



# Amnesty International

Group 524  
May 2024



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## IAR Case News/Prisoner Releases Salehi Death Sentence US Asylum Ban

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### Welcome

Our focus this month is a discussion of taking on a IAR case, an Iranian death sentence and the US asylum ban. We hope to see you at the meeting May 21 at 6pm.

### Individual At Risk Case

We have received documentation on six Individual At Risk case options from Amnesty. We will hold a discussion to see if we would like to take on one of them as a Group. See pages 2 and 3.

### Prisoner Releases

We have good news concerning the release of two prisoners, Mohamed Baker and Munther Amira that we have written in support of. See page 4.

### Toomaj Salehi Death Sentence

The subject of recent actions, Iranian artist Toomaj Salehi has just been given a death sentence. See page 5.

### End US Asylum Ban

It's been exactly a year since President Biden implemented his asylum ban, a repackaged version of the inhumane U.S. border policies of President Trump. Details are on Page 5 and an action letter on page 6.

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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](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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## Individual At Risk Case Options

At our Group's request we have received options for taking on an Individual At Risk long term case. There is a needed focus on those cases in Eastern Asia and the Pacific Islands.

Our 6 cases are all in China:

### A) **Yu Wensheng and his wife Xu Yan**, Lawyer, China, Arbitrary Detention

Yu Wensheng is a lawyer who defended other lawyers targeted in the large-scale crackdown against Chinese human rights defenders in 2015. He has also represented religious practitioners and individuals who faced prosecution simply for peacefully exercising their rights. Xu Yan, Yu's wife, has faced continual surveillance and harassment by the authorities since she started advocating for her husband. She has been summoned, detained and banned from travelling.

### B) **Zhang Zhan**, Citizen Journalist and Lawyer, China, Torture and other Ill-Treatment

Zhang Zhan is a citizen journalist and former lawyer active in speaking out about politics and human rights issues in China. In February 2020, Zhang Zhan travelled to Wuhan, which was then the centre of the COVID-19 outbreak in China. She used online platforms (including WeChat, Twitter and YouTube) to report on the detention of other independent reporters as well as the harassment of victims' families. Zhang Zhan went missing on 14 May in Wuhan and was subsequently revealed to have been detained by police in Shanghai, more than 640 km away. Pudong New District People's Court sentenced Zhang Zhan to four years in prison on the charge of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" on 28 December 2020. According to her lawyer, she decided not to appeal. Zhang Zhan is a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising her right to freedom of expression.

### C) **Wang Quanzhang, Jiang Tianyong and the lawyers' crackdown**, Human Rights lawyers, China, Torture and other Ill-Treatment, Detention

Jiang Tianyong and Wang Quanzhang are two human rights lawyers persecuted in an unprecedented, ongoing government crackdown targeting lawyers and activists in China since July 2015. They are two of nearly 250 lawyers and activists targeted and persecuted in this large-scale and on-going crackdown. Their families have also been facing constant harassment and surveillance since the crackdown began.

### D) **Ilham Tohti**, Economics Professor, China, Torture and other Ill-Treatment

Ilham Tohti, an economics professor at Central University for Nationalities (Minzu University) in Beijing, the founder of "Uighur Online" website, and a well-known critic of China's ethnic and religious policies in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR), was sentenced to life imprisonment on 23 September 2014. He was first taken away from his home in Beijing on 15 January, and his wife received the arrest warrant on 25 February telling her that he was being charged with "separatism", a charge that has often been used against Uighurs who speak out against human rights violations. He is a prisoner of conscience, who was held incommunicado for over five months, and according to his lawyers he was denied food for 10 days and has had his feet shackled in detention.



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**E) 126 Individuals missing in Xinjiang, Muslim ethnic minorities, China, Arbitrary Detention, Torture and other Ill-Treatment**

126 Uyghurs, Kazakhs and individuals from other predominantly Muslim ethnic minorities have been allegedly interned in camps or sentenced under vague and overly broad legal provisions without a fair trial and sent to prison in China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang). They have been included in the ongoing Free Xinjiang Detainees campaign (<https://xinjiang.amnesty.org/#cases>). These cases are representative of the perhaps 1 million or more men, women and children estimated to have been detained in the region since 2017. The Chinese government has knowingly and purposefully targeted mostly Uyghurs, Kazakhs and those from other predominantly Muslim ethnic minority groups in Xinjiang, including by conducting a campaign of mass detention and torture and other ill-treatment. The Chinese authorities must immediately release all people arbitrarily detained in internment camps and in prisons in Xinjiang. Pending their release, the Chinese authorities must disclose their whereabouts, allow them access to their family and a lawyer of their choice, and ensure they are not subjected to torture and other ill-treatment.

**F) Gao Zhisheng, Activist, China, Prisoner of Conscience, Torture and other Ill-Treatment**

Former Prisoner of Conscience Gao Zhisheng has been missing from his home in Yulin City, Shaanxi, northwest China, since 13 August 2017. His exact location and current condition remain unclear. Gao has been kept under close surveillance by Yulin authorities since his release from prison on 8 August 2014. Given his previous treatment in detention, and without access to a lawyer, he is at grave risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

*At our meeting we will discuss each case and rank them in order of preference and that will be sent back to the Amnesty coordinator who will determine what case we we will be assigned.*



## Mohamed Baker is Free!

*We wrote in support of his case during the Write for rights 2021 action.*

Mohamed Baker, an Egyptian human rights lawyer and head of the Adalah Center for Rights and Freedoms, was detained in September 2019 for defending people jailed unjustly. Authorities in Egypt never put him on trial. Instead, they made false, terrorism-related accusations against him and imprisoned him solely for his human rights work. After spending almost four years in arbitrary detention, Mohamed Baker is now free following a presidential pardon. Amnesty International campaigned extensively on Mohamed’s case and we want to thank the over 311,000 Amnesty members and supporters who took action on his behalf during Write for Rights 2021.



## GOOD NEWS Palestinian Human Rights Activist Released: Munther Amira



Munther Amira, a Palestinian human rights defender and social worker, was arbitrarily detained by Israeli forces without charges or trial over alleged Facebook posts.

Here’s what Munther shared with our team after his release: “When I was told by my lawyer in Ofer prison that Amnesty International was planning to campaign on my case, it gave me so much strength — I felt that I was not alone, that I haven’t been forgotten.”



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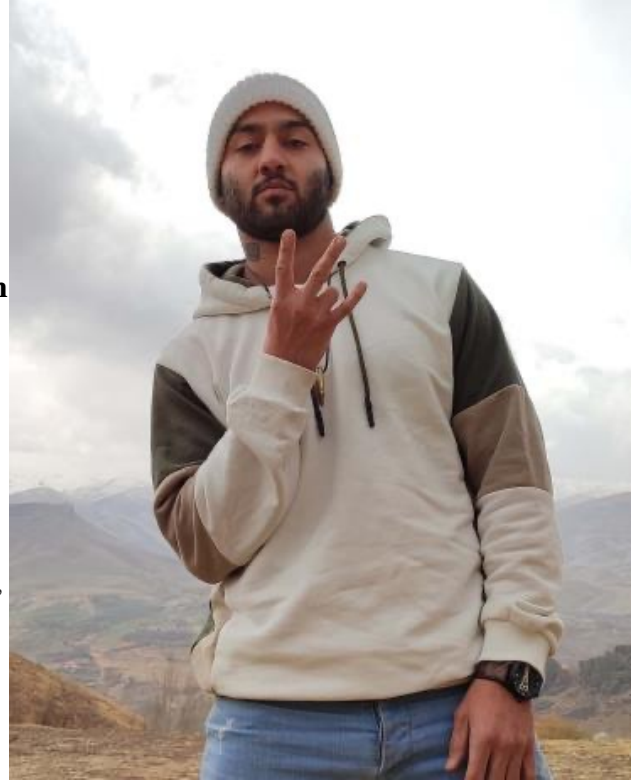
## HELP STOP TOOMAJ'S EXECUTION

Well-known Iranian rapper and hip-hop artist Toomaj Salehi has been in detention for over a year in connection with his music and posts on social media denouncing the unjust practices of the Iranian government.

**In horrific news, he has just been sentenced to death by a court in Iran.**

Salehi was a very vocal supporter of the protests that broke out in Iran after the death in custody of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini last year. Through his music he has called for freedom and an end to repression.

He has been reportedly tortured and kept in prolonged solitary confinement. According to his Twitter account, he was severely beaten despite fears that he could lose his eyesight.



*We will have a petition to sign at the meeting.*



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## TELL BIDEN: END THE ASYLUM BAN

It's been exactly a year since President Biden implemented his asylum ban, a repackaged version of the inhumane U.S. border policies of President Trump.

A whole year of policies that make seeking asylum nearly impossible.

Now, President Biden is talking about taking further executive action to "shut down the border" altogether.

Let's get one thing straight: Seeking safety is legal — and it's a human right. We must hold our elected leaders accountable when they enact policies that violate this human right.



Preventing people from seeking safety is unconscionable. **If you agree, raise your voice for children and families — urge President Biden to end the asylum ban NOW!**

It's hard to believe but the only way to seek asylum is to obtain an appointment through the cellphone application "CBP One." But:

Many people and families don't have a smartphone;

The mobile app is glitchy and plagued by errors;

Appointments are extremely limited and book up within minutes;

People wait MONTHS in danger in Mexico trying to secure a spot.

Our brand new research and reporting(1) confirms that forcing people to use this app violates the human right to seek safety and goes against international law. It's a way to severely limit the number of people who are even able to apply for asylum in the U.S.

As you read this, families are suffering.

**We must fight harder to restore full access to asylum.**  
**Send your letter to President Biden: end the cruel asylum ban!**

Group 524  
May 2024



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

Dear President Biden,

I am disappointed to learn that as the Asylum Ban has now been in place for one year, you're now considering further executive action to "shut down the border." The asylum ban is cruel and unconstitutional because it denies asylum seekers - including families and babies - their human right to seek safety.

Amnesty International has new research that finds that the Circumvention of Lawful Pathways Final Rule, or the Asylum Ban, is just the newest iteration of border policies implemented by the US government which drastically limit access to asylum in violation of international human rights and refugee law. Asylum seekers traveling through Mexico and using the CBP One app to schedule an appointment to seek safety are extorted, kidnapped, and experience discrimination and sexual and gender-based violence. Asylum seekers who already have CBP One appointments seem to have even worse experiences because bad actors take advantage of the fact that they are desperate to make it to their appointment.

This mandatory use of the CBP One application violates the human right to seek safety and mirrors the disastrous policies of prior Administrations that force people to wait in danger in Mexico in order to seek asylum.

President Biden, you came into office promising to rebuild an immigration system that would center human rights and racial justice. With the continuation of the Asylum Ban and new threats to "shut down the border," you are going back on your promises.

Amid a global refugee crisis, your administration is embracing racist, xenophobic, and deadly policies that aim to make the exercise of seeking asylum so painful that individuals and families just give up.

I write alongside thousands of other Amnesty International supporters to urge you to reverse course and uphold human rights at the border, rather than advancing policies of hate and exclusion. You must immediately end the asylum ban, and instead invest in a robust welcoming system that allows asylum seekers to seek asylum at the border and pursue their asylum claims outside of detention while supported by community based organizations.

This was your commitment, and we are holding you accountable.

Sincerely,