



Amnesty International

Group 524
April 2022



No April Meeting Releases and Successes!! Interfaith Month of Action Ukraine

Welcome

Some say April is the cruelest month and the news can be bleak, but we do have some positive results and actions to take to help others at this time.

Prisoner Releases and Governmental Successes

We have news of the release of **THREE** prisoners including Raif Badawi, whom we have worked on for many years. We have also advocated for the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act which has been accomplished. See the details on how our efforts do **make a difference** on pages 2 and 3.

April Interfaith Month of Action

Amnesty has designated April 1-30 as an Interfaith Month of Actions for Refugee Rights. Activities include outreach efforts to religious communities. Details are on page 4 and this month's letter action comes from this effort and is on page 5.

Amnesty's Ukraine Crisis Campaign

Amnesty has set up a page on their website to coordinate actions and information concerning Ukraine. <https://www.amnestyusa.org/UkraineCrisis/> A statement concerning the shutdown of Amnesty's Moscow office is on page 6.

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 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).





GOOD NEWS: Raif Badawi is free!

Saudi Arabian blogger Raif Badawi has finally been released from prison after serving a 10 year prison sentence. Badawi was detained in June 2012 and sentenced in 2014 to 10 years in prison, followed by a 10-year travel ban and a 1 million Saudi Arabian riyal (about USD 267,000) fine for creating an online forum for public debate, which the government accused him of insulting Islam. He was also sentenced to a cruel and inhuman punishment of 1,000 lashes, the first 50 of which were meted out in a public square in Jeddah on January 9, 2015.



This is an IAR (*Individual At Risk*) case that AIUSA worked on very heavily for many years. **Thank you to all those who took action on his case over the years.** Amnesty will continue to push to make sure that Raif's travel ban is removed and that he can be reunited with his wife and kids in Canada.

Our Group had been writing in support of him since the W4R event in 2014!

GOOD NEWS: Bernardo Caal Xol is free!

On March 24, 2022, Bernardo Caal Xol was released from the penitentiary centre in Cobán after more than four years of imprisonment. The defender's lawyers reported that a judge had ordered his release for good behavior.

Bernardo Caal Xol, a 50-year-old indigenous teacher, trade unionist and defender of the rights of the Indigenous Maya Q'eqchi' people and of land, territorial and environmental rights, had been wrongfully imprisoned since 30 January 2018 for defending the rights of the Maya Q'eqchi' communities affected by the construction of a hydroelectric project on the sacred Cahabón river, in the department of Alta Verapaz, northern Guatemala. Despite the lack of factual evidence to support the charges, on 9 November 2018, the court in



Cobán sentenced him to 7 years and 4 months in prison for the crimes of aggravated robbery and aggravated illegal detention.

On July 16, 2020, Amnesty International named Bernardo Caal a prisoner of conscience. The Guatemalan human rights defender was one of the individuals included in Amnesty International's annual and global Write for Rights campaign in 2021, during which people around the world took around half a million actions calling for Bernardo Caal's release.

We wrote in support of Bernado at last year's W4R event.



Guantanamo Prisoner Sufyian Barhoumi Released

After 20 years of imprisonment at Guantanamo without charge or trial, [Sufyian Barhoumi was sent home to Algeria](#) to be reunited with his family. This is a really important step, as we are finally seeing detainees sent home after years of inaction. (President Trump stopped all transfers.)

There are now 37 detainees left at Guantanamo, 18 of whom have been cleared for release. We need to keep fighting to send them home and to close Guantanamo and end indefinite detention once and for all! This is especially important to accomplish now, because a future Congress or administration would likely stop transfers out and make it once again impossible to close Guantanamo.



Violence Against Women Act Reauthorization

On March 17, 2022 President Biden signed the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act of **which we assisted in campaigning for**. The 2022 reauthorization of VAWA strengthens this landmark law, including by:

- Expanding special criminal jurisdiction of Tribal courts to cover non-Native perpetrators of sexual assault, child abuse, stalking, sex trafficking, and assaults on tribal law enforcement officers on tribal lands.
- Increasing services and support for survivors from underserved and marginalized communities — including for LGBTQ+ survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking; and increasing support for culturally specific services and services in rural communities.
- Establishing a federal civil cause of action for individuals whose intimate visual images are disclosed without their consent.
- Improving prevention and response to sexual violence, including through increased support for the Rape Prevention and Education Program and Sexual Assault Services Program
- Updating the SMART Prevention Program and the CHOOSE Youth Program to reduce dating violence, help children who have been exposed to domestic violence, and engage men in preventing violence.
- Enacting the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) Denial Notification Act to help state law enforcement investigate and prosecute cases against individuals legally prohibited from purchasing firearms who try to do so.



INTERFAITH MONTH OF ACTION For Refugee Rights, April 1-30

Amnesty International USA's (AIUSA's) Faith in Action network is open to all faiths and engages faith-based groups across the country in grassroots activism for human rights. Spring is a time when many faith communities come together for celebrations of hope and reflection, and to demonstrate their faith in action.

This April, AIUSA is hosting an Interfaith Month of Action in support of refugee and migrant rights. Faith-based groups are invited to take actions to defund hate in the US immigration system, free individuals from ICE detention, ensure the safety of refugees seeking asylum in the US, and fight for refugee and migrant rights globally. This is an opportunity to make an impact on a critical human rights issue. When we take action together, our voices are amplified!



As part of AIUSA's priority in defending refugee and migrant rights, we have worked hard with activists like you to end the US policy of detaining migrant families, and we now have our sights set on **defunding and shrinking the hate-fueled immigration detention and deportation machine** as a whole.

Every day, tens of thousands of immigrants and asylum-seekers are locked up by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) while they fight for their right to stay here. Spending days, weeks, months or even years behind bars, they don't have easy access to attorneys and are held in **conditions that are oftentimes abusive and sometimes even deadly**. Negligent medical care and Covid-19 have only heightened the dangers of detention.

US leaders have expressed commitments to advance human rights and racial justice, but many of those in detention are Black, Indigenous, and people of color, **a reflection and reinforcement of systemic racism and racial inequity**. Meanwhile, some of the private prison companies who run ICE detention facilities have seen profits soar into the billions of dollars.

Everyone should be treated with dignity, fairness and respect, no matter their immigration status, and we must rebuild the US immigration system with humanity and compassion. People in detention have ties to family, faith, and other communities in the US who could house and guide them through the immigration system if needed.

This month's letter action is to President Biden and his administration over the unequal treatment of refugees and migrants depending on where they originated.

Group 524
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President Joseph Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

I'm writing with Amnesty International and as a supporter of human rights to first thank you for your recent decision to provide \$1 billion in humanitarian assistance to Ukraine – and for your commitment to welcome 100,000 Ukrainian refugees. As the Russian government's brutal onslaught enters its second month, these measures will save lives.

As you design specific plans to ensure the maximum number of refugees are afforded safety and provided permanent legal status, I implore you not to ignore the discrimination and violence suffered by Black and Brown refugees fleeing Ukraine who have faced ill-treatment and are being blocked from accessing safety. I encourage your response to explicitly include third country nationals in Ukraine – including people from Africa, the Middle East, South Asia and beyond.

While I applaud your swift action to protect Ukrainians, your announcement stands in stark contrast to how you've responded to refugees and asylum-seekers from majority Black and Brown countries.

Time and time again, you have failed to act as quickly to protect those at-risk from countries including Cameroon, Ethiopia, and Haiti. Refugees from these countries are still stuck in limbo, waiting in camps for years despite some already being approved for resettlement in the U.S.; over one million people seeking protection have been expelled at the Southern border; and tens of thousands more remain unjustly locked up in U.S. immigration detention or live in constant fear of deportation without any safety net.

This sharp difference in treatment lays bare the racism and double standards of U.S. leadership. All people fleeing conflict should be treated with the same aid and compassion, no matter what country they're from, or what demographic they are.

Please, as you continue to take steps to protect Ukrainians – you must ensure protections for all others fleeing conflict and violence. All people should be afforded the same opportunity for refuge in the U.S.

Thank you,

Copy to:

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528



AUTHORITIES CLOSE DOWN AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S MOSCOW OFFICE

April 8, 2022

Today, the Russian authorities have closed down representative offices of Amnesty International and other international NGOs. Reacting to the news, Agnès Callamard, Secretary General of Amnesty International, said:

“Amnesty’s closing down in Russia is only the latest in a long list of organizations that have been punished for defending human rights and speaking the truth to the Russian authorities. In a country where scores of activists and dissidents have been imprisoned, killed or exiled, where independent media has been smeared, blocked or forced to self-censor, and where civil society organizations have been outlawed or liquidated, you must be doing something right if the Kremlin tries to shut you up.

“The authorities are deeply mistaken if they believe that by closing down our office in Moscow they will stop our work documenting and exposing human rights violations. We continue undeterred to work to ensure that people in Russia are able to enjoy their human rights without discrimination. We will redouble our efforts to expose Russia’s egregious human rights violations both at home and abroad.

“We will never stop fighting for the release of prisoners of conscience unjustly detained for standing up for human rights. We will continue to defend independent journalism’s ability to report actual facts, free of the Russian government’s intervention. We will continue to work relentlessly to ensure that all those who are responsible for committing grave human rights violations, whether in Russia, Ukraine or Syria, face justice. Put simply, we will never give up.”

Background

On April 8, the Russian Ministry of Justice delisted Amnesty International’s Moscow Office from the register of the representative offices of the international organizations and foreign NGOs, effectively closing it down alongside with offices of Human Rights Watch, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, Friedrich Ebert Foundation and other organizations. This decision has been taken “in connection with the discovered violations of the Russian legislation.”

On March 11, Russia’s media regulator also blocked access to Amnesty International’s Russian-language website.

