



Amnesty International

Group 524

March 2019



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

March 19th at Providence Heights

At our March meeting, we will sign a note of greeting to **Supreme Patriarch Thich Quang Do**, as we did last month. His situation was described in the February newsletter, and Kathy Herbst has received nothing to indicate that things have changed.

We will also sign petitions to send to Senators Casey and Toomey, concerning the recent attempt to set aside Trump's phony emergency declaration. The wording will be adapted from the model for a letter-writing/emailing action that can be found on Page 2.

Our discussion will include at least one item of good news – the decision by California governor Gavin Newsom to declare a moratorium on executions in that state, where there are more than 700 people on death row. This article provides some useful background on the topic:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/california-gov-gavin-newsom-to-impose-moratorium-on-death-penalty/2019/03/12/3a3ad1dc-4520-11e9-8aab-95b8d80a1e4f_story.html?utm_term=.d2b87523ed13

Released Prisoner Becomes Political Leader in Malaysia

Experienced Amnesty activists – and many people receiving this newsletter fit that description – may remember the name of **Anwar Ibrahim**. During the Nineties, he was an important figure in Malaysian politics, but in 1998 a dispute with the prime minister caused him to be imprisoned on trumped-up charges. In 1999, Amnesty International declared him a prisoner of conscience, and groups like ours wrote letters and signed petitions on his behalf until his release in 2004.

Once he regained his freedom, Anwar got back into public life, as a leader of the opposition political party. These activities continued – interrupted by several more years in prison – until last year, when he helped to form a coalition with other opposition groups, and they defeated the ruling party in a May 2018 election. On February 26th, Anwar was interviewed for NPR's Morning Edition. See Pages 3 – 4 for two excerpts, along with a link to the full interview. One excerpt ties in with an article by Thomas Friedman, found on Pages 5 – 7.

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).



Action Opportunity: Letter or Email to Pennsylvania Senators

On Thursday the 14th, both Bob Casey and Patrick Toomey both voted for a resolution to overturn the Trump-declared emergency reallocation of funds to construct a border wall.

At first glance, Toomey’s vote seems surprising, because he has spent the past two years helping to enable virtually everything that Trump has done. But this was a “safe” vote for Toomey. He could register an instance of token opposition to Trump, while knowing that there were not enough votes to override Trump’s veto of the resolution.

In this case, anyway, it probably makes sense to send messages of thanks to both senators. The model text below was adapted from a February 2019 AIUSA petition. Addresses below include an alternative – a link to the contact form at the senator’s website – if you prefer to distill the short model letter into an even shorter message.

Electronic messages will be delivered promptly, but letters will be delayed about a month, because of mail security procedures.

Senator Bob Casey
393 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510
<https://www.casey.senate.gov/contact>

Senator Patrick Toomey
248 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510
<https://www.toomey.senate.gov/?p=contact>

Dear Senator -----:

Thank you for voting on March 14th to terminate the national emergency that had been declared by President Trump.

I urge you to strongly oppose any further funds for President Trump’s border wall, or for any additional “border security measures” that would 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.

Congress has the power to stop these abuses. Turning our back on those in need is an affront to our country’s traditions, and to our international obligations to welcome people seeking safety. It undermines our 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 commitment of the United States to human rights.

Malaysia: Overview of Human Rights Progress

From the website of Human Rights Watch, here is a brief overview of the current situation in Malaysia, followed by a link to an article discussing the challenges facing the new government as it seeks to implement its human rights agenda.

After more than 60 years in power, the ruling UMNO-led coalition that had governed Malaysia since independence was defeated in May 2018 by the Pakatan Harapan alliance, led by former Prime Minister Mohamad Mahathir, who established a new party and joined longtime political foes to oust his former protégé Najib Razak.

Having run on an election manifesto promising to abolish oppressive laws and make Malaysia's human rights record "respected by the world," expectations for the new government are high.

With a range of rights-restricting laws on the books, a police force with a history of abuse and impunity, and government institutions weakened by the efforts of the prior administration to maintain political control and suppress discussion of government corruption, the new government faces steep challenges to meeting its human rights pledges.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/01/17/malaysia-human-rights-make-major-gains>

Malaysia: From Political Prisoner to Political Leader



The NPR interview with **Anwar Ibrahim** was conducted by Steve Inskeep of Morning Edition. Clicking the link below will take you to a page where you can listen to the 7-minute interview, or read a transcript of it. On the next page are two excerpts from that transcript.

<https://www.npr.org/2019/02/26/698043732/anwar-ibrahims-role-in-malaysias-dramatic-advance-in-democracy>



Malaysia: Two Excerpts from Interview with Anwar Ibrahim

Excerpt 1 – Introduction by Steve Inskip

[*Overview paragraph on transcript page.*] Steve Inskip talks to Anwar Ibrahim, president of Malaysia's ruling party, about how he plans a new era of governance. His party ousted a ruling coalition that had been in power for over six decades.

INSKEEP: We have the story of a man behind an advance in democracy. He's a politician in Malaysia, which effectively had one-party rule. That changed when the opposition won an election last year, causing a peaceful transfer of power. Democracy may be retreating elsewhere, but not in Kuala Lumpur. ...

How did that happen? We have the story of that change in power through the eyes of a man who spent years in prison for his politics and has now risen to leadership. Anwar Ibrahim came by our studios. Over the last two decades, he was jailed repeatedly by other politicians and had reason to think he might never get out. ...

Anwar is 71. He has dark hair and a salt-and-pepper goatee. The lines on his face around his eyes hint at the stress of his captivity. For years, he suffered the fate of many Malaysian opposition figures.

Excerpt 2 – Looking to America for Support

INSKEEP: Does Malaysia need the United States?

IBRAHIM: Yes, I think. I make no apologies. We need United States' more vigorous and progressive foreign policy. I cannot say that we are too hopeful of the present position of foreign policy in the United States. Although, in my personal case, I should say from the days of President Clinton, Bush, Obama and less so under Trump, my issue was always raised at different levels.

INSKEEP: I see.

IBRAHIM: But notwithstanding that, the general attitudes towards promoting democracy, of course, have been relegated to the background. And that is, to me, unfortunate. You must encourage countries with your power and resources to support efforts towards peace, security, and democracy. You cannot be ambivalent talking about democracy and then supporting all the tyrants and dictators of the world.

INSKEEP: So when you see the Trump administration grow even closer to Saudi Arabia, which the U.S. has always been close to, or even closer to the Egyptian military-backed regime, this bothers you?

IBRAHIM: I have no issues of countries having bilateral relations trade. I'm not suggesting that we go to war with every country. But their position must be clear. Why do you choose selective condemnation of some countries for being corrupt and oppressive, and some countries that are corrupt and oppressive continue to be your friends?



United States Foreign Policy: Commentary by Thomas Friedman

In Excerpt 2 on the preceding page, Anwar Ibrahim provides a common-sense description of the impact of Donald Trump's conduct of foreign policy upon a country that is attempting to establish human rights reforms.

In this column, published in the New York Times on March 5th, Thomas Friedman extends the analysis, considering on a global level the impact of Trump's conduct of foreign policy.

The Trump Musical: 'Anything Goes'

Goodness knows I'm loath to write anything these days that would feed Donald Trump's ego. But this time it's unavoidable. There is a new global political era emerging that, while not entirely attributable to Trump, his party and his administration, they've surely played a huge role in fostering. A variety of analysts have now given this era the same name: "Anything goes." And for good reason.

Look around the world and not only do you see a democratic recession — the number of democracies abandoning their democratic bona fides with sham elections is steadily mounting — but you see something much more grotesque: Leaders are grabbing power for life, murdering or jailing even the mildest of critics and shamelessly building coalitions with openly racist and bigoted parties.

Most important, they're doing it with utter impunity — confident that either no one is watching or no one will meaningfully call them out.

This is what happens when people think America isn't looking, doesn't care, or worse — has a president, himself having uttered over 9,000 lies and misleading statements, who has zero moral authority to call out others. When it comes to being a global watchdog that tries to enforce some basic norms of decency, America under Trump is out to lunch — and a lot of people have figured that out, and so anything goes.

"It's not just that liberal democracy is retreating under pressure from demagogic politicians exploiting the stresses of globalization, rising inequality, economic insecurity, job displacement, immigration, and so on," argues Larry Diamond, author of a prescient new book, "Ill Winds: Saving Democracy From Russian Rage, Chinese Ambition, and American Complacency." "It's that authoritarian forces everywhere perceive that there is no longer any price to pay for ruling as nastily as they want."

So, today, "every type of regime is getting worse," Diamond adds. "Liberal democracies are becoming more intolerant. Illiberal democracies are electing authoritarian personalities like President Duterte in the Philippines, who are purging judges and locking up journalists who dare to criticize them. Authoritarian regimes that once coexisted with pockets of opposition no longer see the need to bother. In Cambodia, the party of the long-ruling dictator, Hun Sen, now controls every seat in Parliament. And China is now constructing the first truly Orwellian surveillance state."



United States Foreign Policy: Commentary by Thomas Friedman (continued)

It all makes some of the lyrics of Cole Porter's classic song seem so ahead of their time:

The world has gone mad today/ And good's bad today/ And black's white today/ And day's night today/ And that gent today/ You gave a cent today/ Once had several chateaux .../ Anything goes.

Just think of those shocks you've got/ And those knocks you've got/ And those blues you've got/ From that news you've got/ And those pains you've got/ (If any brains you've got) .../ 'Cause Franklin knows/ Anything goes.

When America, the world's most influential democracy, has a leader without shame, who is backed by a party without spine, willing to prostitute itself to Trump, no matter how low he goes — and both are protected by a virtually state-run network without integrity, called Fox — it becomes a hunting license for leaders everywhere to go after their own domestic opponents and cross any human rights redline to stay in power.

And we're talking about some close allies. Last week, Israel's attorney general recommended that Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu be indicted on charges of fraud, bribery, and breach of trust in connection with three different corruption cases. This comes just after Netanyahu forged a political alliance with an openly racist, anti-Arab party.

Netanyahu's new political ally, the Otzma Yehudit (Jewish Power) party, traces its lineage to Rabbi Meir Kahane's outlawed Kach Party, which advocated annexing the West Bank, expelling the Palestinians who lived there and resettling Israeli Arabs in Arab countries. Otzma's leader, Michael Ben-Ari, with whom Bibi made his alliance, was denied a visa to the U.S. in 2012 on the grounds of being associated with a violent extremist group.

Among Otzma's leaders, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency reported, "is former Kahane aide Baruch Marzel, a resident of Hebron who holds a party every year at the grave of Baruch Goldstein, who in 1994 massacred 29 Palestinians at the Cave of the Patriarchs."

These are the people Netanyahu wants to bring into his government. Why not? Bibi knows that no matter how low he sinks, Trump will always have his back.

Yes, politics can be a dirty business, "but there are sacred areas in which you don't play politics, where there has to be a boundary," says Hebrew University philosopher Moshe Halbertal. And making an alliance "with a racist party is one of them. Because when you do that, you actually inflate them and send a message about what kind of speech is permissible."

You may think that "they are just a means to your ends," adds Halbertal. "But in the end, they will control you, they will dominate your identity," and, in Bibi's case, "they will define who he is, who is Israel, who is Israel in the eyes of world Jewry and who is Israel in the eyes of the world."



United States Foreign Policy: Commentary by Thomas Friedman (continued)

Our enemies and rivals are also worse than ever. Iran has been deeply complicit in the ethnic cleansing of Sunnis in Iraq and Syria, in the use of poison gas by Syria's regime, and in the crushing of Lebanese democracy through its proxy, the Hezbollah militia.

But Iran gets away with it. The Iranians know that U.S. human rights activists are so focused on Saudi Arabia's vile murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi and its bombings in Yemen that they're ignoring Iran's misbehavior. So anything goes.

China's government has felt free enough to admit that it's been forcing religious minorities, particularly Chinese Muslims, into "re-education camps" to eliminate "extremism." But news seeping out of these camps indicates they have "a lot more in common with concentration camps. Thousands of guards carrying spiked clubs, tear gas and stun guns surveil the government's 'students,' who are held in buildings ringed with razor wire and infrared cameras," said Vox, citing a recent report by Agence France-Presse.

Allies of Egypt's president, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, are well on their way to amending the Egyptian Constitution to make him, in effect, president for life, or at least until 2034, and give even more power to the military. El-Sisi, who made this power grab after a visit from and praise by U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, has also arrested far more Egyptians for the mildest of criticism, and snuffed out far more press freedoms, than his predecessor Hosni Mubarak — without a peep out of America.

In Uganda, 74-year-old President Yoweri Museveni got age limits abolished so he can, in effect, also become president for life, after sending troops onto the floor of Parliament to beat up opposition lawmakers objecting to the move.

Larry Diamond says, "A leading Ugandan human rights lawyer wrote to me that with Trump in the White House and Europe silent and democratic norms generally in retreat, African rulers like Museveni now feel emboldened to rule as long and as brutally as they want."

Again, whether it is the presidents of China, Egypt, Uganda, Russia and Turkey all basically making themselves into presidents for life, or Bibi forging an alliance with a racist politician banned from America so that he can cling to power in Israel, or the Saudi crown prince's team murdering moderate journalist/critic Jamal Khashoggi, or allies Poland, Brazil and Hungary all drifting away from democracy under the sway of power-hungry nationalists, it's obvious that none of them, none of them, ever bothered to ask themselves before their respective moves, "But what will the Americans say if we do this?"

They knew the answer: Anything goes.