



Amnesty International

Group 524

September 2023



Gun Violence Panel Event

Banned Books Week 2023

Welcome

I hope everyone is well. At our meeting on September 19, this month's focus is the Group 39 event and the annual Banned Books Week action.

Group 39 Gun Violence Panel Discussion Event

Group 39 is hosting a gun violence panel discussion on September 27. The details are on page 2.

Banned Books Week 2023

Each year Amnesty partners with others to focus on those who have been persecuted, imprisoned or censored due to exercising their human right of freedom of expression. There are 6 cases featured in the action and we will be working on all of them at the meeting. The USA action sample letter is on page 9. Additional information and sample letters are available at <https://www.amnestyusa.org/campaigns/banned-books/bbw2023/>

Amnesty International Group 524

Meeting Schedule: Third Tuesday of the month, at 6:00 p.m.

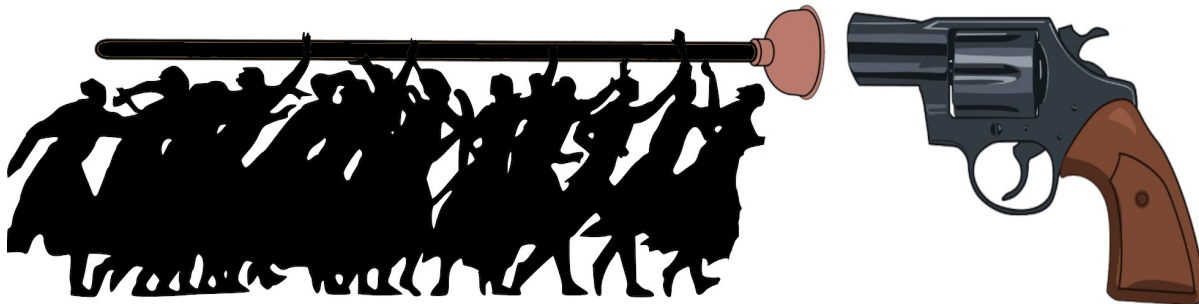
Meeting Location: The Commons Residence Providence Heights
9000 Babcock Blvd.



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).



Moving Forward to End Gun Violence



A panel discussion with local elected and community leaders

Dan Frankel, State Representative
Erika Strassberger, Pittsburgh City Council
Rev. Eileen Smith, South Pittsburgh Coalition for Peace
Richard Garland, Violence Prevention Program
Moderation and Introduction: **Josh Fleitman**, CeaseFirePA

**Wednesday,
September 27, 2023,
7:00pm**

**Calvary Episcopal
Church,
315 Shady Ave,
Pittsburgh, PA 15206**



Contact:
amnesty39@gmail.com



Ahmetjan Juma, Abdukadir Jalalidin & Rahile Dawut

Teacher, Professor, Ethnographer | China

Sent to internment camps or prisons in light of professional work and publications

Perhaps 1 million or more predominantly Muslim men and women have been detained in Xinjiang, China since 2017. Some have disappeared, their whereabouts unknown; others are known to have been sentenced to or detained in internment camps. Many are being held because of their academic publications, reporting, or literary writings.



As Amnesty International documented in its report "Like We Were Enemies in a War", huge numbers of men and women from predominantly Muslim ethnic groups have been arbitrarily detained and sent to internment camps or prison in Xinjiang, China.

This is part of a larger campaign of subjugation and forced assimilation of ethnic minorities in Xinjiang. Lawful activities many of us take for granted can be considered a reason for detention: traveling or living or studying abroad; number of children; religion; having WhatsApp on their phone; and making calls to friends and relatives abroad. Possessing books or articles about Islam or Uyghur culture may be classified as "extremist" activity, and intellectuals, academics and other writers have been detained for exercising their right to freedom of expression. Ahmetjan Juma, Abdukadir Jalalidin, and Rahile Dawut were all active in writing about Uyghur culture, translation or publication, which were likely factors in their detentions.



YAHAYA SHARIF-AMINU

Singer| Nigerian

on death row for song circulated on Whatsapp

Yahaya Sharif-Aminu, age 25, is a singer detained in Kano prison, Kano State, in northern Nigeria. He is at risk of imminent execution after an Upper Shari'a Court sentenced him to death by hanging for circulating a song via WhatsApp considered blasphemous.

On August 27, 2020, the Kano State government published on its official website a statement that the governor would not hesitate to sign the warrant for Yahaya Sharif-Aminu's execution.

Three years later, Yahaya remains in jail without bail while awaiting a retrial, where he still faces a potential death penalty.



There are serious concerns about the fairness of Yahaya Sharif-Aminu's first trial and the framing of the charges against him. Before and during the trial, he was not permitted legal representation. He was only granted access to legal advice to prepare an appeal after human rights lawyers and activists pressured the court to respect his right to legal representation. Shari'a law, which is practiced in many states in northern Nigeria, provides for the death penalty for blasphemy. No one should ever be sentenced to death or executed.

Amnesty International calls for the immediate and unconditional release of Yahaya Sharif- Aminu.



Michelle Recinos

Author| El Salvador

Her book was removed from an international book fair

Author Michelle Recinos, age 24, whose short story collection *Sustancia del hígado* [“Liver broth”], which dramatizes the abusive ‘state of exception’ maintained by Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele, was scheduled for presentation at the XX Guatemalan International Book Fair (July 2023). However, the Salvadoran government issued an ultimatum to the Book Fair organizers: either remove the book from the program or El Salvador would cancel its participation in the gathering.

In El Salvador, a state of exception declared in 2022 by President Nayib Bukele is causing a human rights crisis. This measure, allegedly enacted to counter gang violence, has suspended basic rights, leading to over 60,000 people being unjustly detained without due process. Harassment and stigmatization have become the norm for human rights defenders and journalists who dare to speak out against these injustices. The right to free speech and press is also seriously under threat, with journalists leaving the country or self-censoring their voices.

Amnesty International calls for the end of this state of exception and the creation of human rights-focused policies. Although the government claims to combat gang violence, the widespread incarceration leaves the structural causes unaddressed





Floraine Irangabiye

Journalist | Burundi

Sentenced to 10 Years for Expressing Critical Views on a Radio Program

Journalist Floriane Irangabiye, mother of 2 young children, was arbitrarily detained and convicted on January 2, 2023 for “undermining the integrity of the national territory.” She was sentenced to 10 years in prison and a one million Burundian francs fine by the High Court of Mukaza in Bujumbura. Her lawyers unsuccessfully appealed this decision.

During the trial, the prosecution presented comments made during the broadcasting of a show, in August 2022, on Radio Igicaniro, a Burundian online media outlet, where she criticized the government of Burundi. In an audio recording of the show retrieved by the prosecutor, she purportedly said: “the population is resigned to the evils of the leaders of Burundi, citizens do not express themselves for fear of being killed, we call on Burundians to brave the fear.” The prosecution also presented as evidence photos of her posing with President Paul Kagame of Rwanda and former President Pierre Buyoya at public events. She was also accused of participating in meetings held by Burundian youths in exile in Rwanda.

Floriane Irangabiye’s unfair prosecution is motivated by continuous efforts by Burundian authorities to clamp down on peaceful dissent, despite multiple promises by President Evariste Ndayishimiye to improve the country's human rights situation.





TOOMAJ SALEHI

Hip-Hop Musician | Iran

Sentenced to 6 Years in Prison and ban on his artistic activities in light of his music and posts on social media

Well-known Iranian rapper and hip-hop artist Toomaj Salehi, age 32, has been in detention since late October 2022 in connection with critical music and social media posts denouncing the unjust practices of the Iranian government and calling for freedom and human rights. He was a very vocal supporter of the protests that broke out in Iran after the death in custody of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in September 2022, and through his music he has called for freedom and an end to repression.

He reportedly has been tortured, kept in prolonged solitary confinement, and according to his Twitter account, he was severely beaten despite fears that he could lose his eyesight. He was originally charged with “enmity against God” and “corruption on earth”, which could have carried the death penalty.

In July 2023 he was convicted of “corruption on earth” and sentenced to six years, three months in prison, and a ban on his music and artistic activities for an additional two years.

Toomaj Salehi has used his music and videos to call for an end to human rights violations in Iran. He gained notoriety for his videos and lyrics that rail against corruption, widespread poverty, state executions, and the killing of protesters in Iran. His songs also point to a widening gap between ordinary Iranians and the country’s leadership, accusing authorities of “suffocating” the people without regard for their well-being. Toomaj Salehi has filmed himself participating in the most recent wave of protests that erupted in September 2022 and has supported demonstrators.

He was previously targeted for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression in September 2021 when he was arrested in Esfahan and accused of “propaganda against the system” and “insulting the leadership”, but was subsequently released on bail.





UNITE AGAINST BOOK BANS

United States of America

Stop government censorship and erosion of freedom of expression

Widespread efforts throughout the U.S. that permit state and municipal-sponsored censorship through book bans on content related to race, gender, sexuality, and LGBTQIA+ subject matter restrict the right to freedom of expression. They also deny equal access to all, jeopardizing community members' right to education and right to health, among other rights.

Removing and banning books from public libraries is a slippery slope to government censorship and erodes the U.S. government's obligation to respect, protect and fulfill the right to freedom of expression.

States must respect, protect and fulfill the right to free expression by not interfering with it as well as take active steps to ensure people can enjoy this right. The right to freedom of expression is violated whenever a government limits the freedom of individuals to hold opinions or to seek, receive, or impart information.

Under human rights law, governments have obligations to set a framework for conduct that enables people's enjoyment of their rights. All persons who have been vested with state authority for certain tasks such as public administration are responsible for supporting the realization of these rights for all people.

Amnesty International is concerned about the targeting of librarians and teachers in light of the publications they use to support their professional responsibilities, including elevated incidents of threats & harassment as well as police reports filed against library staff regarding books available for circulation. These reports mirror serious challenges to freedom of expression found in authoritarian regimes elsewhere in the world.

According to data from the Office for Intellectual Freedom tracked in 2022, there were 41 reported incidents of threats and or harassment, and 25 police reports filed against library staff regarding books available for circulation.





YOUR SCHOOL BOARD
YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT
LOCAL STATE REPRESENTATIVE TOWN/CITY MAYOR

Dear (insert proper title),

I am writing in response to the alarming book bans that have recently been enacted in public libraries and schools across the United States. These bans represent a grave threat to the freedom to read and to learn, much to the detriment of students in our community.

Widespread efforts throughout the U.S. that permit state and municipal-sponsored censorship through book bans on content related to race, gender, sexuality, and LGBTQIA+ subject matter restrict the right to freedom of expression. They also deny equal access to all, jeopardizing community members' right to education and right to health, among other rights.

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Under human rights law, governments have obligations to set a framework for conduct that enables people's enjoyment of their rights. All persons who have been vested with state authority for certain tasks such as public administration are responsible for supporting the realization of these rights for all people.

We urge you to resist these dangerous bans, and instead pledge your support for additional resources to enrich the quality and variety of educational materials in our libraries and classes.

Further, Amnesty International is concerned about the targeting of librarians and teachers in light of the publications they use to support their professional responsibilities, including elevated incidents of threats & harassment as well as police reports filed against library staff regarding books available for circulation. These reports mirror serious challenges to freedom of expression found in authoritarian regimes elsewhere in the world.

Sincerely yours,