

Amnesty International Group 22 Pasadena/Caltech News

Volume XX Number 1, January 2012

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, January 26, 7:30 PM. Monthly Meeting. **Note new location – 505 S. Wilson Ave., Pasadena.** (This is just south of the corner with San Pasqual. Signs will be posted.) We will be planning our activities for the coming months. Please join us! Refreshments provided.

Tuesday, February 14, 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, February 19, 6:30 PM. Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion group. This month we read “A Person of Interest” by Susan Choi.

COORDINATOR’S CORNER

Hi everyone

We had a very successful Write-a-thon for Human Rights Day with 111 letters written. This year the Write-a-thon was held at Zephyr Café in Pasadena instead of Café Culture.

The 2012 AGM (Annual General Meeting) will be held in Denver, Colorado from March 30 to April 1). No agenda has been posted yet on AI’s website, but two major events will be held on Friday March 30: Local group training session starting in the morning and lasting most of the day, and a rally that will start around 2 pm. The rally will include at least two of the following three topics: DP Abolition, Immigrant Rights and the Occupy Movement.

On Martin Luther King weekend, Stevi, Lucas, Robert and I attended an Organizing City Los Angeles meeting downtown with other LA area AI groups and student groups and then Rob and I helped to collect signatures at the African American Museum in Exposition Park to put the Cal Safe Act on the ballot.

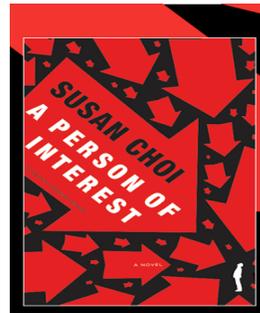
Welcome to Cheri and Matt’s new baby girl! Yvette Vigueur Pohlman arrived January 19, weighing 7 lbs 5 oz. Parents and baby are at home and “blissfully happy” according to Cheri’s facebook post. Congratulations to the proud parents from Group 22!

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, Feb. 19, 6:30 PM

Vroman’s Bookstore
695 E. Colorado Blvd.
In Pasadena

A Person of Interest
by Susan Choi

With its propulsive drive, vividly realized characters, and profound observations about soul and society, Pulitzer Prize–finalist Susan Choi’s latest novel is as thrilling as it is lyrical, and confirms her place as one of the most important novelists chronicling the American experience. Intricately plotted and psychologically acute, *A Person of Interest* exposes the fault lines of paranoia and dread that have fractured American life and asks how far one man must go to escape his regrets.

Professor Lee, an Asian-born mathematician near retirement age would seem the last person to attract the attention of FBI agents. Yet after a colleague becomes the latest victim of a serial bomber, Lee must endure the undermining power of suspicion and face the ghosts of his past.

About the Author



Susan Choi was born in South Bend Indiana and raised there and in Houston, Texas. She studied literature at Yale and writing at Cornell, and worked for several years as a fact-checker for the New Yorker.

Her first novel, *The Foreign Student*, won the Asian American Literary Award for fiction, and her second novel, *American Woman*, was a finalist for the 2004 Pulitzer Prize.

With David Remnick she co-edited the anthology *Wonderful Town: New York Stories*

from the New Yorker and her non-fiction has appeared in publications including Vogue, Tin House, Allure, O, and the New York Times and in anthologies including *Money Changes Everything* and *Brooklyn was mine*.

A recipient of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Guggenheim Foundation, she lives in Brooklyn, New York with her husband, Pete Wells, and their sons Dexter and Elliot.

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE
Gao Zhisheng
By Joyce Wolf

China at long last revealed the whereabouts of human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng, who was subjected to enforced disappearance and had been missing since April 2010. On January 1, his brother Gao Zhiyi received an official notice that Gao Zhisheng was in Shaya Prison in the remote western region of Xinjiang.

Gao Zhiyi and other relatives traveled to Shaya as quickly as they could make arrangements for the 2000-mile journey, only to be told on their arrival that Gao Zhisheng could not have visitors because he was undergoing a three-month "education period". Geng He, wife of Gao Zhisheng, who now lives in California, is anxious to see some evidence that her husband is actually alive and in Shaya Prison.

For the latest news about Gao Zhisheng, scroll down to the news search box at the bottom of the Rights Readers page <http://rightsreaders.blogspot.com/p/GaoZhisheng>.

At this time families all over China are reuniting in order to celebrate the New Year. Please write on behalf of Gao Zhisheng and urge that his family be allowed to contact him. Here is a sample letter.

HU Jintao Guojia Zhuxi
The State Council General Office
2 Fuyoujie
Xichengqu
Beijingshi 100017
People's Republic of China

Your Excellency,

I am deeply concerned about **Gao Zhisheng** (高智晟), a Beijing-based human rights lawyer

who was detained in Shaanxi Province on February 4, 2009. Since April 20, 2010, he was subjected to enforced disappearance. On December 19, 2011, he was admitted to Shaya Prison in a remote area of Xinjiang.

I urge you to ensure that Mr. Gao is not subjected to torture or other ill-treatment while he is in custody, that he receives whatever medical treatment he may require, and that he is able to contact his family and lawyers.

In China at this time families are gathering together to celebrate the New Year. I ask that you make every effort to ensure that Mr. Gao and his brother Gao Zhiyi are able to establish contact with each other.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. I wish you health and good fortune in the Year of the Dragon, and I look forward to hearing from you regarding the current status of Gao Zhisheng.

Sincerely,

Copy to:
His Excellency Ambassador Zhang Yesui
3505 International Place, NW
Washington, D.C. 20008

Compelling Death Penalty Documentary
Into the Abyss
Reviewed by Kai Mariama

Into the Abyss, a new documentary about the death penalty in America, will soon be available to Netflix subscribers after a critically acclaimed run in local theaters such as Pasadena's Laemmle. This film, by Werner Herzog, should appeal to Amnesty International members, as it's made from an anti-death penalty point of view. LA Times critic Betsey Sharkey reports about Herzog: "The director, who came of age in post-World War II Germany with its concentration camp legacy, makes it clear where he stands on the issue — the taking of another life, whether legally sanctioned or not, is wrong." Here's a review from Group 22 member Kai Mariama, who attended the movie's L.A. opening in Hollywood, and was treated to a Q & A session afterward with Herzog:

The film was really amazing. Mr. Herzog was there and he spoke after and took questions.

The film was very powerful and the cinematography was awesome. The movie was also funny in some parts because of the way Herzog interviews and the way he asks questions to his subjects in the film. Herzog mentioned that he has experienced meeting killers, all kinds of thugs, and other criminals in his life, but no one of his subjects has terrified him more than Michael Perry, the individual on death row that he interviewed. I also noticed in the film how he was very natural with his subjects, including Perry, and I thought it was amazing that he could capture that in just a 50-minute interview, the longest time prison rules would allow. Herzog explained that he does not personally believe that a state has the right to kill anyone. I found it interesting that Perry, though he knew things that only the perpetrator could know and he described in detail how he killed his victims, he was telling Herzog that he was innocent as his execution drew near. Herzog explained that oftentimes this is what death row inmates tend to do before execution. Herzog said that after reading the 800-page police report, it seems impossible for this kid (Perry was a teenager at the time of the murders he committed) not to be guilty of the crime. I really can't describe the film—you have to see it for yourself.

When I was in college, I wrote to an individual on death row as part as my internship my last year at school. At first, I did not want to do it, but I then I thought: This is a human being--he eats and sleeps just like everyone else. Besides writing to death row inmates, I have been to several prisons and have met individuals on their journey of hope in conjunction with MVFR (murder victim's families for reconciliation). Some of these people were sentenced to death but then set free after being found innocent. I truly believe that the death penalty is racially biased and inflicted most on African-Americans. I have seen this phenomenon myself and have met actual people who were sentenced to death but later found innocent. That is why I oppose the death penalty.

– Kai Lawson

A signature campaign is underway for a citizen's initiative to repeal California's death penalty. The coalition group Savings Accountability Full Enforcement (SAFE) is leading the effort to qualify this measure for the November 2012 election. According to the SAFE website, they have collected 560,000 signatures so far. Their goal is to collect about 200,000 more by March in order to have the

necessary buffer in place to meet a 500,000 signature requirement. (Signatures will be checked, and those not valid will be rejected.) SAFE is asking all volunteers to request petitions at www.safecalifornia.org and return them by February 15. A recent Field Poll showed that more voters would prefer life without parole for certain crimes rather than the death penalty, according to the Death Penalty Information Center website.

DEATH PENALTY NEWS

By Stevi Carroll

Already the end of January 2012 and we see the year flying by. December was a quiet death penalty month here in the USA. Gary Haugen in Oregon had his execution stayed, and nobody throughout our land got the lethal needle.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Since January is Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday month, let's remember a little something he had to say about the death penalty.

"I do not think that God approves the death penalty for any crime, rape and murder included. Capital punishment is against the better judgment of modern criminology, and, above all, against the highest expression of love in the nature of God."

Europe

What happened in December was succinctly stated in this headline: "Europe moves to block trade in medical drugs used in US executions". It seems the Europeans do not want drugs they produce used to kill intentionally. The EC said it "has added eight barbiturates to its list of restricted products that are tightly controlled on the grounds that they may be used for 'capital punishment, torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment'." The list includes pentobarbital and sodium thiopental – the two drugs on which almost all American executions currently depend. Of course, the manufacturer of sodium thiopental has already given US execution states the heave-ho which caused those states to embrace the use of pentobarbital.

SAFE CA Campaign

The SAFE (Saving Accountability Full Enforcement) CA campaign continues on. All petitions must be in to the campaign office by February 15th. If you happen to have any petitions hanging around your house, please send them to

SAFE California Campaign
237 Kearny Street #334
San Francisco CA 94108

If you'd like to get involved, let me know (pax2u@aol.com) and I can get petitions to you or you can go to http://salsa.democracynaction.org/o/1265/p/salsa/web/common/public/signup?signup_page_KEY=6365 to have them mailed to you. Even a signature or two will help in the big picture of getting the death penalty on the California 2012 ballot.

If the moral issues of the State's involvement in murder becoming the same as the murderer's or the arbitrary nature of the imposition of the death penalty doesn't move people, the cost savings might.

A Little International News

I know I concentrate on the death penalty in the US, but of course, other nations also commit state-sanctioned murder. With that in mind, I am hopeful to see that Mongolia has taken steps to abolish the death penalty. According to an article at the Amnesty website (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/mongolia-takes-vital-step-forward-abolishing-death-penalty-2012-01-05>), "The Mongolian parliament's vote today is another vital step forward, and Mongolia should follow up by immediately implementing laws that abolish the death penalty altogether." said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International Asia-Pacific Director."

This article reminds us that more than two thirds of the world's countries have abolished the death penalty and that China is the leading execution country. Now with that said, 17 of the 41 Asia-Pacific countries have abolished the death penalty.

In December the USA's ally the Saudi Arabia, beheaded Amina bint Abdul Halim bin Salem Nasser, a Saudi Arabian national, for 'witchcraft and sorcery'. Here in the USofA, we might think of Salem. According to the article at the Amnesty website, "the charge of sorcery has often been used in Saudi Arabia to punish

people, generally after unfair trials, for exercising their right to freedom of speech or religion."

In 2010, the number of executions in Saudi Arabia almost tripled and "Saudi Arabia was one of a minority of states voting against a UN General Assembly resolution calling for a worldwide moratorium on executions."

The GOP Debates

This leads me to remember the GOP debates here in the USofA. In September 2011, let's remember Rick Perry, no longer a contender for the GOP presidential nomination for 2012, who got applause when he was asked about the 234 executions carried out during his governorship of Texas. What Governor Perry said was, "In the state of Texas, if you come into our state and you kill one of our children, you kill a police officer, you're involved with another crime and you kill one of our citizens, you will face the ultimate justice in the state of Texas, and that is you will be executed."

Just something for us to keep in mind as we pursue the SAFE CA campaign.

Stays of Execution

December		
5	Gary Haugen	Oregon
January		
17	Ralph Birdsong	Pennsylvania
18	Kenneth Haiston	Pennsylvania
	Charles Lorraine	Ohio
19	Michael St. Clair	Kentucky

Clemency Granted

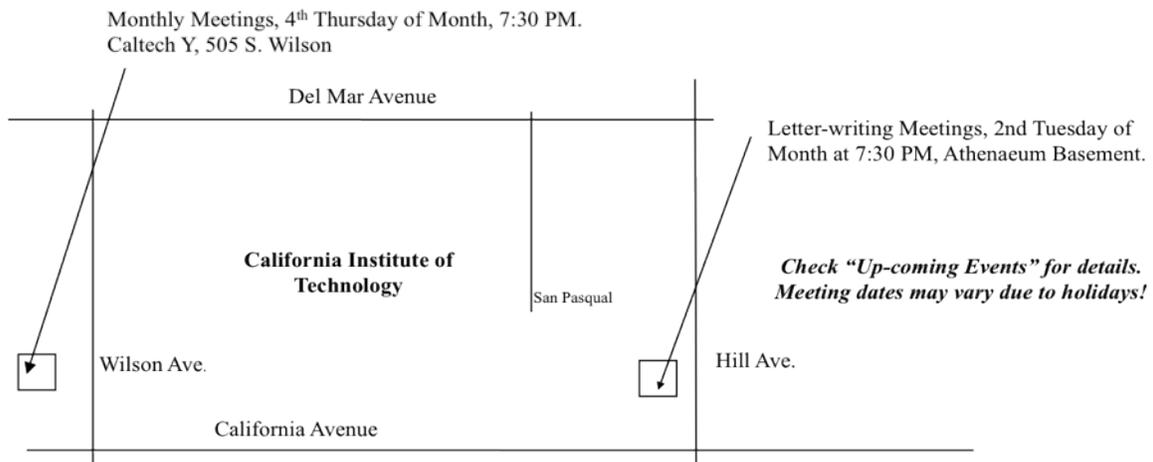
January		
20	Robert Gattis	Delaware

Execution

January		
5	Gary Welch	Oklahoma
	Lethal Injection	

GROUP 22 MONTHLY LETTER COUNT

December Write-a-thon	111
January Urgent Actions	19
January POC	8
Total	138
To add your letters to the total contact lwkamp@gmail.com .	



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 C1-128
Pasadena, CA 91125
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.