

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL**  
**NORTH COUNTY CHAPTER 471**

**PRESS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**LOCAL AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CHAPTER MEETS THEIR  
FORMER ‘ADOPTED’ CASES AT AIUSA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
(AGM) AND LAUNCHES COMMUNITY ACTION AT CARLSBAD  
VILLAGE FAIRE FOR “DISAPPEARED” JOURNALIST.**

Nearly half of the members of the North County Chapter of Amnesty International recently attended the U.S. Sections Annual General Meeting (AGM) in San Francisco, marking 50 years of the worldwide organization’s fight to protect human rights.

One of the many seminars they attended was of particular interest to the local activists as it featured three journalists and former prisoners of conscience who are now free in part due to Amnesty International’s efforts: Mexican journalist Lydia Cacho, who exposed an organized crime ring involved in sex tourism, child pornography and human trafficking; journalist Roxana Saberi who moved to Iran in ’03 to provide stories to news outlets including the BBC, NPR and Fox; and Sri Lankan journalist J.S. Tissainanayagam who spent 20 years reporting on human rights and minority politics during the country’s civil war. “It was especially important to hear their stories and how critical Amnesty International’s letter writing actions were towards gaining their freedom,” said local chapter coordinator Kathy Ford. “Knowing that our group had been part of that effort, and then to get to meet and hear from these courageous people in person was amazing. It helps to know that our letter writing campaigns are effective and this charges our batteries for our next battle.”



*Amnesty International Local Group 471 members receive Western Region Award at AGM in San Francisco*

**The next battle is the chapter’s recently ‘adopted’ journalist in Sri Lanka, Prageeth Ranjan Bandara Ekmaligoda, who was covering the upcoming presidential election last year when he disappeared just days before the vote. He was traveling home and on his cell phone with a friend when the phone went dead. “Prageeth had been a sharp critic of the government and had been abducted once before but was released,” reports the group’s case coordinator Jim Rockoff who is directing the member’s actions on Prageeth’s behalf. “His disappearance is a typical pattern in Sri Lanka, where journalists are at great risk of death or disappearance.” Since 2006, 15 Sri Lankan journalists have been killed and dozens have fled the country.**

Hearing about the freedom gained by Mr. Tissainanayagam has given the local chapter hope that a new campaign they will be launching at the Carlsbad Street Faire on Sunday May 1<sup>st</sup> might garner some positive results. Chapter Media Director Alessandra Colfi explains: “We’ll be inviting folks to have their picture taken holding a board with Prageeth’s photo and a message to the Sri Lankan authorities: ‘What happened to Prageeth?’ Through the year we hope to obtain 500+ individual photos that we’ll be periodically sending to the Sri Lankan government. We think the Carlsbad Faire is the perfect place to begin this campaign.” The local chapter is a known fixture at the Faire, having hosted a booth for more than 20 years. People are invited to stop by the booth located mid-way down Madison Street where they can sign petitions and have their picture taken in support of Prageeth.

Earlier this month our local members wrote to Prageeth’s wife in Sri Lanka, lending their support and telling her about this new effort they’ll be starting on behalf of her husband, in addition to the appeals they’re already sending to the government. They hope this added effort will bear fruits in getting to the bottom of his disappearance. Ford explains: “*hope* is such an important part of the human rights movement, *hope* that people can actually make a difference. You can’t give up on folks who fall victim to human rights abuses, they’re the ones enduring the tough stuff; we just have to do our part to keep the pressure on. And to do so, we need help from our community. We are holding on to the possibility that maybe next year we’ll attend Amnesty International conference and will get to hear from Prageeth himself.” If that were to happen, we would have to thank the whole community that joined in our efforts; we would especially owe gratitude to the local media for helping us raising awareness because they felt compelled to support a colleague on the other side of the world.