



News from the Minehead Group

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Actions you can take this month:

- ✓ **Sign the petition** calling on the Chechen Government to stop the persecution of people who are, as they put it, of 'non-traditional orientation', and urge immediate action to ensure their safety. Over a hundred men suspected of being gay have been abducted, tortured and some even killed in the southern Russian republic of **Chechnya**. The Chechen government won't admit that gay men even exist in Chechnya, let alone that they ordered what the police call 'preventive mopping up' of people they deem undesirable. Find the petition on the home page at www.amnesty.org.uk.
- ✓ **Come along** on 17 June and visit our stall outside Iceland, The Avenue, Minehead for 'The **Great Get Together**' in memory of Jo Cox MP, and part of AIUK's **Campaign Against Hate**. 'There's more that unites than divides us'. We will give out flowers and cakes, and have a solidarity card to Brendan Cox for people to sign. More offers of help welcome – contact Alison Dietz.
- ✓ **Support** our **film show** and **photo exhibition** for Refugee Week on Thursday 22 June at 1930 in the Quaker Meeting House and invite your friends. More details about the film are overleaf.
- ✓ **Make a note** to join us (and help!) at our next fund-raising event: **AmnesTEA** on Saturday 8 July from 1500 to 1700 at Karen and Graham Mills' home, Westbrook, Furzeland Road, Porlock, TA24 8NF.
- ✓ **Note in your diary** to come along to our summer social on Thursday 24 August at 1800 – bring and share supper at Susan's home in Carhampton.

Round up of May news

On Friday 19 May, 10 people joined us for some part of the afternoon to write letters on human rights cases featured in Amnesty's **'Real Lives'** booklet. 59 letters were written in total, covering all nine people in the leaflet. Later the letters



were all copied to send to the embassies in London, so that another 59 letters were sent. The total cost in stamps was £102.07, all provided by stamp collector Peter Atherton at no cost to the group. Thank you Peter! Our next letter writing session will be in the autumn. Keep an eye on the website, our Facebook page or our newsletters for details of the next one. All are welcome to join us.

Our May **group meeting** was a short business meeting at which we planned our future events and actions. We heard that £800 has been sent from the group to AIUK, so many thanks to everyone who has helped with fund-raising and made donations. We agreed to send letters on behalf of the group to all of our prospective parliamentary candidates (PPCs) asking their views on human rights, the Human Rights Act and the refugee crisis. Some of us have also emailed our PPCs and have received encouraging replies from some. If you are reading this before 8 June, it's not too late for you to email your PPCs too!

After the meeting, some members went to see the film 'I Daniel Blake' which was being shown on the same evening at the Beach Hotel. If you haven't seen it, this is an excellent and moving film about aspects of human rights in our own country. All our politicians should see it!

Diary Dates

Monthly meetings:

We meet on the fourth Thursday of the month (except August and December) at 1930, at the Quaker Meeting House on Bancks Street, Minehead. The first part of the meeting is open to all and features a speaker, film or workshop. After a tea break, AI members are invited to stay for a short business meeting which will end by 2130.

Sat 17 June

Great Get Together action in Minehead. 1000-1200.

Thursday 22 June

Refugee Week Event: Film 'Fire at Sea' and AI photo exhibition 1930 at QMH.

Saturday 8 July

AmnesTEA: 1500-1700 in Porlock.

Thursday 27 July

Group meeting: two short films: women's HR and HR in India.

Sunday 20 August

Stall at Allerford Fete. Times tbc.

Thursday 24 Aug

Bring and share supper at Susan's home in Carhampton. All supporters welcome.

Sunday 17 Sept

Fund-raising concert in Alcombe Parish Church at 1500.

Thursday 28 Sept

Group meeting: Business meeting. Other items tba.

Campaign News

Ethiopia: there is nothing new to report on this campaign, but Cherry is hoping to meet with Patricia Bartley (AIUK's country coordinator for Ethiopia) and Yemi (Andy Tsege's wife) in London to discuss strategies for campaigning for Andy.

I Welcome Refugees: during Refugee Week, on Thursday 22 June at 1930 in the QMH, we will be showing the award-winning film 'Fire at Sea' (114 minutes) directed by Gianfranco Rosi. This film won awards for best film at the Berlin Film and other Festivals and the Amnesty International film award. It is about life on the Italian island of Lampedusa, at the sharp end of the migrant crisis and a gateway to Europe. Gianfranco Rosi spent months living on the Mediterranean island, capturing its history, culture and the current everyday reality of its 6,000-strong local population as hundreds of migrants land on its shores on a weekly basis. The resulting documentary focuses on 12-year-old Samuele, a local boy who loves to hunt with his slingshot and spend time on land even though he hails from a culture steeped in the sea. An Amnesty International photo exhibition about refugees will also be on display.



Human Rights Defenders under Threat - a shrinking space for civil society: Alison Dietz attended the launch of this new global campaign in London on 16 May. *She reports:* Kate Allen said Human Rights Defenders (HRD) are under threat all over the world. 282 were killed last year. Twenty years ago, the UN agreed to protect HRD. Our government has played its part in Burma, Colombia, and the DRC. However, after the General Election we must campaign to urge the government for a strategy of protecting HRD in all parts of the world. Diplomats should play a positive part.

An Egyptian HR activist and scholar, Dr Nancy Okail, was arrested and put on trial in Egypt for her work but managed to flee, so was sentenced in absentia. She cannot return to Egypt. She said the fact there is such a campaign sends a strong signal to those who persecute HRD, and stressed the importance of sustaining the campaign. Few killers of HRD are brought to justice.

Becky Shah, UK activist and campaigner for the Hillsborough Justice campaign, lost her mother and friends in the disaster in 1989; her brother aged 13 survived. She was 16, and they were taken into care. She described how her brother was interrogated by the police, which was shocking. The Sun published an editorial (Kelvin McKenzie) the following day saying that Liverpool fans had urinated on bodies. Smears and blame were all the victims received – apart from the Guardian, which was supportive from the start. In 1991 the verdict of accidental death was delivered. Only in April 2016 did a new inquest conclude that 96 people were unlawfully killed. This result would not have been possible without the Human Rights Act. Tony Blair put his relationship with Murdoch above truth and justice.

An impressive woman called Guadeloupe Marengo is heading the campaign. She said that since 1998 3,500 HRD have been killed. Earlier this month, after smears and false accusations, a mother was killed in Mexico for seeking justice for her 14 year old daughter who was abducted. We all need to be HRD. We must put pressure on the government to offer more protection. The narrative now is one of fear and division. This must change to human rights for all.

Q&A raised these points:

- Not only governments abuse HRD: there are non-state abusers too, such as businesses, criminal groups and armed groups.
- The crackdown on HR is in all countries. The narrative is that it makes us feel more secure.
- In Egypt in 2013 the new government promised all would be protected. But 60,000 are now political prisoners. Last month there were two terrorist attacks: repression just leads to more radicalisation. The roots, not the symptoms, of the problem need to be addressed.

How to contact the Minehead Amnesty International Local Group:

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Facebook: www.facebook.com/amnestyminehead

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