



Amnesty International

Group 524

September 2018



Next Meeting: Tuesday, September 18 – 7:00 p.m. – Providence Heights

Good News from Turkey!

Last month, shortly before our group got together for our August meeting, we learned of some good news about a case that we have been working on for more than a year. **Taner Kilic**, the chair of Amnesty's Turkish section, had been released, after spending 14 months in prison!

As explained on Page 3, the charges against him have not been dropped, but for now he has been reunited with his family.

Amnesty Secretary General meets with Taner Kilic

Not long after Taner Kilic was back home with his family, **Kumi Naidoo**, Amnesty's newly appointed Secretary General, left his London office and flew to Turkey to meet with him. Naidoo succeeded **Salil Shetty**, who completed his second four-year term on July 31st. Page 5 describes the meeting and Page 6 helps us get to know the new Secretary General.

Vietnam: "Mother Mushroom" Included in Banned Books Week Action

Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh, one of Vietnam's most prominent independent bloggers, is best known by her pen name, "Mother Mushroom." She is a prisoner of conscience, serving a 10-year prison sentence imposed after an unfair one-day trial.

This year, Mother Mushroom's case is one of more than a dozen that are included in the action recognizing Banned Books Week – the last week of September. Each year during that week, the American Library Association (ALA) calls attention to books that have been challenged in U.S. Libraries. At the same time, Amnesty International groups draw attention to people around the world who have been imprisoned, threatened, or murdered because of what they wrote or published or because of their work in the publishing or media industries.

See Page 2 for a case summary and a model letter.

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).

Vietnam: Model Letter Calling for Release of “Mother Mushroom”

From the Banned Books Week materials received from AIUSA, here is the case summary. The model letter has been adapted from a petition included in those materials. At our meeting on September 18th, we will have that petition to sign, along with several others.

At the PEN America website, there is a more complete case summary. At the bottom of that page you will find the link to an interview with Mother Mushroom.

<https://pen.org/advocacy-case/nguyen-ngoc-nhu-quynh/>



Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh, one of Vietnam’s most prominent independent bloggers, is best known by her pen name, “Mother Mushroom.” She has been behind bars since 2016. In 2017, she was sentenced to 10 years in prison after a one-day trial. The charges were in connection with 18 articles she posted online, including reports on an industrial toxic spill by Formosa Steel. This environmental catastrophe devastated large areas of the country’s coast.

Prime Minister H.E. Pham Quang Vinh
Prime Minister’s Office
Hanoi, Vietnam
[Email Address: nguoiphatngonchinhphu@chinhphu.vn]

Dear Prime Minister:

I am very concerned about the situation of Ms. Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh, also known as Me Nam, an online activist and Coordinator of the Vietnamese Bloggers Network, who is known for revealing corruption cases, human rights violations, and environmental disasters. She was sentenced last year for her activism to ten years in prison.

Quynh is presently in Prison No. 5, Thanh Hoa province, more than 1000 kilometers away from her family of one elderly mother and two young daughters. Letters to and from her family were withheld without either of them knowing why and how.

Last June, Me Nam won the Committee to Protect Journalists International Press Freedom Award, and she was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize. PEN International wrote that “Me Nam is being targeted for peacefully exercising her right to freedom of expression” whilst five UN Special Rapporteurs sent your government a letter questioning Quynh’s arrest and detention.

I call upon you to ensure the release of Me Nam, a prisoner of conscience imprisoned for the personal expression of her beliefs. Further, I ask that the government of Vietnam put an end to the arrest, detention, and harassment of human rights defenders who are exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

Copy to: Ambassador Nguyen Xuân Phúc
 Embassy of Socialist Republic of Vietnam
 1730 M Street NW, # 501
 Washington DC 20036

Turkey: Taner Kilic Released from Prison



When he walked out of a Turkish prison on August 15th, Taner Kilic was greeted by his family and many of his fellow human rights activists. The text below was adapted from an August 16th article at the Amnesty International website.

Taner Kiliç, who was released yesterday after more than fourteen months behind bars, thanked his supporters and said he hopes the campaign for his release helps to highlight the situation facing other victims of politically motivated prosecutions in Turkey.

Taner, whose trial will resume on November 7, was reunited with his family late yesterday, after being released by a court in Istanbul.

“I think the campaign for my release has helped to shine a light on all those people who have been the victims of politically motivated, unfair prosecutions in Turkey. “I hope that justice will prevail and that everyone will be given a fair trial.”

Taner was arrested in June 2017 on baseless charges of “membership of a terrorist organization”. He was accused of using an encrypted messaging app called ByLock, which the Turkish government said was used by members of the banned Fetullah Gülen group. Two police reports and four independent forensic analyses found no trace of ByLock on his phone.

“Despite the fact that there was not a single reason for my imprisonment, I was jailed for more than 14 months. I was jailed despite the fact that I did not use ByLock.”

“I hope it was not for nothing, that the awareness generated around the world will help others face fair trials in Turkey,” said Taner.



Turkey: Taner Kilic Released from Prison (continued)

Taner also expressed his thanks for the international solidarity shown towards him.

“To everyone who sent me countless letters from around the world – cards from Canada to Japan, from Norway to Benin – I want to express my deep gratitude,” he said.

“While in prison, these actions lifted my spirit and reminded me of the importance of international solidarity in the struggle for human rights.”

“Fourteen months behind bars feels like a very long time. I am still feeling a little stunned. I think it will take me some time to process it, but this is the best Eid celebration we could have hoped for.”

Note: Eid is a Muslim religious festival, marking the end of Ramadan fasting.

Background

Taner Kiliç was detained on June 6, 2017, and sent to prison three days later. Ten other activists (known as the Istanbul 10), including Idil Eser, the Director of Amnesty International Turkey, were detained a month later while attending a human rights workshop. Eight of them were held for almost four months before being released on bail in October.

They are all accused of “membership of a terrorist organization,” a baseless allegation for which the prosecution has yet to provide any evidence that would stand up to scrutiny.

Last December, Turkish authorities admitted that thousands of people have been wrongly accused of downloading ByLock. They published lists containing the numbers of 11,480 mobile phone users, leading to mass releases. Taner Kiliç was not on the list. Experts believe a much higher number of people were wrongly accused of downloading and using the messaging app.

More than one million people have signed Amnesty International appeals demanding the release of Taner Kiliç and the other human rights defenders since their arrest last summer. Scores of well-known figures, including including Ai WeiWei, Peter Gabriel and Catherine Deneuve, have called for the release of Taner and the dropping of charges against the Istanbul 10.

Turkey: Amnesty's Secretary General meets with Taner Kilic



*Not long after taking over as Secretary General of Amnesty International, **Kumi Naidoo** headed for Turkey, to meet with his newly-released human rights colleague, **Taner Kilic**.*

On the morning of that meeting, the following statement was posted on the Amnesty website.

Leading human rights champions – including Amnesty International’s newly appointed Secretary General, **Kumi Naidoo**, and Amnesty Turkey Honorary Chair, **Taner Kiliç**, appearing publicly for the first time since his release from prison – will today pledge to intensify the struggle to ensure the release of all those unjustly jailed in Turkey.

The gathering, attended by civil society leaders and parliamentarians, will highlight the situation facing hundreds of human rights defenders, journalists, academics, lawyers, artists and others – jailed in the aftermath of the 2016 failed coup attempt.

“All over Turkey, ordinary people with extraordinary passion are speaking out for justice and equality, despite the threat of being unjustly punished for the stand they take. They are journalists and academics, artists and lawyers. They are also mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers. They are driven by their deep commitment for human rights, justice, freedom and equality,” said Kumi Naidoo.

“Instead of punishing them, Turkey should be proud of this vibrant and vital human rights community.”

“The writer, Aziz Nesin, once said we are responsible not only for what we say but for what we fail to say by staying silent.”

“Amnesty International cannot and will not stay silent in the face of Turkey’s human rights crisis, and I am here today to re-affirm our solidarity with our sisters and brothers in Turkey, who are fighting for a brighter future for all.”



Kumi Naidoo Begins Term as Amnesty's Secretary General

*About a week before his meeting in Istanbul, **Kumi Naidoo** was in South Africa, where he was interviewed for this August 16th article posted at the Amnesty website.*

“Bigger, Bolder and More Inclusive”: Kumi Naidoo sets out his Vision for Human Rights

Amnesty's first ever South African Secretary General sets out his vision for the direction of the world's largest human rights organisation as he starts his tenure visiting Johannesburg.

The human rights movement needs to be bigger, bolder and more inclusive if it is to tackle the challenges that people face today, said seasoned activist Kumi Naidoo as he officially started his role as Secretary General of Amnesty International.

“Our world is facing complex problems that can only be tackled if we break away from old ideas that human rights are about some forms of injustice that people face, but not others. The patterns of oppression that we're living through are interconnected,” said Kumi Naidoo.

“You cannot talk about the climate change crisis without recognising that it is also an inequality and race issue; you can't address sexual discrimination without recognising that it is bound up in the economic exclusion of women; and you can't ignore the fact that people's civil and political rights are often suppressed exactly when they are trying to demand basic economic justice.”

Amnesty International has repeatedly warned that we are living through some of the most divisive times in modern history, with prominent leaders offering a nightmarish vision of society blinded by hatred and fear. Only if we come together under the common values that unite us, like human rights, can we overcome this adversity, said Kumi.

“In my first message as Secretary General, I want to make clear that Amnesty International is now opening its arms wider than ever before to build a genuinely global community that stretches into all four corners of the world, especially in the global south.

“I want us to build a human rights movement that is more inclusive. We need to redefine what it means to be a human rights champion in 2018. An activist can come from all walks of life – a trade union, school, faith group, government or indeed business,” he said.

“I want young people to know especially that we are open to you and need you to challenge us to do better by you. It is my abiding belief that young people are not the leaders of tomorrow, but the leaders we need here and now. The Ahd Tamimis, the Elin Erssons, the Sibongile Ndashes, and every single person that has not shied away from civil disobedience or being called naïve or idealistic are the bold role models we need today.

“Amnesty International was built on the idea that people, regardless of where they are or who they are, take the injustice that other people face personally. And it has proved time and time again that when strangers come together to fight for people that they have never met across the other side of the world, change is possible.”



Kumi Naidoo Begins Term as Amnesty's Secretary General (continued)

“Now, more than ever, we need people to come together and stand up to oppressors. I invite people who care about the present and future, for people who care about their children and grandchildren, for people who take injustice personally, to join us. Amnesty International needs your voice, your participation and your presence in our movement to make human rights a reality.”

Paying tribute to Amnesty International's former chief, Kumi said, “I want to thank Salil Shetty for the contributions he has made to Amnesty International over the past eight years, and for his work on strengthening our presence throughout the world. I hope to build and expand on his legacy, to ensure that we become a united global movement.

Rule-Breaker, Change-Maker

Kumi Naidoo is a life-long social justice campaigner hailing from South Africa. Born in Durban in 1965, Kumi's first taste of activism came at age 15 when he organised and took part in an anti-apartheid protest that saw him expelled from his school.

From there he became deeply embedded in activism in his local community and organising mass mobilisations against the apartheid regime. In 1986, at the age of 21, Kumi was charged for violating the state of emergency regulations. He was forced to go underground, before deciding to live in exile in the UK, where he stayed until Nelson Mandela was released and liberation movements were unbanned.

As the apartheid regime crumbled, Kumi returned to South Africa in 1990 to work with the African National Congress. There, he took up a cause close to his heart: education, specifically adult literacy campaigns and voter education efforts to empower historically and systematically disenfranchised communities.

Kumi has held multiple leadership roles, but his time as Executive Director of Greenpeace International cemented his reputation as a bold activist who championed civil disobedience, most notably when he was arrested for scaling a Greenlandic oil rig to hand-deliver a petition in protest of drilling in the Arctic in 2011. A year later, he occupied a Russian oil rig in the Barents Sea in the Russian Arctic.

Kumi's most recent role has been as a co-founder and interim chair of the pan-African organization, Africans Rising for Justice, Peace and Dignity. The group, which has forged partnerships across trade unions, religion and civil society, aims to change the fact that while Africa as a continent has benefitted from economic growth, Africans themselves have not shared in that increasing wealth and power.

It was seeing a letter that Nelson Mandela had written to Amnesty International in 1962, thanking the organisation for sending a representative to observe his trial, that inspired Kumi to apply for the role as the global head of Amnesty.



Kumi Naidoo Begins Term as Amnesty’s Secretary General (continued)

On the eve of taking up his new role at Amnesty International, Kumi returned to where his story began, by paying a visit to Chatsworth Secondary School in Durban, where he was expelled from in 1980.

Speaking to the children at the morning assembly, Kumi said: “Do not accept that your voice does not matter, do not wait until tomorrow to exercise leadership, since if you wait, there will be no tomorrow. And remember that service to humanity brings you the greatest happiness.”