



Amnesty International

Group 524

August 2020



August 18th Meeting via Zoom

Next Meeting (via Zoom): Tuesday, August 18th at 7 p.m.

After five long months, it was a great a pleasure to drop the word “Cancelled” from the headline on this page! On Saturday morning, three of us held a test meeting, using the Zoom software, and everything seemed to work well.

For August, therefore, we will get back to our **third-Tuesday-of-the-month-at-7:00** schedule, by way of Zoom. Via an email message on Saturday, you should already have received the Zoom link, but here it is again:

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/77877354300?pwd=UIVPTmVEUm9CMHlkRnNITEoyOTZUdz09>

Nothing special planning for this meeting; just an opportunity to catch up with one another!

Webinar Conducted by Human Rights Allies

Last week, some of our local human rights allies, included representatives of Squirrel Hill United Against Gun Violence and Ceasefire PA, took part in a webinar on white supremacy and racism. The one-hour discussion was recorded, and is now available through Facebook.

https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=912293042580119&ref=watch_permalink

Although this was not an Amnesty event, the issues are ones that AIUSA has been focusing on.

We have all heard the term “white supremacy,” but what does it mean? What do white supremacists believe, and why are white supremacists a real threat? Join CeaseFirePA and Squirrel Hill Stands Against Gun Violence for a discussion that will explore the intersections of racism, anti-Semitism, and guns--a lethal combination exacerbated by the current environment of uncertainty and fear that is engulfing our Commonwealth, our country, and the world.

Rob Conroy from CeaseFirePA will talk with Drs. Kathleen Blee and Waverly Duck--internationally recognized experts on white supremacy and racism, respectively--and with Carolyn Ban, one of the leaders of Squirrel Hill Stands Against Gun Violence, an organization founded in the wake of the 2018 massacre at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh.

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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 web site (www.amnestyusa.org) and Group 39’s Amnesty Pittsburgh web site (www.amnestypgh.org).

China: Review of Uighur Prisoner Case

Back in March/April/May, as we were slammed by the pandemic, forcing cancellation of our group's face-to-face meetings, the group also felt the impact of several unrelated outside events. It was a complicated time. This month, it seems worthwhile to review those events, and explain where things stand at the moment.

In late February, we learned of the death of **Thich Quang Do**. For 10 years, our group had the honor of working for the freedom of this remarkable Vietnamese religious leader, and we mourn his loss.

While Thich Quang Do was still alive, Kathy Herbst had initiated the process of obtaining for us a second prisoner case that we could also work on. The approval for that case – a young Uighur woman imprisoned in China – had just come through in early March, when we learned of Thich Quang Do's death. Thus we still had a prisoner case to work on.

In March and April, we introduced the case to the group, and sent out our first batch of letters to the Chinese embassy in Washington. By the time we reached May, however, we were startled by the news that the young woman had been released!

Forced to scramble for another writing opportunity, we found another Uighur case, which had been the subject of an Amnesty Urgent Action in 2017. As far as we could determine, nothing about the young woman's situation had changed, so we went ahead with that case.



*Almas Nizamidin, with his wife (our current prisoner case), **Buzainafu Abudourexiti**.*



China: Model Letter Calling for Release of Buzainafu Abudourexiti

In May, we introduced you to the case of **Buzainafu Abudourexiti**, a young Uighur woman who has been imprisoned since 2017. We adapted the text of our appeal from an online petition at the website of Australia's Amnesty section. Her husband, Almas Nizamidin, is a Uighur man who has already settled in Australia. Buzainafu is simply seeking to leave China and join him in Australia. What appears below is the text of the Australian petition, which can be sent as a brief letter to the Chinese embassy in Washington. (Due to the pandemic, international mail has been disrupted, so our focus is on targets in DC.) You can also send email to the Chinese embassy: (chinaembpress_us@mfa.gov.cn).

Last month, we checked the website of the World Uyghur Congress, and confirmed that Buzainafu was included on their list of political prisoners held by the Chinese authorities: <https://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/current-issues/uyghur-political-prisoners/>

Here is a link to Buzainafu's case summary on that site.
<https://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/urgent-action-uyghur-woman-incommunicado-after-secret-trial/>

Here is the text of our model letter on this case:

Ambassador Cui Tiankai
Embassy of the People's Republic of China
3505 International Place NW
Washington, DC 20008

Dear Ambassador:

I am extremely concerned for **Buzainafu Abudourexiti**, who is serving a seven-year sentence at Urumqi Women's Prison following a secret trial in June 2017. No official documentation about her case, nor the charges she has been convicted of, has been provided to her family.

I am calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Buzainafu Abudourexiti, unless there is sufficient credible and admissible evidence that she committed an internationally recognized offense and is granted a fair re-trial in line with international standards.

Please ensure that Buzainafu Abudourexiti has regular, unrestricted access to family and lawyers of her choice, is not subject to torture and other ill-treatment, and receives regular and unrestricted access to medical care on request or as necessary.

We recently found that on July 21, we found that Almas had been featured on a short segment of an Australian podcast that focuses on human rights and social justice issues. You can find that podcast here:
<https://podcasts.apple.com/au/podcast/177-parliament-wont-sit-we-talk-to-uyghur-activist/id1213208653?i=1000485584558>

Once you reach the podcast, skip ahead to this section near the end: 42:17-50:40



Human Rights Perspective from the Washington Post

The Washington Post published this editorial on July 27. It speaks for itself.

The World is Realizing the U.S. is No Longer Committed to Basic Standards of Decency

Not so long ago, asylum seekers turned to the United States, seeking refuge from repressive states. Now the United States is one of those repressive states.

That's the gist of a Canadian federal court ruling, which would scrap a 16-year-old bilateral treaty called the Safe Third Country Agreement, under which Canada and the United States each recognize the other as a safe place to seek refuge. Justice Ann Marie McDonald ruled that Canada's practice of turning back third-country refugees who try to cross at official points of entry along the U.S.-Canada frontier — on the theory that they have already reached a safe harbor in the United States — no longer makes sense given the atrocious treatment to which they are subjected south of the border. Canada, she wrote, can no longer turn a blind eye to the reality that the United States denies decent and dignified treatment to asylum seekers.

Justice McDonald based her ruling partly on testimony from asylum seekers who described harrowing conditions of confinement in U.S. detention, to which they are automatically taken when turned back by Canada. One of them, a refugee from Ethiopia named Nedira Jemal Mustefa, recounted what she called a “terrifying, isolating and psychologically traumatic” experience at a “freezing” facility where she was held in upstate New York. Other testimony in the Canadian court provided evidence that detainees in U.S. facilities were denied access to counsel, phone calls and translators, and some were subjected to solitary confinement.

The judge found that the “accounts of the detainees demonstrate both physical and psychological suffering because of detention, and a real risk that they will not be able to assert asylum claims” in the United States.

None of this is surprising to advocates and others who have monitored the travails of asylum seekers, especially since President Trump took office. In the past two years, his anti-immigration policies have prompted more than 50,000 asylum seekers to cross into Canada outside official ports of entry, thereby skirting the treaty's automatic-return provision — until the pandemic forced the border's closing this spring. After arriving in Canada and undergoing security and medical screening, they have been allowed to work and receive basic benefits such as medical care as they await adjudication of their asylum claims.

Canada is among the United States's closest allies; gratuitous America-bashing is not the norm there. That a Canadian judge would give a failing grade to this country's commitment to human rights where they concern refugees is a damning rebuke.

Before her ruling takes effect, the judge gave the Canadian government six months to appeal, should it choose to do so. Until now, the treaty's supporters have justified it on the grounds that it bars “asylum shopping” by refugees. The question facing the administration of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is whether its neighbor to the south still adheres to what Western democracies regard as the basic standards of dignity and decency on which the original treaty was based.

The evidence suggests it does not.