



**Aylesbury Amnesty International Group**

**Monthly Group Meeting, 25<sup>th</sup> January 2017, 7.30pm**

**Friends Meeting House, 9 Rickfords Hill, Aylesbury, HP20 2RT**

**Present:**

Carol Tarrant

Bob Corn

Sallyann Thilthorpe

Frances Booth

David Barnard

Henry Mayer-Gross

**Apologies:** Bronwen Lee, Annelies Varsey, Jim Edwards, Katherine Danflous

**Carol welcomed everyone to the meeting –hoping that everyone had had an enjoyable Christmas Break! This evening’s meeting will focus on the Amnesty International UK’s Campaign ‘Protecting the Space for Human Rights Defenders’ – Bob to give a presentation.**

**1.0 Previous Minutes** – Agreed

**2.0 Urgent Actions:**

2.1 David had prepared letters in support of Lee Jin-Young, Republic of Korea.

2.2 Everyone present signed the letters – Bob to post.

**3.0 Protecting the Space for Human Rights Defenders:**

Bob delivered a presentation to support this Campaign, which sparked off lively discussion:

**‘PROTECTING THE SPACE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS’**

“It takes more than courage to engage in this, because when you suffer, it’s not only you. You put all of your family through that who do not have somebody else to rely on.”

**Tanzanian Human Rights Defender**

“Who is ready to die? Who is ready to risk his life? Sometimes if you don’t have human rights blood, you can’t do it. Some find it’s not worth it and some of them don’t want to. It takes heart, it takes courage.”

**Tanzanian Human Rights Defender**

“It’s only the brave that are going to remain in NGOs, if you begin observing the attitude towards the work by NGO actors, it is varying... it becomes difficult, because only the brave will talk about oil.”

**Ugandan Human Rights Defender**

East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

<http://www.defenddefenders.org>

**‘Only the Brave Talk About Oil’**

<http://www.defenddefenders.org/our-publications>

‘The challenges faced by a nation engaged in large-scale natural resource extraction can only be met with the support of a strong civil society engaged in the legislative process, monitoring compliance and environmental management practices, and promoting transparency. Without strong and committed human rights defenders filling this role, the resource blessing threatens to become a resource curse.

However, human rights defenders engaging with the extractive industries sectors frequently face harassment and intimidation and are blocked from accessing the information and physical locations necessary for them to fulfil their monitoring and advocacy roles.’

**THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE IS TAKEN FROM THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER – HUMAN RIGHTS (OHCHR):**

**Who is a Human Rights Defender?**

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/SRHRDefenders/Pages/Defender.aspx>

“Human rights defender” is a term used to describe people who, individually or with others, act to promote or protect human rights. Human rights defenders are identified above all by what they do and it is through a description of their actions and of some of the contexts in which they work that the term can best be explained. The examples given of the activities of human rights defenders are not an exhaustive list.

### **What do human rights defenders do?**

#### 1. All human rights for all

To be a human rights defender, a person can act to address any human right (or rights) on behalf of individuals or groups. Human rights defenders seek the promotion and protection of civil and political rights as well as the promotion, protection and realization of economic, social and cultural rights.

Human rights defenders address any human rights concerns, which can be as varied as, for example, summary executions, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, female genital mutilation, discrimination, employment issues, forced evictions, access to health care, and toxic waste and its impact on the environment. Defenders are active in support of human rights as diverse as the rights to life, to food and water, to the highest attainable standard of health, to adequate housing, to a name and a nationality, to education, to freedom of movement and to non-discrimination. They sometimes address the rights of categories of persons, for example women’s rights, children’s rights, the rights of indigenous persons, the rights of refugees and internally displaced persons, and the rights of national, linguistic or sexual minorities.

#### 2. Human rights everywhere

Human rights defenders are active in every part of the world: in States that are divided by internal armed conflict as well as States that are stable; in States that are non-democratic as well as those that have a strong democratic practice; in States that are developing economically as well as those that are classified as developed. They seek to promote and protect human rights in the context of a variety of challenges, including HIV/AIDS, development, migration, structural adjustment policies and political transition.

#### 3. Local, national, regional and international action

The majority of human rights defenders work at the local or national level, supporting respect for human rights within their own communities and countries. In such situations, their main counterparts are local authorities charged with ensuring respect for human rights within a province or the country as a whole. However, some defenders act at the regional or international level. They may, for example, monitor a regional or worldwide human rights situation and submit information to regional or international human rights mechanisms, including the other special rapporteurs of the United Nations Human Rights Council and treaty bodies. Increasingly, the work of human rights defenders is mixed, with the focus being on local and national human rights issues, but with defenders making contact with regional and international mechanisms which can support them in improving human rights in their countries.

### **What are Human Rights?**

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Pages/WhatareHumanRights.aspx>

The principle of universality of human rights is the cornerstone of international human rights law, as first emphasized in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights in 1948, which contains 30 Articles of Basic Rights and Freedoms.

Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status. We are all equally entitled to our human rights without discrimination. These rights are all interrelated, interdependent and indivisible.

All States have ratified at least one, and 80% of States have ratified four or more, of the core human rights treaties, reflecting consent of States which creates legal obligations for them and giving concrete expression to universality. Some fundamental human rights norms enjoy universal protection by customary international law across all boundaries and civilizations.

Human rights are inalienable. They should not be taken away, except in specific situations and according to due process. For example, the right to liberty may be restricted if a person is found guilty of a crime by a court of law.

Universal human rights are often expressed and guaranteed by law, in the forms of treaties, customary international law, general principles and other sources of international law. International human rights law lays down obligations of Governments to act in certain ways or to refrain from certain acts, in order to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals or groups.

### **Declaration on Human Rights Defenders**

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/SRHRDefenders/Pages/Declaration.aspx>

“Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms”

Serious Discussion began in 1984, and the text was finally adopted in 1998 by the UN General Assembly - the Declaration is addressed not just to States and to human rights defenders, but to everyone.

### **BUT! ..... IN 2004, IN OUR OWN GROUP'S SPHERE OF INTEREST – WEST PAPUA:**

This – one of many reported and unreported abuses of Human Rights perpetrated on the West Papuan population by the occupying Indonesian Forces:

Amnesty International urges President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) to ensure that his plan to resolve past human rights violations includes accountability for the killing of West Papuan Human Rights defender Munir Said Thalib (Munir):

<https://www.amnesty.nl/nieuwsporaal/pers/indonesia-new-administration-must-resolve-killing-human-rights-defender-munir>

‘.....Although three Garuda Airlines staff have now been convicted of the killing, there are credible allegations that those responsible at the highest levels of government have not yet been brought to justice. ....’

<http://tabloidjubi.com/eng/uncen-students-host-screening-documentary-human-rights-defender-munir/>

‘.....“It is very important and recorded in the history about human rights defenders in this country,” Putra Rumagia said.....’

Munir was poisoned on 7 September 2004 when travelling from Indonesia to Amsterdam, Netherlands with Garuda Airlines – one of the Air Crew put arsenic in his orange juice. Interestingly, Amsterdam has recently dedicated a Public Cycle-Way to Munir’s memory.

<https://hrdmemorial.org/hrdrecord/munir-said-thalib/>

### **SO – HOW DO YOU ‘PROTECT THE SPACE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS’?**

International Service for Human Rights (ISHR):

<http://www.ishr.ch/news/opinion-shrinking-space-human-rights-defenders>

‘..... It is welcome news, therefore, that Norway has recently announced that it will put a landmark resolution to the Human Rights Council this session, calling for the elimination of laws which impair or restrict the work of human rights defenders and the passage of laws which ensure that they are able to fully exercise their fundamental rights to freedom of expression, assembly, association and peaceful protest.

However, it is not only odious laws that are shrinking the space available for human rights defenders. The global financial crisis has resulted in a major contraction of funds available to support non-government and human rights organisations, with Australia even going so far as to re-direct overseas aid and development funds into paying private security companies to run immigration detention centres in Nauru and Papua New Guinea.....’

<http://www.ishr.ch/news/canada-new-guidelines-put-human-rights-defenders-front-and-centre>

'..... Defenders and organisations working at the national level often tell us that they are surprised by the frequent contradictions in government policy in Geneva, and on the ground, especially on issues like support to human rights defenders. This is particularly frustrating, as diplomatic recognition and support in challenging contexts can provide defenders with critical protection, political support and partnerships.

National guidelines on supporting human rights defenders – like those released by the Canadian government last week – have been an important tool for defenders to seek consistency from governments who want to help them advance their human rights work. The European Union launched the first such guidelines in 2004; Norway in 2010; Switzerland and the US followed suit in 2013, and Finland in 2015 .....

#### **A SAFE SPACE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN THE UK:**

University of York – Centre for Applied Human Rights:

<https://www.york.ac.uk/cahr/defenders/>

"The Protective Fellowship Scheme offers a visionary approach to protecting and supporting individuals who risk their lives for the protection of human rights."

James Savage, Amnesty International UK

<https://www.york.ac.uk/cahr/videos/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bj-OiWob3JU>

Christeen and Gullalai - Defending women's rights in Egypt and Pakistan

[https://www.york.ac.uk/media/cahr/documents/Uni%20Magazine%20Spring%202013\\_HRDs.pdf](https://www.york.ac.uk/media/cahr/documents/Uni%20Magazine%20Spring%202013_HRDs.pdf)

Page 16 - Karak Denyok from South Sudan took up a six-month protective fellowship at York in October 2012

#### **AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL UK'S WORK ON HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS:**

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/issues/Human-rights-defenders>

'Defenders or activists are the people on the front line, working for human rights to be respected in their society.

They take all kind of shapes and work in many different ways, but one thing is sure: our human rights would suffer if they didn't do their good work - which is why they are often targeted by people who don't want abuses to be exposed.'

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/human-rights-defenders-what-are-hrds>

'Human rights defenders – some of the bravest people in the world'

#### **4.0 Any Other Business:**

4.1 South Midlands Regional Conference – this normally takes place at end of January annually, although due to there not being a South Midlands Regional Rep at the moment, evidently the Regional Conference will not be taking place – Bob mentioned that other Regional Conferences are in place – details on the AIUK website.

4.2 AIUK National Conference and AGM – 8th and 9thth April, at Nottingham University; attendance is free, although accommodation will be charged for; booking is now open on line, through the AIUK website. Bob and Carol will attend only on 9<sup>th</sup>, due to a family commitment on 8<sup>th</sup>; David mentioned that he hopes to attend.

4.3 Noted that the February Meeting was to have taken the form of an evening discussion surrounding "Human Rights in the UK" led by Johnny Heartbreaker – Bob to write to Johnny asking him if he is still available to lead the discussion.

**5.0 NEXT MEETING: 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2016** at 7.30pm, Friends Meeting House, 9 Rickfords Hill, Aylesbury, HP20 2RT