



# Amnesty International

## Group 524

## June 2018



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**Next Meeting: Tuesday, June 19 – 7:00 p.m. – Providence Heights**

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### Vietnam: Loss of a Friend and Colleague

Last month, our group lost a friend and a dedicated Amnesty colleague. **Al Jacobson**, of Group 56 in Lexington, Massachusetts, died of leukemia on May 21<sup>st</sup>. Our case coordinator, Kathy Herbst, worked with AI to plan some of the actions that our group could take in behalf of **Patriarch Thich Quang Do**.

In turn, AI stayed in touch with Penelope Faulkner of the Vietnam Committee on Human Rights in Paris and, through VCHR, with Thich Quang Do. On Page 7, you will find the tribute to Al which appeared on the VCHR website. Five years ago, when Al was diagnosed with leukemia, Thich Quang Do wrote to him, with a message of concern, mixed with appreciation for what Al had done over the years. Those touching words are included in the VCHR tribute. Also on that page is a link to the obituary which appeared in the *Boston Globe*.

About a week after Al's death, Thich Quang Do issued his annual Vesak Day message, marking the day when the birth of Buddha is celebrated. His message of overcoming repression with nonviolence and compassion is summarized on Page 6 (with a link to the full message).

### Turkey and Malaysia: Bad News and Good News about Prominent Prisoners

In Turkey, the leader of Amnesty remains in prison (model letter on Page 2), but in Malaysia, **Anwar Ibrahim**, a prominent prisoner of conscience, has at last been released (see Page 3).

### Summit with North Korea: Comments from Amnesty and Human Rights Watch

At our meeting on June 19<sup>th</sup>, we'll have an opportunity to discuss the summit in Singapore, including the takes on it from both human rights organizations (see Page 4).

We should also discuss the Trump administration's abusive actions against asylum-seekers. Also on tap is a new Amnesty action focusing on human rights abuses in Russia.

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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](http://www.amnestyusa.org)) or the website of Amnesty International Group 39 ([amnestypgh.org](http://amnestypgh.org)).

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## Turkey: Model Letter Calling for Release of Taner Kilic

*As of last week, the leader of Amnesty International Turkey had been held in prison for one year. More than a million people from 194 countries and territories have already signed Amnesty appeals demanding the release of **Taner Kilic** and all other human rights defenders in Turkey imprisoned solely for their peaceful activism.*

*Taner's next hearing is set for June 21<sup>st</sup>. If he is found guilty of the charges against him, he could face up to 15 years in jail. This model letter is adapted from the one we featured in the April newsletter.*

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 one year.

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

## Malaysia: Anwar Ibrahim Released After Campaign Lasting Two Decades



*Way back in 1998, Anwar Ibrahim was the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, but his efforts to enact political reforms had earned him a lot of enemies. Arrested and imprisoned on fabricated charges, he endured two decades of trials, prison sentences, and beatings. Amnesty activists campaigned on his behalf for 20 years. That long campaign ended in May 2018. The text below came from an Amnesty press release dated May 16<sup>th</sup>.*

The release of the long-time Malaysian opposition leader and Amnesty International prisoner of conscience Anwar Ibrahim is a landmark moment for human rights in the country, the organization said today.

Anwar, who has twice been imprisoned on politically motivated “sodomy” and corruption charges, received a royal pardon following last week’s election win for the Pakatan Harapan coalition led by Mahathir Mohamad. Amnesty International has campaigned on Anwar’s case for 20 years.

“Anwar should never have been jailed in the first place, and his long overdue release is an important step towards the restoration of justice and human rights in Malaysia after so many years of political persecution by previous governments,” said Salil Shetty, Amnesty International’s Secretary General.

“This day should go down as a landmark moment for human rights in the country, but the new government must not stop here. Rather, this should be the first of many more positive changes.”

“The new government should now repeal the repressive laws that muzzle freedom of expression and assembly, and that were used relentlessly to target government critics and human rights defenders under the previous government.”



## **Summit in Singapore: Statement from Amnesty International USA**

*AIUSA released this statement on June 12<sup>th</sup>.*

According to President Trump, human rights were discussed during the summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. Francisco Bencosme, advocacy manager for Asia Pacific at Amnesty International USA, issued the following statement:

“While we welcome news that President Trump raised human rights at the summit, Amnesty International urges the U.S. government to continue to push for urgent reforms in North Korea. Human rights should not be a footnote in any engagement with Kim Jong Un, but rather a crucial component in negotiations between the two countries.

“There are no ‘great winners’ when North Korea continues to commit systemic, widespread, and grave violations of human rights, some of which may amount to crimes against humanity. It must close its prison camps, where up to 120,000 people continue to be held; protect freedom of expression; and reunite families separated through displacement during the war, forced disappearances, or abductions.”

## **Summit in Singapore: Commentary from Human Rights Watch**

*John Sifton, Asian Advocacy Director for HRW, published this commentary on June 13<sup>th</sup>.*

### **Romancing Kim Won’t Denuclearize North Korea or Improve Its Human Rights Record**

As counterproliferation experts and seasoned North Korea watchers have concluded in parsing the joint communique to Tuesday’s summit between Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un, no significant or tangible steps were actually taken toward denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula. The joint statement released after the meeting, most of which had been agreed to beforehand, committed North Korea to nothing. The two sides essentially agreed to do what they have already decided to do — continue negotiating.

North Korea, which made only vague rehashed pledges, gained significant concessions, including a halt to joint US-South Korea war games. Meanwhile, China, which helped broker and leaven the summit, has relaxed its recently stepped-up enforcement of the UN sanctions, an important piece of leverage on Kim.

One leading counterproliferation expert, Jeffrey Lewis, called the agreement “a joke.” Eliot Cohen, a senior official in George W. Bush’s State Department, said Trump was essentially conning the US media market for political purposes: “He’s a huckster and a fantasist. This is all the fast talk of a New York grifter. You can’t believe any of it.”

Kim, in achieving the remarkable diplomatic feat of transforming from ruthless dictator to world statesman in just a few months, seems to have learned something from his friend, former NBA star Dennis Rodman, also on hand in Singapore for the summit circus. Indeed, North Korea is now in a position to do what Rodman memorably did exactly 20 years ago on the same night as the summit, during the crucial final minute of Game 3 of the 1998 NBA finals: grab the ball, hold on, and let the clock run out. Kim can now keep talking, keep the clock running, gain legitimacy on the world stage, and ultimately “win,” when the world finally concedes on North Korea’s status as a nuclear power.

The news is even worse for the people of North Korea, who daily suffer from the Kim regime’s totalitarian abuses. In burnishing Kim’s stature, the deal may well end up indefinitely entrenching his rule. In a news conference Tuesday, when asked about prisoners in North Korea’s vast network of labor camps and gulags, Trump tried to suggest that they were “great winners” because of the summit, presumably on a vague and unsupported theory that denuclearization (which isn’t likely to happen anytime soon) will somehow lead to improvements in North Korea’s human rights record.



### **Summit in Singapore: Commentary from Human Rights Watch (continued)**

There is no evidence that the summit made progress on human rights. Trump wasn't even able to secure a passing reference in a nonbinding joint communique. How will the US ever be able to achieve actual progress on human rights issues in subsequent negotiations, if the issues aren't even on the table and there's no pressure on Kim to make changes?

That is not how tyrants act. The hundreds of thousands of North Koreans being brutalized daily in prisons and labor camps and gulags in the mountains are not "winners" now and they won't be tomorrow. Nor are the millions of other North Koreans who are routinely subjected to forced labor and deprived of basic rights, ranging from freedom of speech and assembly to adequate food, housing, education, and health care.

Notably, Trump's language about human rights at Tuesday's news conference was dramatically weaker than the "cruel dictatorship" language he has used before, for instance in his January State of the Union address and his November 2017 speech before South Korea's parliament, in which he outlined the North Korean government's grotesque record of abuse.

The vacillations between condemnation and praise reveal what we all know: Trump doesn't really care about human rights. But he does care about making an impression and making a deal. So here is a hard truth that his cabinet can hopefully explain to him: There will never be meaningful progress on a deal unless there is a counterproliferation verification process. And a verification process will require at least some human rights reforms, including cooperation with the UN system and its human rights bodies. While it is possible to carry out verifications in an authoritarian country like Iran, it is far harder to achieve a durable and fully verifiable denuclearization in a country that is completely closed and utterly totalitarian.

Moreover, it is likely that Kim knows that North Koreans have a growing awareness of their unfortunate situation in the world, and has realized that to remain in power he will need to deliver a more prosperous and stable life for them – one of the points that the White House seemed to be making in the hyper-schlocky mock-film trailer that they showed to Kim in Singapore. But Kim can't accomplish that without opening the door to more than simply weapons inspectors. In that sense, human rights are already on the agenda.

In any case, the parties have no choice but to discuss human rights as negotiations progress, since by law the bulk of US sanctions for human rights abuses can't be suspended until North Korea's rights record improves. The success of future talks cannot hang on giving Kim a pass on his totalitarianism. Human rights are on the agenda, whether the negotiating parties want it or not.

Addressing the plight of North Korea's long-suffering population means repeatedly raising concerns about Kim's human rights record – forcefully, publicly, and without apology – and instilling in him the point that sanctions were imposed on him for his human rights record, not just his weapons proliferation. The United States can keep talking to Kim, but praises and pulled punches are irresponsible and counter-productive.

Real diplomatic progress demands clear-eyed acknowledgment that Kim has to commit to more than stemming proliferation activities. He will also have to open his prisons to human rights monitors, undertake labor reforms, establish real relationships with UN agencies, and implement numerous other recommendations by their human rights bodies. The key factor behind these demands is not flattery, but rather the targeted, hard sanctions that the US has imposed on Kim and his government for their past abuses. Kim isn't going to be morally persuaded or cajoled into improving his government's human rights record. He will need to be compelled.



## **Vietnam: Vesak Day Message from Thich Quang Do**

*Vesak Day, when the birth of Buddha is celebrated, occurred on May 29<sup>th</sup> of our calendar. On the 28<sup>th</sup>, the VCHR website published Thich Quang Do's annual Vesak Day message. The text below accompanied the message. To read the full message, click this link:*

<http://queme.org/en/vesak-thich-quang-do-urges-to-overcome-repression-through-nonviolence-and-compassion/?v=7516fd43adaa>

### **In Vesak Day Message, UBCV Leader Thích Quảng Độ Urges Buddhists to Overcome Repression through the Teachings of Nonviolence and Compassion**

PARIS, 28 May 2018 (IBIB) – The Most Venerable Thích Quang Đạo, Fifth Supreme Patriarch of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) issued his annual Message on the Anniversary of the Vesak (Birth of Buddha). Vesak Day, the most important event in the Buddhist calendar, is celebrated on the 15th day of the 4th Month of the Lunar Year, which falls on Tuesday 29th May 2018.

The UBCV Patriarch, who turns 90 this year, sent the message from the Thanh Minh Zen Monastery in Saigon where he is under house arrest. Despite decades spent in detention, deprived of adequate medical care and under constant surveillance, Thích Quang Đạo remains a symbol of the nonviolent movement for religious freedom, human rights and democracy in Vietnam.

In his Message, Thích Quang Đạo quoted UN Secretary-general António Guterres on the relevance of Buddhism in today's world: "From peace, to climate change, to human rights, we see how much the teachings of the Buddha are so relevant in the work of the United Nations today. Now more than ever, Buddhist communities and all of us must give every day meaning to the Buddha's message of tolerance, empathy and humanism. We must resist those who seek to twist a call for love into a cry for hate".

In Vietnam today, he wrote, "the UBCV is repressed so harshly that its future hangs by a thread" and its members "live in an unbearable state of insecurity, oppression and poverty". Indeed, followers of the UBCV, which is not recognized by the communist authorities, suffer daily, insidious repression including harassments and intimidation (i.e., that they will lose their jobs or their children will be expelled from school if they continue to frequent UBCV pagodas).

In this repressive climate, the UBCV cannot hold large gatherings or religious celebrations. To keep Buddhism alive, therefore, Thích Quang Đạo urged each Buddhist to heed the lesson of the "Inexhaustible Lamp": "Every Buddhist who studies the Dharma can bring its teachings to hundreds of thousands of others, who in turn can guide countless more towards enlightenment, without limit. Thus, like one lamp that lights up multitudes of other lamps all over the earth, ignorance and darkness will become bright. The Golden Light of the Dharma will be limitless and never be extinguished".

**Vietnam: VCHR Tribute to Al Jacobson**



**VCHR Mourns the Passing of  
Alvin L. Jacobson,  
Human Rights Advocate  
and Friend of Vietnam**

*The title above and the text below came from the VCHR website. Here is the link to Al's obituary:*

<http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/bostonglobe/obituary.aspx?pid=189079367>

PARIS, 28 May 2018 (VCHR) –The Vietnam Committee on Human Rights (VCHR) mourns the passing of Alvin (“Al”) L. Jacobson, a dedicated human rights advocate and true friend of Vietnam. He died at his home in Cambridge, Massachusetts (USA) on May 21st 2018 at the age of 76, after a long battle against leukemia. In January 2018, he decided to renounce hospital treatment and spend his last days in the company of his family and friends.

“Al Jacobson worked tirelessly for the release of prisoners of conscience, in Vietnam and elsewhere, with passion, compassion and tenacity. His life and work are an inspiration to all human rights defenders” said VCHR President Võ Van Ái.

Al Jacobson had a distinguished and varied career as an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of North Carolina, then working in consulting and the financial services industry. In the 1970s he co-founded Amnesty International’s Group 56 in Lexington. His involvement with Vietnam lasted 16 years, beginning in 2002 when his group adopted Thích Huyen Quang, then Patriarch of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) as a prisoner of conscience.

After Thích Huyen Quang’s death under house arrest in 2008, Group 56 took up the case of his successor, Thích Quang Đò, who they continue to support today. During these years, VCHR worked closely with Al Jacobson to provide information and ideas for the group’s actions, which included hundreds of letters to members of the US Congress, the President, State Department, media and to CEOs of US companies doing business with Vietnam.

Amongst his latest campaigns, Al Jacobson sent 70 letters calling for the release of Thích Quang Đò to a European Parliamentary delegation visiting Vietnam, and mobilized high school students from Lexington to send messages of support to Thích Quang Đò, which VCHR helped to deliver to the UBCV Patriarch without being intercepted by the Police.

*[Text continues on Page 8.]*



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**Vietnam: VCHR Tribute to AI Jacobson (continued)**

When AI was diagnosed with leukemia in 2013, Thích Quang Đôn sent these words of sympathy and thanks:

“It is in times of illness or misfortune that one realizes the importance of friendship and solidarity. They are as precious as the air we breathe. I learned this myself through my long years in internal exile, prison and under house arrest. The authorities can detain, isolate and humiliate you, but they cannot take away the inner warmth nurtured by the sentiment that you are not alone.

“You have worked so hard for my release over so many years, often with absolutely no recognition or reply. Your determination has helped to sustain mine, and strengthen my commitment to struggle for human rights and freedom in Vietnam. For I believe that nonviolence and compassion will overcome hatred and repression, and I will pursue this path, whatever the consequences. I send you these few words to let you know that I am beside you in your ordeal, as you are in mine.”