ARTISTS FOR AMNESTY

ARTISTS FOR AMNESTY IS A GROUP OF ARTISTS COMMITTED TO PREVENTING HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES, SAVING LIVES AND PROMOTING A GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHTS.

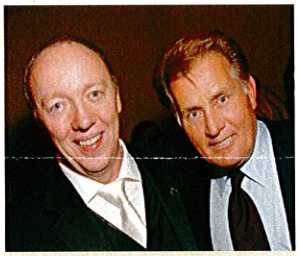
MONTHLY BULLETIN

MARCH/APRIL 2005

Welcome to the *Artists for Amnesty Monthly Bulletin*, which will keep you informed on critical human rights issues, cases of individuals at risk, and the life-saving work of Amnesty International. Our Monthly Bulletin will also highlight the efforts of artists on behalf of human rights.

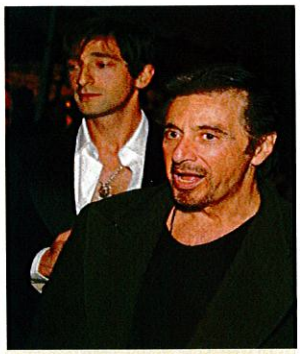
OSCAR NIGHT

On February 27, Artists for Amnesty joined the Lee Strasberg Institute, City of West Hollywood, and the ACLU Foundation of Southern California in hosting the third annual **CELEBRATION OF ARTISTIC FREEDOM** Oscar Viewing Dinner and After Party at **AGO**. The event was a tremendous success with over 300 people attending the Viewing Dinner, and over 500 joining us for the After-Party.



Terry George and Martin Sheen
Photo by Kevin Parry © 2005

MARTIN SHEEN was on hand to receive the Artist of Conscience Award for his body of work and his lifelong commitment to social justice.

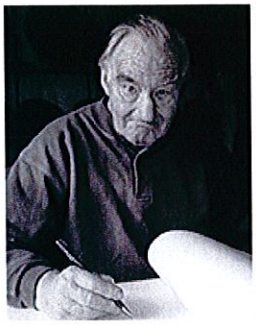


Adrien Brody and Al Pacino
Photo by Randall Michaelson

TERRY GEORGE, nominated for an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay for Hotel Rwanda, received the Artistic Freedom Honor, presented by **PAUL RUSESABAGINA**, on whose story the film Hotel Rwanda is based.

PETER BENENSON

Peter Benenson, the founder of the worldwide human rights organisation Amnesty International, died on March 25. He was 83. Mr. Benenson founded Amnesty International in 1961 first as a one-year campaign for the release of six prisoners of conscience. From that point, a worldwide movement for human rights was launched. Amnesty International, which has taken up the cases of many thousands of victims of human rights violations, has inspired millions to human rights defense the world round. "Peter Benenson's life was a courageous testament to his visionary commitment to fight injustice around the world," said Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International. "In 1961, his vision gave birth to human rights activism. In 2005 his legacy is a world wide movement for human rights which will never die."

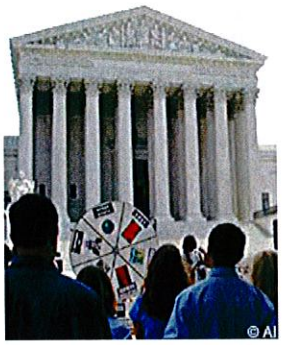


The one-year Appeal for Amnesty was launched on May 28, 1961, in an article about forgotten prisoners in a British newspaper, The Observer. That appeal attracted thousands of supporters, and started a worldwide human rights movement. The catalyst for the original campaign was Mr. Benenson's sense of outrage after reading an article about the arrest and imprisonment of two students in a cafe in Lisbon, Portugal, who had drunk a toast to liberty.

In the first few years of Amnesty International's existence, Mr. Benenson supplied much of the funding for the movement, went on research missions and was involved in all aspects of the organization's affairs. Today Amnesty International is into its 44th year. It has become the world's largest independent human rights organization, with more than 1.8 million members and committed supporters worldwide.

END TO JUVENILE EXECUTIONS

On March 1, Amnesty International celebrated the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Roper v. Simmons,* which determined that sentencing juvenile offenders to death was unconstitutional. AIUSA's Executive Director, William F. Schulz, made the following statement in the wake of the decision: "Today, the Court repudiated the misguided idea that the United States can pledge to leave no child behind while simultaneously exiling children to the death chamber. Now, the US can proudly remove its name from the embarrassing list of human rights violators that includes China, Iran, and Pakistan—nations that still execute juvenile offenders. It can take pride in knowing that it is now in the company of the honorable nations that abandoned this antiquated practice years ago."



FATHER LY FREE

Amnesty International is happy to report that Father Ly was released from prison on February 1, 2005, as part of a general amnesty to mark Tet, the Lunar New Year. More than 8,000 prisoners were reportedly included in the amnesty, although few political prisoners other than Father Ly benefited from it. In addition to Father Ly, Amnesty International has confirmed the release of three other prisoners of conscience -- Dr. Nguyen Dan Que, Thich Thien Minh, and Nguyen Dinh Huy. Each of these men had been the subject of action by Amnesty members.

HOTEL RWANDA

On April 12, **MGM HOME ENTERTAINMENT** will debut the DVD and VHS of **HOTEL RWANDA**. To raise awareness and support for the efforts in Rwanda and Darfur, Sudan, MGM will donate a portion of the *Hotel Rwanda* DVD sales to Amnesty International. In addition, the DVD will include an inserted, pre-addressed donation envelope to allow consumers to contribute an additional amount to the cause. The DVD includes a "Return to Rwanda" documentary with **DON CHEADLE**, director/producer/writer **TERRY GEORGE**, writer **KEIR PEARSON** and **PAUL RUSESABAGINA**, the real-life subject of the film, along with other special features.

GET UP, STAND UP

BUSINESSWOMAN DISAPPEARED IN IRAQ

HUDA HAFEZ AHMAD AL-'AZAWI was arrested by US and Iraqi military personnel on February 17, 2005. Her whereabouts are unknown and Amnesty International is concerned for her safety.

At 4:00am on February 17, US soldiers and members of the Iraqi National Guard forced their way into her house in the district of Hay al-Jami'a in Baghdad. They handcuffed and blindfolded her, and beat, handcuffed and blindfolded her two daughters, Nura,15 and Sarah, 20. The soldiers reportedly took away jewelry and US$ 2,500 in cash from the house. They also allegedly raided Huda Hafez Ahmad al-'Azawi's office, next door to her house, taking three computers and a mobile phone. According to her daughters, the soldiers accused Huda Hafez Ahmad al-'Azawi of "supporting the resistance," before taking her away to an unknown location. At the time of her arrest, Huda Hafez Ahmad al-'Azawi was recovering from a surgical operation that she had undergone a week earlier.

Huda Hafez Ahmad al-'Azawi was detained a first time in December 2003 together with her sister Nahla and her brother Ayad, on suspicion of supporting an armed opposition group. She has claimed that Ayad died in US custody as a result of torture and ill-treatment. Two other brothers, 'Ali Hafez Ahmad and Mo'taz Hafez Ahmad, are being held in US custody in Iraq without charge or trial. Amnesty International does not at this stage have any information on their dates of arrest and place of detention. Following her detention in December 2003, Huda Hafez Ahmad al-'Azawi and her sister Nahla were held in Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad until their release in July 2004. After her release Huda Hafez Ahmad al-'Azawi gave interviews to international media in which she alleged that she was tortured and ill-treated.

Please write letters asking the Ambassador to Iraq to reveal the whereabouts and the reason for the detention of Huda Hafez Ahmad al-'Azawi. Also ask for assurances that she will not be ill-treated or tortured if she is, in fact, detained. Ms. Ahmad al-'Azawi should be granted immediate access to a lawyer and any medical treatment she may need following her recent surgery. Furthermore, call upon the Ambassador to launch an immediate and impartial investigation into the matter, with anyone found responsible for any wrongdoing to be brought to justice. Lastly, please ask that your appeals be forwarded to Mr. Ghazi al-Yawar, President of the Republic of Iraq and to Dr. Iyad 'Allawi, Prime Minister of the Republic of Iraq.

TAKE ACTION

Send your letters to:

Ambassador of Iraq
Embassy of the Republic of Iraq
1801 P Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20036

ARTIVIST

The second annual **ARTIVIST FILM FESTIVAL and AWARDS** will take place on April 20-24th at the Egyptian Theater in Hollywood. The Artivist Film Festival is dedicated to addressing human rights, children's advocacy, animal rights, and environmental preservation through film, visual arts and music. Their mission is to strengthen the voice of artist activism, while raising public awareness and funds for global social issues.

Mira Sorvino with Congressman Tom Lantos (D-CA) while lobbying Congress to do more about violence against women in Darfur,

The 2005 Artivist Awards will be held on the final day of the Film Festival on Sunday, April 24. This year, **MIRA SORVINO** will be honored for her work with Artists for Amnesty as an Ambassador for Amnesty International's Stop Violence Against Women Campaign and for her work for

CHRIS ABANI

Artists for Amnesty member CHRIS ABANI's novel GRACELAND has won the 2005 PEN Hemingway Prize. *Graceland* has also been named a finalist for the 2004 Los Angeles Times Book Prize in Fiction. The winner will be announced during a ceremony at UCLA on April 22, 2005. We hope you will join Artists for Amnesty in congratulating Chris on these well-deserved accolades.

Chris Abani

LAUSD

The Los Angeles Unified School District is launching a pilot program utilizing the film ***HOTEL RWANDA***, to teach about themes such as the dangers of intolerance and the need to speak out against injustice. Teachers attended a special screening of the film at CREATIVE ARTISTS AGENCY, where they received a teaching guide for the film. On April 16, the Center for Active Learning in International Studies at USC will conduct a day-long workshop for teachers on how to use the film in the classroom.

AGM

The **AGM** (Annual General Meeting) is Amnesty International USA's once-per-year national meeting for all members and activists to join to meet, learn, and discuss. The AGM's central theme will focus on the ideal that human rights must be protected and respected at all times, even during the "war on terrorism". No excuses. No exceptions.

This year's conference will be held at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Austin, Texas, April 8-10, 2005. For more information about this meeting, including a conference agenda, please visit:

http://www.amnestyusa.org/events/agm/

AFA Bulletin edited by Bonnie Abaunza and Jamie Skaluba

JOIN ARTISTS FOR AMNESTY

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