

Amnesty International's Gulag Confusion

Political Left vs. Human Rights

By Alex Svetlicinii

Summary: *Soft on tyrants and terrorists, hard on the free nations that confront them, Amnesty International has squandered its reputation as an impartial advocate for human rights. Under the leadership of general secretary Irene Khan and executive director William Schulz, it became just another voice of the transnational Left.*

This month Amnesty International (AI) will release its annual report. Usually a necessarily dreary compendium of nations that violate various human rights, last year's edition erupted into controversy. In it, AI's secretary general, Irene Khan, branded the U.S. prison camp at Guantanamo Bay "the Gulag of our times."

As Ms. Khan must have known, the Soviet Gulag was Stalin's network of forced labor camps filled with political prisoners, as well as those guilty of assorted thought crimes, members of the wrong nationality or class, and victims of bureaucratic whim. Millions perished.

The fallout came almost immediately. Vice President Dick Cheney said, "It's an absurd allegation." Kenneth Anderson of the *Weekly Standard* dubbed it "rhetorical hand grenades." Juan Williams of National Public Radio called it "an insult to the memory of what took place in the Gulag."

Although Khan's obscene statement shocked many, to anyone who has watched Amnesty International in recent years it came as little surprise. Indeed, the "Gulag" re-



The Real Gulag: Tens of thousands of slave laborers died digging the Balmor Canal from the Baltic to the White Sea in the 1930s.

mark was just the most egregious example of AI's transformation from a respected human rights advocate to simply another left-wing organization with an anti-America bent.

History and Structure

In 1961 two students in Portugal, under the regime of Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, were sentenced to seven years in prison for raising a toast for freedom. Horrified, British lawyer Peter Benenson launched a campaign called Appeal for Amnesty to raise awareness about these and other prisoners of conscience. With the help of the British newspaper *The Observer*, Benenson enlisted people around the world in a letter-writing campaign to protest against imprisonment for political or religious beliefs. The public reaction was so strong that within six months the Appeal for Amnesty campaign began to

develop into the organization now known as Amnesty International.

Amnesty International claims about 1.8 million members in more than 150 countries.

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“Dedicated to freeing prisoners of conscience, gaining fair trials for political prisoners, ending torture, political killings and ‘disappearances,’ and abolishing the death penalty throughout the world,” Amnesty International claims to be “independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion.”

It has had many notable success, including the release of political prisoners in Syria, Argentina, Pakistan, Kosovo, Greece and Lebanon, to name a few. It has taken some brave stands over the years, such as speaking out against anti-Jewish attacks and criticizing the Palestinian Liberation Organization for human rights abuses against Arabs. In 1964 it was one of the first nonprofit organizations to receive a special “consultative status” with the United Nations’ Economic and Social Council. In 1977 Amnesty International was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

All major decisions about issues, campaigns and official stands are made at the main headquarters, the International Secretariat in London. National chapters are to follow the policies and support the opinions coming from the Secretariat. However, because of differing political and social circumstances, national chapters are free to choose

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to emphasize some issues over others. For example, Amnesty International USA (AI USA) emphasizes lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights much more than other national chapters.

Fundraising conducted by national chapters supports the worldwide network and London-based Secretariat. The deep American concern for human rights naturally makes the AI USA subsidiary branch a big fundraising contributor to the international organization. The influence bought by this huge financial base provided an exemption for AI USA from the general “country rule” barring a national chapter from providing data or campaigns against alleged human rights violations in its own country. The country rule is intended to foster impartial, objective judgment and protects AI employees against intimidation in the governments of dangerous countries.

Obviously safety is not a concern for AI workers based in America, but impartiality may be. Amnesty International USA’s campaign against the death penalty and especially human rights violations associated the War on Terror may have more to do with domestic politics and coalition-building.

Moving Left

The first initial steps leftward came in 1977 when AI listed the United States as a major human rights violator for executing convicted murderers. Despite due process protections extended to every person on death row, AI claimed opposition to the death penalty was consistent with its stated mission. But it likely damaged Americans’ appreciation of AI’s stand against global human rights abuses. After all, if Amnesty criticizes a practice most Americans support, maybe those regimes AI criticizes abroad aren’t so bad after all.

AI USA’s exemption from the country rule allowed it to become a critic of human rights in the U.S. and advocate a left-wing political agenda. This included frivolous support for the DC statehood campaign, a domestic political issue with no human rights impact.

AI USA’s policy advocacy work promotes Senate ratification of the controversial Convention on the Elimination of All

Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). It also lobbies on behalf of the Torture Victim’s Relief Act, the Torture Outsourcing Act, and the Security and Freedom Ensured Act. Critics say these bills would diminish American sovereignty and restrict our government’s ability to gather intelligence on terrorists.

Amnesty International USA emphasizes lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights much more than other national chapters.

A big stretch from its torture and human rights portfolio is Amnesty International USA’s campaign supporting the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) reauthorization. This bill funds organizations that pursue a strongly feminist and leftist agenda. It bypasses existing criminal statutes that guarantee due process of law to the accused and, like other “hate crimes” initiatives, makes some victims more deserving than others. This bill also requires about \$4 billion from federal taxpayers to fund its provisions.

A credibly impartial defender of human rights must maintain a reputation for objectivity. But Amnesty International USA doesn’t hesitate to join recognizably leftist advocacy groups with varying axes to grind, including the ACLU and others with wholesome-sounding names like the Bill of Rights Defense Coalition, Human Rights Campaign, Human Rights First, and Human Rights Watch. These organizations have clear domestic political goals.

Funding

The money flow into Amnesty International USA reveals a more complete picture of its nature and motives. While much of its budget comes from individual sponsors and membership contributions, large foundations also contribute significant amounts for specific projects and campaigns. The Ford Foundation has contributed over \$300,000 since 1999, having previously awarded Secretary General Irene Khan a Ford

Foundation Fellowship. Over five years the MacArthur Foundation gave over \$325,000 and the Tides Foundation nearly \$180,000.

Following the destruction of the World Trade Center towers downtown, the midtown Manhattan-based Rockefeller Foundation granted \$100,000 to Amnesty International USA in 2002 for so-called “crisis response work,” intended to expose “human rights violations” by U.S. military personnel during terror-fighting operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In 2004 Amnesty International USA generated over \$39 million in operating revenue. About \$10 million was spent to support the Amnesty International Secretariat in London, including research, country campaigns and international actions.

Leadership

Irene Khan, a lawyer, a Muslim born in Bangladesh, and an active anti-war activist since her days at Britain’s University of Manchester in the 1970s, heads AI’s International Secretariat as secretary general. “Taking the helm in Amnesty International as the first woman, the first Asian and the first Muslim to guide the world’s largest human rights organization, Irene brought a new perspective to the organization,” brags AI. This new perspective includes double standards on human rights, a leftist political agenda, an unrealistic view on armed conflict, and propaganda against America and Israel.

Khan’s background and personal experience are clearly reflected in her statements. For instance, she implores the media to select inoffensive descriptive words in stories on international terrorism: “This is a call to the media not to say ‘Islamic terrorist.’”

However she finds it acceptable to describe the U.S. military as administrators of a Gulag at Guantanamo Bay. But consider her reaction to the U.S.-led War on Terror: “Not since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948 has there been such a sustained attack on [its] values and principles.” Since 1948! That would include scores of Stalinist and Maoist communist regimes, and the objects of every Amnesty International campaign since its inception.

The leadership of Amnesty International

USA shows similar proclivities. Executive Director Dr. William Schulz is a Unitarian Universalist minister and was president of the Unitarian Universalist Association. He has served on the boards of directors for Planned Parenthood and People for the American Way. He is author of *Tainted Legacy: 9/11 and the Ruin of Human Rights*.



Talking to the press: AI Secretary General Irene Khan (left) and AI USA Executive Director William Schulz (right)

Schulz has called on foreign governments to “uphold their obligations under international law by investigating all senior US officials involved in the torture scandal and arrest any official who enters their territory and begin legal proceedings against them.” Inspired by the arrest of Augusto Pinochet while visiting the United Kingdom in 1998, Schulz encourages foreign governments to capture Secretary Rumsfeld, Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, and even President George W. Bush.

This restricts his organization’s ability to be taken seriously. While Dr. Schulz inflates policy differences into international crimes against humanity, the real victims of repressive governments are all but forgotten by a distracted Amnesty International.

Naiveté

When he was ambassador to the United Nations Daniel Patrick Moynihan formulated Moynihan’s Law which states that the greater the number of human rights complaints against a country, the more likely the dissidents are to be well-protected. (See page five, “Moynihan’s Law.”) Where people feel safe enough to accuse the

government of abuse, they are much more likely to do so. It takes incredible courage and resourcefulness to honestly report on conditions inside a police state. But does even the most Bush-deranged paranoid believe he will be physically harmed for accusing the President of evil deeds?

Amnesty International vehemently campaigns against the detention of a few hundred combatants at Guantanamo, but it cannot orchestrate a protest inside closed countries like North Korea where millions of people are systematically deprived of their basic rights. In such countries, Amnesty International continues to rely on its “personalized campaigns” sending petitions to a government asking for release of individuals jailed for political activism. Somewhat useful on the individual level, these campaigns fail to address the nature of an au-

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thoritarian regime that makes these violations possible and effectively makes political prisoners of the entire population.

AI's loud criticism of the US lets repressive regimes engage in moral equivalency. The People's Republic of China issues an annual critical report called "The Human Rights Record of the United States." The cover given by Amnesty International gives credibility to the PRC's argument that the US is no beacon of human rights, and that the Chinese people really need not expect better for themselves. The United States' role as the greatest force for human rights – moral by our long historical example and physical by our willingness to act – is intentionally sullied for little benefit.

On issues involving militant Islam, AI advocates "peace" to resolve armed conflict. When the U.S. attacked the Taliban in Afghanistan, Secretary General Irene Khan announced in December, 2001: "the world does not need a war against 'terrorism'; it needs a culture of peace based on human rights for all." While we await the arrival of such a culture, AI sees little need for the hard work of ensuring security. Letter-writing campaigns alone will not deter terrorists nor dictators from violence.

War on Terror

Consistent with Moynihan's Law, Amnesty International has chosen to be critical of the coalition fighting the War on Terror, even though it is not the force that conducts suicide bombings, ritual beheadings, the intentional targeting of

Loud criticism of the US lets repressive regimes engage in moral equivalency

civilians, and other abuses of human rights.

Instead, Secretary General Irene Khan condemned a 2002 British Foreign Office report that used AI research critical of Baathist Iraq as "a cold and calculated manipulation of the work of human rights activists." While Khan professed that the "human rights and humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people must be at the forefront of the debate on Iraq," she opposed driving Saddam Hussein from power.

Once Operation Iraqi Freedom began, Amnesty International lectured US and UK

forces to take all necessary precautions to protect civilians, regardless of any violence by Iraqi forces. This rhetoric exploits minor or individual U.S. and U.K. human rights violations and then portrays them as officially approved strategy. It ignores the US military's unprecedented efforts to minimize civilian casualties often at increased risk to its own soldiers' lives.

Israel also provides ammunition for Amnesty International campaigns. The organization has condemned Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and endorsed a Palestinian state. This stance on a territorial dispute is unique for AI. Somehow meriting a higher status than other populations, Palestinian refugees have support from Amnesty International in their claim to political sovereignty.

Conclusion

Amnesty International has built a powerful brand image as an impartial voice for the powerless. Its message is appealing to most Americans, and service in that cause is needed. But AI is depleting all the moral capital it built over years of hard work for the sake of Leftist politics.

Anyone interested in supporting a leftist cause has plenty of other organizations to support. But those of us concerned about real torture and political imprisonment are poorly served by Amnesty International. The cause of human rights is damaged when the motives of its advocates are suspect.

Amnesty International has moved its focus away from human rights as traditionally understood and toward human rights as Leftist ideology. Meanwhile, the Left has become curiously silent on human rights abuses by Muslim regimes and movements. They don't want to ally with George W. Bush in fighting for human rights in the Muslim world. Amnesty International's absorption into the larger left raises a question for both: What happened to their commitment to human rights?

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For frequent updates on environmental groups, nonprofits, foundations, and labor unions, check out the CRC-Greenwatch Blog at

www.capitalresearch.org/blog



Moynihan's Law

Moynihan's Law is deliberately ironical. It states that the greater the number of human rights complaints about a given country, the greater that country's likely protection of human rights.

To test this assertion, we counted the number of news releases, reports, and urgent actions posted to the Amnesty International website (www.amnesty.org) from the beginning of 2005 through March 22, 2006 for selected countries in different regions of the world.

The rate of complaints (see the "Reports per Million" column, outlined in light lines) suggests the effect Moynihan predicted. If the level of criticism from Amnesty International were a reliable guide, North Korea and the People's Republic of China would have the greatest respect for human rights in the world.

The United States is the subject of Amnesty International complaints at twice the rate of the sample, and is on par with Saudi Arabia. Israel is the subject of the greatest number of complaints per million people.

In the real world, we know that some countries have greater respect for human rights than others and thus merit different levels of scrutiny from observers and activists. More repressive regimes merit greater scrutiny. Factoring in a country's objectively measured political and personal freedoms better indicate how Amnesty International prioritizes its attention and resources.

The Scrutiny Score (outlined in heavy dashed lines) was calculated by dividing the rate of AI reports per million by an average of a country's 2005 Freedom House (www.freedomhouse.org) scores for political rights and civil liberties. Freedom House is a highly-respected non-partisan human rights organization. Countries with high scores garner a high amount of scrutiny from AI in relation to their level of freedom. Low-scoring countries are being ignored by AI and should have more attention paid to their human rights situation.

These Scrutiny Scores show some interesting patterns. In Latin America, leftist icon Hugo Chavez's Venezuela receives the lowest scrutiny, followed by Castro's Cuba. Colombia under Washington-friendly Alvaro Uribe, which is fighting drug lords and the leftist FARC guerrilla movement, is subject to much greater AI scrutiny.

Some of the highest Scrutiny Scores go to countries actively fighting terrorism: the United States, the United Kingdom, and Israel. Only Syria among majority-Muslim countries is highly scrutinized.

Country, by Region	Amnesty Reports	Population in millions	Reports per Million	Freedom House	Scrutiny Score
Sub-Saharan Africa					
Congo (Kinshasa)	15	61	0.2	6,6	8
Somalia	5	9	0.6	6,7	18
Sudan	59	40	1.5	7,7	42
Zimbabwe	24	12	2.0	7,6	60
Western Hemisphere					
Venezuela	5	25	0.2	3,4	11
Cuba	8	11	0.7	7,7	20
Mexico	49	106	0.5	2,2	46
Colombia	43	43	1.0	4,4	50
Haiti	15	8	1.8	7,6	57
United States	190	296	0.6	1,1	128
East & South Asia					
China	46	1,306	0.04	7,6	1
North Korea	2	23	0.09	7,7	2
Bangladesh	14	144	0.1	4,4	5
Vietnam	14	84	0.2	7,6	3
Pakistan	34	162	0.2	6,5	4
Afghanistan	15	30	0.5	5,6	9
Cambodia	13	14	1.0	6,5	17
Europe					
Russia	57	143	0.4	6,5	7
Turkey	23	70	0.3	3,3	11
France	7	61	0.1	1,1	12
Belarus	13	10	1.3	7,6	19
United Kingdom	42	60	0.7	1,1	69
Greece	17	11	1.6	1,2	106
Middle East					
Egypt	17	78	0.2	6,5	4
Saudi Arabia	17	26	0.6	7,7	9
Iran	93	68	1.4	6,6	23
Iraq	37	26	1.4	7,5	24
Syria	77	18	4.2	7,7	60
Israel	32	6	5.1	1,3	255
Palestinian Auth.	12	4	3.2	N/A	N/A
OVERALL:	995	2,956	0.3	5.2, 4.7	22

High scrutiny scores (over twice the average) are in bold, *low scrutiny* scores (below half the average) are in italics.

Overall figures are weighted by country population.

For Freedom House scores, 7 is most repressive and 1 is least repressive. The first number is for political rights, the second for civil liberties. No scores are available for the Palestinian Authority.

Population, Reports per Million, and Scrutiny Scores are rounded.

$$\text{Scrutiny Score} = \frac{\text{Reports per Million}}{.5(\text{Political Rights Score} + \text{Civil Liberties Score})} \times 100$$

BrieflyNoted

Rep. Alan Mollohan (D-WV) has directed at least \$178 million in appropriations “earmarks” to specific nonprofits in his district over the past five years, reports the *Wall Street Journal* (Apr. 7). What makes this a front page story is that the recipients are a network of individuals, nonprofits and companies that are the congressman’s business partners, contribute to his campaigns and depend on federal grants for the bulk of their revenue. Mollohan is senior Democrat on the House Ethics Committee.

Nonprofit organizations that skirt the legal restrictions that come with tax-exempt status are celebrating the departure of **House Ways & Means Committee Chairman Bill Thomas**. Chairman Thomas has been willing to investigate groups that engage in aggressive advocacy efforts, and reluctant to expand tax incentives for charitable contributions. A particular focus of Thomas’s has been the tax exemption of enterprises that compete with private for-profit businesses: credit unions, charity hospitals, and big-time collegiate athletics.

Al Gore’s environmentalist slide show made another stop this past month. The former Vice President headlined the **Ceres Conference** in Oakland, California, where attendees gathered to discuss the conference theme “Accelerating Sustainable Governance.” But stay awake, if you’re a shareholder. Representatives of Citigroup, Dell, General Electric, GM, IBM, Intel, McDonald’s, Sunoco, UBS Investment Bank, and other wealth creators will mingle with the likes of **Environmental Defense**, **Friends of the Earth**, **Mother Jones Magazine**, the **Natural Resources Defense Council**, **Rainforest Action Network**, **Tides Network**, and the **Union of Concerned Scientists**. Not being a wrestling match, no good can come of this encounter.

Co-op America joined several other self-appointed Corporate Social Responsibility organizations in mobilizing its members to sign petitions urging large mutual fund companies Fidelity, Vanguard, and American Funds to support shareholder resolutions on global warming. Alisa Gravitz, Executive Director of Co-op America, says, “Mutual fund companies are out of touch with investors.” That sounds like a business opportunity. Why doesn’t Ms. Gravitz set up her own global warming-sensitive mutual fund? It should be easy to lure customers from the out-of-touch competition.

The **American Civil Liberties Union** supported the City of Berkeley in its successful court battle against the **Boy Scouts**. The California Supreme Court ruled last month that the City of Berkeley can refuse to allow the Sea Scouts, affiliated with the Boy Scouts, free access to the city’s marina solely on the basis of the Scouts’ refusal to admit avowed atheists and homosexuals.

The husband of Illinois Democrat Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky, Robert Creamer, was sentenced to five months in prison for writing millions of dollars in bad checks to fund his **Illinois Public Action** nonprofit organization. A Democrat political consultant, Creamer steered the organization to activism on health care, pollution, and ATM fees. After his sentencing, Creamer said, “I will continue to do whatever I can to work for social and economic justice.”

It’s called the “Green Issue” and it features Al Gore, George Clooney, Julia Roberts and photos of Manhattan and San Francisco under water. The May issue of **Vanity Fair** magazine turns environmental policy into a fashion trend, and it should embarrass anyone serious about environmental policy. But it’s also a classic portrayal of advocacy in the environmental movement. Years from now, copies will be treasured like a “Dewey Defeats Truman” headline.