**Amnesty International**

### **Blackheath and Greenwich**

### **Newsletter**

# March 2017

**Present:**

Amanda Kipling

Andres Crespo

Ann Hillary

Brigitte Hurrell

Daryl Armstrong

David Webbe-Wood

David Weekes

Elisabeth Neumeier Geoff Torry

Ken Ryder

Rachel Lanza

Rachel Errington

Roger Hardwick

Simon Ware

Steph Boulter

**Apologies:**

Angela Dock

Dee Weekes

Eileen Smith

Graham Dock

Guy Ottewell

Olwen Pearson

Shelagh Vouillemin

Tilly Lavenas

Rachel Errington

## Group Meeting 14.03.2017

**1. Introductions and apologies**. Courtenay Howe, AI Country Co-ordinator, Guatemala, and new members Daryl Armstrong and Rachel Lanza were welcomed.

2. **Guatemala discussion:** Courtenay Howe outlined the dire position in Guatemala where crime and violence are rife since the ending of “armed conflict” 1960-96. This especially affects the indigenous population. 39% of the 16 million population live below the poverty line. The risks of living in the country: violence, social and economic, have led to an increase in migration with, particularly, young individuals migrating north for Mexico and the USA. They meet great risks on their way, and Courtenay gave individual examples of death and disappearance. On arrival they are often forced to return, to life-threatening situations. There has been a surge in asylum applications: 16,000 in 2015.

State intervention is low and millions live in terror at what gang members or public security forces can do to them. Trials and re-trials for human rights offences are abandoned, but courts are now willing to hear some cases of violence and torture, trying high ranking officers.

The Death Penalty is still in place, but there have been no executions since 2000. AI is pushing for a death penalty abolition law, drafted in 2016, to be implemented.

Human Rights defenders are largely dealing with indigenous peoples’ rights. The HR defenders are regarded as the “enemy within” and, stigmatised, are accused of terrorism or working with drug traffickers and held without evidence spending a long time locked up, causing suffering to them and their families. It is particularly bad for the women defenders. AI is asking that they are recognised and protected and has created a report “Speak Out for Defenders” <http://speakout4defenders.com/en/about/> *(Courtenay will send a link, but I think this is it..Ann)*

**3. Campaign updates:**

Burma – Brigitte: Some effective investigation, headed by Kofi Annan, into the situation of Rohingya and Muslim minorities had started, but recently the UN published a damning report on crimes against humanity in Myanmar and asked for action. The background was an alleged attack by Rohingya on border police and seizure of weapons and ammunition. Security forces sealed the area, banning humanitarian organisations, media and human rights monitors. Since, AI have documented wide ranging human rights violations, including killings, torture, rape, disappearances, arbitrary arrests and destruction of Rohingya buildings and property.

December 1st, President Htin Kyaw established the ‘Investigative Commission’ but this lacks impartiality, independence and competence.

The Commission led by Kofi Annan has no mandate to investigate human rights violations, and is limited to making recommendations to secure ‘peace and prosperity’ in the Rakhine State.

Central America – Roger:

Mexico: There were 3,000 more homicides in 2016 than in 2015 and smear campaigns against human rights defenders and independent observers. Journalists continued to be killed and threatened. Violence against women remained a major concern.

Many people fleeing Central American countries are heading for Mexico not the USA.

Guatemala: AI Annual Report 2016/17: Criminal justice system misused in Guatemala.

Report notes the landmark decision of the High-Risk Court finding guilty two former military officers of sexual violence and domestic enslavement of 11 indigenous Maya Q’eqchi’ women. Usually cases stall. 14 HR defenders killed, many threatened, stigmatised & attacked (see 2).

Honduras: 1st anniversary of Berta Cáceres’ murder. Raj and Sheila met the Honduran Ambassador to the UK who promised to take up matters they discussed with the relevant authorities. Harrassment, attacks and killing continued against environmental, indigenous and LGBTI campaigners. Weak criminal justice system fosters a culture of impunity. Nicaragua: Activists against the canal constructions were harrassed and detained.

The abortion total ban remained unchanged. See <http://bit.ly/2lNZ4iI>

El Salvador: AI Annual Report 2016/17: 3,438 murders recorded in first 6 months 2016. Concerns: police and military use excessive force and extrajudicial killings during security operations. The total ban on abortion continued in 2016. However Sonia Tábora, jailed for 30 years after suffering a miscarriage was pardoned after serving 12 years.

**Green Party Caroline Lucas tables Early Day Motion 1012 for environmental and human rights defenders** - Roger

Caroline Lucas calls on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to support the rights of communities to refuse mining on their lands, to recognise and protect environmental, land and human rights defenders and to resolve the underlying causes of violence against them by tackling corruption and illegalities that blight the natural resource sectors. Please ask your MP to sign.

**Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe** - Rachel

26 February Simon, Amanda and Rachel joined the Ratcliffe family and other Amnesty activists in Trafalgar Square to highlight the plight of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and Kamal Faroughi, British/Iranian dual nationals held in Iranian prisons on unclear charges.

14 March Richard Ratcliffe published a letter sent to him by his wife, Nazanin, on [change.org](http://change.org/). It is very emotional and a reflection of their lives together, in particular the last year during which they have had very little contact. The letter and Richard’s commentary are here: <https://www.change.org/p/free-nazanin-ratcliffe/u/19698755?utm_medium=email&utm_source=43406&utm_campaign=petition_update&sfmc_tk=8uo1O2XUncx87l3Id2DixY4EPpMFvF2LdT9Xu%2bmH4mwU1L7OYCkq2dcgj9Cw8nWE>

**4. AIUK AGM 8/9 April**

(a) AGM Representation: It was agreed Rachel will represent the Group and Simon will attend.

(b) Group AGM Resolution: B1: Eviction of the Chagassian People. Discussion took place on the AI Board’s opposition to this resolution - AI: “it could not be implemented, as written, without prior policy work by the International Secretariat (IS).”

The group agreed that AIUK should be asked to raise it with the IS. This will flag up the issue.

(c) AGM Resolutions:

B3, The freedom of the Alhmadiyya “to manifest their religion in teaching, practice, worship and obserevance” – our group rep to support.

B4, Making the combatting of homelessness a priority campaign. Roger pointed out that there are many other organisations compaigning on this issue, often with more expertise in this area. The more AI broadens its approach, the less effective it will be is a view often discussed. Simon said that issues have broadened over the years since AI started.

C5, AI Policy on ‘sex work’. Fresh research has led to a review of AI’s current position of decriminilisation.

On B4, C5 and other resolutions: group rep to decide in light of discussion at the AGM..

**5. Book Sale 17 June**

Brigitte will continue to co-ordinate. The garage needed for 5 weeks before, from Monday 15 May, open weekdays 7-9 p.m, weekends 4-6 p.m. Rachel has empty boxes in her garage; Roger has books. Rachel outlined the Book Sale and encouraged all to get involved. Volunteers and cars are needed for book collections. Card payments: David WW getting mobile signal booster.

**6. Letter Writing, 28 March**

7.30 p.m Greenwich Tavern, King William’s Walk, SE10.

Letters to David W-W by lunch, Monday 27th. Roger preparing letter re human rights defenders, Central America. If preparing letter, email group to avoid duplication. David W has letter bag.

**7. Arrangements for Future Meetings**

April Meeting: A speaker on Burma. May Meeting: AGM feedback and Book Sale.

**8. AOB**

Charity Lunch: 2 dates in October have been offered by Kate Allen when she could attend. Graham to arrange with Hamilton House owners.

London Regional Conference: Date to be confirmed.

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|  | **EVENTS 2017** |
| Tuesday 28 March | Letter Writing, Greenwich Tavern, SE10 |
| 8 & 9 April | AGM Nottingham |
| Tuesday 11 April | Group Meeting, St. Magaret’s Crypt |
| Saturday 17 June | Book Sale |
| Saturday 18 November | Book Sale (clearance) |

Group Meetings: Second Tuesday every month (apart from June) at 7.30pm in the crypt of St. Margaret’s Church, Lee Terrace, SE13 5DL

Letter writing evenings: Fourth Tuesday every month (apart from December)

Book Sale: A Saturday mid-to-late June; a Saturday after Remembrance Sunday in November; both at Church of the Ascension (COA), Dartmouth Row, SE10 8BF

Human Rights Action Centre (HRAC): 17–25 New Inn Yard, London EC2A 3EA; for any official events please register via the website at [www.amnesty.org.uk](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/) or tel: 020 7033 1675

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