

AIM Group Annual Report 8 February 2018 for the period February 2017 to January 2018

Welcome to our 2018 AGM.

It falls rather earlier than usual because for 2018 we have changed our meeting day to the second Thursday of the month, same place and time: 1930 in the Quaker Meeting House. We hope that more of our members will wish to attend meetings especially for the first hour, when we have items of general interest: eg. film, speaker, workshop, letter writing. Socials replace meetings in August and January.

Here are examples of items of special interest from the first hour of our meetings in 2017 which we hope will encourage you to come along this year:

Councillor Frances Nicholson, County Councillor and Cabinet Member for children and families, spoke about the complexities of successfully resettling Syrian families locally; Susan led a workshop on the new global AI campaign 'BRAVE: human rights defenders under threat'; Cherry showed us two short films on human rights (or the lack of) in South Asia and in the UK which led to an interesting discussion. And taking up the whole evening in June was a moving and award-winning film 'Fire at Sea' about the plight of refugees attempting to reach Italy by boat as seen through the eyes of a local boy on Lampedusa.

Uppermost in my mind as I think about the year just gone and what lies ahead, is the fact that we are about to lose three key members of our group. Chris and Christina were instrumental in founding AIM in 2002, and Jenny has long been one of our most active members. Our heartfelt thanks for their commitment to the aims of AI and support of the group. And of course a big thank you to all our members for their continued support. Special mention goes to our campaign co-ordinators Cherry, Jill and Susan, whose other roles are Treasurer and volunteer country coordinator for South Asia (Cherry), Press Officer (Jill); meeting notes taker, newsletter and website editor (Susan). Also Jenny for the role of vice chair, Chris for designing and printing the publicity for our events and preparing our street stalls, Christina for the role of membership secretary, and Ann and Judith for designing our striking Amnesty Christmas tree.

It is easy to feel a sense of hopelessness at this time: the plight of the Rohingya and Syrian refugees, of the Palestinians, of the refugees fleeing war and injustice from other countries too, and the refusal of many European countries to offer refuge. But to be part of Amnesty is a way of bringing hope to individuals who learn that there are people all over the world who care, and who put pressure on governments to show compassion and to respect international law.

Over the last 12 months we have asked our MPs to support the 'Dubs Scheme' for relocating unaccompanied child refugees from Europe and to attend the backbench debate on British nationals Nazanin Ratcliffe and Kamal Foroughi still imprisoned in Iran. We continue to call for the release from prison in Ethiopia of Andy Tsege and Eskinder Nega, and of Taner Kilic in Turkey. At four letter writing sessions we and members of the public sent cards and letters to individuals denied justice in countries on every continent: at one session over 70 letters were written and posted. And on 27 January we held, as we did last year, a vigil for HMD followed by music and readings in St Andrews Church. A very moving event.

We had a successful year of fundraising thanks to a sell-out concert, to our annual quiz devised and run by Jean Humber and family, and to an enjoyable AmnesTea in Porlock courtesy of Karen and Graeme Mills. These events raise awareness of AI locally as did our stalls for International Women's Day, for Jo Cox and the Great Get Together, for the Asylum Justice campaign, and for the Write for Rights campaign. We were delighted that Roadwater Art group prepared an exhibition on 'Human Rights are for everyone' held in Toucan in Minehead, raising awareness of injustice in a new way.

As usual some members attended both the SW Regional Conference in Exeter, and the AIUK AGM and Conference in Nottingham. Members also attended events at the Human Rights Action Centre in London. And our trainer Susan gave a talk about AI to Minehead U3a.

We have had an action-packed year, a great team effort, and hope fervently that this will inspire more members to come forward and help us achieve at least as much this year.