



**Amnesty International**

**Group 524**

**May 2021**



## **No May Meeting Volunteer Appreciation Uyghur Family Separations in China**

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### **AI Volunteer Appreciation**

April was Volunteer Appreciation month for AIUSA. Please see the statement by Board Chair Reza Fakhari on page 2 and a message from recently released Pastor Steven Tendo on page 3.

### **Uyghur Families Forced Apart by Crackdown in Xinjiang**

For decades, Uyghurs have experienced systematic ethnic and religious discrimination in Xinjiang. Amnesty International's report, [Hearts and Lives Broken: The Nightmare of Uyghur Families Separated by Repression](#) follows six Uyghur parents separated from their children as a result of the crackdown in China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Details are on page 4 and a model letter to the Chinese Embassy is on page 5.

### **Amnesty USA Joins Campaign to Ban Landmines By US**

Amnesty International USA joined a cohort of organizations as part of the U.S. Campaign to Ban Landmines. Details are on page 6.

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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 Belch ([joheb@aol.com](mailto:joheb@aol.com) or 412-766-1894) for more information on material in this mailing, or visit the Amnesty USA web site ([www.amnestyusa.org](http://www.amnestyusa.org)) and Group 39's Amnesty Pittsburgh web site ([www.amnestypgh.org](http://www.amnestypgh.org)).

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## **Volunteer Appreciation Month**

As we enter into our 60th Anniversary year, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the millions of volunteers who helped to build this global grassroots movement. Amnesty International was founded, and continues to operate on the belief, that if we work collectively to confront human rights abuses and press for greater recognition of human rights, ordinary people can make extraordinary change happen. We have seen this play out over and over in our human rights victories and success stories.

We know the work of our volunteers goes beyond the promotion and protection of human rights. It also encompasses the responsibility that we have to ensure the health of our movement so that we have the strength to take on regimes and systems that deliberately seek to discriminate and erase human rights from being accessible to all people. Like so many passions in life, volunteering for human rights justice is a calling.

We are thankful that you chose to be a part of Amnesty International. Without each of you, we would not be the organization that we are today and continue to strive to be. It should come as no surprise to learn that recent studies on health and happiness have been linked to volunteering. One of the reasons most often cited for the positive effects of volunteering are the social bonds that we form with one another. April is volunteer appreciation month and I hope you'll join me in taking a moment to acknowledge not only what we have accomplished together, but also your individual contributions to the greater good.

AIUSA Board Chair - Reza Fakhari



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### A Message of Thanks

Freedom can be easily taken for granted... until someone rips it away from you. I know this from personal experience.

For more than two years, ICE detained me in a cramped detention center without access to adequate medical care — even during this frightening pandemic. They tried to strip me of my dignity and my hope. The barbed-wire-enclosed detention facility where I was imprisoned overlooked a sanctuary for migratory birds. The birds' freedom was something I could only dream of.

Now that I am free, I am doing everything I can to help free others who are still suffering at the hands of ICE. It's shocking that people remain locked up like I was. I was detained for seeking asylum here in the United States. I thought I would spend all of my days in my home country, but I became a target of the Ugandan government. I was tortured. Two of my fingers were amputated. I was threatened with death. That's why I came to the U.S. — because I feared for my life.

You see, I fled to the one place I thought I was going to find safety. But instead of a fair asylum process, I was thrown behind bars and treated so poorly. While in ICE detention, my health deteriorated rapidly. I lost 30 pounds. My diabetes went untreated. I was losing my vision and ICE delayed my surgery for months — even though I was at risk of going blind. It was all so dehumanizing, and it brought back all of the horrible memories of the torture I faced in Uganda. The worst thing that someone can do to someone else is to lock them in a cell after they have been tortured.

During this difficult period, I took solace that Amnesty International was championing my right to seek protection. They mobilized thousands of grassroots activists to pressure decision makers to release me. Maybe even you helped, or called, on my behalf. They publicized my story in the media. When ICE tried to deport me in September, Amnesty helped stop ICE from sending me back to Uganda, where I know I would have been killed.

I'm so grateful — for Amnesty, for the advocacy of my lawyers, and for the other coalition partners who helped win my release. And now that I'm on the other side, I'm more emboldened than ever to speak out for others who aren't free to speak up like me.

I didn't believe the guards when they told me I was free because they had lied to me so many times. But now, I am now safe and free on parole, while I await my asylum claim. I remember my first night of freedom in February when I ate a wonderful dinner of fresh fish and vegetables. I slept like a baby on a real bed, not on a creaky metal bunk. And I woke up the next morning, free as a bird.

I'm living proof that Amnesty's pressure works. Thank you for your commitment to helping others.

With much appreciation,

Pastor Steven Tendo





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## **CHINA'S GOVERNMENT MUST ALLOW REUNION OF UYGHUR FAMILIES**

Some Uyghur parents have been separated from their children as a result of the unprecedented crackdown on ethnic populations in Xinjiang. With your voice, we can push the Chinese government to end this separation.

Mihriban and Ablikim fled from Xinjiang to Italy in 2016 after being harassed by police and pressured to give up their passports. They left their four children in the temporary care of grandparents, but soon afterwards the grandmother was taken to an internment camp while the grandfather was interrogated by police. In November 2019, they received a permit from the Italian government to bring their children over. However, the four children – aged between 12 and 16 – were seized by police and sent to an orphanage and boarding school in Xinjiang when they traveled to the Italian consulate in Shanghai to apply for visas.

Mihriban and Ablikim's story is tragically not unique. Many Uyghur parents overseas have had to leave one or more children in the care of family members in Xinjiang. Some parents have since learned their children were taken to state-run "orphan camps" or boarding schools after the relatives taking care of them had been detained.

Call on the Chinese government to ensure that children in Xinjiang are allowed to be reunited as promptly as possible with their parents and siblings already living abroad.

Group 524  
May 2021



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

Dear Ambassador Tiankai,

I am alarmed to learn of the reports that some Uyghur parents have been separated from their children for years as a result of the unprecedented crackdown on ethnic populations in Xinjiang.

Since 2017, an estimated one million or more people have been arbitrarily detained in “transformation-through-education” or “vocational training” centers in Xinjiang, where they have been subjected to various forms of torture and other ill-treatment, including political indoctrination and forced cultural assimilation. This mass detention campaign combined with systematic repression have prevented Uyghur parents from returning to China to take care of their children themselves, and made it nearly impossible for their children to leave China to reunite with them abroad. Some Uyghur parents believe their children may have been taken to state-run “orphan camps” or boarding schools when the relatives taking care of them were detained.

I therefore call on you to ensure that children are allowed to leave China to be reunited as promptly as possible with their parents, if that is preferred by them, as well as with siblings already living abroad.

Yours Sincerely,



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## **US Campaign to Ban Landmines**

Amnesty International USA joined a cohort of organizations as part of the U.S. Campaign to Ban Landmines – U.S. Cluster Munition Coalition to write to President Biden urging him to adopt a policy that sets the United States on course not just to “curtail the use of landmines,” but to ban their use, production, acquisition, and transfer and to swiftly accede to the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty.

Paul O’Brien, the executive director of Amnesty International USA said:

*“Antipersonnel landmines are inherently indiscriminate weapons that can’t distinguish between fighters and ordinary people and maim and kill long after conflicts end. They should not have a place in the arsenal of any country. The landmine policy of the United States starkly sets it apart from its allies on a shortlist of countries that include Myanmar, North Korea, and Syria. For the United States to serve as a human rights leader on the global stage, the Biden administration must immediately join the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty.”*

Amnesty International, as a member of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, urges all governments to ban the use, production, stockpiling, or transfer of anti-personnel landmines and to join and implement the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty.