



# Amnesty International

## Group 524

### January 2019



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**Next Meeting: Tuesday, January 15 – 7:00 p.m. – Providence Heights**

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#### **Write for Human Rights Generates More Than 400 Letters!**

As you know, Group 39's annual *Write for Human Rights* event took place on December 12<sup>th</sup>. More than 400 letters were written! At the merchandise table, John Belch was busy selling Amnesty stuff, and raising \$173 to help cover the postage for all those letters!

For more on the *Write for Human Rights* event, see Page 2. As we had in October, November, and December, we have one of the 2018 cases as a letter-writing opportunity. We have a case summary and a model letter calling upon officials in India to protect the life of **Pavitri Manjhi**, who has been leading the fight against two corporations that have plans to turn her rural village into the site of two power plants. See Pages 3 and 4.

#### **January 15<sup>th</sup> at Providence Heights**

Because *Write for Human Rights* took the place of our group's December meeting, it has been nearly two months since we last got together at Providence Heights. The living situation for our Vietnamese prisoner, **Supreme Patriarch Thich Quang Do**, has greatly improved since we last met, and it will be good to talk about those developments. Thich Quang Do is certainly a remarkable person, managing to endure weeks of physical hardships, then finally eluding the security police and reaching a place of safety – just a week before his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday!

As you know, Donald Trump's Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, is currently in the Middle East, firming up relationships with authoritarian regimes, and avoiding any mention of human rights. One such government is in Bahrain, where **Nabeel Rajab**, the president of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, is currently serving a five-year prison sentence for the "crime" of posting comments critical of the government on Twitter. Our group has been writing letters and signing petitions on his case for several years. See Pages 5 and 6.

Hope you can join us on Tuesday the 15<sup>th</sup>!

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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 Human Rights 2018**

Led by the Sisters of Divine Providence (more than 50 letters), folks from our group contributed substantially to the impressive mound of letters that this year's event produced. As always, the organizers from Group 39 reached out to many other local organizations with concerns for human rights. A week later, Eve Wider (AIUSA Area Coordinator for Western PA) summarized the event in an email. Here is her first paragraph:

*We had a successful Write for Rights event last week where we wrote over 400 letters! It was great to see many of you there. Thanks to Calvary Episcopal Church for hosting, and to City Council and the Mayor for supporting this event by each issuing a proclamation. We also thank members of CeaseFirePA, AIUSA North Hills Group 524, CISV Pittsburgh, Casa Jan Jose, Pennsylvanians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty, Building New Hope, Hope Tree Project, Sierra Club, 350.org, Pittsburgh Human Rights City Alliance, Thomas Merton Center, and others for their presence and stimulating conversations!*

For about 20 years, our group has contributed to the event by selling Amnesty merchandise, with the proceeds helping to cover postage for the letters written. John Belch has always served as the "proprietor" of the merchandise table. In recent years, it became difficult for John to maintain an adequate inventory of Amnesty T-shirts, caps, and other items, because AIUSA – inexplicably – had shut down the merchandise section of its website.



This year, however, the merchandise inventory was bolstered when Eve obtained a large quantity of Amnesty tote bags.

"Build Bridges, Not Walls" strikes a particularly positive note in a place like Pittsburgh! John sold 15 of these bags.

We should also note that in December AIUSA activated a new merchandise site, where various items of Amnesty merchandise (including this bag) can now be purchased. <https://shop.amnestyusa.org/>

## 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**, a blogger known as ‘Mother Mushroom’, was released!

Here are the ten remaining countries that were represented in this year’s case list: Brazil, India, Iran, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Morocco, South Africa, Ukraine, United States, Venezuela. This month, as you see below, we are writing in support of **Pavitri Manjhi** of India.

## Write for Human Rights 2018: Indian Community Activist Pavitri Manjhi

**Pavitri Manjhi** is taking a stand. She’s part of an Adivasi indigenous community who are at risk of being kicked off their land to make way for two power plants. They stand to lose their farms and livelihoods. But she’s leading the fight back.

Villagers say they were forced to sell their land by agents acting on behalf of two private companies. Many haven’t even been adequately paid. As head of her village council, Pavitri brought people together to file nearly 100 formal complaints. And for that she faces ongoing intimidation.

Local ‘strongmen’ have repeatedly pressured her to withdraw all the complaints. They visited her home and told her: “Everyone who helped you file the complaints are outsiders. They will not be able to save you and we will silence them.”



The men returned in the following days to make more threats. Pavitri reported the harassment to the police, but little has been done.

For decades, Adivasi people have been forced from their land and had their rights trampled on to make room for business developments. But Pavitri isn’t going anywhere. She’s determined to help her community stand up to big business and protect their ancestral lands.



**Write for Human Rights 2018: Indian Community Activist Pavitri Manjhi (continued)**

*Here is the model letter for this case, based on one distributed by AIUSA. At our meeting, we will sign a petition adapted from this letter, and also sign a message of support and encouragement to send to Pavitri Manjhi.*

Director General of Police  
Chhattisgarh Police Headquarters  
Naya Raipur  
Chhattisgarh  
India – 492001

Dear Sir:

**Pavitri Manjhi**, the Adivasi leader of the Bhengari village council in Chhattisgarh, faces continued threats, intimidation and harassment for her peaceful activism. She is a human rights defender, protesting the actions of two private companies that allegedly defrauded indigenous Adivasis of their land in Raigarh district.

I urge you to consult with Pavitri Manjhi and other Adivasi villagers in order to give them adequate security and protect them from further harassment.

I also urge you to investigate complaints of the harassment of Adivasi villagers and of the unlawful dispossession of land and bring those responsible to justice.

Yours sincerely,

cc: Ambassador Navtej Singh Sarna  
2107 Massachusetts Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20008



## Washington: Amnesty International Letter to Mike Pompeo

On January 8<sup>th</sup>, AIUSA sent the letter described in the press release below to Mike Pompeo.

### **Failure to Raise Human Rights During Pompeo Visit to Gulf Could Risk Increased Abuses**

Amnesty International USA has sent a letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo regarding his current tour of the Middle East, with visits to Jordan, Egypt, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Kuwait. Philippe Nassif, advocacy director for Middle East and North Africa, issued this statement:

“While Secretary Pompeo holds talks with the leaders of countries in the Gulf, the United States continues to transfer arms to Saudi Arabia, despite the devastating civilian suffering caused by the Saudi-led coalition’s air strikes in Yemen. This brazen disregard for human rights and humanitarian law must not continue.

“Pompeo must act on this opportunity to improve the US record on human rights in the Gulf. We urge him to place basic rights at the heart of these meetings by pledging to halt arms transfers to the Saudi-led coalition, as well as condemning the persecution of human rights defenders for peacefully expressing dissent and speaking in support of freedom of the press. Failure to raise these issues would embolden states in the Gulf to continue trampling human rights.”

Amnesty International is calling for the release of human rights defenders across the region including **Nabeel Rajab** in Bahrain, blogger **Raif Badawi** in Saudi Arabia, and **Amal Fathy**, imprisoned for her criticism of the Egyptian government.

*Here is the section of the AIUSA letter focusing on Bahrain. The full letter can be found here:*  
<https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/AIUSA-letter-to-Secretary-of-State-Pompeo-1-7-2019-final.pdf>

AIUSA is calling for the following human rights defenders to be immediately and unconditionally released in accordance with international human rights law. In addition, authorities should drop all politically-motivated criminal charges and halt the violence and harassment against the HRDs.

#### **Bahrain:**

**Nabeel Rajab** is a prominent human rights defender in Bahrain and is the President of the NGO Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR). He has been repeatedly targeted for his human rights work and has been in and out of prison since 2012 and on a travel ban since November 2014. Nabeel has been in detention since his arrest on June 13, 2016 and put on trial for posting and re-posting peaceful comments on Twitter regarding the conflict in Yemen and torture in Jaw prison in March 2015. On [December 31, 2018](#), Bahrain’s Court of Cassation upheld Nabeel Rajab’s conviction and five-year prison sentence.

*It seems unlikely that Pompeo would have bothered to read a letter from Amnesty International. In any case, as this article about his Middle East trip explains, Pompeo has made certain that he does not utter the phrase “human rights.”*

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/10/world/middleeast/pompeo-speech-obama.html>



**Bahrain: Model Letter Calling for Release of Nabeel Rajab**

*On December 31<sup>st</sup>, an appeals court in Bahrain rejected Nabeel Rajab's appeal of his five-year prison sentence. Here is a model letter for this case. At our meeting, we will sign a petition adapted from this letter.*

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 he 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 in 2018 was given an additional two-year prison sentence for TV interviews he gave in 2015 and 2016. The Court of Cassation upheld his sentence, 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.

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.

Yours sincerely,

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