



News from the Minehead Group

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Actions you can take this month:

- ✓ **Take action** in support of our Amnesty colleagues in Turkey, by emailing the Turkish Ambassador in London, saying that the Chair of Amnesty **Turkey**, Taner Kılıç, must be released immediately and all charges against the 'Istanbul 10' dropped. Read the latest news on the home page of www.amnesty.org.uk.
- ✓ **Sign the petition** telling the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland that women and girls in **Northern Ireland** should have the same rights as elsewhere in the UK. Women there are suffering due to the near-total ban on abortion. They can face up to life in prison for a health service freely provided on the NHS in the rest of the UK. The law needs to be brought into line with international standards and abortion decriminalised. Find the petition here: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/northern-ireland-abortion>
- ✓ **Send a card to Eskinder Nega** for his birthday on 6 Nov, at Kaliti Prison, Addis Ababa Prison Administration, PO Box 2436, Addis Ababa, **Ethiopia**.
- ✓ **See our Amnesty Christmas Tree** at the Christmas Tree Festival on 1 and 2 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 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).



Round up of October news



Our latest **letter writing** session took place on the afternoon of Thursday 5 October at Townsend House, Minehead. We were writing letters about cases in AIUK's latest edition of its leaflet 'Real Lives Matter'. 70 letters were written, thanks to the hard work of our local members and supporters. And a big thank you to Peter Atherton for supplying the stamps.

The main item at our October group meeting was an introduction to the new **Brave campaign**, led by Susan. This is a global campaign involving AI members around the world and will run until the end of 2019. It seeks to strengthen the recognition and protection of human rights defenders (HRDs) and is in response to increased attacks and targeting of HRDs, activists and civil society organisations. Over recent years, HRDs have faced harassment, intimidation, smear campaigns, ill-treatment and unlawful detention. In 2016, at least 281 HRDs were killed in 22 countries. AIUK will be focusing on individual prisoners of conscience as part of this campaign. At our meeting we all signed a letter about **Tej Vanny**, who has been in prison in Cambodia since August 2016.

Campaign News

Ethiopia Cherry reports: There is no sign of progress on the cases of Andy or Eskinder – as Patricia, Country Coordinator for Ethiopia, commented 'Ethiopia seems to be locked into its rule of repression'. Andy's wife, Yemi, is currently gearing up for a 'Bring Andy Home for Christmas' campaign. Meanwhile it is Eskinder's birthday on 6th November, so do send him a card. (See above.)

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 Nov

Group meeting:
campaign updates and planning our approach to the Brave campaign.

1-6 December

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

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 25 Jan

Group meeting:
planning for the year ahead; campaign updates.

Saturday 27 Jan

Holocaust Memorial Day: plans tba.

Friday 23 Feb 2018

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

South Asia Cherry notes these highlights from the recent South Asia newsletter:

- Increasing numbers of Afghan asylum seekers are being forced to return to a country where no areas can be considered safe. More than 75% of Afghan asylum seekers in UK have their claims rejected, forcing them to return to violence, insecurity and persecution. A report was released on 5 October 'Forced back to Danger'.
- The widely reported murder of outspoken Indian journalist Gauru Lankesh raises alarms about the state of freedom of speech in India.
- In Pakistan, journalist Matiullah Jan was recently violently attacked for the second time, apparently in response to his criticism of Pakistani government policies, the military and intelligence agencies.
- The Rohingya crisis in Myanmar and Bangladesh is having an impact across S. Asia, with extremist groups violently attacking others who 'look different' – eg in Bangladesh people who look Buddhist are attacked, and in Sri Lanka Buddhists are preventing Rohingya refugees from seeking shelter.



Refugees: In the last few weeks, over 530,000 people – mostly Rohingya – have fled Myanmar to nearby Bangladesh. In fact, more Rohingya refugees fled to Bangladesh in the space of three weeks than the total number of people who fled by sea to Europe in 2016. The latest in a series of deadly boat journeys saw at least 12 people, including children, die as their vessel capsized near Bangladesh on 8



October. Witness accounts, satellite imagery and data, and photo and video evidence gathered by AI all point to the same conclusion: hundreds of thousands of Rohingya women, men, and children have been the victims of a widespread and systematic attack, amounting to crimes against humanity. Thousands more are also believed to be stranded in the mountains of northern Rakhine State. They are being denied basic aid because NGOs and

humanitarian organisations are not being allowed access to the area. AI has also found evidence of a mass scorched-earth campaign across the region, where Myanmar security forces and vigilante mobs are burning down entire Rohingya villages and shooting people at random as they try to flee. Security forces have even planted internationally-banned landmines along its border with Bangladesh which have seriously injured at least three civilians, including two children, and reportedly killed one man. You can find more information and actions to take on the AIUK website: www.amnesty.org.uk

Other news:

As noted in last month's newsletter, 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. *Alison has now read Shirin Ebadi's book 'Until we are Free' and writes about it here:* Shirin Ebadi is a perfect example of a human rights defender who, in spite of years of intimidation and violence, never wavered in her determination to fight injustice. This book is therefore an ideal read if one wants to understand why AI has launched the **BRAVE** campaign. Many Iranians left their country after the 1979 revolution and during the Iran Iraq war. But, as a judge, Ebadi felt she must stay. Matters got worse in 2003 when an unknown called Ahmadinejad with extremist views was appointed mayor of Tehran. Ebadi had been closely monitored by the authorities since the 90s, when her legal work defending women and children started getting national attention. But the intimidation and threats grew. She was no longer allowed to hold the office of judge, only that of clerk to the court. Then all women were banned from the law courts. She continued to represent people from an office first near her home, then in her home. While Ebadi was abroad in 2009, Ahmadinejad unexpectedly 'won' the elections, critics of fundamentalist policies were imprisoned, students were shot. The Ministry of Intelligence formally approved Ebadi's killing. She has been unable to go back, and now lives in London. Ebadi wrote her memoir in 2015 and towards the end says this: *'I am compelled to share my story on behalf of the many faceless Iranians, political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, who sit today in the prisons of Iran, an Iran that has become one of the world's largest prisons for journalists, lawyers, women's rights activists and students'.*

How to contact the Minehead Amnesty International Local Group:

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