



Amnesty International

Group 524

August 2021



No August Meeting Sri Lankan Prisoner Hejaaz Hizbullah Alabama Prisoner Rocky Myers

Welcome

I'm sure the family of our late leader, John Warren, appreciated all those members who were able to attend his memorial service earlier this month. Similar to July, the August heat and storms have continued and among our two letter actions this month is one repeated from last month.

Action to Close Guantanamo

Back in January we wrote to President Biden, urging him to close Guantanamo prison. A letter requesting the same from 75 members of the House of Representatives prompted a statement from Amnesty shown on page 2.

Sri Lankan Prisoner of Conscience Hejaaz Hizbulla

Hejaaz Hizbullah is a prominent lawyer and member of Sri Lanka's Muslim minority. He was arrested on April 14, 2020 and has since been detained on trumped-up charges under the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). Details are on page 3 and a model letter on page 4.

Alabama Death Penalty Prisoner Rocky Myers

Rocky Myers has been on Alabama's death row at Homan Correctional Facility in Atmore, AL, for nearly half his life. Serious flaws have affected his case including racial and class bias, inadequate legal representation, and allegations of police pressure. Amnesty is urging Alabama Governor Kay Ivey to intervene and immediately review Rocky Myers' case. Details are on page 5 and a model letter is on page 6.

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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 Belch (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) and Group 39's Amnesty Pittsburgh web site (www.amnestypgh.org).



President Biden Has the Political Support to Close the Guantanamo Detention Center

August 4, 2021

In response to the news that a Congressional letter was [sent](#) to President Biden by 75 Representatives urging him to close the military prison at Guantanamo Bay ‘once and for all,’ Daphne Eviatar, Director, Security with Human Rights at Amnesty International USA said:

“This letter, signed by four House committee chairs, should send a clear message to President Biden: he has the political support to swiftly close the detention center at Guantanamo. With the twentieth anniversary of the so-called ‘War on Terror’ around the corner, it’s time to shutter this horrific symbol of torture, indefinite detention, and injustice, once and for all, and pursue a national security strategy that is rooted in human rights for all.”



Release Muslim Lawyer in Sri Lanka

Hejaaz Hizbullah is a prominent lawyer and member of Sri Lanka's Muslim minority. He was arrested on April 14, 2020 and has since been detained on trumped-up charges under the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), without proper access to his family or legal counsel. No credible evidence of wrongdoing has yet been presented before a court. The day before his arrest, he had joined in a statement opposing the government's forced cremation policy for COVID-19 victims, a policy which violated Muslim religious practices. He is also known for being a strong advocate on human rights and Constitutional law.

The PTA provides the authorities with broad powers to arbitrarily detain individuals. Hejaaz Hizbullah has been targeted by the government simply for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression. He is a Prisoner of Conscience and must be immediately and unconditionally released. All charges against him must be dropped without delay.

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Ambassador Ravinatha P. Aryasinha
Embassy of Sri Lanka
3025 Whitehaven Street NW
Washington, DC 20008

Dear Ambassador,

I am deeply concerned about the prolonged arbitrary detention of Hejaaz Hizbullah, a Sri Lankan lawyer. He has been detained since April 14, 2020 on trumped-up charges under the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). No credible evidence of wrongdoing by him has yet been produced before a court. The day before his arrest, he had joined in a statement protesting your government's forced cremation policy for COVID-19 victims. He remains in detention without being given unrestricted access to his relatives and his lawyers.

The PTA has had a chilling effect on the exercise of the right to freedom of expression in Sri Lanka as it provides the authorities with sweeping powers to arbitrarily detain individuals for up to 18 months without charge or trial on mere suspicion of an offense. Hejaaz Hizbullah has been a vocal critic of the government, raising issues of discrimination against the Muslim minority in Sri Lanka, among his other human rights work.

Hejaaz Hizbullah is a Prisoner of Conscience targeted for his work and opinions. He must be immediately and unconditionally released and all charges against him dropped. I also call on the Sri Lankan government to repeal the PTA and end its use immediately. Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,



ALABAMA DEATH PENALTY PRISONER ROCKY MYERS

Rocky Myers, a Black man, has been on death row in Alabama, USA, since 1994. A nearly all-white jury convicted and sentenced him to life without the possibility of parole for the murder of his white neighbor. The trial judge overrode their decision and imposed a death sentence — a practice now outlawed in Alabama.

Rocky Myers grew up in New Jersey in poverty. At 11, he was diagnosed with an intellectual disability. His assigned lawyer for post-conviction appeals abandoned his case without notice, making him miss key deadlines for judicial appeals. The courts relied primarily on IQ tests, a standard which the US Supreme Court found to be inadequate in 2014, to reject his request for a deadline extension submitted on the grounds that he had an intellectual disability.

No evidence linked Rocky Myers to the murder, except for a VCR stolen from the victim, which he maintains he had found abandoned in the street. Key testimonies against him were tainted by inconsistencies and allegations of police pressure, with one later recanted as untrue. Rocky Myers faced execution in 2004 and 2012.

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Governor Kay Ivey
Alabama State Capitol
600 Dexter Avenue
Montgomery, AL 36130

Dear Governor Ivey,

I am greatly concerned by the many flaws that have affected the case of Rocky Myers, who is currently on death row at Holman Correctional Facility in Atmore, Alabama. I urge you to intervene and ensure that his case is immediately reviewed and the death sentence commuted, ending the injustice that has tarnished Rocky Myers' case for more than a quarter of a century.

Rocky Myers was convicted by a nearly all-white jury who sentenced him to life without the possibility of parole for the murder of his white neighbor. The trial judge overrode their decision and imposed a death sentence – a practice now outlawed in Alabama. No evidence linked him to the murder of which he was convicted, except for a VCR stolen from the victim, which he maintains he had found abandoned in the street. Key testimonies against him were tainted by inconsistencies and allegations of police pressure, with one later recanted as untrue.

Aged 11, Rocky Myers was diagnosed with an intellectual disability and reads at primary school level. His assigned lawyer for post-conviction appeals abandoned his case without notice, making him miss key deadlines for judicial appeals. The courts relied primarily on IQ tests, a standard which the US Supreme Court found to be inadequate in 2014, to reject his request for a deadline extension submitted on the grounds that he is a person with an intellectual disability. Racial and class bias also affected the proceedings against him.

Rocky Myers faced execution in 2004 and 2012. As the Governor of Alabama, you can use the power of clemency to alleviate the flaws in the case against him that the criminal justice system could not address and even heightened. I urge you to halt all executions in the state and conduct a review of the case of Rocky Myers as well as of others on death row including those affected by similar concerns, with a view to commuting their death sentences.

Yours sincerely,