



News from the Minehead Group

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Actions you can take this month:

- ✓ **Take action** to help save the Human Rights Act. Don't let the government turn universal freedoms into privileges for a chosen few. Call on the Justice Secretary, Liz Truss, to save the Human Rights Act. Go to www.amnesty.org.uk to find the action on the home page.
- ✓ **Come along** to our **Write for Rights stall** and **coffee morning** 1000-1200 on Friday 9 December at the Avenue Methodist Church. Sign cards and send letters on behalf of those featured in this year's campaign. If you can help, phone Chris on 01643 704779.
- ✓ **Send** a Christmas card with solidarity message to **Eskinder Nega** who is 4 ½ years into an 18-year sentence for his work as a journalist (Kaliti Prison, Addis Ababa Prison Administration, PO Box 2436, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia).
- ✓ **Join us** for our New Year's **social** on Sat 7 Jan starting at 1230 at Alison's home in Roadwater. Bring and share lunch. This event is for everyone who supports the group – not just those who come to meetings. Email Alison dietz@btinternet.com for directions & to confirm you're coming.
- ✓ **Make a note in your 2017 diary** to join in the various events planned for **Holocaust Memorial Day** on 27 January and the **quiz** on 3 March.
- ✓ **Note our change of meeting day** - from January 2017, we will be meeting on the fourth **Thursday** of the month. Same time, same place!

Round up of November group news



We held a very successful **letter writing afternoon** on 9 November. *Christina reports:* 15 Amnesty members and friends wrote a magnificent total of 65 letters for the **Write for Rights** campaign. All are now stamped with a beautiful array of stamps, provided by Peter Atherton to the value of £60.75. Many thanks to Peter for this contribution.

November Group meeting: our main item was a report back from Alison and Cherry, who had attended the **Networks Conference** at AI's Human Rights Action Centre in London on 28 October. *Here is a summary of what they had to say:* We enjoyed a packed and informative day. The major topic was the refugee situation and Amnesty's new campaign 'I Welcome Refugees'. Kate Allen opened, speaking passionately about the need for action to help the huge numbers of desperate people displaced from their homes and to overcome negative attitudes towards them. A panel of four expert speakers looked at different aspects of the crisis, including specific needs of children, women and LGBTI. The overwhelming message was of a system which perpetrates HR abuses and increases the suffering of already traumatised people. We were left with the question of how Brexit will affect things. It seems likely it will be harder to reach vulnerable people, thus encouraging traffickers.

There was a choice of participative workshops. Cherry attended one on **Changing Opinions**, which was full of useful tips on how to communicate effectively with people about HR issues and how to address difficult and sometimes aggressive

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.

1-4 December

Minehead Christmas Tree Festival: please go along and admire our tree!

Friday 9 December

Write for Rights campaign stall and coffee morning: 1000-1200 Avenue Methodist Church, Minehead.

Sat 7 Jan 2017

New Year Social: at 1230 at Alison & Roy's home in Roadwater.

Thursday 26 Jan

Group meeting: extended campaign updates and planning our activities for 2017.

Friday 27 Jan

Holocaust Memorial Day: vigil and other activities.

Thursday 23 Feb

Group meeting: AGM

Friday 3 March: Quiz

at Minehead Social Club

questioning. The key message was to try to build empathy and understand why people feel the way they do: facts can be useful but don't overdo it as this alienates people, stick to a few simple messages, aim to plant small seeds of change and remind people that UK signed up to the global effort to help refugees after World War II. The **Women's Action Network** session said the specific needs of women refugees are the latest priority, with abortion and forced marriage still on the radar but less intensively. Yazidi women are a particularly needy group, deeply traumatised by their terrible experiences and still not receiving the support they need. The NGO, Women for Refugee Women (WRW) is doing a lot of excellent work in this area (www.refugeewomen.co.uk).

Alison's first workshop was on **Citizenship Rights for Children**. This revealed how hard – and at times impossible – it is for many children who have grown up in the UK to gain citizenship. Various hurdles are put in their way and there is a lack of awareness of the need to apply before the age of 18. And if they have not applied in time, they will be sent 'back' to a country they do not know. 65,000 children living in the UK have the right to register but have not done so. Her second workshop was on **Working with the Gender, Sexuality and Identity Unit** which does research for the International Secretariat. Eight researchers are involved in projects covering such topics as: women in Nepal who suffer a prolapse after childbirth, challenging inter-sects discrimination eg Syrians in Lebanon and intersex rights in Europe. At present they are working on Indigenous people's land rights in Kenya, especially the forest dwelling communities in Embobut Forest, and sexual and maternal health services in South Africa.



Also, at the November meeting, Susan reported on the **campaign launch for Write for Rights 2016**, which was held at the HRAC on 1 November. She was inspired by the speakers, which included Albert Woodfox, who featured in the 2015 WfR campaign and was released in February 2016 after 43 years in solitary confinement in a US prison.



Richard Ratcliffe spoke about his wife Nazinin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, a British-Iranian imprisoned in Iran on unspecified national security charges. In the Q&A session, Shaker Aamer stood up in the audience and spoke. And throughout, Chris Riddell, the Children's Laureate, was drawing live on screen. It was an amazing evening!



Holocaust Memorial Day Friday 27 January 2017. The planning group has been busy developing their ideas and plans for this day. Publicity will be available later this month. The main events will be as reported in last month's newsletter but the timings have been firmed up. The vigil will be in Wellington Square between 1100 and 1300 and an exhibition, words and music will be in St Andrew's Church between 1100 and 1500. There will also be a display in the library. The talk in the evening by Donald Reeves will be at 1900 in the church. For more information, contact Jenny Lennon-Wood or Chris Lawson.

Campaign News

Ethiopia: *Cherry Bird writes:* It is now a year since the protests began in Oromia, and in October the Ethiopian government imposed a 6-month state of emergency, allowing arbitrary arrests, curfews, restriction of movement and curtailing media reporting. At least 1500 people have been detained, many of them beaten and tortured. Humanitarian aid work is affected as NGOs find it harder to reach the people who need their help and fear for staff safety if they comment on the situation. It is estimated that over 9 million people will need food aid this year as the rains have failed for two successive years. In this repressive context Reprieve reports concern for British citizen **Andy Tsege's** safety. Following disturbances at Kaliti prison, where both he and Ethiopian journalist Eskinder Nega are being held, Andy got word out to British officials on 28 October that he was in fear of his life. He has not been heard from since and British officials admit they have not seen him since August this year. You can sign a petition for his release on Reprieve's website (www.reprieve.org.uk) or tweet Theresa May.

How to contact the Minehead Amnesty International Local Group:

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