



News from the Minehead Group



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Actions you can take this month:

- ✓ **Sign the on-line petition** asking the Iranian authorities to urgently free **Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe**. Nazanin is a British-Iranian serving a five-year prison sentence but she hasn't committed any crime. She was recently told she could face new charges and potentially even longer in prison, separated from her young daughter and husband. She is in poor mental and physical health. Find the petition on the home page of www.amnesty.org.uk.
- ✓ **Come along and sign cards** at our **Write for Rights** stall and coffee morning on Friday 8 December 1000-1200 at the Avenue Methodist Church. And if you can help, please contact Chris Lawson (01643 704779).
- ✓ **Send a Christmas card to Eskinder Nega** at Kaliti Prison, Addis Ababa Prison Administration, PO Box 2436, Addis Ababa, **Ethiopia**. Also one to his wife (and young son) Serkalem Fasil, c/o Individuals and Communities at Risk Programme, Amnesty International USA, Mid-Atlantic Office, 600 Pennsylvania Ave. SE, 5th Floor, Washington DC 20003, USA.
- ✓ **See our Amnesty Christmas Tree** at the Christmas Tree Festival on 1-6 December at the Avenue Methodist Church Minehead. It will be eye-catching with decorations linked to the **Brave** campaign and **Write for Rights**.
- ✓ **Make a date** to join our vigil on **Holocaust Memorial Day** on the morning of Saturday 27 January. Details to be circulated in January.
- ✓ **Note in your diary** that in 2018, **group meetings** will move to the second Thursday of the month, starting on 11 January. Same time, same place!

Round up of November news

At our **November group meeting**, Cherry told us about the Country Coordinators' conference she had attended at the Human Rights Centre in London. She has recently taken over the voluntary role for AIUK of country coordinator for India and Nepal, which means she will be undertaking research, keeping in touch with developments in the region and giving talks to local groups. Her knowledge and direct contact with staff and other volunteers at AIUK will be of great benefit to our group, and it may mean that we give greater priority to this region in our campaigning work. We'll talk more about this at our January planning meeting. You can read a report from Cherry overleaf.

At the November meeting we also talked more about the new **Brave campaign**, and how we might respond to it. AIUK has produced a campaign leaflet and also



action cards for each of the four featured prisoners of conscience. Contact Susan if you would like any of these – she has a box-full! We agreed to take cards for one of the cases, **Azza Soliman**, to hand out during our **Write for Rights** event on 8 December, as Azza is featured in the WfR campaign. Azza Soliman is a prominent Egyptian lawyer who has dedicated her life to defending victims of torture, domestic abuse and rape.

The authorities have responded to her courageous work by calling her a 'spy' and a 'threat' to national security. She has been put under surveillance, harassed and had lies about her spread around by the security forces and parts of the media. Azza now faces made-up charges and if found guilty, she faces jail.

Diary Dates

Monthly meetings:

We meet on the second 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.

1-6 December

Christmas Tree Festival at the Avenue Methodist Church.

Friday 8 December

Write for Rights stall & coffee morning 1000-1200 Avenue Methodist Church, Minehead

Saturday 6 Jan

Christmas Social
Bring & share lunch at 1230 in Roadwater. **All supporters welcome.**

Thursday 11 Jan

Group meeting: planning for the year ahead; campaigns.

Saturday 27 Jan

Holocaust Memorial Day: vigil in the morning in Minehead.

Thursday 8 Feb

Group meeting: AGM; Brave campaign cases.

Friday 23 Feb

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

Sat 17 March

South West Regional Conference in Exeter

Campaign News

South Asia Cherry reports on the AIUK Country Coordinators' conference: topics included interesting feedback from the recent International Council meeting, with two AIUK proposals accepted, one on abortion policy change - to bring it in line with international human rights (HR) law - and one on safeguarding HR affected by climate change and other environmental changes. There was much talk about the moving of International Secretariat research hubs to countries within the regions, for example the South Asia hub has just moved to Sri Lanka. Despite obvious advantages in terms of closer connections with local AI sections and other HR groups and better understanding of local issues, concerns were noted about security and impartiality. Other sessions focused on building our skills in public speaking and campaign management, including the use of social media.

I Welcome Refugees: here is an update from Jill Walmsley. Cllr Nicholson has sent this link <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN06805> for the Parliamentary report on the UK response to the Syrian refugee crisis. So far, 65 Syrian refugees (17 families) have been resettled in **Somerset**. A meeting is taking place on 10 January with Dr Orla Dunn, consultant to the Somerset scheme, to discuss opportunities for settling a family in West Somerset. Finding a suitable rental flat will be key. Contact Jill if you would like to be involved. RAFT (Refugee Aid from Taunton) is making regular shipments to Calais, Ukraine, Uganda and Syria. Donations of tinned vegetarian food, toiletries, sewing materials (and machines) are needed. For more information or to offer help, call Jenny Gateau (01643 708471) or check the RAFT website or Facebook page. The **AIUK campaign** is focusing on the situation in Greece where thousands of unaccompanied children are in camps or homeless. The expectation that the UK would take 3,000 children has not materialised – only 200 have been admitted so far. In Somerset, 32 unaccompanied children have been accepted here since December 2016.

Asylum Justice Campaign: Alison writes - many of us have taken part in the 'Stop Indefinite Detention' action where we cut out birds, coloured them in, and signed on the back with our address. AIUK is now going to launch an online petition for the ending of indefinite detention of asylum seekers in the UK. In the New Year there will be an event in Parliament Square with a giant bird: details to follow. Immigration detainees are also featured in the Write for Rights campaign. The Verne Immigration Centre in Dorset will be closed and turned back into a prison on 1 January. It opened as an adult male immigration removal centre in 2014 and now holds 524 detainees. They will be transferred to other removal centres.

News from AIUK networks: any member can join a network. Here are reports from two.

Women's human rights: Cherry reports - Online abuse of women is widespread. According to a poll conducted this year by Ipsos MORI on behalf of Amnesty International, one in five women has been abused online, and among young women it is one in three, with 27% saying they were threatened with physical or sexual assault. Eight countries were sampled with many women reporting severe psychological consequences as a result of these experiences. Online abuse generally results from a woman expressing an opinion, political comment or speaking out on women's human rights, and women said it had become a 'normal part of being online'. They also said the response of online institutions to reports of abuse was woefully inadequate.

Children's Human Rights Network: Alison reports - this network is still campaigning against the profit-making citizenship fee which prevents many children who would be entitled to British citizenship from registering. On 23 November members of the network, together with members of the Project for the Registration of Children as British Citizens (PRCBC), were outside the Royal Courts of Justice in the Strand. The PRCBC were in court challenging the fee in relation to a child refused citizenship because the family was unable to pay the fee.



And finally for this month, we wish all our readers a very **Happy Christmas and a healthy, peaceful New Year.**

How to contact the Minehead Amnesty International Local Group:

Website: www.amnesty.org.uk/minehead

Facebook: www.facebook.com/amnestyminehead

Chair & group contact: Alison Dietz: Tel. 01984 641603 Email: dietz@btinternet.com

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Press officer: Jill Walmsley Tel. 01643 705061 Email: jillwalmsley09@btinternet.com

Meeting notes, newsletter & website: Susan Mew Tel. 01643 821209 Email: brightmanmew@btinternet.com

Stalls & special events: Chris Lawson Tel. 01643 704779 Email: c2lawson@care4free.net