



February 2010

Amnesty International Group 41



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Next meeting - Tuesday, February 23, 2010 7:30 pm

Unitarian Church, 401 Kings Highway, Cherry Hill, NJ

January Meeting

Our scheduled speaker was not able to attend our January meeting, but we had an excellent representation of our regular members and were able to send some much needed letters, as well as to receive updates on Yemen, Guantanamo, and Myanmar.

Death Penalty

In an earlier newsletter we reported on Texas Judge Sharon Keller who refused to keep the courthouse open late in 2007 for an appeal by Michael Richards which was filed in light of a new ruling. The prisoner was executed a few hours later. A judge of the State District Court who presided over the ethics hearing regarding Judge Keller's action concluded that, while her conduct was not exemplary and was even questionable, she did not engage in conduct so "egregious" that she should be removed from office.

Child Soldiers

Time limits did not permit discussion of child soldiers but we will discuss the topic at the February meeting.

Profile in Courage

Ana Gonzalez, a Chilean woman, lost four members of her family in April of 1976. Two sons and the pregnant wife of one of them failed to return from work one evening. Her husband went to look for them. None returned. For more than thirty years she has been a tireless advocate for those who seek answers about 30,000 people who disappeared during the time of Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile. She organized protests and hunger strikes at churches, embassies, and offices of the Red Cross and UN. Gonzalez's courage, persistence, and positive spirit have touched many Chileans who were not directly affected. She has become the 84 year old face on the poster for a current campaign to link DNA samples with scattered remains of presumed victims. (NY Times, January 23, 20010)

Upcoming Event

There will be a meeting of local Amnesty groups on March 20 from 9:30 am -5:00 pm at the Philadelphia Ethics Society in Rittenhouse Square. The occasion will provide an opportunity to meet with other AI members and to attend workshops on topics from immigration detention to the death penalty as well as to learn about human rights issues. For further information call David Rendell at 856-547-8447.

February 4, 2010

Ambassador Arturo Saruhkan
Ambassador of Mexico to the United States of America
1911 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20006

Dear Ambassador,

I am writing to express my deep concern at the number of attacks and threats against human rights activists in Mexico which are not effectively investigated as shown in the recent Amnesty International report.

In August 2008, the Mexican government adopted a National Human Rights Program, including a component on protection for human rights defenders. **This has still not produced concrete benefits for human rights defenders who continue to face harassment, intimidation and killings.**

I urge you to prioritize the situation of human rights defenders and develop a comprehensive Protection Program to allow those who defend the right of others to carry out their work without fear of attacks or reprisal.

Respectfully Yours,

February 4, 2010

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

Thank you for granting Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to eligible Haitians in the United States and your quick reaction in pledging much needed humanitarian, technical and financial support to the devastated nation of Haiti. The Department of Homeland Security's temporarily halting all deportations to Haiti is also a welcome step.

However, there has been no decision to suspend the policy of interdiction at sea, which poses specific risks to Haitians who flee as a last resort and may be in need of international protection due to persecution or other serious human rights violations. Haitians fleeing persecution or other serious human rights violations have the right to seek protection in the US, but in flagrant violation of international law, they are routinely stopped on the high seas by the Coast Guard and returned to Haiti.

Statements made by Secretary Napolitano upon the announcement of TPS make clear that this policy will continue. Protecting the human rights of Haitians requires suspension of the interdiction policy.

Thank you again for the TPS decision made, and for the rapid mobilization of the US government to deliver lifesaving humanitarian assistance to Haiti.

Respectfully Yours,

February 4, 2010

Ambassador Evan J. Paki
Embassy of Papua New Guinea
1779 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Suite 805
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Ambassador,

Between April and July 2009, police officers in Papua New Guinea illegally and forcibly evicted people from their homes alongside one of the biggest mines in Papua New Guinea, the Porgera gold mine.

People fled as their homes were burned by police. In some cases police assaulted and threatened people with firearms. One woman, a mine employee, said that while she was nursing her small child in her arms, a police officer hit her on the shoulder with a rifle butt when she hesitated to leave her house, pointed the gun at her and threatened her. Another resident said that when he refused to leave, the police tried to lock him in his house and set fire to it while he was inside.

Those affected by the forced evictions have had to seek shelter elsewhere. One woman told Amnesty International, "I am a bit ashamed because my wontoks [relatives] have to provide for my family." Several former residents of Wuangima say that due to their forced eviction, they can no longer rely on their gardens for food. Women in particular report significant hardship as a result of the police action as it is generally their responsibility to provide food for the family.

Many people told Amnesty International that they want compensation and an explanation from the authorities as to why the police destroyed their homes. As one man stated, "I didn't steal gold and I didn't do anything wrong. Why are they burning my house?"

Amnesty International is calling for:

- the government of Papua New Guinea to immediately investigate the police actions, prosecute those responsible and provide effective remedies for people whose rights were violated.
- the companies to withdraw their support for the police deployment and call for an investigation into the police action.
- the Canadian government to actively promote respect for human rights by Canadian companies in their operations at home and abroad.

Respectfully Yours,