



News from the Minehead Group

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Actions you can take this month:

- ✓ **Come along to our letter writing afternoon** on Thursday 5 October 1400-1600 in Townsend House, Minehead. Paper, pens and information about the **Real Lives** cases will be provided. Refreshments too!
- ✓ **Take action** to stop the campaign of discrimination against LGBTI people in **Azerbaijan**. More than 100 people suspected of being gay, lesbian, bisexual or trans have been rounded up by Azerbaijani police in Baku. Many report being beaten, verbally abused and subjected to forced medical examinations while in custody. Ask the President to release them immediately. Go to the home page of www.amnesty.org.uk and following the link.
- ✓ **Send a solidarity card** to **Andy Tsege**, c/o Her Excellency Ambassador Susanna Moorehead, The British Embassy, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- ✓ **Note the change of quiz date** to Friday 23 February at 1930. Still in the Minehead & District Social Club on North Road, Minehead.

Round up of August and September news

On 20 August, the weather was rather wet and wild for the **Allerford Fair**. But we did our best and managed to keep ourselves and our stall reasonably dry under the gazebo. A number of people ventured out of the warm and dry village hall (where tea was being served) to sign a petition and decorate paper doves for the **Asylum Justice project**. The doves signify the freedom we hope all detained asylum seekers will enjoy someday. All were sent to the Immigration Minister.



Our **summer social** in Susan's home and garden was well attended and it was great to welcome some new faces. The weather was kind and we were able to stay outside until quite late. We played an Amnesty-related game and enjoyed the bring-and-share supper. We took the opportunity to say good-bye and thank you to **Jenny Lennon-Wood** who is moving with her family to Weymouth. Jenny has been a highly supportive and valuable member of our group and we will miss her greatly. We wish her lots of luck in the future.

The **afternoon concert** on 17 September was a great success, raising over £700 for Amnesty. **Arwell Huw Jones** (bass), accompanied by **Keith Jones**, presented a wonderful lecture-recital entitled 'In search of "Ol' Man River" - the life and music of **Paul Robeson**'. Huw sang songs which Robeson loved to sing as well as those he is well remembered for, and in between the songs, he talked about the singer's life. The church was packed, and everyone was moved by the story of Paul Robeson's indomitable spirit, his struggles and achievements, not least in civil rights. Huw and Keith held the audience spell-bound, making us laugh and, at times, bringing us close to tears. It was a real treat to hear such wonderful music in Minehead. We are extremely grateful to Huw and Keith, and also to Alcombe Parish Church for their help and support.



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 5 Oct

Letter writing afternoon
1400-1600 at Townsend House.

Thursday 26 Oct

Group meeting: focus on the new global campaign 'Brave - protecting space for human rights defenders'.

Thursday 23 Nov

Group meeting: Planning December and January events; plus campaign updates.

1-6 December

Christmas Tree Festival at the Avenue Methodist Church. Set up on 30 Nov. Preparation date tba.

Friday 8 December

Write for Rights stall details tba

Saturday 27 Jan

Holocaust Memorial Day: plans tba.

Friday 23 Feb 2018

Amnesty quiz at 1930 at the Minehead & District Social Club.

Campaign News

I Welcome Refugees *Jill reports:* the speaker at our very well attended September group meeting was County Cllr Frances Nicholson, who as Cabinet Member for Children and Families, has the Vulnerable Syrian Persons Resettlement Scheme in her portfolio. Cllr Christine Lawrence accompanied her. Cllr Nicholson outlined the County Council's response to the UK Government's pledge to re-settle 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020. Somerset would take up to 50 families and 17 had already been housed in Taunton, Bridgwater and Frome. Cllr Nicholson described the issues that have to be considered before placing a family: suitable housing (private rented), school places, religious and language needs, access to public transport, hospitals etc. Minehead had been ruled out as not being an area where those needs could be met. Families had sometimes chosen to move away, or accept different housing, but on the whole re-settlement had been a success, and volunteers' help had been invaluable. Cllr Nicholson learnt about the Minehead and District Refugee Support group, formed this year, and the fact that Dr Orla Dunn, Public Health consultant to the Council Scheme is said to be 'looking at Minehead again', and considering the Skills Bank of the group. AIUK has asked groups to focus this autumn on fundraising for the I Welcome campaign (including for Rohingya refugees in Myanmar). Our group has agreed to send £700. Online petitions can still be accessed at www.amnesty.org.uk asking European leaders that safe channels for refugees and migrants are expanded, Mediterranean rescues stepped up, and an end to refugees being returned to persecution in Libya.

Anti-Death Penalty project: AIUK is launching this new project on 10 October, International Day Against the Death Penalty. Events are planned in London and Sheffield on that day. Campaigning against the death penalty is a core part of what Amnesty does, and the new working group will be looking at how to increase the impact of this work. If you would like to be involved in the group or sign up to news and updates from the project, contact the activism team at activism@amnesty.org.uk

Ethiopia *Cherry reports:* Good news is that the state of emergency imposed a year ago, which gave extra powers to the military, has now been lifted. This means constitutional rule of law will return. Good news also that an Ethiopian journalist (**Elias Gebru**), who was detained for months without charge, has been released on bail. Sadly, there is no news about **Eskinder Nega**, who remains in prison, serving an 18-year sentence. Meanwhile British citizen **Andy Tsege** also remains in prison under a death sentence, with no sign of his release and no chance of appeal. However, we are told that, as a result of increasing pressure from the UK government, he now has regular, private consular access and contact with his family. According to an open letter from Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, "Britain does not interfere in the legal systems of other countries by challenging convictions (but) .. we do lobby strongly and consistently against application of the death penalty."

Women's Action Network (WAN) *Cherry reports:* Following the relaunch of the WAN this year, the team is busy developing ideas that will have a positive impact on women's human rights. Amnesty hosted the Festival of Choice on 16 September with speakers from International Planned Parenthood Federation, London-Irish Abortion Rights Campaign and Hollaback (an organisation working to end public harassment of women). Looking ahead, from 25 November to 10 December there will be 16 days of activism against gender based violence. Ideas for this are currently being discussed.

Other events: Several of us went to see **The Landings**, a complex production performed in fields, on tracks and along the beach between Blue Anchor and Dunster. It involved lots of walking and various routes, with the audience following different groups of players. It was a thought-provoking and moving portrayal of refugees and their dangerous, and often tragic, journeys.



Susan went to the Budleigh Salterton Literary Festival to hear **Dr Shirin Ebadi**, the Iranian lawyer, human rights activist and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. Susan met several other AI members there, including Sue Hazelwood who used to be in our group, and she bought a copy of Shirin Ebadi's book 'Until we are Free'. Contact her if you would like to borrow it.

How to contact the Minehead Amnesty International Local Group:

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