights. My Group 22 story didn't win us any awards, but I thought you might like to look back with us at this strange year. A total of 23 Local Groups provided stories; you can see ours at <https://www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22/story2020.pdf>

*** LAST WORD ***

Get your Covid shots, stay safe.
Peace and all good,
Joyce and Kathy and Stevi