

activities ~ a sampling

Over the twenty years that AIUSA has linked action to Banned Books Week (BBW), groups across the country have used the materials in classrooms (from elementary school through college), meetings, coffeeshop gatherings, conference workshops, book fairs, poetry slams, and vigils. They have organized public events around them, usually involving visiting speakers or readings by local writers. They have set up displays in libraries, bookstores, and schools, met with editorial boards to discuss the cases, and talked about them on radio and television. One year, a set of bookstores in Maine handed out the bookmark/postcards to customers with every purchase, and for several years Group 550 and a bookstore in Exeter, New Hampshire collaborated to place the bookmark/postcard in every book sold during one week in September.

Students at Westover School in Middlebury, Connecticut always write many letters about Banned Books Week cases in September and on updates and new cases throughout the school year. Recently they extended this effort into a session at the school's COLORES (diversity) Festival, in October. Their faculty advisor reports that "our Amnesty group wrote well over 1200 letters this past year — one of our highest totals ever!"

At the town library in Camden (Maine), a public event focusing on freedom of expression was organized in April 2011 by the Amnesty group at Rockland's Watershed School, assisted by their counterparts at Camden Hills Regional High School. An impressive array of local writers read selections from the work of imprisoned or threatened writers in various countries.

Community-wide weeks of attention & action have been organized at SMU in Dallas, at Arizona State University, and on other campuses. In September 2008, the Brown University AI chapter presented "Banned Books: an Insider's Perspective on Writing and Resistance in Burma", a talk by Ma Thida "about her experiences as a writer in Burma, her captivity, and her special relationship with Amnesty International and human rights", wrote novelist Amy Tan.

At an event sponsored by Amnesty International with support of the Pittsburgh Human Rights Network, Khet Mar, Writer-In-Residence at City of Asylum/Pittsburgh, spoke in July 2010 about repression of journalists and other human rights conditions in Myanmar and the repression of journalists there. She read from her writings, in Burmese and English, about being interrogated and incarcerated. Her talk was preceded by clips from two short films: "Burma - Land of Fear" and "Eyes of the Storm", according to the *Pittsburgh Examiner*. In conjunction with City of Asylum/Ithaca (NY), Group 73 collected many signatures in Ithaca (NY) when writer Irakli Kakabadze from the Republic of Georgia read and performed (with musicians) poetry in Georgian, Russian, and English in 2008.

In May 2010, AIUSA Groups 317 & 440 in Indianapolis joined with the Indiana University School of Law Program in International Human Rights Law to sponsor an event focusing on Journalists at Risk in Sri Lanka and Eritrea, including prisoner

of conscience Dawit Isaac, a Swedish-Eritrean journalist who has been held without a trial in Eritrea since September 2001. AIUSA's Country Specialists for Eritrea and Sri Lanka participated, along with Indiana Area Coordinator Tom Benner, Professor George Edwards, director of the university's Program in International Human Rights Law, and over 40 attendees, some from as far away as Columbus and Cincinnati, Ohio, and many originally from Eritrea or Sri Lanka. After the event, Sri Lanka Country Specialist Jim McDonald noted that "some of the Sri Lankans present commented on how honored they felt that Amnesty would hold an event about their small country in such an impressive venue."

Local Group 173 in Lincoln, Nebraska participated in activities for Banned Books Week at Indigo Bridge Bookstore in September 2010. At their monthly meeting, members focused their letterwriting on authors facing human rights violations. On the following day, group member Christy Hargesheimer participated on a panel with an ACLU attorney and the director of local libraries to discuss issues of censorship. Nearly 100 signatures were gathered on Amnesty International petitions at these events.

In Michigan, Group 78 organizes Banned Books Week letterwriting. And last year, at Henry Ford Community College in Dearborn, the student group displayed the casesheets in clear plexiglass photo-frames in the school cafeteria and collected many signatures on letters there; in the mail room, faculty "were happy to sign ready-made letters".

Amnesty case information was used for appeal letters in Cambridge, Massachusetts on a Sunday in early October 2010 when the Northeast regional office co-sponsored with PEN New England the Vasyl Stus Freedom to Write Award, an event honoring a writer who faced censorship and persecution. Vasyl Stus was a Ukrainian poet who perished in a Soviet labor camp in 1985.

Amnesty International Puget Sound and Group 4 (Seattle) have collaborated on Banned Books Week readings with PEN in Washington. For several years, Group 270 has tabled with Banned Books Week materials and petitions at events planned by the local ACLU chapter and the Whatcom Human Rights Task Force in Bellingham, Washington.

A Maine local group (169) along with Bates and Bowdoin Colleges have presented readings by a Chilean poet. Another Maine group (371) held an evening of readings and musical performances in an art museum. A group in Florida (519) has planned double events at a library and a community college. Similar observances have been organized in Kansas City, Philadelphia, Washington, DC, Detroit, Des Moines, Boulder, San Francisco, Austin, Texas, and many other towns and cities.

Every year, Steve Marquardt, South Dakota State University Dean of Libraries Emeritus, converts the BBW casesheets into petitions for several dozen librarians & human rights activists and anyone else who requests them <marquardt.steve@gmail.com>. **TO CONTINUE BEYOND AUTUMN:** The editor of this Banned Books Week packet sends AI press releases and Urgent Action bulletins about writers to interested persons year-round; to join this e-list, contact <thesil@midcoast.com>.