**Amnesty International**

**East Devon Group**

**Annual General Meeting Feb 15th 2018**

**Annual Report for 2017**

Letter Writing and Monthly Actions:

Letters are our key work, writing on behalf of Prisoners of Conscience, those detained for their human rights work, and many other injustices. The group has sent letters and cards to countries and governments all over the world, from China and Vietnam to USA and El Salvador, including 46 Urgent Action cases. We have also written to our own UK government and MPs about Arms Sales, Human Rights Act, Asylum seekers, and Nazanin Ratcliffe imprisoned in Iran. Our secretary Angela Lambert has written Monthly Action letters and 39 Urgent Action letters on the group’s behalf.

Our Special Cases:

These are cases we write for regularly each month. In 2017 these were:

China: Ilham Tohti, Coordinated by Kate Stanley.

Saudi Arabia: Raif Badawi, coordinated by Yvonne Taylor.

Kyrgyzstan: Azimzhan Askarov, coordinated by Martin McDonagh

Egypt: photojournalist Mahmoud Abu Seid (Shawkan,) coordinated by Tony Mcfarlane.

Tony reports on Egypt – Mahmoud Abu Zeid

We have campaigned to release Mahmoud Abu Zaid ( known as Shawkan), a photo journalist who has been imprisoned without trial and without adequate medical attention since August 2013. He is a prisoner of conscience. Despite many court appearances he has not come to trial. We have written many letters to the authorities, and supported the exhibition of Shawkan’s work organised by the Exeter group at the Phoenix Theatre. We have written to the authorities about the widespread repression of political protest and the harassment of human rights defenders and also about homophobic persecution. We have also called for a proper investigation of the murder of Giulio Regeni, an Italian post graduate student murdered in Egypt – where there are suspicions of state security involvement.

Amnesty Regional Areas –

Tony McFarlane keeps in touch with the North Africa coordinator, and receives regular updates on the area, and Angela Lambert with the South and Central America Region coordinator.

Christmas Write For Rights Campaign:

Twenty eight people attended this successful evening on Dec 7st, organised by Maureen Thurlow. Mulled wine and nibbles were served while members and friends wrote cards to prisoners all over the world. A total of 217 cards and appeal letters were sent, as well as several On Line Greetings. These cards make a real and positive impact on prisoners and their jailers.

Publicity:

Martin MacDonagh has maintained our Group Website, essential in today’s world, and Maureen Thurlow had a very good item about the Christmas Write for Rights event published in the Sidmouth Herald. Martin has given two assembly talks to Sidmouth College. He and David Evans contacted other schools in our area offering talks but have had no response as yet.

A new Amnesty banner – freestanding feather style - was purchased in July.

Fundraising:

We helped in the annual Grizzly Run on March 12th, organised by the Axe Valley Runners in Seaton, and received a generous donation of £700. This was David Evans’s last year as our coordinator for this, and the group are immensely grateful to him for organising this for many years.

Our proposed event at the Jurassic Centre was cancelled due to changes in the catering arrangements there.

Stalls:

Honiton Charter Day July 22nd - unfortunately the outdoor events were cancelled due to storms and rain. However Tina Lunt and Gretchen Danckwardt braved the weather to man our stall in Honiton High Street, and collected signatures for our cases in El Salvador, China and Kyrgyztan,

Sidmouth Folk week stall August 5th at the Sidmouth Unitarian Church had better slightly better weather – showers and sun – and was successful in collecting signatures, and selling from our book stall.

Meetings:

Attendance varied from four to fifteen, with an average of eleven. In June an excellent talk was given on “Human Rights in Turkey’s Kurdistan” by Kerry Bramhall of Exeter University, and in September Annie Pfingst, an Australian photo-journalist, spoke eloquently on Palestine and the Occupied Territories. In July Yvonne Taylor updated the group on the situation in Burma /Myanmar, an interesting and timely talk in view of the Rohingya crisis that followed soon after.

Angela Lambert and Martin McDonagh attended the S.W. Regional Conference in February.

Members of the group joined forces with other local organisations for a couple of events, the first being a fund raising supper ‘Sidmouth Cooks for Syria’ in February, which raised funds for Syrian refugees. We also joined with 150 people in the Jo Cox Memorial ‘Great Get Together’ on June 18th, on the Sidmouth Rugby field, organised by our member Jill Gray.

Finally, a huge vote of Thanks to our marvellous committee, Angela, Martin, Gretchen, and all rotating chairs, and everyone else for their help and contributions in the past year.