



Amnesty International

Group 524

April 2018



Next Meeting: Tuesday, April 17 – 7:00 p.m. – Providence Heights

Follow-up to March Meeting

A mid-March snowstorm, coupled with some other circumstances, limited the turnout last month to three of us. We signed petitions calling for the release of **Sing Chanthakoummane** (Laos) and **Raif Badawi** (Saudi Arabia), but did not mail them. We will be able to add some signatures this month.

From our colleague Al Jacobson (Group 56 in Lexington, MA), we have received positive news related to our model letter in the March newsletter. The letters, sent by members of Group 56, as well as our group, were addressed to Congressman Alan Lowenthal of California – a man who has a strong record on human rights issues. We were asking that he become an advocate specifically for **Thich Quang Do**, under a special program available to members of Congress. On Tuesday, Al received a message, confirming that Congressman Lowenthal had agreed to take on that role. For details on this positive development, please see Page 4.

Here's one more follow-up item. Every month, while beginning the work on the newsletter, we run a standard Google search for any recent news concerning Thich Quang Do. Today that search pointed us to a news feature on a website operated by the newspaper in Lexington. The article describes the project by high school students to send greetings to Thich Quang Do, and it contains several of the photographs we included in our February and March newsletters. Congratulations on this great news coverage to the students and our friends in Group 56!

<http://lexington.wickedlocal.com/news/20180410/stronglexington-students-send-letters-supporting-imprisoned-buddhiststrong>

Turkey: Amnesty International Chair Remains in Prison

On April 4th, Amnesty International activists in many countries conducted actions to call for **Taner Kilic** to be released from prison. That day marked the 300th day of imprisonment for Kilic, the chair of Amnesty International Turkey. On Page 2 we have some information about the April 4th events, and excerpts from a recent letter from Kilic. On Page 3 is our updated model letter, calling for him to be released from prison.

Amnesty International Group 524

Meeting Schedule: Third Tuesday of the month, at 7:00 p.m.

Meeting Location: Providence Heights
9000 Babcock Blvd., Allison Park, PA 15101



Contact John Warren (jf.warren@verizon.net or 412-766-2506) for more information on material in this mailing, or visit the Amnesty USA website (www.amnestyusa.org) or the website of Amnesty International Group 39 (amnestypgh.org).

Countries Around the World: April 4th Actions Support Taner Kilic

As noted on Page 1, April 4th marked the 300th day of imprisonment for **Taner Kilic**, the chair of Amnesty International Turkey. Two of the photographs show groups of German activists demonstrating at the Turkish embassy in Berlin. The third shows Taner Kilic with his family. The text below came from an Amnesty press release.



Ahead of today's international day of action, marking his 300th day behind bars, the imprisoned honorary chair of Amnesty International Turkey, Taner Kiliç, has expressed his heartfelt thanks to all those who have stood in solidarity with him. In a letter sent from Sakran prison in Izmir, where he has been held since 9 June 2017 pending the outcome of his trial, Taner Kiliç writes:

“Photographs taken from the actions organized under the hot sun, rain, and the freezing cold have lifted my spirits and reminded me of the importance of international solidarity in the struggle for human rights.”

In the letter, published today to coincide with stunts to demand his release by campaigners in more than 40 countries, Taner Kiliç goes on to say:

“In prison it is easy to feel that you will be forgotten, even by your nearest and dearest. But for me, rather than being forgotten, my situation has become known both in Turkey and beyond...I would like to thank everyone who has shown their solidarity for me: supporters and volunteers around the world. You're always in my mind and prayers.”

Actions around the world today will include a guerrilla graffiti stunt in Belgium, candle-lit vigils in Chile, the release of 300 hundred of balloons in Switzerland, and a photo stunt in Mali.

“Three hundred days after he was imprisoned on false charges, people around the globe are coming together to demand an end to this miscarriage of justice and the immediate release of Taner Kiliç,” said Gauri van Gulik, Amnesty International's Europe Director.

“No evidence has been presented by the prosecution to substantiate the absurd charges against Taner. Incredible as this may seem, he is just one of many in a similar situation and is a potent symbol of the deliberate dismantling of civil society during the crackdown.”

Turkey: Model Letter Calling for Release of Taner Kilic

Mr Bekir Bozdag
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
Adalet Bakanligi
06659 Ankara, Turkey



Dear Minister:

I am contacting you out of great concern for **Taner Kiliç**, the current board chair of Amnesty International Turkey. As I am certain you are well aware, Mr. Kilic has now been detained in pretrial custody for more than 300 days.

The charges that your government has brought against him – accusations of acting to aid various terrorist organizations – are bizarre and obviously fabricated.

It is clear that he has been imprisoned solely because he committed the “crime” of standing up for human rights.

I urge you to drop all charges against **Taner Kiliç**. He should be released from detention, immediately and unconditionally.

cc: Ambassador Serdar Kiliç
Embassy of the Republic of Turkey
2525 Massachusetts Ave. NW
Washington DC 20008



Vietnam: Congressman Lowenthal Accepts Role as Advocate

Here, from Alan Lowenthal's website, is the announcement of his role as an advocate for Thich Quang Do, whom he visited in 2015.

Congressman Lowenthal Officially Adopts Patriarch Thich Quang Do As A Prisoner Of Conscience

Washington, D.C., April 6, 2018 | [0 comments](#)



Congressman Alan Lowenthal (CA-47) today announced that he has officially adopted the Most Venerable Thich Quang Do as a prisoner of conscience through the Defending Freedoms Project of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission.

The Supreme Patriarch of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, Thich Quang Do has been under house arrest since 1998 for his activism against the Vietnamese government's anti-Buddhist policies—without due process or a formal charge. A renowned spiritual leader, scholar, dissident, and 16-times Nobel Peace Prize nominee, the Patriarch's activism in support of religious freedom has resulted in a total of

three decades of exile, imprisonment, and house arrest by Vietnamese authorities.

"The Patriarch has suffered decades of oppression and imprisonment for nothing more than standing up for his universal right of religious freedom," Congressman Lowenthal said. "I am proud to be his advocate and I will continue to fight for his release."

Under the Defending Freedoms Project, Congress Members seek the release or reduction of a prison sentence or the improvement of prison conditions for their adoptees, while also raising awareness about the unjust laws or policies that led to imprisonment.

Congressman Lowenthal has been calling for the release of the Patriarch since he became a Member of Congress and joined the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission in 2013. The Congressman has spoken with the current and two previous U.S. Ambassadors to Vietnam on numerous occasions encouraging them to pressure the Vietnamese government to release the Patriarch. He has also directly appealed to both the Obama and Trump Administration to make the release of the Patriarch and other prisoners of conscience a priority of American foreign policy in Vietnam. In 2015, the Congressman traveled to Vietnam to meet with the Patriarch, where they discussed his case and the state of religious freedom in Vietnam. During the same trip, the Congressman engaged directly with members of the Vietnamese government to advocate for the Patriarch.



Pittsburgh: Update from City of Asylum

Our good friend Eve Wider, who serves the AIUSA Area Coordinator for this region, forwarded this email update from City of Asylum Pittsburgh. To learn more about the organization, including its busy schedule of events, you can visit their website (<http://cityofasylum.org>) or their Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/cityofasylumpittsburgh>).

Back in 2014, The Atlantic brought the work of City of Asylum Pittsburgh to the attention of a nationwide readership. It's an article that you might find interesting:
<https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/10/pittsburghs-city-of-asylum/382145>

The update was sent by Henry Reese, who, along with Diane Samuels, founded the organization 14 years ago.



It has been a very active 2018 for City of Asylum. Our mission—giving voice and opening ears—has been at the center of many local, national, and international conversations. Our community-centric model for supporting writers, global cultural exchange, and creative freedom is being seen as an effective builder of civil society. Here is a short update on recent activity.

Our writer residency program will be expanding—we have invited Rania Mamoun from Sudan, and we expect her to arrive in June. Rania is a writer of fiction and a journalist (in print media and television), as well as a human rights activist and advocate for women in Sudan. She is currently unable to write freely in Sudan and will be coming with two daughters, aged 1 and 9.

While in residence at COA, Rania will be a scholar at Chatham University, which has sponsored her visa. Rania will be the first COA writer-in-residence to come from abroad since the Trump Administration's visa policies were implemented.

COA currently has 3 other exiled writers-in-residence: Osama Alomar, Tuhin Das, and Israel Centeno. Each of them has recently completed a novel!

Osama just completed the first draft of a novel, *The Broken Souls*, recreating a manuscript lost in Syria. He has been very active, doing many readings around Pittsburgh—you may have seen him recently at the Bach Choir's Peace concert—and throughout the U.S., most recently in Austin, Chicago, and Princeton.

Pittsburgh: Update from City of Asylum (continued)

Tuhin’s novel, is titled *Pratyakhyatal*, which translates as “refused, rejected, discarded, disallowed, slighted, neglected.” A selection of his poems is also being translated into English. Tuhin has a degree in business management, and after his two-year residency ends in April, he will be taking a position in our finance department, doing bookkeeping and database administration.

Tuhin has also been active in reading and speaking locally about immigrant/refugee experiences in Pittsburgh, including a panel led by Grant Oliphant of the Pittsburgh Foundation at the Andy Warhol Museum.

Israel’s draft marks the first time he has written a novel in English. Different than writers like Nabokov or Beckett, who wrote in their second languages after mastery, Israel’s novel is both trans-national and trans-linguistic, in a partially mastered English reflective of an exile during transition.

City of Asylum has received an award of \$30,000 from the National Endowment for the Arts for 2018 Jazz Poetry Month. The NEA’s funding has for many years been important to Jazz Poetry, both for the significance of the funds and its imprimatur, which has encouraged others to support Jazz Poetry. Silvia Duarte, our Associate Director, is hard at work on curating the poets and musicians, and it looks to be sensational.

And, of course, Brugge on North @ Alphabet City will be opening later this month. It will feature many favorites from other Brugge locations (like its famous mussels) but also many dishes unique to Alphabet City.

Please come and visit soon.

