



Amnesty International

Group 524

November 2018



November Meeting: Tuesday, Nov. 20 – 7:00 p.m. – Providence Heights
December Meeting: Wednesday, Dec. 12 – 6:00 p.m. – Calvary Episcopal

November and December Meetings

This month, as you can see above, we will meet on **November 20th**, at our usual meeting time and location. In December, as always, Group 39's annual *Write for Human Rights* event will take the place of our regular monthly meeting. That date is **Wednesday, December 12th**. The *Write for Human Rights* event will run from 6:00 to 9:00, and will be held at the usual location – Calvary Episcopal Church in Shadyside.

The December issue of this newsletter will be sent out early, so that it can serve as a reminder about the *Write for Human Rights* gathering, which is the Pittsburgh component of Amnesty International's worldwide 'Write for Rights' action.

For 2018, Amnesty originally identified 11 cases for us to focus on. Just before our October meeting, however, we received the news that one case had been dropped, because the prisoner ("Mother Mushroom" from Vietnam) had just been released! For details on this good news, please see Page 2.

Contents of This Issue

- Vietnam: Release of "Mother Mushroom"
- Vietnam: Model letter to U.S. Ambassador, asking him to visit **Thich Quang Do**
- Myanmar: Amnesty revokes 2009 human rights award to Aung San Suu Kyi
- Myanmar: Fake Facebook accounts used to provoke ethnic cleansing
- Write for Rights: Model letter on Iranian case – Death penalty activist **Aetna Daemi**

We hope you can join us at Providence Heights for our November 20th meeting!

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: “Mother Mushroom” Released from Prison



On October 17th, **Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh**, the Vietnamese blogger also known as Me Nam (“Mother Mushroom”), was suddenly released from prison. With her two young children and her mother, she was driven to the airport and placed on a flight bound for Houston.

Me Nam’s release coincided with a visit to Vietnam by Secretary of Defense James Mattis. As a condition of her release, she had to agree to be deported.

At the time of her release, Me Nam had served just over a year of a ten-year sentence for “conducting propaganda” against the state. Her “crimes” included participating in public protests, producing a report on deaths in police custody, and possessing poetry collections considered critical of the state.

Before being arrested in June 2017, Me Nam had made very effective use of Facebook and other social media to defend human rights and fight against injustice. On Facebook, she reposted articles and pushed for action on police brutality and environmental issues, including the toxic industrial spill by Formosa Steel, which polluted more than 125 miles of coastline, devastating sea life and local economies dependent on fishing and tourism.

Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh is now beginning a new life with her family in the United States.



Vietnam: Model Letter to U.S. Ambassador in Hanoi

*In last month's newsletter, we described how Supreme Patriarch **Thich Quang Do** had been suddenly expelled from the Saigon monastery where he had lived under house arrest since 2003. The monk in charge of the monastery – apparently under pressure from Vietnamese authorities – ordered him to leave at once, with little more than the clothes he was wearing.*

At 91, and in fragile health, he found himself on the street, moving from one pagoda to another in Saigon, with no permanent place to stay. Eventually he ended up in the northern province of Thai Binh, the district where he was born.

This is a remote rural area, but our case coordinator, Kathy Herbst, has worked with her friend in Paris, Penelope Faulkner of the Vietnam Committee on Human Rights, to obtain an address where we can mail messages of support and encouragement to Thich Quang Do. We will sign one such message at our November 20th meeting.

Kathy has also provided the model letter below, asking Ambassador Daniel Kritenbrink to visit Thich Quang Do in Thai Binh. In April, when Thich Quang Do was still living at the monastery in Saigon, Ambassador Kritenbrink visited him. Thus we can be cautiously optimistic that he will make the trip to Thai Binh.

The Honorable Daniel J. Kritenbrink
Ambassador of the United States
Embassy of the United States
7 Lang Ha Street
Hanoi, Vietnam

Dear Mr. Kritenbrink,

I am contacting you in the urgent matter of the welfare of The Honorable Thich Quang Do, Supreme Patriarch of the United Buddhist Church of Vietnam.

Your visit in April to the Thanh Minh Monastery was much appreciated but situation now is more serious.

As Congressman Alan Lowenthal wrote you, Thich Quang Do was asked to leave the state-owned monastery by his longtime friend, Thich Thanh Minh, head of that monastery. This invitation came because of pressure by the government – years-long harassment of visitors, surveillance of correspondence, economic pressure, etc.

After spending several days moving from place to place within Ha Noi with only a few items of clothing, he returned to his ancestral hometown in the province of Thai Binh, and contact with him has ceased.

A noted scholar and Nobel Prize nominee, he has been deprived of all his books and papers. At 91, he is in frail health and requires regular medical attention.

I am gravely concerned for him. Please arrange to have embassy staff visit him and ascertain his situation. A regular means of communication is needed to insure his welfare.

Sincerely,



Myanmar: Amnesty Revokes 2009 Human Rights Award to Aung San Suu Kyi

For many of us, the horrendous situation in Myanmar is especially troubling, because we spent 20 years in the campaign to help Aung San Suu Kyi gain her freedom. We were inspired by her writings, and the courage she demonstrated in standing up to the military dictatorship. This news release from Amnesty speaks for itself. On Page 6 is an article which details some of the abuses being committed in Myanmar.

Aung San Suu Kyi Stripped of Amnesty’s Highest Honor

Amnesty International announced today that it has withdrawn its highest honor, the Ambassador of Conscience Award, from Aung San Suu Kyi, in light of the Myanmar leader’s shameful betrayal of the values she once stood for.

On 11 November, Amnesty International’s Secretary General Kumi Naidoo wrote to Aung San Suu Kyi to inform her the organization is revoking the 2009 award. Halfway through her term in office, and eight years after her release from house arrest, Naidoo expressed the organization’s disappointment that she had not used her political and moral authority to safeguard human rights, justice or equality in Myanmar, citing her apparent indifference to atrocities committed by the Myanmar military and increasing intolerance of freedom of expression.

“As an Amnesty International Ambassador of Conscience, our expectation was that you would continue to use your moral authority to speak out against injustice wherever you saw it, not least within Myanmar itself,” wrote Kumi Naidoo.

“Today, we are profoundly dismayed that you no longer represent a symbol of hope, courage, and the undying defense of human rights. Amnesty International cannot justify your continued status as a recipient of the Ambassador of Conscience award, and so with great sadness we are hereby withdrawing it from you.”

Perpetuating Human Rights Violations

Since Aung San Suu Kyi became the de facto leader of Myanmar’s civilian-led government in April 2016, her administration has been actively involved in the commission or perpetuation of multiple human rights violations.

Amnesty International has repeatedly criticized the failure of Aung San Suu Kyi and her government to speak out about military atrocities against the Rohingya population in Rakhine State, who have lived for years under a system of segregation and discrimination amounting to apartheid.

During the campaign of violence unleashed against the Rohingya last year, the Myanmar security forces killed thousands, raped women and girls, detained and tortured men and boys, and burned hundreds of homes and villages to the ground. More than 720,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh. A UN report has called for senior military officials to be investigated and prosecuted for the crime of genocide.

Although the civilian government does not have control over the military, Aung San Suu Kyi and her office have shielded the security forces from accountability by dismissing, downplaying or denying allegations of human rights violations, and by obstructing international investigations into abuses. Her administration has actively stirred up hostility against the Rohingya, labelling them as “terrorists”, accusing them of burning their own homes and decrying “faking rape”. Meanwhile state media has published inflammatory and dehumanizing articles alluding to the Rohingya as “detestable human fleas” and “thorns” which must be pulled out.



Myanmar: Amnesty Revokes 2009 Human Rights Award to Aung San Suu Kyi (continued)

“Aung San Suu Kyi’s failure to speak out for the Rohingya is one reason why we can no longer justify her status as an Ambassador of Conscience,” said Kumi Naidoo.

“Her denial of the gravity and scale of the atrocities means there is little prospect of the situation improving for the hundreds of thousands of Rohingya living in limbo in Bangladesh, or for the hundreds of thousands of Rohingya who remain in Rakhine State. Without acknowledgement of the horrific crimes against the community, it is hard to see how the government can take steps to protect them from future atrocities.”

Amnesty International also highlighted the situation in Kachin and northern Shan States, where Aung San Suu Kyi has failed to use her influence and moral authority to condemn military abuses, to push for accountability for war crimes or to speak out for ethnic minority civilians who bear the brunt of the conflicts. To make matters worse, her civilian-led administration has imposed harsh restrictions on humanitarian access, exacerbating the suffering of more than 100,000 people displaced by the fighting.

Attacks on Freedom of Speech

Despite the power wielded by the military, there are areas where the civilian-led government has considerable authority to enact reforms to better protect human rights, especially those relating to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. But in the two years since Aung San Suu Kyi’s administration assumed power, human rights defenders, peaceful activists and journalists have been arrested and imprisoned while others face threats, harassment and intimidation for their work.

Aung San Suu Kyi’s administration has failed to repeal repressive laws – including some of the same laws which were used to detain her and others campaigning for democracy and human rights. Instead, she has actively defended the use of such laws, in particular the decision to prosecute and imprison two Reuters journalists for their work documenting a Myanmar military massacre.

Aung San Suu Kyi was named as Amnesty International’s Ambassador of Conscience in 2009, in recognition of her peaceful and non-violent struggle for democracy and human rights. At the time, she was held under house arrest, which she was eventually released from exactly eight years ago today. When she was finally able to accept the award in 2013, Aung San Suu Kyi asked Amnesty International to “not take either your eyes or your mind off us and help us to be the country where hope and history merges.”

“Amnesty International took Aung San Suu Kyi’s request that day very seriously, which is why we will never look away from human rights violations in Myanmar,” said Kumi Naidoo.

“We will continue to fight for justice and human rights in Myanmar – with or without her support.”



Myanmar: Fake Facebook Accounts Used to Provoke Ethnic Cleansing

Abuses carried out through social media are taking place all around the world, but the situation in Myanmar is one of the very worst cases. John Belch found this Oct. 15th article on the Daily Kos website. The article summarizes the findings of a substantial investigation carried out by The New York Times. Paragraphs quoted from text in the Times begin with this tag: [NYT]

Myanmar Military Used Fake Facebook Accounts to Provoke Ethnic Cleansing

[NYT] The Facebook posts were not from everyday internet users. Instead, they were from Myanmar military personnel who turned the social network into a tool for ethnic cleansing, according to former military officials, researchers and civilian officials in the country.

[NYT] The Myanmar military were the prime operatives behind a systematic campaign on Facebook that stretched back half a decade and that targeted the country's mostly Muslim Rohingya minority group, the people said. The military exploited Facebook's wide reach in Myanmar, where it is so broadly used that many of the country's 18 million internet users confuse the Silicon Valley social media platform with the internet. Human rights groups blame the anti-Rohingya propaganda for inciting murders, rapes and the largest forced human migration in recent history. [...]

[NYT] Facebook confirmed many of the details about the shadowy, military-driven campaign. The company's head of cybersecurity policy, Nathaniel Gleicher, said it had found "clear and deliberate attempts to covertly spread propaganda that were directly linked to the Myanmar military."

Facebook has known about this for years, but only got around to shutting down these accounts this week, after a NYT investigation.

[NYT] The military tapped its rich history of psychological warfare that it developed during the decades when Myanmar was controlled by a military junta, which gave up power in 2011. The goal then was to discredit radio broadcasts from the B.B.C. and Voice of America. One veteran of that era said classes on advanced psychological warfare from 15 years ago taught a golden rule for false news: If one quarter of the content is true, that helps make the rest of it believable.

The NY Times says several of the military personnel who used these propaganda tactics on Facebook were trained in Russia.

It's well past time Silicon Valley social media companies grappled with the negative impact of their businesses. Earlier this year, several fake posts on Whatsapp (a platform Facebook also owns) resulted in people being lynched in India.

Write for Rights 2018

Amnesty originally selected 11 cases – all women this year – for action at 2018 Write for Rights events. As explained on Pages 1 and 2, the Vietnamese case has been dropped for the very best of reasons: “Mother Mushroom” is now free!

December 10th will be the 70th anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. All over the globe, most of the events will take place on or near that date. Here in Pittsburgh, Group 39 will hold its Write for Human Rights event on Wednesday, December 12, from 6 to 9, at Calvary Episcopal Church in Shadyside. As always, our group will take part in the event, and it will take the place of our group’s December meeting.

Here are the countries represented in this year’s case list: Brazil, India, Iran, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Morocco, South Africa, Ukraine, United States, Venezuela.

Write for Rights 2018: Iranian Death Penalty Activist Aetna Daemi

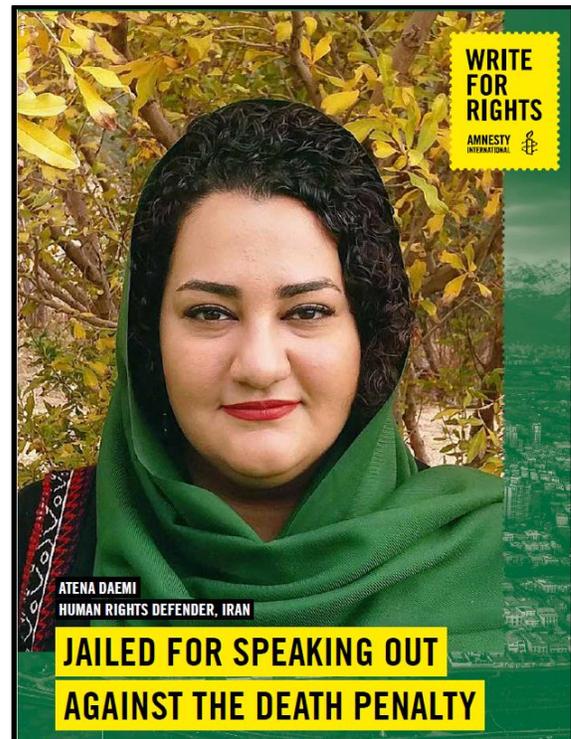
Like so many, **Aetna Daemi** dreams of an end to the death penalty in Iran. She’s written Facebook and Twitter posts criticizing the country’s execution record. She’s handed out leaflets. And she’s taken part in a peaceful protest against the execution of a young woman. Simple actions which sadly, in Iran, take great courage.

Incredibly, these activities have been cited as “evidence” of her criminal activity and now she’s been sentenced to **7 years in jail**. Her trial was a sham – it took just 15 minutes and she was convicted on trumped-up charges, including “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security”.

Her cruel treatment is one more bitter example of the intense crackdown on people who speak out for a fairer Iran. Dozens have been imprisoned, and many others face surveillance, interrogations and drawn-out prosecutions, forcing them into silence.

Aetna has suffered so much already. She’s been beaten, pepper sprayed and forced into solitary confinement, but she continues to fight for human rights. Earlier this year, she went on hunger strike to protest her transfer to a notorious prison. Her health has deteriorated alarmingly in prison. She must be released immediately.

Tell Iran: **Aetna Daemi** must go free!



Write for Rights 2018: Iranian Death Penalty Activist Aetna Daemi (continued)

Here is the model letter for this case, as distributed by AIUSA.

Head of the Judiciary Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani
c/o Permanent Mission of Iran to the United Nations in Geneva
Chemin du Petit-Saconnex 28
1209 Geneva
Switzerland

Your Excellency:

I urge you to release **Atena Daemi** immediately and unconditionally, and to quash her sentence and conviction. She is a human rights defender who has done nothing more than peacefully campaign against the use of the death penalty in Iran.

She is a prisoner of conscience who has been imprisoned for seven years, solely for peacefully exercising her right to freedom of expression, association and assembly.

Atena Daemi has been in poor health while imprisoned. Therefore, I call upon you to ensure that she is granted access to the specialized medical care she requires outside prison.

She must be released today.

Yours sincerely,

For each case, the material provided by AIUSA includes a section like the one shown below. Thus it will be possible for us to send messages of support and encouragement to the subjects of the Write for Rights cases. In some cases, as you can see below, an indirect approach is necessary, so as not to endanger the prisoner. On December 12th, we will have the chance to sign a message for each of the cases.



**STAND WITH
ATENA DAEMI**

Sadly, it isn't safe to send letters to her or her family inside Iran. But please write to us and we will ensure your messages of solidarity are heard, or show your support on Twitter or Instagram.

Amnesty International – International Secretariat
c/o Iran Team
1 Easton Street
London WC1X 0DW
United Kingdom

Instagram: www.instagram.com/atenadaemi
Twitter: @AtenaDaemi

**WRITE A LETTER
CHANGE A LIFE**