



# Amnesty International

## Group 524

### December 2018



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**December Meeting: Wednesday, Dec. 12 – 6:00 p.m. – Calvary Episcopal**  
**January Meeting: Tuesday, January 15 – 7:00 p.m. – Providence Heights**

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#### December and January Meetings

Every December, Group 39's annual *Write for Human Rights* event takes the place of our group's regular monthly meeting. This year, that date is **Wednesday, December 12<sup>th</sup>**. 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 announcement sheet for the event (see Page 2) provides additional information, including the address of the church. On Pages 3-4, you will find a letter-writing opportunity taken from the set of 10 cases selected by Amnesty for Write for Rights 2018. Our letters will be going to Morocco, in support of a human rights defender named **Nawal Benaissa**.

Finally, as noted above, our next Group 524 meeting will be on **Tuesday, January 15<sup>th</sup>**, at our usual meeting time and location.

#### Vietnam: Good News about Thich Quang Do!

Just a few days ago, Kathy Herbst received some very good news about **Thich Quang Do** from our friend in Paris, Penelope Faulkner of the Vietnam Committee on Human Rights.

In September, as described in our October newsletter, Thich Quang Do had been suddenly expelled from the Saigon monastery where he had lived under house arrest since 2003. Out on the street with little more than the clothes on his back, he endured many hardships over the next two months, as he moved from place to place. On November 22<sup>nd</sup>, after eluding the security police, he managed to get to a temple where he should be safe. A week later, an American diplomat visited him there.

See Pages 5-6 for details of this remarkable story.

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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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Write for Rights 2018: Group 39 Event Announcement

# WORDS MATTER.



## WRITE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

On the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, join Amnesty International Group 39 and other human rights group and community leaders for our 32<sup>nd</sup> Write for Human Rights event.

**Wednesday, December 12, 2018, 6-9pm**  
**Calvary Episcopal Church, 315 Shady Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15206**

Write a letter. Change a life.  
Come for five minutes or the whole event.  
Light refreshments will be provided.



Please help us make this event happen by submitting a donation at [amnestypgh.org](http://amnestypgh.org) or send to Amnesty International Group 39, P.O. Box 8112, Pittsburgh, PA 15217

Contact: [amnesty39@gmail.com](mailto:amnesty39@gmail.com)

## Write for Rights 2018

Amnesty originally selected 11 cases – all women this year – for action at 2018 Write for Rights events. As explained in our November newsletter, the Vietnamese case was dropped for the best of reasons: **Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh**, the blogger known as ‘Mother Mushroom’, has been released!

Here are the ten remaining countries represented in this year’s case list: Brazil, India, Iran, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Morocco, South Africa, Ukraine, United States, Venezuela. For our monthly letter-writing opportunities in the newsletter, we used the Venezuela case in October and the Iran case in November. This month, as you see below, we are writing in support of **Nawal Benaissa** of Morocco.

## Write for Rights 2018: Moroccan Human Rights Defender Nawal Benaissa

Nawal Benaissa is prepared to stand up for what she believes in. That’s why she speaks out for social justice and better health care services in her region, Rif, where many people feel forgotten by their government.

As one of the leading voices of a popular movement called Hirak, she’s been on peaceful protests and campaigned for change on social media.

Every step of the way, she’s been harassed by the Moroccan authorities in an attempt to silence her. They arrested and held her in custody four times in just four months, and demanded that she close her popular Facebook profile, which had 80,000 followers.



Finally, in February 2018, she was given a 10-month suspended sentence and a fine for “inciting to commit an offence”.

She is appealing the verdict, but the intimidation continues. She moved to another city to avoid the constant surveillance.

Nawal’s treatment is part of a major crackdown on the Hirak movement and its leaders. Moroccan security forces have arrested hundreds of peaceful protesters, and some people just for expressing their support on Facebook.

For Nawal, the solution is simple. She wants to be completely free to fight for a better future for her community and her children. Tell Morocco to stop harassing Nawal today!



**Write for Rights 2018: Moroccan Human Rights Defender Nawal Benaissa (continued)**

*Here is the model letter for this case, based on one distributed by AIUSA.*

Prime Minister Saad-Eddine al-Othmani  
Palais Royal Touarga  
Rabat  
Morocco

Your Excellency:

**Nawal Benaissa** is a 37-year-old human rights defender who has done nothing more than exercise her rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

Yet since June 2017 she has faced harassment by security forces, surveillance and repeated arbitrary arrest, just for speaking out for peaceful change in the Rif, northern Morocco. A court in Al Hoceima, her native city, served her with a 10-month suspended sentence, once again purely in relation to her peaceful and legitimate campaigning.

I urge you to do all in your power to end the harassment of Nawal Benaissa and her family, so she can be free to campaign for social justice for her community.

cc: Ambassador Lalla Jounala Alaoui  
1601 21st Street NW  
Washington, DC 20009

*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 12<sup>th</sup>, we will have the chance to sign a message for each of the cases.*



### Vietnam: Thich Quang Do Returns Safely to Saigon

*Direct from the website of the Vietnam Committee on Human Rights, here is the remarkable story of the safe return to Saigon by Supreme Patriarch **Thich Quang Do**. According to the article, the diplomatic representatives of the United States played a positive role in the situation.*



*Thích Quảng Độ (centre) and Pamela Pontius of the US Consulate (right)*

### UBCV Leader Thich Quang Do Returns Safely to Saigon

PARIS, 28 November 2018 (VCHR – IBIB) – The International Buddhist Information Bureau (IBIB) and the Vietnam Committee on Human Rights (VCHR) are happy to announce that the Most Venerable Thich Quang Do, Patriarch of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) has returned safely to Saigon after almost two months in northern Vietnam. He arrived back on 22 November, and is now resting at the Tu Hieu Pagoda, a temple belonging to the UBCV.

Today marks the 90<sup>th</sup> birthday of the UBCV Patriarch, who has spent more than a third of his life under detention for his peaceful advocacy of religious freedom, democracy and human rights.



### **Vietnam: Thich Quang Do Returns Safely to Saigon (continued)**

As we previously reported, on 15 September 2018, Thich Quang Do was expelled from the Thanh Minh Zen Monastery by its Superior monk Thich Thanh Minh, who said his presence caused “political and economic problems” to the monastery. As soon as he left, his room was locked up and all his belongings, sutras and books were impounded.

In poor health and in a state of shock, Thich Quang Do accepted an invitation to stay at a temple dedicated to his ancestors in his home village at Tien Hai district in the northern province of Thái Bình. Thich Quang Do told IBIB Director Võ Văn Ái by phone that he wished to visit his birth-place for the last time. He left Saigon by train on 5th October 2018.

On arriving in Thái Bình, however, Thich Quang Do soon realized he was under house arrest once again. His nephew, a former Security Police officer, forced Thich Quang Do’s assistant to return to Saigon and took control of all his communications. When Thich Quang Do expressed his wish to go home, the “family” found endless pretexts to prevent him leaving.

Thanks to the UBCV’s resourceful network, on 17 November, Thich Quang Do left the family temple, never to return. Under the pretext of visiting a nearby Buddhist Pagoda, they took him in secret by car back south, staying in Buddhists’ homes and temples on the way.

UBCV followers told IBIB that Security Police were tracking them, often arriving at places they had spent the night, only hours after they had left. Despite all hardships, however, on 22 November, Thich Quang Do arrived at Tu Hieu Pagoda safe and sound.

Vietnamese Buddhists all over the world are celebrating the return of the UBCV Patriarch, after weeks of concern about his safety and security. Thích Nguyên Lý, the Abbot of Tu Hieu Temple, said that monks, nuns and lay followers had been flocking to the temple to pay their respects. Today, Pamela Pontius, Political Officer at the US Consulate in Ho Chi Minh City, paid a visit to the UBCV Patriarch (see photo above).

IBIB sincerely thanks the US Embassy and Consulate, as well as all the other diplomatic missions and international organizations who have closely monitored Thich Quang Do’s situation during these recent weeks, as well as during his long years under house arrest.

As a Buddhist monk, he does not celebrate his birthday, but today is nevertheless a day of celebration for all who have followed the itinerary of this spiritual leader, scholar, prominent dissident and exceptional man.