



## News from the Minehead Group

[www.amnesty.org.uk/minehead](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/minehead)

[www.facebook.com/amnestyminehead](https://www.facebook.com/amnestyminehead)

### Actions you can take this month:

- ✓ **Send a letter** to the Ethiopian Ambassador in London asking for his help in seeking the release of **Eskinder Nega** who is 4 ½ years into an 18-year sentence for his work as a journalist. A sample letter is attached.
- ✓ **Take action** to protect human rights by asking President **Trump** to halt his new executive order banning people from six Muslim-majority countries and closing the door on refugees. It demonises the vulnerable – those who have fled torturers, warlords and dictators – and people will lose their lives as a result. Find the action on the home page of [www.amnesty.org.uk](http://www.amnesty.org.uk).
- ✓ **Make a date** to come along to our **quiz** on Friday 21 April (new date) and **invite your friends** to make up a team or two.
- ✓ **Note the dates** of our next **letter writing** afternoon on 19 May and our fund-raising **AmnesTEA** on Saturday 8 July in Porlock. More details later.

### Round up of January/February group news

At our January and February **group meetings** we discussed our plans for the forthcoming year and agreed a number of fund-raising and awareness-raising events. We also received updates from our campaign coordinators.



The big event at the beginning of the year was **Holocaust Memorial Day** on 27 January. This was a great success and the organisers hope it will become an annual event. Many thanks to Jenny Lennon-Wood who was very active on our behalf as a member of the organising group. *Alison Dietz reports on the event:*

This was a moving day of events in Minehead. The day of commemoration and reflection was introduced by the Mayor. Her words included the following: '27 January marks the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi death camp. On Holocaust Memorial Day we learn from those who have experienced oppression both during the Holocaust, and in subsequent genocides. We each have an individual responsibility to ensure that differences are respected. We can all contribute towards a safer, better future.' In Wellington Square, we held a two-hour vigil from 1100. Many people lit candles which were placed on chairs. Each chair had placed on it a large poster with shocking information about the killing of millions of men, women and children. In the centre of the square, old clothes were laid out on the ground. In St Andrew's, from 1100 until 1500, we listened to live music and readings all of which made us reflect on the horrors of the Holocaust. In the evening in St Andrew's, Donald Reeves, Director of Soul Europe and former Rector of St James' Piccadilly, gave an inspiring talk on his work of reconciliation in Bosnia after the war. From 2000, in Banja Luka, he and his team brought together former enemies, persuaded the three main religious leaders (Muslim, Orthodox and Roman Catholic) to cooperate in the interest of peace building, and against the odds, made possible the rebuilding of the ancient and beautiful Ferhadija Mosque. Twenty-three years after it was destroyed, in May last year, the reconstructed mosque was inaugurated.



### 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.

#### Thursday 23 March

Group meeting: discussion of the AIUK AGM resolutions and how we would like our representative to vote. Plus feedback from the regional conference.

#### 4 April – 13 May

Roadwater Art Group exhibition at Toucan

#### Friday 21 April:

Quiz at Minehead Social Club starting at 1930 prompt.

#### Thursday 27 April

Group meeting: report back from the AIUK AGM & conference.

#### Friday 19 May

Letter writing session in St Andrew's Annex 1400-1600.

#### Thursday 28 May

Group meeting: special item to be decided.

#### 19-25 June

Refugee Week

#### Saturday 8 July

AmnesTEA: in Porlock.

**International Women's Day:** *Chris Lawson* says: Thanks to all for making this year's stall a success. We collected about 80 signatures on letters and cards and received £47 in donations. Passers-by showed plenty of support for Amnesty International and one person was added to the mailing list.



**Art Exhibition:** Amnesty Minehead and Roadwater Art Group (RAG) are arranging an exhibition of art work by RAG, depicting Amnesty's work and human rights issues in general. The exhibition will be upstairs in Toucan café from Tuesday 4 April for six weeks. So please do go along and see it. You may even want to buy a picture!

## Campaign News

**I Welcome Refugees:** *Jill Walmsley* is coordinating this campaign for us. At our February meeting we signed letters to the Ministers of State for Immigration about vulnerable unaccompanied child refugees seeking reunion with family members. We have also collected signatures on a petition about the same issue. We shared information about Refugee Aid from Taunton (RAFT) which collects clothing and other items for distribution to refugees. Collections are being made in Minehead but space is limited. Items can also be taken direct to RAFT at the Auction House, Canal Road in Taunton. Details of what is currently needed and opening times can be found on the website, Facebook page or by phoning Frederika on 07545895768. Offers of help are also welcome. Philippa passed on details of CHARIS, a joint church initiative in Taunton which is helping Syrian families re-settling in Taunton. Six families have re-settled in Somerset since the decision was made to help in December 2015. Jill is hoping to arrange a speaker to talk to our group about the Syrian Families Re-settlement scheme.

## South West Regional Conference 25 February in Exeter

*Cherry Bird* reports: Once again this was a very busy and interesting event, with over 60 people attending from all over the South West and a packed and varied agenda. Highlights included:

**Ethiopia:** Special guest Getachew Simie Obse spoke about his work as a human rights activist in Ethiopia. Having experienced time in the notorious Kaliti jail, where Eskinder Nega and Andy Tsege are being held, he confirmed it is 'like a concentration camp'. He no longer practises as a journalist, instead working for an NGO that operates through community radio stations to raise awareness about children's rights. Child trafficking is rife and a huge issue. He said the space for civil society is shrinking due to legal barriers placed against HR organisations and because NGOs are not allowed to access funding from foreign agencies. They are also subject to regular visits from the security agency and government representatives. He fears they may soon have to close owing to a lack of funding.

**Turkey:** This is an 'elected dictatorship' which started full of promise for reform but has deteriorated dramatically, with deep divisions between traditional/religious and secular/westernised thinking. Turkey is the world's biggest host of refugees (estimated around 3 million) hence the EU will not say anything about HR. Of particular importance is the dire situation in the Kurdish region, where the government is systematically wiping out the Kurdish ethnic identity. Whole villages and towns, including heritage buildings listed by UNESCO, have been bombed out of existence. Photos look like Syria, but no-one is talking about it and it is impossible for reporters to get into the area. Huge numbers of people have been displaced. The Kurdish political party won 11% of the vote at the last election but all the Kurdish MPs have been arrested. Kurdish people are constantly harassed.

**What can we do?** In both cases the speakers said we should: (1) Spread awareness of the situation via our MP and government. (2) Question how the large amounts of UK aid are allocated and how diplomacy is used. (3) Campaign to stop arbitrary detention. (4) Exert pressure to amend repressive legislation.



The lunchtime whole conference action was on the Cathedral Green, asking 'where are the Mexico 43?' This referred to the 43 student who disappeared from a teacher training college almost two years ago. 43 pairs of shoes were laid out to represent the disappeared.

## How to contact the Minehead Amnesty International Local Group:

**Website:** [www.amnesty.org.uk/minehead](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/minehead)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/amnestyminehead](https://www.facebook.com/amnestyminehead)

**Chair & group contact:** Alison Dietz: Tel. 01984 641603 Email: [dietz@btinternet.com](mailto:dietz@btinternet.com)

**Vice Chair:** Jenny Lennon Wood Tel. 01643 706900 Email: [rodent.major@btopenworld.com](mailto:rodent.major@btopenworld.com)

**Treasurer:** Cherry Bird Tel. 01984 641052 Email: [cherryebird@gmail.com](mailto:cherryebird@gmail.com)

**Press officer:** Jill Walmsley Tel. 01643 705061 Email: [jillwalmsley09@btinternet.com](mailto:jillwalmsley09@btinternet.com)

**Meeting notes, newsletter & website:** Susan Mew Tel. 01643 821209 Email: [brightmanmew@btinternet.com](mailto:brightmanmew@btinternet.com)