



The History of AIUSA Group 11

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INTRODUCTION

Amnesty International, founded in 1961, is today one of the most venerable protectors of human rights in the world. Shortly after it was started, the first local volunteer groups in the United States were formed on the west and east coasts. Among the earliest of these is what is now known as Group 11. This group has its own high reputation, and people from around the country and the world turn to it for inspiration and support. This document charts the history of the group, describing the work it did in its early years and the people who dedicated a large part of their time to this work; it then moves to the present, profiling the current members and the work they undertake as the struggle for human rights continues.

I. THE EARLY YEARS OF GROUP 11: THE MADISON AVENUE GROUP

Group 11, originally called the Madison Avenue Group, was founded in February 1972 by Yajja Zeltman, Ed Kline, and Masha Vorobiov, a Russian language and literature instructor. Andrew Blane, professor of history and member of the Riverside Amnesty group (Group 3), served as the group's guide and consultant. The reason why Yajja started the Madison Avenue group was very personal. At the time, the Vietnam War was at its height, and everyone paid close attention to affairs that pertained to the United States and Vietnam. Yajja, however, was

equally concerned with international affairs happening elsewhere, such as the student riots in many European countries and terrorist activities in Italy and Germany. As such, in the late 60s, while pursuing a Master's Degree program in Soviet Studies at Hunter College, Yadja became interested in Amnesty International when she heard about the organization from her professor Andrew Blane. Andrew Blane was a member of the Riverside Group and took Yadja and her friends Ed Kline and Masha Vorobiov to one of the meetings. Because of the large number of prisoners that needed to be adopted and, consequently, the need for growth, Yadja and her friends decided to start a group of their own. This marked the beginning of Group 11.

The Madison Avenue Group was named after the group's first meeting place, which was Yadja's apartment on Madison Avenue. It was rather common at this time for Amnesty local groups in the United States to use the locations where the groups met as names because there were so few groups in the beginning. The names created were also less bureaucratic and more intimate. However, every group that was created and approved by AI was automatically given a number. The group, therefore, had two names in the beginning: the Madison Avenue Group and Group 11.

Initially, the group concentrated on freeing prisoners of conscience (POC). This was because the chief objective of AI was to defend prisoners who were incarcerated for their political or religious convictions while not advocating acts of violence in pursuit of their objectives. Other human rights issues, such as the death penalty, were not Amnesty's concerns at that time. In fact, the founders of the organization, Ivan Morris in particular, argued quite emphatically that it would be detrimental to the cause of political prisoners to be placed side-by-side with convicts who faced execution for committing violent crimes. Amnesty did work, however, on behalf of prisoners who were sentenced to death exclusively for their political

convictions or religious beliefs. The organization was quite effective because the leaders of totalitarian regimes deeply cared about their reputation, making them pay attention to letters, petitions and other activities organized on behalf of prisoners of conscience. The Madison Avenue Group, adhering strictly to AI's notion of impartiality, was assigned three cases from countries in each political sphere which, at that time, were described as the "first, second, and third worlds"—South Africa (1), the Soviet Union (2), and Indonesia (3).

Soon after the three cases, however, the group felt the need for more diversity, as the members were all very close friends with similar interests. They wanted to attract people from different professions, such as the arts and the business world, who would bring different perspectives and skills to the group. Thus, to recruit more members, Yadja and Masha turned to the AIUSA office for help and requested the addresses of the contributors to Amnesty International from the Upper East Side, the Madison Avenue neighborhood. The group then sent letters to the AI contributors and invited them to an orientation meeting. About 40 people, including Andrew Blane; David Hawk, the Executive Director of AIUSA at the time; and James Harrison, Chairman of the Board of AIUSA, participated in the recruitment meeting. Everyone was crammed into Yadja's apartment and listened to descriptions of the first three cases of the Madison Avenue Group, as well as explanations of the structure, the mandate and the functions of AI. As a result, the group successfully added Larry Israel, Carl Schachter, Norma Messing, Trudy Kearn, Iris Akahoshi, Pauline Emmet, and Vincent Amari to its list of members.

The revamped Group 11 started to take on larger tasks. In addition to the initial three POC cases, the group adopted new cases from South Africa, Taiwan, Argentina, Chile, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), and Poland. The following are explanations of some of the POC cases taken on by the Madison Avenue Group.

Dr. Sutanti Aidit, a medical doctor from Indonesia, was arrested in 1961 after an attempted coup, for which her husband (the leader of the Communist Party) was deemed responsible. When Group 11 took the case, she had already spent eleven years in prison without a single trial. The group regularly sent letters to her and Indonesian authorities, establishing correspondence with the State Department and Congress. Notably, the group launched a very effective letter-writing campaign; over 80 registered (return receipt requested) letters were mailed to the prison simultaneously, making the prison officials sign over 80 pink cards at once. The action was effective: a trial date was announced soon after the action. In addition, the group helped her children, who lived in the Netherlands, by sending packages and money to them. Fortunately, Dr. Aidit was granted amnesty along with many other prisoners during the Carter administration, which had developed a special interest in Indonesian human rights abuses.

Group 11 also worked closely with South African prisoners. The group helped finance their defense and delivered packages to their families. The group tried to get subscriptions to the *Christian Science Monitor* for its adopted POC in Rhodesia because representatives of the magazine regularly visited its subscribers to make sure that they were receiving their copies. The magazine subscriptions weren't very effective in the Rhodesian case as prison authorities denied these visits. However, this approach was effective with the group's Polish POC, a physicist to whom they sent *Scientific American*, donated by the publisher.

In another case, Group 11 worked with defense lawyers for prisoners in Russia and Chile. The Chilean prisoners were granted Amnesty under the condition that they would leave the country. One family went to the UK and the other went to Belgium. The Belgian government was generous enough to secure housing and assistance for the prisoner's family from the very beginning of their arrival to the country. Group 11 member Laurie Sievers, who worked at the

United Nations, arranged all the assistance to this prisoner's family. Sorrowfully the former prisoner was killed in a car accident in Belgium.

There were also actions in Asia. Group 11 had a "fascinating correspondence" (Larry Israel) with a Taiwanese prisoner on Green Island, a prison island in Taiwan. The prisoner had been there since the early 1950s. Fortunately, the prisoner was freed when the prison in Green Island was dismantled because a group of real estate developers wanted to build a resort on the island.

As customary, all cases Group 11 adopted were researched and assigned by the research department in London, except one. Zbigniew Romaszewski, an active member of *Soidarnose* in Poland, came to our attention through a letter to *The New York Times* from a former colleague of his. Having enough documentation and information from the letter writer about Mr. Romaszewski, the group decided to begin work on his behalf. Only then did the research department let us officially adopt him. Working on his case actually meant working for three people: Romaszewski, his wife and her mother. All three were often incarcerated at the same time.

As shown in these four examples, the Madison Avenue group was clearly effective. The correspondence and actions they undertook made a real and lasting impact on the prisoners and the group members. The greatest strength of the group lay in the diversity of its members. The group was not only diverse in terms of race and ethnicity, making it one of the first Amnesty groups to be integrated, but it was also diverse in terms of talent. Every member had something different to offer, contributing in ways that corresponded to his or her area of specialization or interest. This was possible, of course, because the members were brought together by a shared passion and deep devotion to the humanitarian cause of Amnesty. Everyone had the common

belief that securing one prisoner's freedom was work that had far-reaching implications for all of humanity. In essence, the group succeeded because the members worked harmoniously with each other, making differences not an obstacle, but an asset. To paraphrase Aristotle, in the case of the Madison Avenue group, the whole was stronger than its parts.

Inevitably, however, there were times when members had clashing viewpoints. Notably, when Steve Abrams joined the group in 1978, Yadja assigned him a task: to lead a discussion about the abolition of the death penalty. Because the group was very divided on the issue, fierce debates happened during every meeting. It was a trying experience for the group. Eventually, the group reached a consensus to support abolition, but the event caused a real split in the group as numerous members who supported the death penalty left the group.

Nonetheless, such instances were rare, and the members all contributed to the group in a variety of ways. Several examples of the Madison Avenue group members demonstrate this essential quality. Vincent Amari's vast expertise in finance and accounting greatly aided the group; he became the group's treasurer and continues to serve in this capacity today. When Steve Abrams joined Group 11, he had already become involved in assisting AI/USA on financial matters; after becoming a group member, Steve served on the AI/USA Executive Board and contributed to the running of Amnesty International. Thanks to his involvement at the national and international levels of the organization, he helped the group understand policy matters and the changes and expansions of the mandate, including the death penalty.

Anya Procyk contributed to the group with her extensive knowledge of Eastern European history and politics. Her knowledge was a huge asset in the Zinovii Krasivsky case as well as in the Soviet and Eastern European Coordination Groups. The Soviet Coordination Group, which originated in the Madison Avenue Group, was the second co-group in the world (the Indonesian

Coordination group was the first), serving as a model for future groups in AI/USA and other IA sections. The organizers realized that some groups needed help with their adopted prisoners from the USSR but had little practical knowledge of how to proceed. Groups that had Soviet prisoners sent their members to Group 11's monthly meetings to discuss their and Group 11's cases together. The co-group even had one individual driving every month from Ithaca, NY. (The Madison Avenue Group was also the originator of the East European Group, organized by Irena Lasota and Irena Grudzinska, both former leaders of the student uprising in Poland in 1968 and former POCs adopted by Amnesty International.) More about Anya and the Krasivsky case will be dealt with in later sections of this document.

Carl Schachter contributed to the group through his organization of the annual fund-raising concerts. At his first meeting, which was the aforementioned orientation meeting, Carl received a little form asking him the ways that he could contribute to the group. Carl wrote that although he didn't know much about politics, he could perhaps hold concerts to help raise money for the group because he knew many good musicians. Carl's idea immediately sparked enthusiasm within the group, and since then, the annual fund-raising concert has been a tradition of Group 11, helping the group in a variety of ways. More about Carl and the concert will be dealt with in depth later in this document.

Lastly, the group's chair Yadja Zeltman contributed to the group through her leadership. She was a leader with strong conviction and unswerving dedication to the welfare of the prisoners. For example, after one year of no response from prisoners or authorities, it was customary for some Amnesty groups to request a new case from London. The Madison Avenue Group, however, did not follow this custom. Under Yadja's guidance, the group did not easily give up on prisoners and persevered much longer than other groups usually did. An anecdote

that demonstrates Yadja's leadership is one that occurred shortly after the group's first Soviet prisoner was released before the end of his sentence. While on a speaking tour in the U.S., Valery Chalidze, one of the first dissidents in the Soviet Union in the 1960s and 70s, lost his Soviet citizenship and the right to go back to his native country. With the help of Ed Kline, a Group 11 member, he settled in New York, close to Ed's and Yadja's homes. Valery was very helpful in keeping the group informed about events in the Soviet Union. One day, after a telephone conversation with his mother-in-law, Valery informed Yadja that the group's prisoner had been released ahead of time; his mother-in-law had run into him on the street in Moscow. Valery was extremely happy with the outcome, since the group could now adopt another prisoner, who was a close friend of his. He was thus shocked when Yadja told him that it did not work that way. First, the release of the group's prisoner needed to be confirmed. Second, three groups in other countries had already adopted Valery's friend. Third, and most importantly, Yadja needed the group's approval, and she told him that the group members might want to work on a prisoner from another Communist country. His response was, "You are the chairman. Why can't you just tell them what to do?" Yadja replied, "I don't decide what the group does by myself. My function is to help the group and make sure that what the group wants is carried out." For Yadja, this was an experience that helped her gain a clearer understanding of the word "democracy" and how hard it is for many, especially those born and raised under autocratic rule, to adjust to it. Looking at it from a different perspective, however, what she said to Valery in response to his question perfectly exemplifies the extraordinary leadership Yadja had, which was undeniably one of the biggest reasons why the Madison Avenue group could become such an unusually strong group.

The end of the name “Madison Avenue” came as Yadja stepped down from the chair position in the 1980s to move to Virginia for a new job. Because the group no longer met on Madison Avenue, it discarded the name and started to use its other name, Group 11. Regardless of the name the group chose to use, the emphasis on letter writing and POC work remained the core of the group’s purpose. The extraordinary work that was done during the Madison Avenue Group years has truly served as a solid base of Group 11, contributing to the group’s continued success today.

II. THE CONCERT

As one of the biggest traditions of Group 11, the annual fund-raising concert has been the backbone of the group for the past forty years. Thanks to the concerts, the group has never had financial problems, unlike most local Amnesty groups. Such financial security has been the basis of Group 11’s activities: paying for postage and envelopes for the letters it sends out; aiding the families of POCs financially by sending packages and helping them pay legal fees and make telephone calls abroad; renting the Advent Lutheran Church for the monthly meetings; and hosting the annual Christmas dinner for its members. The group also makes yearly contributions to AI/USA.

The first concert was held in 1976, a year after Carl first came up with the idea during the orientation meeting. This was possible because of Carl’s hard work to make the concert a reality. To find a place to hold the concerts, Carl went to the president of Mannes Conservatory of Music, where he once worked as a music theory professor, and asked for permission to use its hall for the concert series. Fortunately, the president accepted his proposal, and the concerts were held at the Mannes Conservatory auditorium until 2013. The Mannes Conservatory was originally on East 74th Street and later on West 85th Street, but it moved to 13th Street in 2014,

far away from Group 11's district. The concerts are now held instead at the Advent Lutheran Church on West 93rd Street. The group was very lucky to have the school's aid for the concerts, for the school lent the auditorium – with its excellent acoustics – for free, arranged rehearsals, printed the programs, and provided ushers.

The programs of the concerts were always musically rich and diverse. Although a majority of the musicians that Carl was able to recruit were classical musicians, the programs were never the same, as Carl worked hard to have varied programs for every concert. Sometimes, there were even performances that were quite out of the norm. For example, at one concert, a group of Chinese musicians were invited to play traditional Chinese music.

The musicians of the concerts varied in other ways. Some of the performers in the concerts were talented students, while others were prominent and established musicians. All of the musicians donated their services. There were a few cases in which people wanted to be paid, but Carl declined their requests and did not let them play for the concerts. For the musicians, the concerts were very important and meaningful, for they could use their music for a humanitarian purpose.

The concert has traditionally taken place on a Saturday evening in November except for one occasion, when it was on Halloween. For every concert, Carl wrote invitational letters and mailed them to a group of people along with brochures that contained the program. The mail also included an envelope that people could use to send their money for admission. The admission fees were suggested minimum contributions. It was set up this way because Carl did not want the concert to be for the sole purpose of fund-raising; he wanted people to come to enjoy the music.

However, the concert is not completely divorced from the work Amnesty does. Before the concert begins, a table is set up with petitions, posters, and merchandise to reach out to the audience about Group 11. When the concert begins, there is always a little speech not only thanking the people and the organization that lent the space for the concert, but also informing the audience about Group 11's work for the year. In addition, during the intermission, Group 11 tries to invite a prisoner of conscience to talk about his/her story and what Amnesty has done for him/her. For example, in 2013, Mansour Ossanlou, an Iranian prisoner helped by Group 11, visited the concert to share his story. Mr. Ossanlu, the leader of the Union of the Tehran and Suburban Bus Company, was imprisoned in Iran three times between 2005 and 2007 for advocating the rights of his fellow bus workers. In 2013, when Mr. Ossanlu was granted a temporary medical leave from the prison with the help of international organizations, he managed to flee to America and now lives on the East Coast, where he still fights for workers' rights in Iran. Accounts such as this have always been extremely moving and gripping, giving the audience a feeling of connection to the organization as well as a sense of awareness of the kind of work their money supports.

All in all, the concert has been a big part of Group 11's identity. This is largely due to Carl's relentless effort for thirty-seven years, from 1976 to 2013, to put together the annual fundraising concerts for Group 11. Reflecting on the concerts, Carl says that "sacred music is one of the great ways in expressing one's humanity. As such, it is very fitting that the concert is used for one of the greatest humanitarian organizations, Amnesty International." Carl's work on the concert, as well as his other contributions to the group, have been unparalleled, and although he does not work on the concerts anymore, his legacy will forever remain to benefit the group.

III. TWO WORLDS, ONE IDEA

The book *Two Worlds, One Idea* chronicles one of Group 11's most prominent cases, the correspondence from 1976 to 1991 with Zinovii Krasivsky, a renowned Ukrainian poet, human rights activist, defender of Ukraine's right to independence, and former Soviet prisoner of conscience. At that time, Krasivsky was persecuted by the Soviet authorities, moving from prisons to labor camps to a psychiatric hospital and to enforced exile in Siberia. During such times of persecution, Krasivsky found significant support in the letters, books, and gifts that Group 11 sent. The touching correspondence between Group 11 member Iris Akahoshi and Krasivsky is especially notable among such efforts, not only for its beautiful themes of nature and spirituality but also for its demonstration of an "uncommon and lasting personal bond" (Anya Procyk) between the Ukrainian prisoner and a human rights activist in New York City. Dealing with this touching and inspiring story, the book emphasizes what has been the core of the organization's activity at its inception: the human factor involved in Amnesty's work on behalf of political prisoners.

The editor and translator of the book, Anya Procyk, has been a member of Amnesty since the very beginning, joining eight years after the organization was founded in England by Peter Benenson. She was initially part of the Riverside Group, one of the first three groups in the United States, founded by Mark Benenson, cousin of Peter Benenson, and Ivan Morris, a professor at Columbia University. At the time, Anya was a Ph.D. candidate specializing in Eastern European history and politics at Columbia University. She joined the Madison Avenue group because her area of specialization coincided with that of many of the group's members, who were very knowledgeable about the Soviet Union and the Eastern European region. The London Office assigned the Krasivsky case after she joined the group.

In the beginning, the group had very little information about the prisoner. They knew he was a Ukrainian poet, transferred from a labor camp to a psychiatric hospital at an unknown address. They wrote letters addressed to Zinovii Krasivsky to every psychiatric hospital for which they had an address. It took them well over a year, and with the help of an AI group in Germany they learned that he was in one in Western Ukraine, not far from his hometown. And so began their correspondence with him.

At the meeting during which the case of Krasivsky was presented, a new member, Iris Akahoshi, volunteered to work on his behalf. Because of her limited knowledge about political matters, especially with respect to the Soviet Union, she asked Anya for advice on the question of corresponding with a Ukrainian political prisoner. Anya responded that what was most important was to write letters on any subject so that the prisoners and the authorities would be aware that there were people on the outside who were concerned about their well-being. It was perfectly fine and even advisable to write about trivial matters such as her beloved cats and her trips to California deserts because there was a better chance that the letters would get to the prisoner. At the time, letters were often rejected and did not reach the prisoners due to censorship and severe security. Group 11 members such as Anya or Masha even had to write under pseudonyms to cover their last names of Eastern European origin. As such, Iris was perfect for the Krasivsky case in terms of her name as well as the content of her letters.

There were also other reasons why Iris was a good choice. Members of the Madison Avenue Group usually wrote one letter per monthly meeting, but Iris was different. She wrote two to four letters every month, partly because she had time, as she wasn't working, but mainly because she was dedicated to the cause from the start. Such qualities of Iris were a great strength when it came to communicating with prisoners of conscience. After he was released, Krasivsky

wrote that her letters kept him alive; Iris's perseverance and faith truly helped for the prisoner's survival.

Such moving letter exchanges between Krasivsky and Iris were also a matter of importance to Ukraine's Amnesty section. Shortly after Krasivsky's death in 1991, and with the assistance of some of his colleagues, Group 11 published a book of selected correspondence between the group and Krasivsky in Ukrainian. This book inspired current Group 11 members to embark on their own project, and so for ten years the book project members worked hard to get their book published.

The book group spent many hours discussing what the book would be, what would be included, and how to get it published. As the editor and translator, Anya was responsible for translating the letters and deciding what photos and documents would be included. In addition, she wrote introductions to each chapter, which illuminate the historical context as well as the events that took place in the chapters. The most difficult part for her was going over the original letters. At the time of the correspondence, many letters were translated in a hurry and rather casually so that the group could become familiar with its content at the next meeting. The editing work – rereading the original, comparing it to the translation and then editing the translation – took the most time. This became especially problematic when, with the passage of time, the content of the letters became more involved, as the correspondents were exchanging views of a spiritual and philosophical nature.

Sue Dicker's part was to go through the manuscript to make suggestions on which letters should stay and which should be deleted, since including all the letters would be impossible. Many letters and postcards were short, for example, notes saying that Krasivsky had received Iris' previous letter and that he would answer it soon. Sue was guided by the idea that reading

through the book should be similar to reading a novel, in which the characters meet, get to know each other, and build a relationship; their lives would change (like Krasivsky getting remarried) and as a result their relationship would change (as Iris' and Krasivsky's relationship surely did). Anything that wasn't relevant to the story was deleted.

Ruth Baron had the important task of digitizing all the letters, newspaper articles, and documents concerning the book by typing them up. The book group gathered a plethora of material for the book project, including photos of Krasivsky and his second wife Olena, Group 11's Krasivsky case file, Group 11 minutes from 1976 to 1978 that were requested from the Amnesty Archives, and Larry Israel's material about Krasivsky. A lot of these materials, thanks to Ruth's work, were organized and made accessible electronically.

After all this hard work, the book was finally published in November 2013. It was titled *Two Worlds, One Idea* because the story signified the meeting of two worlds: different in many ways, but united through a common idea, "the strivings for goodness and truth of the human spirit" (Anya Procyk). The book "is the result of a concerted effort by members of Amnesty who befriended Krasivsky in his time of need, as well as current members of Group 11, to bring to public attention the ennobling activities that exemplify Amnesty International's mission" (press release for *Two Worlds, One Idea*). Thus, without doubt, the book and its story will continue to leave a lasting impression on its readers, empowering many to act for the cause of protecting human rights.

IV. NOTABLE CASES

It is quite impossible to talk about the group's history without mentioning some of the cases, since the work Group 11 has done on human rights is arguably the most important part of its history. The cases are also valuable in that they offer insight into what the group is like. This

section is wholly devoted to describing a number of notable cases that Group 11 has worked on. The cases are organized chronologically and thematically if there are multiple cases that pertain to the same theme.

In 1992, Group 11 was assigned the case of Liu Gang. Liu Gang was a postgraduate in Beijing University when he was arrested on June 19, 1989 for being one of the leading figures of the pro-democracy movement at Tiananmen Square, China. He was sentenced to six years of imprisonment in 1991 at the Lingyuan reform-through-labor camp by the Chinese government. To take action, the group organized a nationwide petition campaign for Liu Gang's immediate release. The campaign was very successful, as the group gathered 8,000 petitions from individuals in 940 cities and towns in 47 states of the United States. The petition and signatures were delivered to the Prime Minister of the People's Republic of China. A year after Liu Gang was released from prison on June 18, 1995 under the condition of house arrest, he successfully made his way to the United States and attended AIUSA's General Meeting in Washington, D.C. in June 1996. It was then that Rosalie Lipsett, the Group 11 member who coordinated the petition drive and other release efforts, delivered a plaque to Liu Gang on behalf of Group 11.

Work on the Liu Gang case inspired Group 11 to continue to work on cases related to China. Since then, Group 11 has been part of the China Regional Action Network (CHIRAN). To those in the regional network, Amnesty regularly sends cases that concern individuals at risk in China. Within the group, the network is currently comprised of about twenty members who regularly receive the actions and write letters individually. The cases that the group has worked on involve abolishing China's death penalty; ensuring freedom of expression in the face of press and Internet control and freedom of religion; protecting detainees against torture and ill-treatment; Falun Gong; and the Tiananmen mothers, a group of victims and families of those

killed in the crackdown who continue to investigate the case and call for redress and compensation from the government.

In the late 1990s, the group worked on behalf of three men from former South Yemen who disappeared during the 1970s. They were taken into custody by government authorities, or with the knowledge of these authorities, who neither acknowledged any of the disappearances nor conducted any investigation into them. The core of Group 11's action on the case was letter writing. The group established a valuable relationship with the families of two of the three men who disappeared, Abdullah Mogahed Ahmed Al Hadrami and Abdullah Salem Saleh. M. Al-Fadhli. In a letter to the group, Mr. Al Hadrami's sister Elham Mogahed Ahmed wrote: "Your letter [made] us very surprised, how you reached to such information in the same time there was not any other international organization of any side, we also didn't write to any person, so that we got very impressed by your letter... Thank you very much for your attention even though it's a bit late but you bring us hope again." This excerpt of the correspondence exemplifies the fact that Group 11's letter-writing efforts have a real and profound impact on those who receive the letters.

In addition to letter writing, Group 11 also established connections with government officials. On April 15, 1999, two members of Group 11, Harry Schwartz and Ruth Baron, met with Mr. Walid A. Al-Ethari to establish an on-going relationship for the Yemen case. Mr. Al-Ethari was the third secretary of the Permanent Mission to the Republic of Yemen to the United Nations at the time. During the visit, he was very welcoming and gave the members a brief oral summary of Yemen history, booklets on human rights in Yemen, and assurance that there had been no recent disappearances or political arrests in Yemen. Mr. Al-Ethari also reassured the members that the family members who exchanged letters with the group would not get into

trouble. Overall, the meeting was successful, as Mr. Al-Ethari was willing to meet with the members of the group again.

Group 11 has often had such meetings with government officials, namely during the 1990s when Group 11 member Harry Schwartz visited the Greek consulate on 79th Street for a case on conscientious objectors of military service in Greece.

From 1998 to 2000, Group 11 worked on behalf of four men — Mujib Turmus, who had been imprisoned for over 10 years; Muhammad Khalil Turmus, who had been imprisoned for more than four years; Sulayman Ibrahim Karnaib; and Khalil Ibrahim Karnaib. All of these men were imprisoned in Khiam detention camp without trial and denied access to families, lawyers, and physicians. Before it closed in 2000, the Khiam detention camp was located in Southern Lebanon under the control of the Israel Defense Force (IDF). Many of the hostages detained there were imprisoned without trial and denied access to their families, legal assistance, and necessary medical care. The conditions inside the prison were horrible. For instance, communal cells held up to nine prisoners, and some cells only had light that came through ventilation holes. Even worse, some detainees reported that they had been subjected to brutal methods of torture such as electric shocks and beatings. In its numerous letters to government officials, the group described Khiam detention center as a “gross human rights violation” and called for immediate action from the U.S government. The group also urged Israeli officials to take responsibility for violating international agreements such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Besides letter writing, Group 11 participated in a protest against the continued detention of Cosette Ibrahim and some other 149 prisoners in the Khiam Detention Center in Israeli-occupied South Lebanon. Cosette Ibrahim, a 25-year-old journalism graduate who worked for

the Al-Liwaa newspaper in Beirut, was detained at Khiam without trial. The protest was held near the Israeli Consulate General in midtown Manhattan on October 28th, 1999.

Another important part of the group's work has been the full opposition to capital punishment. In 1999, Group 11 worked on the case of Joseph Stanley Faulder, a Canadian who was sentenced to death in Texas. Mr. Faulder was not informed of his right to see a Canadian Consular official, had an incompetent attorney, and was sentenced to death based on the testimony of Dr. Grigson, a psychiatrist whose methods and findings had been found questionable by his colleagues. There were several important pieces of correspondence given into evidence during the trial, including ones with George W. Bush, governor of Texas at that time, and the European Union. Similarly, the group worked on the case of Troy Davis, who was sentenced to death for the murder of police officer Mark Allen MacPhail. The trial of Mr. Davis was unfair in many aspects: there was no weapon found at the scene of murder, and the case against him was filled with inconsistent witness testimonies, all but two of which non-police witnesses admitted were pressured and coerced. Unfortunately, however, Mr. Davis was executed on September 21, 2011 despite the efforts of numerous human rights organizations in addition to Group 11.

In the early 2000s, the group worked on behalf of U Win Tin, who was a prominent journalist and writer in Myanmar. He was arrested in Yangon on July 4, 1989 during a national crackdown on the opposition by the ruling military authority, The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). He was sentenced to thirteen years of prison time after three trials, none of which met international standards. In prison, he received the cruel treatment of hard labor and served detention in a very restrictive "dog cell," which was about one meter in height, width and length. Despite numerous accusations by SLORC, Amnesty deemed U Win

Tin a prisoner of conscience and believed that he was arrested for promoting human rights and peacefully exercising his rights of expression, assembly, and association. Fortunately, U Win Tin was released in 2008 from Insein Prison in Yangon. After his release, in November 2008, he sent an audio file to Group 11 for the annual fund-raising concert, thanking Amnesty International for its efforts and urging the organization to continue its hard work, as many prisoners in Myanmar languish in jail longing for help.

In addition to the aforementioned case of Mansour Ossanlu, Group 11 expressed keen interest in other human rights violations happening in Iran. In 2002, the group protested Iran's torture and ill treatment of political prisoners. In particular, the group focused on the case of Ahmad Batebi, who was a 21-year-old student of film production at Tehran University at the time of his arrest. When he went to cover the disturbance at a student dormitory for a documentary he was producing, which was officially authorized by the university and which dealt with the dangers of drug addiction and social problems, Batebi was arrested by plainclothes militiamen. That year, in 1999, his photo appeared on the cover of *The Economist*, holding up the bloodied T-shirt of a colleague who had been injured in the demonstration. After an unfair trial, Batebi was sentenced to death, but the death penalty was later commuted to jail time in Tehran's Evin Prison. He was subjected to horrible torture and was forced to confess by the Iranian authorities under the threat of his family members being raped, tortured, and imprisoned. Group 11 took action by writing to Iranian authorities, publicizing the case, and communicating with newspapers and non-governmental groups. By doing so, the group hoped to ensure compensation for the victims of Iran's treatment of political prisoners; extensive, impartial investigation of the cases; and legislative, practical measures against torture. The group also aimed to publicize cases of torture in Iran and increase public awareness about the issue. In 2006,

when Batebi was re-arrested after his short release for marriage and medical treatment, Group 11 acted again on behalf of Batebi to ensure his safety in prison. In 2008, Batebi escaped Iran and arrived on U.S soil seeking asylum. Group 11 hosted his first public appearance on October 30th at the Advent Lutheran Church.

As demonstrated by these examples, Group 11 has been very successful in many of its cases. The driving force of these campaigns has been meticulous research – securing background information on the country and details about the prisoner – paired with creative and effective tactics such as writing letters, exchanging correspondence, lobbying or visiting government officials, and conducting public campaigns such as protests and tablings. With such effective methods, the group's work on human rights will undoubtedly continue to have a lasting impact in the cause of protecting human rights.

V. GROUP 11 TODAY

This history has touched on the early years of Group 11, the annual fund-raising concerts, the book project, and various cases. This section will discuss the various activities of Group 11 today, including information about the monthly meetings, social gatherings, recruitments, and involvement at the national and international levels, and how they have built on the group's earlier work.

Group 11 holds monthly meetings except in June and December. In the 1980s and 90s, Group 11 gathered at members' apartments such as those of Karis Hall, Judy Sachs, and Sue Dicker. However, ten years ago, the membership size grew to become too big for an apartment. As a result, the group has since met at the Advent Lutheran Church on West 93rd Street and Broadway. The meetings are led by Sue Dicker and Harry Schwartz, the group co-coordinators. They start out with announcements to the group, moving on to specific case reports, and ending

with signing letters and conversation. Previously, each member was responsible for writing the letters individually. Six years ago, however, a few people started to bring in letters to group meetings; letter writing became a regular activity during the meetings and has since been a distinct characteristic of Group 11. The letters are complete except for dates and signatures. Members fill these in, put the letters in envelopes, and address the envelopes. Sue Dicker takes the letters home, stamps them and mails them. Each year, the number of letters sent has steadily increased, from 699 in 2010 to 1,296 in 2015.

Occasionally, Group 11 invites a speaker during the regular meetings. Past speakers have been people from Amnesty who talked about cases and issues, prisoners of conscience who were helped by Amnesty, and various specialists related to the cases Group 11 has worked on. Early on, when the group was working on behalf of Dr. Sutanti Aidit, the group was able to invite a former cellmate of the doctor who was touring the United States and speaking about the plight of POCs in Indonesia. It was wonderful to receive a firsthand report about Dr. Aidit and her family: about her habit of reading the *Koran* to her cellmates; and about the lives of her five children, all grown up and living in the Netherlands and the USSR. This information made her so much more human to the members. More recently, two people from the United Nations visited and talked about countries in Mid-Africa. Larry Ladutke, the national coordinator for El Salvador in AIUSA, visited to talk about Teodora, Group 11's El Salvador Campaign. Sometimes, if the group thinks that a speaker would be of interest to a wider audience, a public meeting is held in a venue larger than the basement of the church, where the group usually meets. Ahmad Batebi's speech in 2008 in the church's beautiful sanctuary is a noteworthy example.

In June and December, when the monthly meetings aren't held, Group 11 holds two social gatherings. One is the summer Garden Party, which has been in Karis Hall's garden since the 1990s. The party is a potluck; everyone brings food to share with the group. If it rains, the party is held in Karis's apartment. In December, the group holds its Holiday Dinner, which also started in the 1990s. Traditionally, the group goes to a Chinese restaurant on the Upper West Side. A new tradition is a guessing game: members around the dinner table guess the number of letters sent during the year, the answer known only by Harry Schwartz and Sue Dicker. The first year the group played this game, the winner won a copy of its own book, *Two Worlds, One Idea*; now, the winner receives a book on a human rights issue selected by Harry. These two events have always brought the group closer together, contributing to the family-like atmosphere of the group.

The reason for the large membership of Group 11 has been its diverse recruitment methods. In the days of the Madison Avenue Group, the Chamber Music concert at Mannes College, tables in front of the Metropolitan Museum and street fairs were used to recruit new members. For example, Alan Finberg, Legal Counsel to the *Washington Post* and *Newsweek*, became a very active member after one concert. He was instrumental in interesting Robert Kaiser, then the *Post* correspondent in the Soviet Union, to look into the fate of the group's adopted prisoner, Zinovii Krasivsky. This resulted in a big news article about Krasivsky in a Sunday issue of the *Post*. Nowadays, regular recruitment is mainly done through the group's website (aiusagroup11.org). Other ways in which people join the group include members bringing their friends and people calling Amnesty directly and asking about the local group. Occasionally, the group also has big recruitment drives. The most recent one happened in October 2014, when the group held a special welcome meeting at the Advent Lutheran Church to

recruit members. Todd drafted a letter of invitation to the meeting, which detailed the group's work: monthly meetings, letter writing, and special projects, notably the book *Two Worlds, One Idea*. An invitation to that year's concert was also attached. The letter was sent to 2,200 Amnesty members in six zip codes in the Upper Manhattan. In the fall of 2016, the group's membership directory had 62 names.

At the turn of the millennium, Group 11 has slowly but decidedly turned to social media for dissemination of its activities. As noted above, its website, which describes its recent and current activities, is one way in which the group recruits new members. The website also attracts the attention of other human rights advocates, nationally and internationally, who contact us for advice, often attend our meetings while they are in New York, and sometimes join the group. Recent visitors, who also gave talks on human rights in their countries, came from Japan, Cameroon, Brazil and Mexico. Meeting announcements, which used to be sent via snail mail, are now sent by email. The group also has a Facebook page and a Google site for sharing human rights events and disseminating information on current issues.

The group has also begun to host summer interns. In the summer of 2015, Bason Park, a recent high school graduate from South Korea, did a mailing to over two thousand members of AIUSA in upper Manhattan, which resulted in a number of new members. In 2016, Subin Lee, another high school student from South Korea, updated the group's directory, organized its archives, and arranged for them to be housed at Columbia University, where AIUSA's archived are stored. Subin used the archives and interviews he conducted with some of the group's past and present members to write this history of the group. Basin's and Subin's work was exceptional, and their commitment to the group and to human rights was in great evidence.

In addition to being part of a local group, Group 11 members have also been very active at the national and international levels. Nationally, Andrew Blane, Ed Klein, Bill Freilich and Yajda Zeltman represented Group 11 on the AIUSA Executive Board in the early years of the organization. Yajda chaired the International Committee of the AIUSA Board, was for three years a member of the Nominating Committee to the Board of Directors, and served as coordinator of the Search Committee that appointed Jack Healey as Executive Director of AIUSA. Steve Abrams served on AIUSA's Executive Board from 1981 to 1999, effectively being the connection between Group 11 and the national offices. Today, members of the group regularly participate in large events such as the annual spring Get on the Bus Day activities in New York City, organized by the Somerville, Massachusetts AIUSA group; the Northeast Regional Conference; the Annual General Meeting (AGM); and December Human Rights Day (Write for Rights).

Today, Todd Schwarz, who has been a member of Group 11 since 1999, is the person who most prominently connects the group to the national offices. Todd has been Amnesty's area coordinator in New York City since 2004. He served as the representative from the Northeast region to the National Training Program from 2005 to 2008, part of a national planning group in the Individuals at Risk program from 2010 to 2011. He was the second alternative in the 2011 board election, which, after the resignations of two board members, allowed him to serve as a board member from August 2011 to June 2012.

Todd brought Group 11 into the national policy discussion on the Sunday of the 2004 AGM in Brooklyn. On Saturday night, the International Secretariat of Amnesty International in London decided to shut down the Uzbekistan case he had been coordinating for Group 11. Sunday morning, Steve Abrams connected Todd with the people who were sponsoring a

resolution to generate more case files and keep POC cases more prominent for members. During the plenary, Todd shared his story about the Uzbekistan case closure. Due to the sheer timing of events, Todd became actively involved in the debate between the two sides and represented Group 11's views on the issue. That year, in the middle of August, Amnesty moved from a proscriptive, targeted mandate to a broader mission. The move to a mission statement led Amnesty to transition from only concentrating on civil and political rights to concentrating on a full spectrum of issues, including economic, social, and cultural rights. In this time of turmoil, Todd participated in national discussions, sharing the predominant views of the group, and brought to the group a sense of the discussions and decisions that were being made. As such, thanks to Todd, who has effectively been serving as the intermediary between Group 11 and AIUSA headquarters, Group 11's opinions have been voiced at large Amnesty meetings such as the regional conferences and the AGM.

At the international level, Andrew Blane spent much of his time on matters of the International Executive Committee (IEC). Steve Abrams served on the International Executive Committee (IEC) and the Financial Control Committee (FCC). Members have also participated at the International Committee Meeting (ICM).

CONCLUSION

Group 11 has truly been an extraordinary local group. Its strong traditions, such as the annual concerts, letter writing, and POC work, have strengthened the group and formed the group's identity; its numerous cases and effective actions have had a monumental impact on the lives of many; its special projects, such as the publication of the book, have demonstrated the fact that Group 11 goes beyond what a normal local group does; the social gatherings, meetings,

recruitments, and connections to the national office have consolidated the group into an effective organization. All of the strong traits of Group 11, however, were made possible by its remarkable and dedicated members, who have all contributed to form a group with the ability to do exceptional humanitarian work. This is why the group, without doubt, will continue to thrive and advance in the days to come.