



Newsletter

2012 REVIEW OF GROUP ACTIVITIES, AND A LOOK FORWARD TO 2013



Welcome to the Ely City Amnesty Group's second Newsletter, reporting on our activities in 2012 and looking forward to another packed and fruitful year in 2013.

On a regular basis, we continue to meet monthly at 7.00 p.m. on the third Thursday of the month at St Peter's House, Broad Street, Ely.

Attending a meeting is a great way of getting to meet other people who are passionate about human rights and of finding out what is happening locally and internationally.

Our meetings generally start with a **monthly action**. In 2012, actions included:

- a group photograph in support of the Young Women for Change (YWC), a grassroots feminist movement with the aim of empowering and improving the lives of women across Afghanistan



- joining 300,000 Amnesty supporters worldwide in signing a petition to the CEO of Shell demanding that his company take responsibility for the destruction it has caused in the Niger Delta
- writing a letter to the home secretary Theresa May expressing our concern about changes to the rights of migrant domestic workers.

Sunday meditations in the Amnesty Chapel

On the first Sunday of each month, at 10 a.m. in St Catherine's Chapel, Ely Cathedral, a small group meets to remember and pray for prisoners of conscience and victims of human rights abuse. This is a time of silent meditation. If a focus is required, details of prisoners are provided and can be taken away for further reflection. People of all faiths and none are welcome at these meditations.

Former Soviet Union

Our group has taken a special interest in the countries comprising the Former Soviet Union. On an individual basis, group members regularly respond to Amnesty's Urgent Action emails concerning individual cases in the region by writing letters or sending emails.

Cases this year included the punk group Pussy Riot, whose members were jailed for protesting against the policies of Russian President Vladimir Putin, and 23-year old journalist Mehman Huseynov who is facing up to five years in jail in Azerbaijan on fabricated charges.



Photo © Jeremy Nicholl 2012

Campaigns, fundraising & other events

A **bookstall** in Ely's Saturday market in February raised £250 and got us off to a good start for the year.



With a considerable amount of trepidation and a lot of hard work the group held a **film night** at St Peter's Church, Ely, in March, screening Ridley Scott's 'Life in a Day'. Local artists Natasha Day and Barbara Grafton kindly donated star prizes for the raffle. Most of the tickets were sold on the night, rather than in advance, which led to a lot of nail-biting anxiety. In the event the church was packed and we made £484 after expenses.

For 17 years Amnesty International has been active in campaigning for an **arms trade treaty** to regulate the flow of arms. In advance of a July Arms Trade Treaty Conference in New York to discuss the draft text of the treaty, we joined other local Amnesty groups in gathering signatures on a petition to David Cameron. Our stall in the Ely market in May resulted in 69 signatures, a lot of interesting discussions with members of the public and coverage in the local press. The UN's Final Conference on the treaty will be held in New York in March 2013.



In July we were invited to take part in **Circle the World**, a celebration of world cultures at Ely Cathedral, intended to complement the Olympic Games. Our eye-catching display attracted both local and international visitors, and drew interest from other participants. Building on the release of hundreds of dissidents in Myanmar last year we collected signatures for a petition appealing to the Burmese authorities to free all remaining political prisoners. At the close of the event we joined other participants in leaving a symbol of our organisation at a shared area under the Octagon tower – a candle representing Amnesty's iconic candle of hope.



Also in July, a more modest local celebration saw the group celebrating our **third birthday** with a scrumptious cake.

August found members of the group sitting on hay bales in a field near Soham enjoying a **pop concert**. The organiser, Linda Homan, is an Amnesty supporter, and she kindly donated half the profit from the event to Amnesty, raising over £200. Our display boards attracted a lot of attention from the young attendees and we collected 41 signatures on our petition for Ibragim Gazdiev, a young Russian who was abducted by armed men in 2007 and has not been seen since. Linda emailed afterwards to say 'I had several young people tell me how outraged they were that another young person could be taken away by the government and no one able to do anything.'

September was an extremely busy month for the group. On the 8th we held a **Write for Rights** event in the Cathedral Centre, when our group and members of the public wrote about 30 urgent action letters to overseas governments in support of four Amnesty cases in Gambia, Palestine, China and the Ukraine. We also collected over 50 signatures on a petition against the execution of Reggie Clemons in Missouri, USA. Our bamboo cage outside the Centre containing volunteer prisoners, attracted publicity on the day and coverage in the local press.



On 22nd we held another **bookstall** at the Ely Saturday market and raised £190.

On 16th our chair, Barbara Grafton, was interviewed by **Radio Cambridgeshire** about Amnesty International and our forthcoming lecture.



And on 26th we held our third **Annual Lecture** in the South Transept of Ely Cathedral. Dr Sharath Srinivasan, Director of the Centre of Governance and Human Rights, University of Cambridge of the Institute of Criminology at Cambridge, gave an enlightening lecture on ‘Peace and War in the Sudans’. Unfortunately, torrential rain and driving wind had an adverse effect on the audience numbers.

We ended our year by participating in Amnesty’s annual **Greetings Card Campaign**. We have designed and printed our own unique greetings cards which will enable us to save on purchase and postage costs and therefore contribute more to Amnesty campaign funds. Sending cards gives their recipients hope that they have not been forgotten and send a powerful message to repressive governments. On 25th November members of the Cathedral congregation and visitors to the Cathedral signed cards for 11 individuals, groups and communities around the world that are suffering human rights abuses.

On 1st December several of our group attended the **East Anglia Regional meeting** organised by the Cambridge Group and held at the Friends’ Meeting House in Jesus Lane.

The highlight of the day was a debate entitled “The Human Rights Act: Protecting us all or just the undeserving?” Putting forward the motion “The UK Human Rights Act is good for this country” was Cambridge Lib Dem MP Julian Huppert. Barrister and Head of Fenners Chambers in Cambridge, Martin Collier, put forward the opposing view. Overwhelmingly, and unsurprisingly, the delegates supported Julian Huppert.

So that’s been our 2012 - busy but very enjoyable and, hopefully, effective in many areas of fund-raising and awareness-raising.

Our plans for 2013 include regular events such as bookstalls and Write for Rights, plus some exciting fund-raising events such as a jazz concert and producing a book of seasonal and international recipes.



We are hoping to expand our group in 2013 so that we can undertake more activities. If you can spare some time for a regular or occasional commitment (or to help out at a particular event) we would love to hear from you. Our contact details are below.

About Us

We are a friendly, active and creative group.

We meet at 7.00 p.m. on the third Thursday of the month at St Peter's House, Broad Street, Ely, CB7 4AH.

We welcome people of faith and no faith, and of any nationality.

If you care about human rights, and would like to campaign with like-minded people around Ely, then just turn up on any meeting night - you will be made very welcome.

Even if you are not ready to join our group, you can be added to our "interested parties" list to receive details of our activities by e-mail.

AIUK website: <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/>

Contact us at: info@amnestyely.org.uk and check out our Facebook page at <http://ow.ly/iSEP8>.