

# Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XVIII Number 4, April 2010

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Tuesday, April 20, 7:30 PM.** Kalaya'an Mendoza, AIUSA Field Organizer, gives talk at Caltech, Beckman Institute Auditorium. This event is sponsored by the Caltech Y Social Activism Speaker Series and co-sponsored by AI Group 22. Topic: "Activism v 2.0: Technology and Grassroots Organizing".

**Thursday, April 22, 7:30 PM.** Monthly Meeting. Caltech Y is located off San Pasqual between Hill and Holliston, south side. You will see two curving walls forming a gate to a path--our building is just beyond. Help us plan future actions on Sudan, the 'War on Terror', death penalty and more.

**Tuesday, May 11, 7:30 PM.** Letter writing meeting at Caltech Athenaeum, corner of Hill and California in Pasadena. This informal gathering is a great way for newcomers to get acquainted with Amnesty!

**Sunday, May 16, 6:30 PM.** Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion group. This month we read "50 Miles from Tomorrow: A Memoir of Alaska and the Real People" by William Iggiagruh Hensley.

## COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi everyone

It is a beautiful spring day as I look out the window from our office room onto the thicket of trees forming a barrier between our place and the apartments next door.

It's spring and time to be outdoors. Join us for the annual City of Pasadena Greening the Earth Day and Armory Family Arts Festival Saturday April 24 from 10am to 4pm as we encourage adults (and kids!) to take action for environmental causes and activists. We met some interesting folks last year while we were doing our stint at the table, including a group of young people fresh from a "quince" (quinceañera)!

Spring in New Orleans – I can just imagine how beautiful it is. I have never been there, but our intrepid globe-trekkers Joyce and Lucas attended the AI Annual General Meeting (AGM) in N'leans a few weeks ago. Read all about it in this newsletter!

Con cariño,  
Kathy

## RIGHTS READERS

Human Rights Book Discussion Group

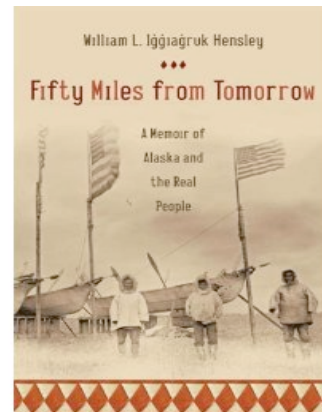
Keep up with Rights Readers at  
<http://rightsreaders.blogspot.com>

Next Rights Readers meeting:

**Sunday, May 16, 6:30 PM**

**Vroman's Bookstore**

**695 E. Colorado Boulevard  
In Pasadena**



**50 Miles from Tomorrow**  
**A Memoir of Alaska and the Real People**  
by William Iggiagruh Hensley

## Author Biography



William L. Iggiagruh Hensley was a founder of the Northwest Alaska Native Association and spent twenty years working for its successor, the Iñuit-owned NANA Regional Corporation. He also helped establish the Alaska Federation of Natives in 1966 and has served as its director, executive director, president, and co chair. He spent ten years in the Alaska state legislature as a representative and senator, and recently retired from his position in Washington, D.C., as manager of federal government relations for Alyeska Pipeline Service Company.

Hensley and his wife, Abigale, live in Anchorage, where—now an Iñupiat elder—he is the chair of the First Alaskans Institute.

**BOOK REVIEW**  
**From the Washington Post**  
**FIFTY MILES FROM TOMORROW**  
**A Memoir of Alaska and the Real People**

**By William L. Iggiagruk Hensley**

Late in this illuminating memoir, the author recounts a transcendent moment. The time is 1977, the place is Barrow, Alaska, and the occasion is a whaling convention that has evolved into a momentous gathering of Inuit (the "real people" as they call themselves) from the United States, Canada and Greenland. As William L. Iggiagruk Hensley explains, it's the first meeting of these far-flung Inuit groups since they migrated eastward from Asia 5,000 years ago. Amazingly, given the millennia of separation, they find the several versions of Inupiaq, their common language, to be mutually intelligible. Powered by linguistic euphoria, they talk and dance and, above all, sing. "We celebrated as long as our bodies didn't fail us," Hensley writes, "and slept only long enough to resume the orgy of Inupiaq communication that had so long eluded us."

Hensley's life story epitomizes the upheavals his people have endured. He was born above the Arctic Circle, alongside Kotzebue Sound, Alaska, in 1941, to a Lithuanian fur trader and an Inuit mother. His father deserted them, and his mother was a mess. When a cousin discovered the boy and his sister (from a different, unknown father) living in squalor in Nome, he took them back to Kotzebue, apparently with their mother's consent. There they grew up in straitened circumstances: tiny house, not enough beds, no indoor plumbing, no electricity.

"I think of those early years of my life as the twilight of the Stone Age," Hensley writes, but he was now among villagers who knew how to get the most from the land and sea. High among the qualities that sustained them was their awareness of having inherited a proven way of life, in which older female relatives commonly raised kids who turned out just fine despite being fatherless. It was a vigorous, outdoorsy existence, though the absence of dentists and the Inuit habit of using their teeth as tools (to cut animal skins, for example) wreaked havoc inside everyone's mouth.

Most of the defeats inflicted on the children had nothing to do with absent fathers or the unforgiving natural environment. It was their "betters" who relentlessly humiliated and

punished them: the Christian missionaries, who condemned their traditional religion and frowned on dancing; the teachers at the Bureau of Indian Affairs school, who forbade them to speak Inupiaq and saw to it that, in Hensley's words, "schoolwork . . . excluded any mention of the ancient music, art, dance, and history of their own people."

Hensley's deracination became more severe than most: At age 15, encouraged and subsidized by a local minister, the boy was sent off to Tennessee, where he attended high school at a Baptist academy. Like most teenagers, however, he was eager to conform, and his intelligence and football skills helped him fit in. He went on to George Washington University. Being in the capital awakened an interest in politics (he attended the 1963 March on Washington and listened to Martin Luther King Jr. deliver his "I Have a Dream" speech); after graduating in 1966, Hensley returned to Alaska a budding activist.

He worked on various phases of the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, which conveyed 40 million acres of federal land in Alaska to its natives, to be managed by native-run corporations set up for that purpose (as a young lawyer at the Interior Department, this reviewer played a very small part in getting the law passed). In 1974, Hensley ran unsuccessfully for the U.S. House (he lost to Don Young, who, more than three decades later, is still Alaska's congressman).

But as Hensley tells it, the signal event of his life was an "epiphany" in Nome, a town where the wreckage of native Alaskans' lives was starkly visible. Earlier, his greatest fear had been that his people would lose their land; in Nome, he became saddened by the possible loss of their identity. In trying so hard to assimilate, he decided, "we were digging our own cultural grave."

Hensley followed through on this insight by helping to develop a camp at which young Inuit can learn their folkways. This is an admirable initiative, but Hensley says little about what success, if any, it and related programs have had. Are young Inuit growing up able to speak both Inupiaq and English these days? Have hunting skills been passed on? Has the incidence of chronic alcoholism declined?

Even without the answers to such questions, however, "Fifty Miles from Tomorrow" is an entertaining and affecting portrait of a man and his extraordinary milieu.

## AGM 2010 ALL RIGHTS FOR ALL PEOPLE!

By Lucas Kamp and Joyce Wolf

Amnesty International USA held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) April 9-11 in New Orleans. This was the first AGM for me, and I picked a good one! It started with a bang (drum) and a blast (horns) as a traditional New Orleans brass band led us through the streets on a rally for Katrina victims. Marchers carried signs bearing the AI candle logo and messages such as "Returning Home is a Human Right" and "Healthcare is a Human Right". At City Hall, Larry Cox spoke and Bernice Johnson Reagon led us in singing "This Little Light of Mine". See the video at <http://www.twitvid.com/UTFXK>.



Before the AGM started, I took a post-Katrina tour and saw the Ninth Ward and other hard-hit areas that had been flooded to depths of 10 to 12 feet. It's quite different from tourist areas such as the French Quarter. The neighborhoods often appear superficially lush and green since there are so many vacant lots where houses had to be demolished. Nearly 5 years later, clinics and police and fire departments are still working out of trailers. It's very difficult for people to comply with all the regulations necessary to get financing in order to rebuild or repair their homes, and many have not been able to return to New Orleans. See <http://amnestyusa.org/katrina>.

The evening plenary session opened with a video tribute to Howard Zinn, author of A People's History of the United States. (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vgoWZWRAL8w>) Unfortunately my hero Gloria Steinem could not appear as scheduled, but the highlight was an inspiring speech by Bernice Johnson Reagon. She reflected on her lifelong involvement with the civil rights movement, starting with her 1961 arrest at a Georgia demonstration. She broke into song whenever that suited her better than spoken words. <http://www.bernicejohnsonreagon.com>.

AIUSA Director Larry Cox announced in the Saturday morning plenary that he was having "a hell of a time in New Orleans, in all senses". Reviewing the past year, he said that in spite of last year's 25 percent cut in resources, AIUSA still managed to set a record in the Write-a-thon and

conduct effective campaigns. The session concluded with a panel on Maternal Health.

Saturday afternoon presented a choice of workshops. Lucas went to "Counter Terror with Justice." I attended "Individuals At Risk," where a former prisoner of conscience from Myanmar (Burma) spoke of her ordeal. In 1993 she was given a 20-year sentence for the crime of "endangering public serenity". Prisoners were not allowed to read or write anything at all. She knew of Amnesty's support for her and it helped to keep her strong, along with her Buddhist faith. She was never allowed to receive any cards or letters, but after her release in 1999 she learned that the Myanmar officials had filed every letter from Amnesty about her case in a huge dossier. The workshop closed with a request for photos for the "Stand with Suu Kyi" campaign. I promised Group 22 would do that!

Later in the afternoon Lucas attended the Local Groups Caucus and then a workshop on Diversifying Our Movement facilitated by our own field organizer Kala. I went to a Program Session on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ESCR). The presenters debunked common ESCR myths: that they are unenforceable, not well defined, incompatible with capitalism. They explained the international legal framework of Covenants and Treaties, and the oversight and enforcement mechanisms implemented by UN Committees in Geneva. They handed out flash drives containing texts of the Covenants, case examples, etc. For me, the presentation did much to dispel my uneasy feeling that ESCR were somewhat fuzzy and arbitrary. I'm happy to share that flash drive with anyone interested.

Saturday evening we attended the Western Region reception. The Director for the Southern Region, also acting director for our region, appeared briefly and said he hoped we would soon get our own director. Longest Amnesty membership was claimed by a Colorado woman – 35 years! I spoke with people from San Diego, Seattle, and New Mexico. Lucas got a chance to chat with Isabel, the WRO intern who was so helpful with Group 22's presentation to the Flintridge school in Feb.

The Resolutions Plenary Sunday morning went quite smoothly. We voted on 12 resolutions, all of which had been passed by one or more Regional conferences. One interesting amendment to the Youth Strategy resolution instructed AIUSA to establish a mechanism for transitioning student

members to local groups. Maybe our group will get an influx of fresh young folks!

The closing plenary included a panel on the Death Penalty. Speakers were a death row exoneree (John Thompson), a former death row warden (Allen Ault), an advocate for ex-offenders who was himself wrongfully incarcerated for 27 years (Norris Henderson), and the brother of the Unabomber (David Kaczynski). Thompson and Henderson spoke about the difficulties and lack of support for the formerly incarcerated, especially in Louisiana. Kaczynski said families of victims and families of offenders were united in suffering, and mostly middle-class white anti-DP advocates should reach out to people of color and try to connect anti-DP with community anti-violence work. Ault gave a no-nonsense answer to the question of why much of the public is pro-DP: Fear, mostly racial, which politicians play on.

The AGM ended with readings from Howard Zinn's "The People Speak" and poetry and music by Asia Rainey and Dave Tieff. Wow! What an incredible three days of learning, enthusiasm, and inspiration, not to mention food, music, and New Orleans!

Save the date for AGM 2011: March 17-19 in San Francisco, celebrating Amnesty's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I can hardly wait to learn what Kala and our Western Region are going to come up with – maybe not a brass band, but something even better? See you there!

-Joyce

I just want to add a few words describing some of the sessions that I attended but Joyce didn't. The first (and best, to my mind) one was the Counter Terror With Justice session, which featured Tom Parker, the AIUSA Policy Director for Terrorism, Counterterrorism and Human Rights, who has served as a counterterrorist official with the British army in Iraq. He reviewed the progress of the Obama government in this area over the past year and drew a pretty bleak picture. To focus on just one of the issues, closing down Guantanamo, Obama has only released about 50 prisoners, whereas under Bush about 550 were released out of the original number of approximately 700. There is a further issue with the fate of these prisoners after release: 90% cannot find work and no money or effort is devoted to helping them. There are about 100 inmates who have been cleared but cannot find any country to take them; in all, 11 countries have accepted released

prisoners, but the US has not accepted a single one. At the end, I went up to one of the facilitators and mentioned Paula's objections to the name of the campaign, "Counter Terror with Justice". She agreed that it does not send a clear message and said that others had also objected, particularly to the implication that AI recognizes the "War on Terror" that Bush proclaimed, whereas AI objects strongly to this. She also mentioned that the name did not originate within AI, but was proposed by an outside PR firm. Also, it turns out that the name will be changed soon, as the campaign is going international, which makes the current name even less suitable.

The Local Groups caucus was quite good. The session split up into 6 smaller groups, each of which was assigned one question and had about 20 minutes to brainstorm in thinking up answers. Ours was "How do you attract, introduce and retain new members" – which is always a burning issue for us! Some interesting ideas were put forward. One very useful point that was made in this session was that the AIUSA Country Group specialists (the so-called "Co-group") are available to come to speak to Local Groups. It might be a good idea for us to invite one, at some point. I will try to obtain a list of these; there are apparently about 100 of them.

I also attended Kala's Workshop on Anti-Oppression Strategies for Activists. The first half was an interactive development of a checklist of "isms" (e.g., racism, sexism) which we encounter in our work (and in daily life) and need to form strategies against. Then, we split into 3 smaller groups and were assigned a sample case of a controversial statement about Western aid to Africa, of which we were to discuss both the contents and our personal reactions to it. I found the connection to the first part of the session a bit unclear, but the discussion was very stimulating, so it was worth while. Finally, we all moved into the main hall, formed a giant circle, and did an "interactive theater" exercise that was quite moving.

All in all, this was a very inspiring and educational AGM! I think it was the best I've yet attended (three, so far).

- Lucas

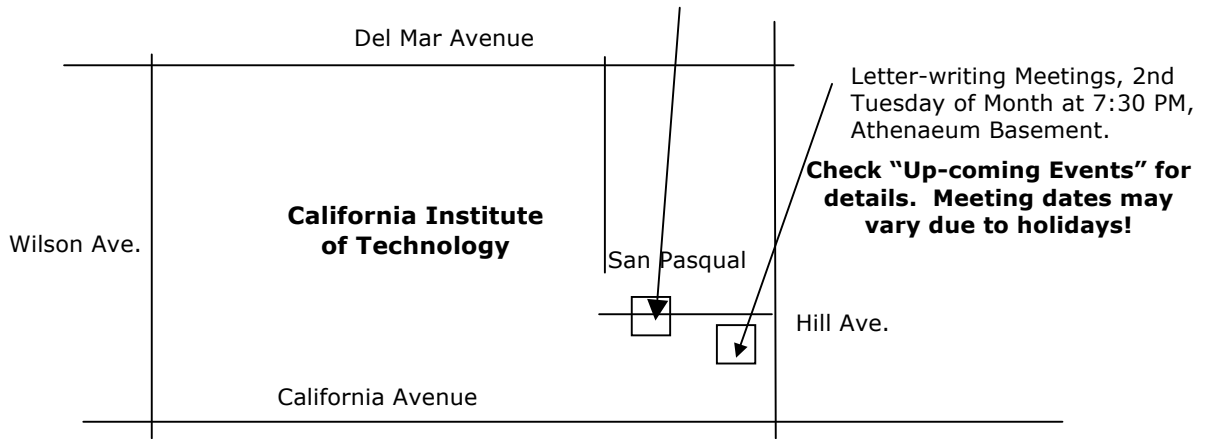
#### MONTHLY LETTER COUNT

UA's	28
Total	28
To add your letters to the total contact <a href="mailto:lwkamp@gmail.com">lwkamp@gmail.com</a> .	



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Monthly Meetings, 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of Month, 7:30 PM,  
Caltech Y Lounge.



From the 210 exit on Lake Avenue, head south, turn left on Del Mar  
From the 110 continue on Arroyo Parkway north, turn right on California  
Street parking is generally available.

Amnesty International Group 22  
The Caltech Y  
Mail Code 5-62  
Pasadena, CA 91125  
[www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22/](http://www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22/)  
<http://rightsreaders.blogspot.com>



Amnesty International's mission is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of its work to promote all human rights.