



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

May 2017

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

Facebook page: Manchester Amnesty International

Facebook group: Manchester Amnesty

Twitter: @amnestymanc

Campaigning

General Election and mini hustings

In order to maximise our impact on human rights issues for the duration of the next parliament, we need to use the opportunity of the election to lay the foundations for positive and fruitful relationships with all MPs – regardless of whether they're newly elected or they've been MPs and working with us for years.

Talk to PPCs at our next meeting

We have invited Greater Manchester prospective parliamentary candidates from each of the main parties to come along to our meeting next Monday, 22nd May, to talk about what they and their parties intend to do about human rights issues and to answer our questions.

We will be inviting other organisations with similar interests e.g. Freedom from Torture, Campaign Against the Arms Trade etc, to come along as well. If you know anyone who would like to ask a human rights linked question, please invite them. You can direct them to our Facebook event :

https://www.facebook.com/events/764966287013416/?acontext=%7B%22ref%22%3A%223%22%2C%22ref_newsfeed_story_type%22%3A%22regular%22%2C%22feed_story_type%22%3A%22117%22%2C%22action_history%22%3A%22null%22%7D

for details.

Please attend our mini hustings and spread the word.

Contact your PPCs

AIUK would like you to ask your PPCs to demonstrate public support for human rights, and to tell you what human rights issue they are most passionate about, so that we can use this information to work with them.

See www.amnesty.org.uk/election2017 for more information, hints and sample letters.

United Arab Emirates

Didsbury Festival

We have a stall at the Didsbury Festival this coming Saturday, 20th May where we will feature our UAE campaign with petitions to the UAE and City Council. Henrike has been in touch with local councillors and parliamentary candidates and several have promised to drop into the stall.



We are a little short of helpers on the stall. If you can spare a couple of hours (either 12-2 or 2-4 pm) on Saturday afternoon, please drop Anne an email at manchestergroup@amnesty.org.uk.

Surveillance Technology and Human Rights

Amnesty International has published a blog written by Joshua Franco, Researcher/Advisor on Technology and Human Rights, about the impact of surveillance technology on human rights defenders. The blog, ***Surveillance Exports: Time for the EU to Put its Money Where its Mouth is***, looks at how abuses of surveillance technology can have a devastating effect on human rights defenders in countries all over the world, including its impact on activist **Ahmed Mansoor**, from the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Ahmed's arrest on 20 March marked a disturbing new chapter in a long story that has seen him face arbitrary detention, assaults, travel bans, death threats and other harassment. This campaign against him has repeatedly relied on sophisticated spyware in attempts to access his personal information and monitor his communications. In at least two instances, researchers at The Citizen Lab in Canada found that this spying has used software sold by EU manufacturers: the German-British Gamma Group and Italian Hacking Team. The blog looks at how more transparency and better regulations are desperately needed so that parliaments, journalists, civil society groups and the public can understand the human rights implications of the European trade in surveillance tools and so that exports that pose human rights risks are prohibited.

A PDF version of the blog is attached to this newsletter and it is available at the following link:

<https://medium.com/@AmnestyInsights/surveillance-exports-time-for-the-eu-to-put-its-money-where-its-mouth-is-10b6cd3e4014>

Film at Home

Last week, HOME screened Black Code as part of the Human Rights Watch film festival. This is a documentary about the work of Citizen Lab and others in uncovering how government manipulation of communications technology in countries including Tibet, Pakistan, Brazil and Syria is resulting in abuses against civil society activists and human rights defenders. We used the opportunity of the link between Ahmed Mansoor and Citizen Lab to gather signatures from the audience for a petition on his behalf.

Take Action for Ahmed Mansoor!

Amnesty International has been working with technology-focused organizations on a petition calling for the release of Ahmed

Mansoor. The petition is available in both Arabic and English now! Please sign and share with your contacts:

Link to English version of the petition:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/get-involved/take-action/free-ahmed-mansoor/>

Link to Arabic version of the petition:

<https://www.amnesty.org/ar/get-involved/take-action/free-ahmed-mansoor/>

There are also plans to have an event to mark the first the 100 days in detention for Ahmed Mansoor. Simona and Henrike are thinking along the lines of a street action before our June meeting as this will be on the 99th day of detention. Watch this space!

Syria

Film Screening

Earlier this month we held a film screening of the moving BBC documentary 'Syria's disappeared: the case against Assad' in conjunction with the Rethink Rebuild society. We also heard from two people who gave first hand accounts of being in Syria's prison system. This was a very emotional evening and really emphasised the need to campaign for human rights in Syria.

At the film screening, Rethink Rebuild asked us to help them spread the word on a campaign they are running called 'Save me in Syria'. See:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TI07C_Gpn00

Please share on Facebook etc.

Urgent Action

This week is Ali Mohammed Mostafa's 55th birthday. He is a father of three who has been forcibly disappeared in Syria for nearly four years, and his family still has no information about his fate or whereabouts.

On 2 July 2013, Ali went missing. He is a businessman originally from Masyaf in Hama countryside, who was at his family home in Damascus when he was arrested by Syrian government forces. Since then, and despite various and continuous requests, Ali's family has not received any confirmed information about his fate or whereabouts, which remain unknown.

Ali Mohammed Mostafa was detained twice before. In 2006, he was arrested by Syrian government forces after attempting to resolve a local dispute in his town. Then, when the protests started in Syria in 2011, Ali participated in peaceful demonstrations and in a local committee created to provide aid to internally displaced people who had fled the violence in Hama. For this, he was detained in August 2011 for a month and a half.

A close family member told Amnesty: "We do not know whether he is dead or alive. It torments us every day. Our only wish is that Ali celebrates his 56th birthday among us".

Please take action. A template letter is attached with this newsletter, with addresses for key contacts.

"I Welcome" Refugee Campaign

Refugee Week

We are hosting a stall for The Great Get Together on 17 June at Crowcroft Park in Longsight with City Of Sanctuary. The event will be a festival for the local community and will start at 5pm - going into the evening and including an Iftar for Muslim families. If you would like to get involved in the planning or manning the stall/attending the event, please email manchestergroup@amnesty.org.uk.



We are also planning to do a film screening of the Syrian film 'The Other Side of Hope' during Refugee Week - more dates and details will follow soon.

If you would be interested in being involved in planning for Refugee-related events and activities, please email rebeccabarnes5@gmail.com

City of Sanctuary

It would be great if members of Manchester Amnesty could support the following City of Sanctuary events:

May's Conversation Club: Thursday 18th May 6-8pm

Cross Street Chapel in Manchester City Centre. Artist Alison Duddle will be with us, helping us design giant puppets and costumes for the Manchester day Parade.

Supporters Get-Together and Training: Tuesday 23rd May 6-8pm

Transformation Community Resource Centre (TCRC), 11 Richmond Grove, M13 0LN, behind Longsight Police Station. Free parking /192 bus route. If you are new to Manchester City of Sanctuary and want to know the heart of it, do come along to TCRC, M13 0LN. (Please note the change of day, now TUESDAYS.)

May's Community Meal: Sunday 28th May 2017 1-3pm

Transformation Community Resource Centre (TCRC), 11 Richmond Grove, M13 0LN, behind Longsight Police Station. Free parking /192 bus route. This month we will be joined by Choreographer from Walk the Plank to help us prepare for the Manchester day Parade.

Individuals at Risk

Letter writing

We held our regular informal letter writing session last Saturday. 5 turned up to write letters and eat cake. A total of 21 letters were written, including 12 for UAE cases. We also wrote 8 postcards for ITAI (enforced disappearance case in Zimbabwe).

Put the date for our July session in your diary now.

July Letter Writing Session

Saturday 15th July 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.

Response Received!

In March, during the letter writing session, Simona wrote to the Mexican authorities about the case of disappeared students in 2014 in Iguala. She has received a response from the Mexican Embassy, see attached with the newsletter.



case of Giulio Regeni, who we have featured in previous newsletters. Although details of the discussion have not been made public, the Pope has confirmed that the Vatican got involved to resolve the open case.

East Asia (inc Burma)

“This was the worst experience of our lives “

The above quote is from a conversation a member of Burma Campaign UK heard when visiting a refugee camp near the border with China, and talking to a family of 10 - parents and eight children who were refugees in that camp, after they fled for their lives 3 times between Dec. 2011 and March 2017.

They had to grab what they could and leave their village in Khachin state in December 2011. After several weeks wandering, and walking seeking safety they found their way to a refugee camp, and were safe there until that camp was attacked by the Burmese army. On hearing the approach of fighter jets, and as the first bombs were dropped, they grabbed what they could and fled once again. The family spent a month in temporary shelters near the border with China, and eventually made their way to the camp where they now are. Conditions are harsh there, hence the quote above. The local people are doing what they can to help and to provide for the needs of refugees, but those who have fled at a moments notice have not had time to collect together what they need for a long stay. To expand on that quote - they long for some privacy, and just the space to wash properly, and have some privacy as a family. But the Burma military makes this impossible, puts further and further away the prospect of going home to their village, and resuming life there. Villages continue to be attacked..

Childrens' network

We will have letters to sign at the next meeting on two issues involving children's rights.

The first concerns 4 children and their mothers held for over 500 days in a Customs Enforcement detention centre in Pensilvania.

The second issue concerns an estimated 120,000 children living in the UK who have neither British citizenship nor immigration permission to be here. More than half were born in the UK and many are entitled to register as British citizens. The fee for registering is excessive (£973) and many cannot afford to pay. There is a petition asking the immigration minister to remove the profit-making element of the registration fee and also a fee waiver for those unable to pay and that no fee to be paid by children in local authority care.

Northern Africa

EGYPT -TRUTH FOR GIULIO REGENI- Earlier this month the Pope visited Egypt and met with the 6th President of Egypt, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. Among other things, the Pope discussed the

Group News

Group Meetings

N.B. Usually on the 4th Monday of the month - 7.30pm.

Monday 22nd May – Human Rights Hustings

We have invited Greater Manchester PPCs from the main parties to our meeting. Come along and ask questions.

Monday 26th June – Human Rights in Kyrgyzstan

One of our newer members, Meerim Asanbaeva, will be talking to us about human rights in Kyrgyzstan and her experiences of working for Human Rights Watch in that country (especially wrt women's rights).

☆MadLab☆

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

N.B This is within easy reach of bus and tram stops at Piccadilly Gardens, Exchange Square and Shude Hill. There is a nearby NCP car park.

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

Some of us will meet at about 6pm before the demo, in Home Sweet Home on Edge Street, for a bite to eat. You are welcome to join us.

All welcome

Acoustic Amnesty

We have another Acoustic Amnesty event coming up: this time in aid of the Help Musicians UK charity (<https://www.helpmusicians.org.uk/>) as well as Manchester Amnesty. Help Musicians UK, helps musicians young and old at all stages of their career. They provide help at times of crisis, but also at times of opportunity, giving people the extra support they need at a crucial stage that could make or break their career.

The excellent performers are Quiet Loner, Kirsty McGee and Karen Turley. A distinctly Americana flavour, although all our artists are very much rooted in the British Isles.

See the event on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/events/1049540998522685/>

Please publicise this event using the attached flyer and do share it on social media.

The gig will be seated and totally silent for performances with the (well stocked!) bar in a separate room. We are remaining with our approach of no sound system whatsoever - totally acoustic using the natural acoustics of the venue.

TICKETS: £8.00 in advance from - <https://www.wegotickets.com/event/396717>

Doors will open at 7pm and the show starts at 7.30pm prompt. Free on-street car parking is available and the venue is a stone's throw from Deansgate/Market Street in Manchester city centre.



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!

Other events

Tango for Syrian Children: Classical and Tango Music Concert

Rethink Rebuild are hosting a tango and classical music concert at Emmanuel Church in Didsbury this coming Wednesday the 17th of May at 7pm. This is in aid of their education project in Syria and will feature musicians from the Halle Orchestra in Manchester.

Here is the link. It would be lovely to see you all, or even if you can't make it, please share it on Facebook and Twitter and invite friends... spread the word...



<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/tango-for-syrian-children-classical-and-tango-music-concert-tickets-34047479929?aff=eac2>