



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

February 2017

<http://manchester.amnesty.org.uk/>

Facebook page: Manchester Amnesty International

Facebook group: Manchester Amnesty

Twitter: @amnestymanc

Group News

Group meetings

From now on, our meetings will be held on the fourth Monday in the month at MadLab on Edge Street in Manchester's Northern Quarter. This is within easy reach of bus and tram stops at Piccadilly Gardens and Shude Hill. There is a nearby NCP car park. See <https://madlab.org.uk/find-us/> for more advice on how to get there.

Coming up we have:

- 27th February – Workshop on Refugee campaign; see →
- 27th March – Group AGM and review of campaigns to opt into, using the Local Groups planning pack.
- 24th April – Talk on the Palestine situation by a lawyer currently working in the Occupied Territories.

Help needed

Amnesty are co-hosting a Women in the Media event at the People's History Museum over the weekend of 4/5th March. More info at: <http://www.womeninmediacon.co.uk/>



We have been asked to help man a stall and help in the auditorium. We are short of volunteers – especially for the Sunday so if you could spare half a day (and want to hear some interesting talks) volunteer by emailing manchestergroup@amnesty.org.uk NOW.

Darwin Day Stall



Earlier this month, we had a stall publicizing the case of Mohamad al-Roken at the Darwin Day organised by Greater Manchester Humanists. Thanks to Heather, Jo and Anne for turning out to get it together.

Facebook

We now have two presences on Facebook:

A Facebook page – this is our public face where we will post what we are doing and events that we are holding. This is a brand new venture and thanks go to Rosemary and Henrike for setting it up. <https://www.facebook.com/amnestymanc/>

A Facebook group – this is a closed group on which we can discuss, post requests for volunteers, chat re Amnesty etc. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/109895619228/>

Follow our page and join the group to keep fully up to date!

Next Group Meeting

7.30pm.

Monday 27th February Refugee Campaign Workshop

Norah Lynam from the Fylde Group and one of the North West Amnesty trainers will be facilitating a workshop to introduce the international Amnesty 'I WELCOME' refugee campaign.

★ MadLab ★

36-40 Edge Street, Manchester, M4 1HN
(in the Northern Quarter)

See <https://madlab.org.uk/find-us/> for how to find it.

*Some of us will meet beforehand (at about 6pm) at Home Sweet Home on Edge Street, for a bite to eat.
You are welcome to join us.*

All welcome

Group roles

Our March meeting will include our Annual General meeting when we review our group officer roles. Do give some thought to whether you could take on one of the jobs or whether you would like to get more involved in any area of our work.

In particular, we will be looking for a new group chair, membership secretary (meeting and greeting new members and doing the admin on our Yahoo group), media lead (maintaining our press contacts list and drafting press releases and letters) and UAE campaign lead. If you fancy having a go at any of these jobs, do have a chat to find out more. All jobs could be done as job shares to provide support to each other.

Subscriptions please!

Annual donations from members are vital to keep the Group going. The suggested sum is £20 if you have a wage, £5 otherwise, or whatever you can afford to give. Please bring your cash or cheque to the next meeting or contact Treasurer Sean Dunne (Sean.a.dunne@btinternet.com) and he will tell you how to get the money to him.

Thanks!

Anti Trump Rallies

Members of the group have represented Amnesty at some of the city centre rallies protesting about Donald Trump's immigration policies. I'm sure that there will be many more opportunities over the coming months, so be prepared to wave a placard.



Campaigning

Individuals at Risk

On Saturday 11th March there will be our regular letter writing session where we will be writing letters for cases from the Spring Real Lives leaflet (whilst sampling the delicious cake at the Eighth Day Café). If you can't make it, don't let that stop you putting pen to paper (or finger to keyboard) as the leaflet is attached with this newsletter.

March Letter Writing Session

Saturday 11th March 2-4pm
The Eighth Day Café, Oxford Road

A letter from you could help free a prisoner, stop an execution or help a bereaved family receive justice.

All Welcome.

United Arab Emirates

We will have a display featuring both Women's Rights and Mohammed al-Roken at the 'Women in the Media' event and will collect signatures on a petition regarding women's rights.

Refugee Campaign

Local councils can help convince the UK Government to keep the Dubs Scheme open.

In March 2016, in the Dubs Amendment, the UK committed to bringing 3,000 unaccompanied minors to safety in the UK. These young people, some as young as eight years old, are suffering and in grave danger in Europe.

To date, around 200 children have been transferred to the UK under the Dubs amendment. The government have recently announced that only 150 more will arrive from the freezing camps of Greece, before the programme is closed.

As politicians from all parties and all parts of the country rally in support of the Dubs Scheme, now is the moment for local councils to send a firm message to central Government: Britain is better than this.

***But for this to happen,
you need to tell your council to speak out.***

As local authorities are required to bear the costs of resettlement, we need to send them the clear message that we want them to help more of these children and are asking them to put pressure on central government to provide the necessary financial resources.

Attached you'll find a template you can use to ask your council to support the call to keep the Dubs Scheme open, and to pledge to make more spaces available for refugee children. By writing in large numbers, we can make sure local councils know that they have the support of the local community.

Please tell your local council to speak out and send a firm message to central Government. Find the contact details for your local councillors here: <https://www.writetothem.com/>

Burma

Jean has received a letter from the Myanmar Embassy in response to one of hers concerning the Rakhine people.

It states that the Government of Myanmar is concerned about the situation in Rakhine State, is aware that the state is in crisis and that the situation there has deteriorated since early October 2016 when 3 Border police posts were attacked. (It was assumed in some quarters that members of the Rohingya group were responsible, and the military took action although nothing was investigated or proved). The Embassy are concerned to redress the balance and assure those who have the interests of Myanmar at heart that the Government is taking action to bring peace to Rakhine state.

Following the attack on the border posts the Government immediately suspended UN aid which was being distributed regularly to the most deprived areas of Rakhine state – Maungdaw and Buthitaung. According to the Embassy, during

this time the Government distributed more than 377million kyats in humanitarian assistance in addition to 53 million kyats for the whole state between 1st April and Dec. 27th 2016. Since the situation after the border attackers has calmed down somewhat the distribution of UN aid to the most deprived areas has been resumed. This is cause for thanksgiving, and AI have closed action on this issue

The Government claims that in the longer term it is committed to improving the situation in the whole of Rakhine state, and accepts that development is vital to reach both long term and short term solutions. Practical moves which have already been made include the establishment of A Central Committee on the Implementation of Peace, Stability and Development of Rakhine State. This includes working committees:

- Rakhine Advisory Commission - headed by Dr. Kofi Annan. This supports the Government's efforts to find solutions to long-standing issues.
- Citizenship Verification Commission - will look at the difficult question relating to the fact that the Rohingya have never been granted Myanmar citizenship
- An Investigation Committee - led by the Vice President - to look into the causes of the recent incidents and allegations.

In its desire to demonstrate concern, and the need to establish peace and stability in Rakhine State the Government is co-operating closely with the UN Rapporteur Mrs. Yanghee Lee. She has been given freedom of access to Rakhine State. In addition 13 independent journalists, both national and international have been given permission to visit the two main affected areas - Maungdaw and Buthitang.

An interim report from the Investigative Committee stressed that the involvement of external extremists led to difficulties in substantiating allegations, or establishing any hard facts or evidence. Peace and the rule of law and stability are difficult to maintain as extremists have access to weapons.

It is recognised that the eradication of poverty, and the implementation of socio-economic development takes time. The Embassy asks for the understanding of people who have the interests of Myanmar at heart as the Government of Myanmar is taking steps to address the challenges; and is investigating thoroughly causes for the situation in Rakhine State, including root causes. The issue will be addressed according to the prevailing laws of the land and the international norms and conventions.

Northern Africa

ALGERIA

MOHAMMED TAMALT: Amnesty have received the very sad news that on 11th December 16, British-Algerian freelance journalist Mohamed Tamalt, 41, died while in custody in a University Hospital in Algiers. After his arrest, on 27th June 16, Mohammed went on hunger strike to protest against his detention, before entering coma in late August. Hundreds attended his burial in Algiers on 12th December 16, including human rights defenders and civil society activists. Back in July 16, as a group, we sent letters for his release.

EGYPT

CLOSURE OF AL NADEEM CENTRE: the Egyptian authorities have shut down the Al Nadeem centre, which used to offer crucial support to survivors of torture and violence. This support

includes help with access to vital services including counselling and legal assistance. In the process the authorities acted without waiting for the outcome of the judicial review into the appeal against the closure. On request of AI UK we have sent a message through Twitter in protest against this decision.

MALEK ADLY: Human rights defender Malek Adly has been released on 28 August after he spent 115 days in detention. The court did not set bail as a condition of his release but required him to specify a place of residence as he faces an ongoing criminal investigation. In June 16, as a group, we wrote letters on Malek's behalf.

MAHMOUD ABY ZEID (SHAWKAN) - An Egyptian court has accepted his lawyers' request to have Shawkan be presented for medical examination by the Forensic Medicine Authority- which reports to the Ministry of Justice, following the prison doctor's report that said he was in good health, despite his family saying that he has Hepatitis C. His trial, and that of the other 738 defendants in the 'Rabaa dispersal' case, has been adjourned to 25th February 17.



TRUTH FOR GIULIO REGENI: In previous newsletters we mentioned Giulio Regeni, a Cambridge University student, who was in Cairo researching trade unions when he was abducted and killed a year ago. **See details of a local meeting below.**

MOROCCO

ALI AARRASS: On 10th October 16, Belgian-Moroccan prisoner Ali Aarrass was transferred to Tifelt II Local Prison, a near-empty prison bloc about 60 kilometres from Rabat. Since then, he has been held in solitary confinement with a restricted courtyard time to one hour a day. According to his family and lawyers, he sleeps on a concrete slab, with few covers, is allowed only one shower a week, and has inadequate food. He is also only permitted to make a brief weekly phone call to his family who are unable to visit him frequently given that most of them live in Belgium, while his elderly father lives in Melilla, Spain and is very ill.

Such harsh conditions of detention have caused Ali Aarrass's health, already fragile after six years in detention, to significantly decline; he has been experiencing frequent vomiting and fainting. In November 16 and January 17, representatives of Morocco's National Human Rights Council visited Ali Aarrass in prison, but he nonetheless remains held in solitary confinement. According to the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Mandela Rules), prolonged and indefinite solitary confinement amount to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and must not be imposed under any circumstances. In response to a letter from Amnesty International, voicing its concern for the solitary conditions in which Ali Aarrass was being held, Morocco's General Delegation for Penitentiary Administration and Reintegration said that Ali Aarrass' isolation is due to the fact that the prison is new and sparsely-populated. However, isolation does not need to be intended as punishment in order to constitute solitary confinement. At the meeting we will sign a letter on this case.

UAE, Women's Rights and Children's Human Rights

No updates this month

Other events

Truth for Giulio Regeni - Justice for Egypt's Disappeared

Joint Meeting with AIUK, UCU and Egypt Solidarity Initiative

Tue 28 February 2017 - 12:30 – 14:00. The Council Chambers, Manchester University Students Union, Oxford Rd, Manchester M13 9PR



Speakers:

- Liesbeth ten Ham (Amnesty International UK, Cambridge City group)
- Jack Shenker (journalist and author of The Egyptians: a radical story)
- Anne Alexander (Cambridge University UCU)

Giulio Regeni, a post-graduate student at Cambridge University, disappeared on 25 January 2016 in Cairo, where he was researching independent trade unions for his PhD. On 3 February his body was found, bearing signs of severe torture which human rights groups say are the hallmarks of the Egyptian security forces.

Research by Amnesty International has exposed how Giulio's murder is part of a much wider picture of human rights abuses by the Egyptian security forces and judiciary which pose a grave threat to academic freedoms and freedom of expression. Hundreds of other cases of enforced disappearance and torture have been recorded in Egypt in the last year alone.

This meeting is hosted by UCU in collaboration with Egypt Solidarity Initiative in support of a joint national campaign by Amnesty International UK and UCU to demand Truth for Giulio and justice for Egypt's Disappeared.

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/truth-for-giulio-regeni-justice-for-egypts-disappeared-manchester-event-tickets-31281332307>

Next Acoustic Amnesty

March 30th at Sacred Trinity Church on Chapel Street.

Tickets soon from Wegottickets.com.

Raising money for 42nd Street - a Manchester mental health charity as well as Manchester Amnesty.

It is "Poets who sing and singers who poet".

It will be led by the incomparable Kieran King who will compare 6 artists who are doing both performance poetry and singing.



Amnesty International National Conference and AGM

Date: 8 & 9 April 2017

Location: East Midlands Conference Centre, Nottingham

Admission: Free

This is always a brilliant and motivating weekend. Do consider attending. Hopefully there will be a group of us going down.

Get more info at <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/national-conference-and-agm-2017>

Let Anne know if you book; email manchestergroup@amnesty.org.uk

Manchester Stands Up to Racism

Thursday 2 March, 7pm, Mechanics Institute

Speakers:

Moazzam Begg (CAGE)

Dr Siema Iqbal (MEND)

Abra Javid (Rotherham 12 campaign)

Louise Regan (NUT Senior Vice President, NUT)

Alex Davidson (President, Manchester TUC)

Zeinab Mohamed (Refugee and RAPAR)

More info: <https://www.facebook.com/events/384391115258560/>