

# Amnesty International **Cambridge City Group**

May 2016 - April 2017



## **Cambridge**

Cambridge is an extraordinary city. It is immensely rich - intellectually, historically, culturally, financially. The University of Cambridge has nurtured more Nobel Prize winners than any other institution. Its thriving high tech industries produce the most patent applications in the country. It comes only second in the tables for pupils achieving good GCSE results in maths and English. It has a high population of young people, very few of whom claim benefits. The average weekly income is near the top nationally, as are house prices.

As are house prices. Cambridge is the most unequal city in the country. Listed third for house unaffordability, a rise of 122% in homelessness over 2015, five food banks in the city centre, lowest per capita welfare spending, with 30% of children living in poverty in three of the city wards : the difference between those who have and those who have not is stark.

This is the environment in which the Amnesty International Cambridge City Group works, a vibrant exciting place to be with problems common to the rest of the country.

Cambridge was an early participant in the Amnesty movement. The group, the eighteenth still active in the country, was established in February 1969, a year of great social upheaval in Europe. The relationship between those in power and those who felt unrepresented was put to the test, sometimes violently. In 2016 that relationship was tested on the world stage.

The Amnesty International Report 2016-17 says : 'For millions, 2016 was a year of unrelenting misery and fear, as governments and armed groups abused human rights in a multitude of ways.' With growing suppression comes growing resistance, an awareness that inaction is not an option. 2016 saw an expansion in the number of sub-groups within the Cambridge City Group and a great increase in the level of commitment and activity among members. Old Amnesty interests like anti-death penalty, torture and Israel Palestine were joined by newer concerns - refugees, women's rights, an LGBTI group.

## Refugees and asylum

The plight of refugees worldwide dominated the news. The Cambridge group responded in 2015 by joining the national Asylum Justice Project and organising a regional conference on refugees.

The Cambridge Asylum Justice Project group campaigns for better treatment of asylum-seekers in Britain and to improve the public perception and awareness of asylum seekers and the asylum process, with the main focus of the group's work being on ending the indefinite detention of asylum-seekers. Members volunteer with Yarl's Wood Befrienders, visiting detainees at the Yarl's Wood detention centre outside Bedford and attend protests there organised by Movement for Justice. A petition of 350 signatures was sent to the Home Office asking for the implementation of the recommendations of the Shaw report on immigration detention and a meeting was held with Daniel Zeichner MP. There was a demonstration covered by BBC and ITV television and the local media. Films and talks were organized, including that by Shrouk, an LGBTI asylum seeker from Egypt, co-hosted with the LGBTI sub-group. The group also supported Aisha, a local LGBTI asylum seeker from Uganda, by writing letters for her court hearing. It works with Cambridge City of Sanctuary.



Contact : Andrea Brandt Von Lindau [andrea\\_bvl@yahoo.de](mailto:andrea_bvl@yahoo.de)

In October the Cambridge group organised the East Anglia regional conference on refugees, attended by over 200 people, with the specific aim of showing how individuals can make a difference. Speakers included Steve Symonds, Amnesty UK's director for refugees; Fathieh Yazdi, an Iranian refugee; Nancy Herz, a Norwegian activist; Syd Bolton, a lawyer working in the field; Saskia Mahal, a coordinator for the German group *Save me Mainz*; and Alison Criado-Perez, a senior MSF nurse. There were workshops on educating UK children about refugees; community sponsorship schemes; the power of story-telling; unaccompanied minors; the campaign to end detention; and information stalls, a lunchtime concert, a photo exhibition on the refugee camp on Lesbos.

[youtu.be/cHJOZapoSPE](https://youtu.be/cHJOZapoSPE)

[www.amnesty.org.uk/groups/cambridge/amnesty-international-east-anglia-regional-conference-refugees](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/groups/cambridge/amnesty-international-east-anglia-regional-conference-refugees)

## Anti-Death Penalty



The Cambridge anti-death penalty group campaigns on a world-wide basis where any country uses the death penalty. It works to communicate to the public why Amnesty campaigns against the use of capital punishment, for reasons including the fact that innocent people have been executed in error. It involves letter-writing either on behalf of specific individuals awaiting execution or when a country may be sentencing to death those below the age of eighteen at the time of the offence as this is against international law. From time-to-time efforts are targeted towards a specific country such as the USA or Saudi Arabia. Troy Davis, left, was executed in the USA in 2011 even though the trial judge stated that she now believed him to be innocent after new evidence emerged.

[www.amnesty.org.uk/cse/search/death%20penalty%20resource%20links](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/cse/search/death%20penalty%20resource%20links)

[www.amnesty.org.uk/death-penalty](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/death-penalty)

[www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/](http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/)

Contact : Mike Tidball [m.tidball@btinternet.com](mailto:m.tidball@btinternet.com)

## Stop Torture / Truth for Giulio Regeni



The Stop Torture group adopted the case of local student Giulio Regeni, tortured and murdered in Egypt in January 2016. This case has shed light on widespread human rights violations in Egypt. The group demonstrates with Cambridge University Amnesty, trade unions and other organizations and individuals to raise awareness of his case. On 10 December 2016, Daniel Zeichner MP, Alex Mayer MEP, Leader of the City Council Lewis Herbert and the Mayor joined the Stop Torture and Asylum Justice groups and hundreds of demonstrators for an event, right, covered by ITV and BBC News as well as local media. On the anniversary of Giulio's death a vigil was held outside Kings College, attended again by Daniel Zeichner and covered by Al Araby TV. During the year an exhibition was mounted in Great St Mary's Church, and stalls highlighting Giulio's story produced signatures on letters sent to officials of the Egyptian government. Amnesty UK launched its national Truth for Giulio Regeni campaign on 13 Feb 2017 with the Head of Amnesty Italy Professor Marchesi; the following day he gave a well-attended lecture at Kings College about the campaign, supported by the group. All the signed campaign cards will be presented to the Egyptian Ambassador in April. It is hoped that this pressure will mean progress in finding out what happened to Giulio and other people who have disappeared in Egypt. A T4G art exhibition and banner are also planned.

[www.cambridge-news.co.uk/news/cambridge-news/amnesty-cambridge-calls-truth-guilio-12303838](http://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/news/cambridge-news/amnesty-cambridge-calls-truth-guilio-12303838)

[www.itv.com/news/anglia/search/?q=amnesty+international](http://www.itv.com/news/anglia/search/?q=amnesty+international)

Contact : Sue Woodsford [sue.woodsford@ntlworld.com](mailto:sue.woodsford@ntlworld.com)

## Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories

The Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories sub-group addresses human rights abuses experienced by individuals and communities in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza. Individuals include Israeli conscientious objectors, Palestinian human rights activists and Palestinians held without charge or trial under administrative detention orders, while Bedouin groups whose homes have been destroyed are among the communities on whose behalf the group works. It is largely a letter-writing group which over the course of 2016 responded to the following appeals: Tair Kaminer, a young Israeli conscientious objector; Mohammad Faisal Abu Sakha, a Palestinian circus performer held under administrative detention; Mohammad al-Hashlamoun, a 17-year-old Palestinian boy, held without charge; Mordechai Vanunu, an Israeli whistleblower who revealed details of Israel's nuclear programme to the West and is still suffering harassment despite having served his term of imprisonment and been released in 2004; Abed al-Rahman Awad, a 16-year-old Palestinian boy, held under administrative detention; Jayyus, a village in the West Bank, where the separation barrier prevent farmers from having access to their land; Hasan Ghassan Ghaleb Safadi, 24, Palestinian and the media coordinator for prisoners' rights group *Addameer* held under administrative detention; and Anas Barghouti, 33, a Palestinian lawyer and human rights defender, who suffers frequent harassment from the Israeli authorities. A petition was signed on behalf of Ashraf Fayadh, a Palestinian poet convicted in Saudi Arabia of 'apostasy' for having questioned religion in his poetry, and sentenced to death. Chris Rose, Director of the Amos Trust, gave a talk to the Cambridge City Group about the work of the Trust in Palestine <http://www.amostrust.org>, and Paul Clark, an Ecumenical Accompanier, spoke about his work in Israel supporting Palestinian communities and Israeli peace activists.



Contact : Sheila Hakim [smh1003@hermes.cam.ac.uk](mailto:smh1003@hermes.cam.ac.uk)

## LGBTI



The group held a number of letter writing sessions to support Amnesty cases, including for men who were imprisoned for being gay in Tunisia; Ihar Tsikhanyuk, a drag artist and LGBTI activist from Belarus who was beaten by police; Costas who was attacked in Greece; Ahmet Yildiz from Turkey, was murdered for being gay. There were stalls in April and at the Pink Festival in September which were useful for promoting Amnesty campaigns and more interest in the group. Two popular events were organised for Cambridge LGBTI History Month in February: one was a talk by Shrouk El-Attar, an Egyptian LGBTI Rights activist who has been living in Wales since 2007 and was forced to claim asylum in the UK. Writer Saleem Haddad also gave a talk on the complex issue of identity and spoke about his novel, describing the challenges of a young gay man living in the Middle East. Recently, Aisha, a local asylum seeker from Uganda threatened with deportation has been supported by the group.

[amnesty-cambridge-city-lgbti-subgroup+subscribe@googlegroups.com](mailto:amnesty-cambridge-city-lgbti-subgroup+subscribe@googlegroups.com)

Contact : Richard Hopper [richardhenryhopper@gmail.com](mailto:richardhenryhopper@gmail.com)

## Women's rights



In February the Cambridge City group held a sold-out conference on women's rights. The keynote speaker was Azza Soliman, founder of the Centre for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance which focusses its work on violence against women, incest, tribal marriage, shelter and honour crime. In 2015 she was arrested - and became an AI prisoner of conscience - because she was determined to give evidence about the killing of the young poet Shaimaa al-Sabbagh; she was later acquitted. There were three workshops: *Women in politics*, led by Manali Desai, a lecturer at Cambridge University; *Everyday feminism*; and *My body my rights*, led by Liz McKean, AI Women's Human Rights Programme Director, and Charlotte Proudman, a barrister researching the role of law in changing harmful social and cultural practices against women and girls, specifically female genital mutilation in England and Wales. A panel discussion *Women on the move* included Sarah Graham, a journalist working at Women for Refugee Women; Rehab Jameel, a refugee from South Sudan; Catherine Markey, a local activist who had volunteered at the refugee camp at Lesbos; and Riel Karmy-Jones QC, a barrister specializing in serious organised crime, including human trafficking and serious sexual offences.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=37OfMdWyTOk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37OfMdWyTOk)

Contact : Liesbeth ten Ham [liesbet7200@gmail.com](mailto:liesbet7200@gmail.com)

## Social media

Cambridge City Group has a thriving social media presence through which campaigns and upcoming events and meetings are promoted. The regional conferences received over 10,000 views on Facebook. The group's Facebook community consists of over 350 people, with over 800 followers on Twitter. The Truth for Giulio Regeni campaign received a great deal of attention both on- and offline, and Twitter and Facebook allowed connection with activists internationally, especially in Italy. Some #TruthforGiulioRegeni tweets received over 40 retweets. Other campaigns such as ending indefinite detention and a number of Amnesty petitions were strongly supported.

Website: [www.amnesty.org.uk/groups/cambridge-city-group](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/groups/cambridge-city-group)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/amnestycambridgeuk/](http://www.facebook.com/amnestycambridgeuk/)

Twitter: [@amnestycambridg](https://twitter.com/amnestycambridg)

Eventbrite: [amnestycambridgecity.eventbrite.com/](http://amnestycambridgecity.eventbrite.com/)

Contact : Liesbeth ten Ham [liesbet7200@gmail.com](mailto:liesbet7200@gmail.com)

## Does it work?

Thousands of Amnesty demonstrations worldwide over the years, millions of letters - does it work?

Ask these individuals how much they value their freedom : Albert Woodfox who was released after 44 years in solitary confinement in a Louisiana prison, or the Myanmar community leader Dr Tun Aung who was released after being sentenced to 17 years in prison for trying to calm a rioting crowd, or Mexican Claudia Medina whose charges were dropped after she had made a false confession under torture, or the five Chinese women who had been arrested for planning to mark International Women's Day by launching a campaign against sexual harassment, or the three sisters from the United Arab Emirates who had been held in secret detention having tweeted about their brother's unfair trial, or the Chad activist Djerlar Miankeol who was released after all charges of insulting the judiciary by questioning the competence of judicial officials in a radio interview were dropped, or the Syrian human rights activist Mazen Darwish imprisoned for three years on trumped-up terrorism charges.

Ask these groups how much they value the support given by Amnesty members worldwide : victims of FGM, Columbian human rights workers, child workers in India, environmental activists in Nigeria, journalists in Palestine, those wrongly detained, children imprisoned, those delivered from a death penalty.



Liesbeth ten Ham for the Cambridge City Group accepting an award for activism at the Amnesty International UK AGM on 9 April 2017.

Nearly fifty years after its founding the Amnesty Cambridge City Group is working harder than ever, to promote human rights and fight injustice.

## Sources

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