

AMNESTY NEWS

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October 2007



Key Human Rights Issues in China

Jenny McConnell and Mary Brown of the Southampton Group highlighted the key human rights in China as we run up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

They reminded us that the following statements had been made:

“We are convinced that the Olympic Games will improve human rights in China” (Jacques Rogge, President of the International Olympics Committee)
“By allowing Beijing to host the Games you will help the development of human rights” (Liu Jingmin, Vice president, Beijing 2008 Olympics Games Bid Committee).

“We must make efforts to create a harmonious society and a good social environment for successfully holding the 17th Communist Party Congress and the Beijing Olympic Games... We must strike hard at hostile forces at home and abroad, such as ethnic separatists, religious extremists, violent terrorists and “heretical organizations” like Falun Gong who carry out destabilizing activities” (Zhou Yongkang, Minister of Public Security)

Amnesty’s approach is:

- ◆ To be encouraging
- ◆ To be positive
- ◆ But to be critical.

Amnesty’s strategy is:

- ◆ To make clear recommendations
- ◆ To aim to accelerate reform

**Group Meeting
Monday October 8th 2007**

ERITREA

**Speaker:
Janet MELLOR**

**Avenue St Andrew’s
United Reformed Church
The Avenue, Southampton
7.30 pm**

ALL WELCOME

- ◆ To focus on the legacy-what will people remember?
- ◆ To remind China that great powers have obligations and responsibilities.

Calling for reforms in 4 main areas:

- ◆ Protection of human rights defenders
- ◆ Freedom of expression and information
- ◆ Fair trials and prevention of torture
- ◆ Death penalty.

AI note that 68 crimes carry the Death Penalty in China, including: tax evasion, reselling VAT receipts, taking bribes, drug related offences, disrupting public order and poisoning livestock.

(Cont on page 3)

AI’s VISION
is of a world in which every person enjoys all of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international standards.

AI’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.

AI’s CORE VALUES
remain those of :
international solidarity, effective action for the individual victim, global coverage, the universality and indivisibility of human rights, impartiality and independence, and democracy and mutual respect.

Worldwide Appeal: EGYPT Blogger imprisoned

Karim Amer, a 23-year-old Egyptian blogger and former al-Azhar University student, was sentenced to four years' imprisonment on 22 February for criticizing Egypt's al-Azhar religious authorities, the Egyptian President and Islam.

AI considers Karim Amer to be a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned on account of the peaceful expression of his views.

A Misdemeanor Court in Alexandria, North Egypt, jailed Karim Amer for writing internet blogs about Islam, the Egyptian regime and the sectarian riots which took place between Muslims and Christians in Alexandria in October 2005. The court found that his writings were "inciting strife and defaming Muslims on the internet by describing the prophet of Islam and his comrades as murderers, which disturbs national peace"; and "insulting the President of the Republic by writing on the internet".

He received three years' imprisonment on the first charge and one year's imprisonment on the sec-



ond. On 12 March the Court of Appeal confirmed the sentence. He lodged a further appeal to the Court of Cassation on 21 April but no hearing has yet been scheduled.

Karim Amer is now in Borg Al-Arab prison in Alexandria. He was held in solitary confinement for 65 days, reportedly in order to force him to give up his views about Islam. He is allowed regular visits by his family and lawyers. Since

July he has also reportedly been allowed daily outdoor exercise and exchanges of letters with his mother. He plans to study literature at Alexandria University from October, if allowed by the prison director.

Please write to the President of Egypt, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of prisoner of conscience Karim Amer.

Send appeals to:

Mohammad Hosni Mubarak
President of the Arab Republic of Egypt
'Abedine Palace
Cairo
Egypt
Fax: +20 223 901 998
E-mail: webmaster@presidency.gov.eg
Salutation: Your Excellency

Please also send expressions of solidarity to: Abdel Karim Nabil Soliman Amer, Borg Al-Arab Prison, Alexandria, Egypt.

Letter writing guide

- *Always be polite. This rule is essential and invariable. Your aim is to help, not to relieve your own feelings. Governments don't respond to abusive or condemnatory letters (however well **deserved!**)
- *Always write your letters on the basis that the Government concerned is open to reason and discussion.
- *It is important where possible to stress a country's reputation for moderation and justice, to show respect for its constitution and judicial procedures, and to demonstrate an understanding of current difficulties. This will give you more scope to point out ways in which the human rights situation can be improved.
- *Follow strictly the instructions given by AI.
- *Never use political jargon. Don't give the impression that you are writing because you are ideologically or politically opposed to the government in question. It is far more effective to stress that your concern for human rights is not politically based in any way, but in keeping with basic principles of international law.
- *If appropriate, explain who you are and what you do. It shows your letter is genuine, and that people from varying walks of life are following events in the country concerned.

September Group

Jenny welcomed all to the meeting

Chair's Report (Jenny):

Jenny informed the meeting that Frank Capocci and Judy Horton had decided to step down from Amnesty as a result of AI's ICM decision on abortion. The Group joined Jenny in expressing our sincere thanks for the tremendous contribution they had made to the work of AI. The Group was reminded that Frank's service to the Group went back to the 70's and he was the longest standing member. Thank you both.

Paul and Veronica volunteered to take over the tea and coffee making responsibilities.

Tin Rattle: This will take place on 13th October outside Sainsbury's Shirley Precinct (if you haven't yet signed up please do so at next meeting)

Secretary's Report (Mary):

Action of the month: was a letter to Zimbabwe on Stop Violence Against Women regarding "Women of Zimbabwe Arise" (WOZA), this was signed on behalf of the Group by Jenny.

Local Groups' review: Mary went through a number of the questions.

China and East Asia: With Judy's resignation Paul Humphrey and Anne Parry agreed to take over this area.

Members were reminded of the "SVAW & China" Conference will be held in HRAC in London on September 25th, details from Paul.

Outreach: Veronica reported that she was trying to get Human Rights on the agenda on the Southampton Women's Group.

She reminded the Group about

- ♦ UNA Southampton AGM on Saturday.
- ♦ International Peace Day 21st September with an exhibition in the Civic Centre 17th-28th September.

Subsequently Veronica has sent in information about the Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

Key Human Rights Issues in China (cont from page 1)

Death Penalty:

Death Penalty often follows unfair trials, torture, resulting in forced confessions and the denial of legal help. Amnesty estimated that in 2006, 1010 people were executed and 2790 sentenced to death. However, Chinese Academic estimates that there were as many as 8000 deaths ie 22 per day.

AI recommends: initially a significant reduction in the use of the death penalty leading to full abolition. Regular publication of statistics and a reduction in the number of crimes resulting in the death penalty.

Media:

AI is concerned at the Double Standards regards the Media introduced in 2007. Foreign journalists will be allowed to bypass permission for interviews and investigations, whereas domestic journalists need permission for "sensitive" historical events, 20 specific issues are banned, including judicial corruption and protecting human rights. Penalty points for infringements can lead to closing down. It is also the case that foreign news is restricted.

The following publications have been restricted: Democracy and Legal Times (staff dismissed, no website coverage); China Development Brief (closed for "conducting unauthorised surveys"); Minjian (distribution restricted)

Internet:

Literary Forum for Contemporary Chinese Poetry closed down. Shi Tao continues to serve 10 year sentence.

Relaxation of Policy?

Official ban on debating Tiananmen Square remains. Three editors have been dismissed for reporting struggle for justice.

But:

Families allowed brief memorial ceremony in Square; "Tiananmen Mothers" group met in cemetery.

