

Action

THE BRIGHTON AND HOVE AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL GROUP NEWSLETTER



November 2017

Forthcoming Brighton & Hove Amnesty Group Meetings/Events

Group meetings take place on the first Thursday of each month from 8-10pm at Community Base, Queens Road, Brighton

November 2nd
Group campaign meeting

December 7th
Group meeting with Seasonal Social

Monthly Collection

18th November

16th December

Contact Madeline

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Monthly Stall

4th November

Contact

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Write for Rights 2017

2nd December

10am to 4pm

Friends Meeting House

I Welcome Hairy Arms Refugee Action

On Saturday 30th September group members assembled in New Road to campaign for the rights of child refugees. We were helped out by an enormous pair of hairy yellow arms!

Current government rules separate child refugees from their immediate family overseas. Children are the only refugees in our system denied the right to sponsor family members to join them in the UK. We got over 150 signatures calling on the government to allow child refugees the right to be reunited with their families.

We also got some great photos all of which you can see on twitter and flickr.

For more info on the campaign see:

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/resources/i-welcome-campaign-keep-refugee-families-together>



Behind the scenes look at the work of AIUK

I went to an Amnesty supporter briefing event at headquarters in London on 11 October. After a welcome we began with the sobering thought that human rights are under attack everywhere; never before have a director and chair of an Amnesty group been imprisoned, on ridiculous charges, as have Idil Eser and Taner Kilic in Turkey. There are 120-130 employees plus 50-60 volunteers at headquarters, organised into various sections, such as campaigns, media, activists' support, education, advocacy, fundraising. There are currently five main campaigns, the first two being worldwide, priority campaigns.

The first priority campaign, "I Welcome", concerns refugees. 84% of refugees are in low to middle income countries. About one third leave their home countries to seek refuge abroad. The UK agreed to take 20,000 people over five years; 20,000 people fled to Uganda from South Sudan in two weeks, recently. AIUK would very much like to make the UK more welcoming, particularly in relation to child refugees. At present an adult refugee may bring spouse and children under 18 years to the UK, but no child refugee may sponsor a family member.

The second priority campaign is BRAVE, which works to improve the treatment of human rights defenders worldwide. (We signed a letter urging the release of Tep Vanny, imprisoned in Cambodia, at our last monthly meeting). Idil Eser and Taner Kilic would come into this category.

The third campaign concerns Human Rights. Some important recent legal issues in the UK have been resolved thanks to the provision of the Human Rights Act. If Brexit goes ahead it is very unclear what will be the effect on human rights. There has been a rise in hate crime since Brexit. BME women MPs receive an astonishing amount of abuse. We need to be very vigilant.

The fourth campaign is Crisis Response. Just now AI is working with Oxfam, UNHCR and others re the influx into Bangladesh of Rohingya people. AI works with other organisations, where appropriate.

The fifth is the ever- with- us Individuals at Risk programme, the foundation of Peter Benenson's thinking and of AI. We do not always succeed; think of Nazanin. However, we were assured our support is a comfort to her and her family. And there **are** successes. We were shown a video of Maxma Acuna, acquitted in Peru, celebrating her freedom.

We were taken to a huge office full of people, and heard about their work from a few heads of sections. Advocacy talks to anyone and anybody who is able to improve human rights. Education educates teachers, teacher trainers, pupils and adults generally. They produce materials for schools, work with education authorities and have input into school syllabuses.

It was a very densely packed visit, and we went away with plenty to think about and very grateful for the time given us by evidently very busy people.

Madeline

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

On Weds 11 October Gwyneth and I went to a very well attended meeting at Amnesty HQ in London. It was organised primarily by a group called Forward (www.forwarduk.org.uk) and was focused on the continuing problem of FGM for girls primarily, but not exclusively, of African origin both in Africa and the UK.

It started with a showing of a film "The Blood of Women" which was based on a view of the Pokot, a tribe living in the northwest region of Kenya and parts of Uganda. As a matter of strong tradition they practise this mutilation. We saw testimony from young girls and women who had been subjected to, and older women who performed the process of, FGM. There was also considerable footage of a group of men being shown the physiological implications of the practice and discussing what they thought of this. In its simplest (!) form FGM involves the removal of the clitoris. This can be expanded to removal or scarring of the labia. The Pokot go further and scar the inside of the vagina. This is done with minimal hygiene and no anaesthesia. Afterwards the victims "recover" in isolation. The result is deliberately and overtly to remove sexual pleasure from the victims, making them unlikely to be unfaithful to their husbands. They marry in their teens in arranged marriages.

The actual impact is to make it difficult to impossible for the male to penetrate, to cause infections of varying degrees of severity and to make childbirth difficult and dangerous. The last, in countryside where access to hospitals is challenging, leads to a high rate of infant mortality and damage and to maternal deaths.



There followed a well informed and informative discussion of how to stop the practice. Like in the UK it is illegal in Kenya. Like in the UK this isn't stopping it. Medical staff working in England's National Health Service recorded close to 5,500 cases of female genital mutilation (FGM) in 2016, but no one has been successfully prosecuted since the practice was banned over 30 years ago.

In Africa there are signs, evidenced in the film that attitudes are changing but it is highly profitable for the women who carry out the procedure and many men prefer "tradition" over facts. The view from the attendees was that FGM should not be specifically illegal since that brings cultural sensitivities into the mix. Rather it should be dealt with under existing Child Abuse legislation. This happens in France where checks are part of monitoring for child abuse of all groupings within the population.

A final disturbing footnote is the rise of labiaplasty as a cosmetic process in the west. A member of the panel, a doctor, told of a 14 year old white girl coming to her surgery and asking to have the procedure because her boyfriend "didn't like the way she looked down there". The girl's mother had accompanied her to the surgery and was waiting for her outside.

Peter

WHEREABOUTS OF DETAINED CHECHEN IMRAN SALAMOV

Last Saturday, 14th October, Andrew, Celia and Julian collected signatures from the public concerning the disappearance of Imran Salamov, a Chechen detained in Russia.

On 5th September Imran was forcibly returned from Belarus to Russia having been held in detention. He had been in the city of Brest in Belarus with his wife and 4 children and for the past 6 months had crossed the border into Poland to claim asylum there. The Polish authorities repeatedly refused to give due consideration to their request for protection in spite of Imran having to flee his native Chechnya due to repeated torture he had received there at the hands of the Russians. Their refusal constitutes a violation of international human rights law and defiance of Poland's duties as an EU member state. For the past month neither his family or lawyer have been told where he is being held in spite of contacting the authorities. 80 letters were signed and sent to the Minister of the Interior Vladimir Kolokoltsev.

Celia

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Amnesty Websites: international - www.amnesty.org AI UK -

www.amnesty.org.uk local group – www.amnesty.org.uk/brighton

Follow us on twitter @AmnestyBrighton

See our photos on Flickr— <http://www.flickr.com/groups/amnestybrighton/pool>

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