



News from the Minehead Group

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Actions you can take this month:

- ✓ **Join us for Holocaust Memorial Day** on Saturday 27 January in Wellington Square, Minehead: 1200-1230 **vigil**; 1230-1330 **exhibition** for reflection in St Andrew's Church and refreshments; 1330-1400 **words and music**.
- ✓ **Send a card** with a solidarity message to detainees in UK **immigration detention** centres. See details of what to write and where to send your card overleaf under 'I Welcome Refugees'.
- ✓ **Sign and send letters** to the Prime Minister of Ethiopia and to the Ethiopian Embassy in London, to remind them of the case of **Eskinder Nega**. *Sample letter is attached to emailed versions of this newsletter.*
- ✓ **Invite your friends** to our annual fund-raising **Quiz** on Friday 23 February at 1930 in the Minehead & District Social Club. Bring a team if you can or come on your own – we will find a team for you to join. If you'd like to donate a raffle prize, please let Judith Ward know (Tel 01643 705083) & bring on the night.
- ✓ **Come along** to our next **letter writing afternoon** on Wed 14 February 1400-1530 at the Quaker Meeting house on Bancks Street. All welcome!

Round up of December and January group news

At the beginning of December, we took part as usual in the annual **Christmas Tree Festival** in Minehead. Many thanks to Ann, Judith and Chris for preparing the beautiful and eye-catching Amnesty tree and also to members who acted as stewards. Despite cold and windy weather, a steady stream of people visited our **Write for Rights** event inside and outside the Avenue Methodist Church on 8 December. We achieved between 40 and 45 signatures on cards and petitions for each of the five cases we had selected from this year's campaign. We were pleased to welcome the Mayor of Minehead, which led to good coverage in the local press, as well as Amnesty supporters and members of the public. We raised £67 in donations and also handed out action cards for the BRAVE campaign to those who didn't have time to stop.



At our **January meeting**, we signed action cards for Rodrigo Mundaca, a Chilean human rights defender featured in the BRAVE campaign. Rodrigo campaigns for MODATIMA, a non-governmental organisation that aims to protect people's right to water and exposes illegal water extraction. Rodrigo has faced legal action, death threats and attacks for this work. If you'd like to send a card, contact Susan Mew.



Unfortunately, illness prevented several members from joining us for our **Christmas social** on 6 January. As usual we played a silly game, enjoyed the bring and share lunch, and had more time to chat than at meetings or when



running stalls. We discussed the plusses and minuses of having our social in January, and would welcome views on the best time for it – December or January? Views to Alison please!

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 meeting begins with a special item such as a speaker or film, as well as campaign updates. After a tea break, AI members are invited to stay for a short business meeting which will end by 2130.

Saturday 27 Jan

Holocaust Memorial Day: 1200-1230 vigil in Wellington Square; 1230-1400 events in St Andrew's Church.

Thursday 8 Feb

Group meeting: group AGM; please come – we need 8 members to be quorate! Plus campaign reports.

Wednesday 14 Feb

Letter writing: 1400-1530 at the Quaker Meeting House.

Friday 23 Feb

Amnesty quiz at 1930 at the Minehead & District Social Club. Your support needed!

Thursday 8 March

Group meeting: discussion of AIUK AGM resolutions. Take part in the democratic process: have your say!

Sat 17 March

South West Regional Conference in Exeter. Theme: BRAVE campaign. All invited.

Campaign News

Ethiopia: *Cherry reports* - Some of you may have been excited to hear a recent radio news item that the Ethiopian government is planning to release 'all political prisoners'. Unfortunately, this was later denied by an angry Ethiopian Prime Minister as a 'mis-translation', which should have said *all politician prisoners*. Ethiopia has always denied having any political prisoners. It is estimated that around 1,000 politicians have been imprisoned under anti-terrorism laws, including high profile leaders from the opposition. It is unclear how many will be freed and when. The PM, Mr Hailemaraim Dessalegn, also stated that the Maekelawi detention centre (described by AI as a torture centre) will be closed and replaced by a new detention centre that 'will comply with international standards'. This small positive sign seems to be the result of political infighting within the ruling coalition and increasing civil unrest.

I Welcome Refugees: *Jill writes* - AIUK is urging the UK Government to dramatically reduce its use of immigration detention and to impose a time limit when it is used. Tens of thousands are held in horrible conditions in the UK every year, causing damage to their physical and mental health and knock-on effects on their families left behind. The uncertainty about how long they are to be held adds to their suffering. Detainees have committed no crime, only having a problem with their immigration status; most are eventually released. Please sign the online petition to the Minister of State for Immigration, and send cards to AIUK for distribution to those in detention (see box).

Send a solidarity message to people in immigration detention.

Please write your message in English, use the salutation 'Dear Friend' and sign it with your name but not your address. The suggested message is 'You are not forgotten. Amnesty UK and its partners are calling for the UK Government to introduce a time-limit for immigration detention. We support your aspirations for freedom, dignity and a safe place to live.'

AIUK will distribute the cards through partner organisations. Send cards to: Individuals at Risk, Amnesty International UK, Human Rights Action Centre, 17-25 New Inn Yard, London EC2A 3EA

The Minehead & District Refugee Support Group continue to hope that settling a Syrian Refugee Family in Minehead will become a reality. A meeting was held on 10 January with Dr Orla Dunn, Somerset County Council Consultant, to discuss possibilities. Six ways forward were agreed: English teaching, housing, meeting members of the Syrian men's and women's groups in Taunton, offering days out or Easter breaks to Syrian families, and holding a fund-raising lunch.

South Asia: *Cherry writes* - The fate of Rohingya migrants in Bangladesh and India remains high on the agenda as both governments threaten to send them back to Myanmar. Amnesty India has launched a high-profile campaign 'We Welcome Rohingya', which was supported by over 660,000 people across India attending solidarity events. In Nepal, the exploitation of migrant workers in the Middle East, particularly Qatar, remains a burning issue. Many Nepalis take on loans they cannot afford, to pay corrupt 'manpower services', who send them to jobs which either do not exist, or do not pay them and treat them as slaves. Often families then take out additional loans to get them back, or in some cases they die as a result of the inhuman conditions. This kind of thing has been a feature of Nepali life for over 20 years, during which time over 4 million Nepalis have gone abroad for work. National newspapers are highlighting these outrages since Amnesty International published its report *Turning People into Profits: Trafficking and Forced labour of Nepali Migrant Workers*. They are lambasting the government for its failure to take any kind of action to guarantee safe migration, accusing them of tolerating this abuse because the recruiters 'have political patronage and lubricate the electoral machinery of the parties'.

Syria: Amnesty continues to monitor the desperate events in Syria. Go to www.amnesty.org.uk to find the latest action. Amnesty is currently urging the Syrian Government to evacuate the 529 patients who need urgent medical care but are trapped in Eastern Ghouta, an area of Syria currently under siege. These patients need treatment for heart disease, kidney failure, cancer and more, but must await evacuation. 14 people have already died waiting.

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

Treasurer: Cherry Bird Tel. 01984 641052 Email: cherryebird@gmail.com

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