



Amnesty International

Group 524

February 2019



Next Meeting: Tuesday, February 19 – 7:00 p.m. – Providence Heights

Amnesty Update on Thich Quang Do

Since the summer of 2010, our group has been writing letters and signing petitions each month in behalf of **Supreme Patriarch Thich Quang Do**, who has been effectively under house arrest in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon). Last fall, he survived a harrowing ordeal. Forced out of the place where he had lived for years, after two months he ultimately eluded the pursuit of the security police and ended up at a temple back in Ho Chi Minh City – a place where he should be safe.

Kathy Herbst, who coordinates our work on this case, has received word from Amnesty USA that the case may be deactivated, because Thich Quang Do's situation has greatly improved. Nothing definite yet, but Page 2 contains some details.

Action Opportunities

In this issue, we have a letter-writing opportunity (Saudi Arabia – see Page 3), and the link to an online action concerning Trump's latest attacks on immigrants (see Page 4).

Squirrel Hill Stands Against Gun Violence

Members of the Dor Hadash congregation, one of three targeted in October's mass shooting at Tree of Life synagogue, have launched a gun safety advocacy group called Squirrel Hill Stands Against Gun Violence. Launched just last month, the group already includes members of all three impacted congregations and individuals from outside them. Its stated goal is to advocate for gun reform at the local, state and national level, hoping that by lending their voices to the issue, they can help bring about change. In doing so, they join a growing gun safety movement born of trauma and fueled by survivors.

Our friend and colleague Eve Wider, a member of the Dor Hadash congregation, was a founder of this group, which was described in *The Incline*, a local online news source:

<https://theincline.com/2019/02/01/targeted-in-the-tree-of-life-massacre-dor-hadash-congregants-push-for-gun-control/>

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).

Case Update: Supreme Patriarch Thich Quang Do

On Monday the 11th, Laura Galeano of AIUSA got back to Kathy with this email message.

I'm circling back on our conversation regarding Thich Quang Do. Truong Son got back to me after I inquired about what next steps should be, and they reiterated some points:

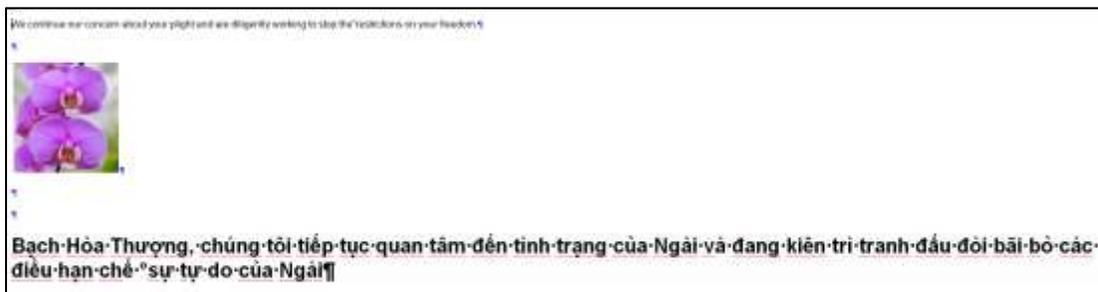
- In terms of Thich Quang Do, as I said he is now retired and living at a new temple in Ho Chi Minh City with his niece taking care of him.
- The authorities of Ho Chi Minh City have reduced their surveillance; people are free to come and visit him.

So my advice for your group is to announce that Thich Quang Do's situation has changed, he is no longer being controlled tightly as before, and people can come to visit him freely. His health condition is good because he has his niece taking care of him every day.

My hunch (and I've asked Truong Son to confirm) is that the casefile may close soon because of this positive update. It looks like the IS [International Secretariat] have taken down the solidarity action, as there's no new address to send letters to. If this changes, I'll certainly reach out. Likewise, if the casefile closes, I'll definitely let you know.

I want to thank you for your persistence in finding new information. I know it has been frustrating to go back and forth, but I'm so thankful for all of the work your group has done. Thich Quang Do's situation has vastly improved, thanks to the campaigning done by you and others worldwide.

Kathy commented that she wonders whether "he is now retired" means that he has stepped down as the head of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam. She will check on that. Kathy has also obtained an address where we can write to Thich Quang Do. Retired or not, we can certainly continue to send him greetings. Here is the message of encouragement that Kathy prepared for us to sign at each meeting and send to Thich Quang Do.



Now that his situation has improved considerably, perhaps it would be best for us to mail him a simple greeting, saying that we are thinking of him, and wishing him well. If you would like to send a card to Thich Quang Do, here is the address:

Supreme Patriarch Thich Quang Do
Chùa Từ Hiếu
432/5 Dương Bá Trạc,
Phường 1, Quận 8,
Hồ Chí Minh, Vietnam

Letter-Writing Opportunity: Saudi Arabia

We put together the model letter below for the August newsletter, after learning of the arrest of Samar Badawi, and Nassima al-Sada. Samar Badawi, an attorney and human rights activist, is the sister of Raif Badawi, whose case we have worked on for half a dozen years.

Amnesty International recently reported that Samar Badawi, and Nassima al-Sada are among at least 10 female prisoners of conscience who have been tortured in prison.

Considering Donald Trump’s attitude toward the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, there can be little hope that his government will make any effort in behalf of these prisoners. Nevertheless, we should do what we can to call for their release. Samar Badawi is pictured below.



Ambassador Khalid bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud
Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia
601 New Hampshire Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20037

Your Excellency:

I am concerned about the imprisonment of Raif Badawi, Samar Badawi, and Nassima al-Sada. I believe that each of these individuals is a prisoner of conscience, held solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression. Each one should be released from prison, immediately and unconditionally.

Raif Badawi has been detained since June 2012, while Samar Badawi and Nassima al-Sada were arrested in July 2018. They are three of the many activists in Saudi Arabia who have been persecuted for the “crime” of openly expressing their views.

Your government must stop arresting, charging, prosecuting, and sentencing your citizens for simply exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly.

Online Action Opportunity: U.S. Congress

AIUSA sent out the link to this online action in an email blast on Friday afternoon, shortly after Donald Trump declared his make-believe emergency.

*Clicking the link will take you to a page at the AIUSA website, where you can fill out a form and click a button to send the message (see text below). The text includes an unfamiliar word: **non-refoulement**. Looked it up and found that non-refoulement is a fundamental principle of international law that forbids a country receiving asylum seekers from returning them to a country in which they would be in likely danger of persecution based on “race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion”.*

*In filling out the form, please note that the telephone number is **NOT** required!*

Call on Congress to Stand Up for Refugees!



I urge you to strongly oppose any further funds for President Trump’s border wall, either through a national emergency declaration or Congressional appropriations, or any additional “border security measures” that will make it more difficult for asylum-seekers to access protection or punish them for doing so by detaining them. Seeking asylum is a fundamental human right. To punish asylum-seekers and deter them from accessing that protection is a violation of our obligations under international law.

The U.S. already operates the world’s largest immigration detention system, at a cost of over \$3 billion in the most recent fiscal year. U.S. detention bed space is already at a historic high – and too often we’re detaining those who are seeking asylum, including families who fled horrific violence in their home countries.

The President’s policies already in place at the Southern border represents an abusive enforcement agenda that undermines both the right to seek asylum and non-refoulement – violations of human rights.

Congress has the power to stop this agenda. Turning our back on those in need is an affront to our country’s tradition and international obligations to welcome people seeking safety, and our cherished values of due process, fairness, and equality. Congress must reject the administration’s efforts to expand the immigration detention system and militarize our border. Instead, we should reaffirm the United States’ commitment to human rights.

<https://act.amnestyusa.org/page/16725/action/1?ac=W1902EARMR3&ea.url.id=1970534&forwarded=true>



Mike O'Reilly Retires After 40 Years with Amnesty International USA

Mike O'Reilly, AIUSA's Chief Strategy and Governance Officer, retired on January 31st, after 40 years with Amnesty. On his next-to-last day, he sent the letter below to friends and colleagues. Eve Wider was copied on Mike's letter, and she thoughtfully shared it with us.

It is good to be reminded that the work of Amnesty staff people like Mike (or Laura Galeano – see Page 2) makes it possible for volunteers like us to contribute to Amnesty's activities all around the world.

Dear Friends,

When I joined Amnesty International some 40 years ago, I was captivated by Amnesty's core belief that ordinary people, working together, could influence decision-makers around the world. Not only could they do this, but they – we – had a moral imperative to do so. Long before the word "friend" became a verb, Amnesty understood the power of interconnectedness. It understood that people wanted to act on their desire for a better world, and it provided a means to do so. That's what drew me to Amnesty as a student, and it's what kept me inspired over many decades of activism.

Tomorrow will be my last day on Amnesty's staff. From my first days as membership department assistant in 1983 through my current years on the executive team, I have always felt privileged to be able to do such worthwhile work in the company of people I admired. The fact that more than a few of the Amnesty members and staff I first came to know decades ago remain active with AIUSA today is a testament to the devotion this work inspires in us. It has been an honor to collaborate with such talented partners – members and staff – in confronting tough challenges and bringing positive change to the lives of so many people.

Because much of my career focused on advancing Amnesty's campaigns for individuals at risk, my life has been particularly influenced by the prisoners of conscience, human rights defenders and their family members that I came to know. Rebiya Kadeer, Jose Gallardo, Taye Woldesemayat, Leyla Zana. These are just a few of the people who taught me the true meaning of courage in the face of adversity. And I will forever honor the memory of those we tried to help, but could not. Fessahaye Yohannes, Fathi el-Jahmi, Orton Chirwa, Liu Xiaobo. They walk with me still.

Some of you will be familiar with Jenni Williams, founder of the activist group Women of Zimbabwe Arise. Jenni regularly puts herself at great risk by organizing public protests for human rights in her country, and she is a tenacious force to be reckoned with. But it wasn't always so. Jenni once told me about the event in the late 1980s that sparked her awakening to activism. It began as a plan for a little fun at a concert, but evolved into so much more. The music was great, but it was the message conveyed during the concert that transformed her. The message that all people have human rights and that all governments must respect those rights, including the apartheid government of South Africa and the repressive government of Zimbabwe.

Yes, the concert that ignited a fire inside the woman who would go on to become one of Zimbabwe's foremost human rights leaders was Amnesty International's global concert tour. The tour's goal of spreading awareness about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights certainly hit its mark in Zimbabwe. When Jenni told me this, I thought of ripples in a pond. The energy we contribute to the world can have impacts far beyond what we might imagine possible. It has been an honor to play a role in this good work with all of you.