



Amnesty International

Group 524

July 2018



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

Vietnam: U.S. Diplomats Visit Thich Quang Do

In the June newsletter, we had to share the sad news of the death of our friend and colleague, **Al Jacobson**, of Group 56 in Lexington, Massachusetts. Just a few days later, at our group's June 19th meeting, Kathy brought us some news that Al would have found very pleasing. From Penelope Faulkner in Paris, Kathy learned that the two top American diplomats in Vietnam had just met with **Patriarch Thich Quang Do**. See Page 7 for details and photographs.

Germany: Angela Merkel Succeeds in Freeing Chinese Prisoner of Conscience

July 13th marked the first anniversary of the death of Nobel laureate **Liu Xiaobo**. He had been serving an 11-year prison term for “subversion” when he died of liver cancer at the age of 61. The Chinese authorities refused his wish to travel abroad for treatment. On Tuesday the 10th, his widow **Liu Xia** was finally allowed to travel abroad to Germany, after eight years of being held under illegal house arrest. For details on this story, see Page 4. Here's a preview:

The decision by the Chinese government to release Ms. Liu days before the anniversary of her husband's death sprang from the passionate interest in her fate by Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, who requested Ms. Liu's release during a meeting with her Chinese counterpart, President Xi Jinping, an unusual move by a Western leader.

AI London: Worldwide Campaign Targets Trump's Separation of Children from Parents

Amnesty has been coordinating a global campaign of opposition to Trump's separation of immigrant children from their parents. From the main website in London, we have examples of appeals by children around the world who are concerned about the children abused by Trump. See Page 2 for information about Amnesty's online action on this issue.

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).

AI London: Campaign Targets Trump's Separation of Children from Parents

On the home page of the main Amnesty website (www.amnesty.org) is this colorful message of encouragement from one of the thousands of children around the world who have taken part in the current Amnesty-led campaign.

Clicking on this illustration takes you to a page which displays other messages that the children have created. On that page of the site, you will also find a link to an online action aimed at the Trump administration.



The online action calls for the following:

- Reunify, as quickly as possible, those families that have been separated.
- Halt the forced separation of children from their parents or guardians. Family units must be kept together in accordance with international standards on family unity.
- End the practice of detaining families seeking asylum.
- Immediately release together parents and children in detention.

School children from around the world have sent messages of solidarity to the thousands of children who have been detained and separated from their families at the US border, as a result of the Trump administration's outrageous immigration policies.



Hundreds of children from Argentina, Burkina Faso, India, Kenya, Senegal, Thailand, Togo and Venezuela took part in the initiative ahead of June 30, the Global Day of Action against the US government's "zero tolerance" immigration policy. This inhumane policy has led to the arrests of people seeking asylum who have crossed over from Mexico and the forcible removal of their children, in some cases, to government-run shelters thousands of miles away.

AI London: Campaign Targets Trump's Separation of Children from Parents (continued)



School children aged between nine and 16 took to pen and paper to inspire hope in the detained children, and to urge the US authorities to respect the rights of children and asylum seekers. The action, organised by Amnesty International's [Human Rights Education](#) program, aims to empower children to speak out and make their voice heard on this critical issue.

In Venezuela, one child drew a picture of a dog in a cage, a reference to the detained children being kept in giant cages while their parents' asylum claims are being processed. Her message was: "We are not animals."



Germany: Angela Merkel Succeeds in Freeing Chinese Prisoner of Conscience

*As noted on Page 1, last Friday was the first anniversary of the death in a Chinese prison of Nobel laureate **Liu Xiaobo**. Chinese officials had refused his request to travel to Europe for treatment of liver cancer. His wife, **Liu Xia**, had been held under house arrest since 2010.*

Last week, thanks largely to the efforts of German chancellor Angela Merkel, the Chinese government allowed Liu Xia to leave China. She arrived in Helsinki on Tuesday, on her way to quarters in Berlin arranged by the German government. The photo on the left below shows Liu Xia with her late husband; the one on the right was taken when she arrived in Helsinki. Both pictures came from this New York Times article. See below for portions of the text. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/11/world/asia/germany-china-liu-xia-liu-xiaobo-dissidents.html>



BEIJING — Until the door of the plane that took her to freedom in Germany closed, they hovered around. They escorted her on the 90-minute car ride from her apartment to the airport. They walked her through a special departure area.

For the past year, China’s formidable security apparatus had guarded, watched and controlled the movements of Liu Xia, 57, widow of China’s most famous dissident, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo, who died of cancer last July under police guard.

Then, out of the blue, a security official telephoned her last week to say she could pick up a passport and leave the country, European diplomats said.

The decision by the Chinese government to release Ms. Liu days before the anniversary of her husband’s death sprang from the passionate interest in her fate by Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, who requested Ms. Liu’s release during a meeting with her Chinese counterpart, President Xi Jinping, an unusual move by a Western leader.

That request coincided with China’s realization that Ms. Liu, a talisman of international human rights groups, had become a liability just as China’s image was taking a battering in the United States and Europe over what are considered predatory economic policies and increasingly authoritarian rule. Beijing calculated, diplomats said, that events planned in Germany on Friday to commemorate Mr. Liu’s death risked turning starkly negative if Ms. Liu were still under house arrest in Beijing, unable to talk to anyone but a few people, and forbidden to move freely beyond her apartment building.



Germany: Angela Merkel Succeeds in Freeing Chinese Prisoner of Conscience (continued)

In March, after China completed the major political events of the year — its annual parliamentary sessions and the declaration of Mr. Xi as president with no term limits — there was some hope among Western diplomats that Ms. Liu would be released. Nothing happened.

Then, in May, Ms. Merkel visited Beijing. The daughter of a pastor who grew up in East Germany, the chancellor has aimed to balance Germany's vital economic interests in China with a critique of Beijing's human rights record.

“Human rights aren't just words for her,” Mr. Stanzel said. “It's genuine.”

In a public show of support for human rights activists, many of them jailed in a nationwide crackdown, Ms. Merkel met with the wives of two Chinese human rights lawyers whose husbands were in detention. One of the lawyers was among more than 200 human rights activists detained or questioned in a July 2015 crackdown.

“Others don't do this,” Mr. Stanzel said, of Ms. Merkel's push on human rights. “The British are desperate for a trade deal; President Macron of France is new; Trump uninterested.”

“The wives told Merkel that she was the only one to meet them,” he said. “This surprised her.”

When Ms. Merkel raised Ms. Liu's situation with Mr. Xi and requested her freedom, the response was that the widow could be freed, but on condition that there be no publicity, a European diplomat with knowledge of the visit said.

While Ms. Merkel pressured Beijing, in the background, in Germany, Liao Yiwu, a Chinese dissident writer, befriended the former German president, Joachim Gauck, who had once been a pastor and prominent rights advocate in East Germany.

Mr. Liao's influence helped push Ms. Liu's case throughout the upper levels of the German government, and stimulated interest among the public, Mr. Stanzel said.



Bahrain: Model Letter for Imprisoned Human Rights Advocate

*In June, we received the discouraging news that an appeal by **Nabeel Rajab**, the president of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, had been dismissed. The model letter below was adapted from a revised petition that we will be signing at our July 17th meeting.*

Shaikh Hamad bin ‘Issa Al Khalifa
Office of His Majesty the King
P.O. Box 555
Rifa’a Palace
al-Manama
Bahrain



Your Majesty:

I am contacting you out of concern for **Nabeel Rajab**, the president of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights. He is currently serving a five-year prison sentence for the “crime” of peacefully expressing his opinions online.

Going back as far as 2012, Nabeel Rajab has been relentlessly harassed and intimidated for his peaceful human rights work and has been in and out of prison since 2012 on various charges related to his peaceful activism. He has been banned from leaving Bahrain since November 2014.

In the most recent round of prosecutions, he has been detained since June 2016, and earlier this year was handed an additional two-year prison sentence for TV interviews he gave in 2015 and 2016. The Court of Cassation upheld his sentence in January 2018, convicting him of “disseminating false news, statements and rumors about the internal situation of the kingdom that would undermine its prestige and status”. He appealed that decision, but his appeal was rejected in June 2018.

This is a great injustice which has been perpetrated on a man who has done nothing more than peacefully exercise his right to freedom of expression. **Nabeel Rajab should be released, immediately and unconditionally.** All of the charges against him should be dropped.

I urge your government to uphold the right to freedom of expression, and repeal laws that criminalize the peaceful exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly, including Article 216 of the Penal Code.

cc: Ambassador Abdulla bin Rashid Al Khalifa
3502 International Drive NW
Washington, DC 20008

Vietnam: U.S. Diplomats Visit Thich Quang Do

These two pages contain both photographs, and some of the text, found in an excellent article on the website of the Vietnam Committee on Human Rights, which is based in Paris. You can read the full article by clicking this link:

<http://queme.org/en/us-ambassador-kritenbrink-visits-thich-quang-do/?v=7516fd43adaa>



PARIS, 15th June 2018 (IBIB) – The U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam Daniel J. Kritenbrink visited Buddhist dissident Thích Quảng Độ, Patriarch of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) at the Thanh Minh Zen Monastery in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), where the UBCV Patriarch is under house arrest.

The Ambassador was accompanied by US Consul General Ms. Mary Tarnowka, Justin Brown, Political Officer at the US Consulate in Ho Chi Minh City, and two members of staff. This is the first visit by the US Ambassador, who took up his post in Hanoi in November 2017.

The meeting took place on Thursday 14th June at 10:00am and lasted for over an hour. Thích Quảng Độ told IBIB Director Võ Văn Ái that the meeting was very friendly and cordial. He handed the delegation a 12-page memorandum detailing the government's systematic repression of the UBCV over the past 43 years, and an overview of his main concerns, including religious freedom, Vietnam-China relations, the recent Cybersecurity Law, human rights and democratization in Vietnam.

Vietnam: U.S. Diplomats Visit Thich Quang Do (continued)

In his written remarks to the US Ambassador, Patriarch Thích Quảng Độ, 90, described his own detention under house arrest since 2003: “As you see, my living quarters are small. They have been my whole universe for the past 15 years. The government has never formally charged me with any crime – they even say I am free. But my freedom stops at these four walls. I am forbidden to travel, my communications are monitored, and police keep watch on me day and night.”

His detention under house arrest, he wrote, was part of an overall policy to stifle all criticism and dissent: “The government’s aim in detaining me here is to silence my voice. Just as the police have used violence and brute force over the past few days to silence the voices of citizens demonstrating all over the country to protest the adoption of new laws that would sell out our national interests and curb our rights to free expression”.

He observed that the recent widespread protests in Vietnam reflected deep popular discontent about the draft law debated in the National Assembly on special economic zones (SEZs) that would allow land to be leased to foreign investors for a 99-year periods. “We Vietnamese know the ambitions of our northern neighbour, for Vietnam was China’s vassal for 1,000 years. The demonstrations that broke out this weekend were a spontaneous reaction to the Communist Party’s concession of our resources and lands”.

“Although I am confined in my Monastery”, he wrote, “I feel very close to the people who have taken to the streets and risked their liberty to defend their ideals. Their protests are a warning call to our government – a call to defend our sovereignty and protect our homeland, but also a call for pluralism, democracy and human rights”. Thích Quảng Độ denounced the Cybersecurity Law adopted by the National Assembly this week that “seriously violates freedom of expression online” and “gives Hanoi new tools to censor the Internet, imprison critics and stifle dissent”.

He informed the US Ambassador that since 1975, when the Communist Party took power in Vietnam, the UBCV had consistently maintained that there could be no development or progress in Vietnam without democracy and human rights. “In my numerous appeals to the Vietnamese government and the Communist Party, I have always insisted that we cannot defend our country if we are denied the right to participate equally in our nation’s affairs. Even religious freedom cannot exist without democracy and human rights. Under the government’s new Law on Belief and Religion, we have a minimal freedom of worship, but true freedom of religion or belief remains taboo”.

Thích Quảng Độ urged the US Ambassador to ensure that religious freedom and human rights remained a high priority in the United States’ relationship with Vietnam, and called upon him to seek every opportunity, both in public and private, “to press Vietnam to cease repression against the UBCV and all other non-recognized religious communities; to re-establish the legitimate status of the UBCV and allow us full freedom to exercise our religious activities in peace”.

