



# News from the Minehead Group

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## Good News – Eskinder Nega released!

On 14 February we received the brilliant news that Eskinder Nega had been released. As we have been writing letters and following Eskinder's case for several years, this is particularly heartening news for our group. Here is the AIUK press release:

### **Eskinder Nega released as part of a government pardon of 746 prisoners**

Commenting after Ethiopian journalist and Amnesty International prisoner of conscience Eskinder Nega walked out of prison a free man today, Sarah Jackson, Amnesty's Deputy Regional Director for East Africa, said:

'We are delighted that Eskinder Nega is finally free after close to seven years in jail on trumped up terrorism charges. We hope the release of this courageous journalist, along with hundreds of other prisoners, heralds a new dawn in the Ethiopian government's handling of



political dissent, a dawn of tolerance and respect for human rights. The Ethiopian government must show good faith and free hundreds of other prisoners of conscience who remain behind bars simply for exercising their right to freedom of expression. The authorities must also take steps to reform the legal system under which arbitrary detentions and torture of dissidents have been allowed to flourish.'

At the time of his arrest, Eskinder was editor of the Satanaw newspaper. He was arrested after publishing an article about the Arab Spring, in which he asked whether a similar grassroots movement for democracy could take hold in Ethiopia. He was charged under the draconian Anti-Terrorism Proclamation with providing support for terrorists and sentenced to 18 years in prison. Opposition politicians and Amnesty International Prisoners of Conscience Andualem Arage and Bekele Gerba were also released. 😊 😊 😊

## Actions you can take this month:

- ✓ **Join us and bring your friends** to our annual fund-raising **Quiz** on Friday 23 February at 1930 in the Minehead & District Social Club. Bring a team of six 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.
- ✓ **Support** our **International Women's Day stall** on 9 March outside Iceland on The Avenue, Minehead from 1000-1200. We will be signing cards and letters for women human rights defenders. If you can help, phone Cherry on 01984 641052. Otherwise, just come along and sign some cards!
- ✓ **Take action and email your MP:** go to the AIUK website home page [www.amnesty.org.uk](http://www.amnesty.org.uk) and follow the links to ask your MP to **help reunite refugee families**. All MPs have to do is turn up in Parliament on 16 March and vote for a change in the law. Refugee families, who have already suffered so much, are being forced apart owing to our government's unfair and restrictive rules.

## 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.

### 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!

### Friday 9 March

Street Stall: for International Women's Day outside Iceland 1000-1200

### Sat 17 March

South West Regional Conference in Exeter. Theme: BRAVE campaign. All invited. Come and be inspired!

### Thursday 12 April

Group meeting: reports back from regional & national conferences.

### Thursday 10 May

Group meeting: Syria film (tbc)

## Round up of January and February group news

**Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) 27 January:** *Alison writes:* The theme this year was 'The Power of Words: words can make a difference both for good and evil'. Words were part of our commemoration but we began, as we did last year, with a silent vigil in Wellington Square. For half an hour about 20 people, of all ages, stood in the rain remembering the millions of people murdered in the Holocaust and in subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, and Darfur. We thought about the suffering of refugees from Syria, Myanmar, Afghanistan, and many parts of Africa, and about the suffering of civilians in Yemen. Afterwards, in St Andrew's church, Amnesty members together with the Revd Simon Robinson, the Minehead Street Choir and members of the public took part in, and listened to, readings and singing. There was an exhibition of panels providing historical facts about genocides, and postcards from the HMD Trust for anyone to respond to the life story of someone who was persecuted during the Holocaust or a genocide. The front of the card reads 'When I write I can shake off all my cares; my sorrow disappears; my spirits are revived.' (Anne Frank)



At our **February meeting**, we signed action cards for **Sakris Kupila**, a transgender activist from Finland who has been denied legal recognition and is featured in the BRAVE campaign. If you'd like to send a card, contact Susan Mew. February was also our **group AGM**, when we reviewed our year's work, received a financial report and confirmed our officers and other roles within the group. The chair's annual report is attached to this newsletter and other reports are available on request from Susan Mew.



On 14 February we held another successful letter writing afternoon, attended by 15 people. We wrote 68 letters and signed 10 action cards. A good afternoon's work – well done everyone!

## Campaign News

At our AGM, each of our campaign coordinators gave a report of our activities over the previous year. Here are some of the key points:

**Individuals at Risk** [*Chris Lawson*]: During the year we wrote letters and signed cards at five different events, including for the annual Write for Rights campaign.

**Ethiopia** [*Cherry Bird*]: after another year of writing letters to Ethiopia we are delighted to hear of the release of Eskinder Nega. But Andy Tsege and many other prisoners of conscience are still in gaol.

**I Welcome Refugees** [*Jill Walmsley*]: We continue to support this two-year global campaign, making links where we can with other organisations, such as our local refugee support group (see below). We have campaigned particularly on child refugees, for the provision of safe and legal routes to the UK, and also on the reunification of refugee families in the UK.

**South Asia** [*Cherry Bird*]: Four key issues we have followed this year were: the plight of the Rohingya migrants fleeing Myanmar to Bangladesh; the exploitation of Nepali migrant workers in the Middle East, coal mining in India and its impact on indigenous tribal peoples, and Afghan asylum seekers being forced to return to unsafe areas.

**Women's Action Network** [*Cherry Bird*]: abortion rights, particularly in Northern Ireland, the rights of women refugees and the on-line abuse of women continue to be key areas of focus.

**Other news:** The Minehead & District Refugee Support Group is making progress in its plans to welcome Syrian families living in Taunton to come to West Somerset for 'days out'. If you'd like to support and/or keep in touch with the project, email Jenny Gateau at [jenny.gateau408@btinternet.com](mailto:jenny.gateau408@btinternet.com).

### How to contact the Minehead Amnesty International Local Group:

**Website:** [www.amnesty.org.uk/minehead](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/minehead)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/amnestyminehead](http://www.facebook.com/amnestyminehead)

**Chair & group contact:** Alison Dietz: Tel. 01984 641603 Email: [dietz@btinternet.com](mailto:dietz@btinternet.com)

**Treasurer:** Cherry Bird Tel. 01984 641052 Email: [cherrybird@gmail.com](mailto:cherrybird@gmail.com)

**Press officer:** Jill Walmsley Tel. 01643 705061 Email: [jillwalmsley09@btinternet.com](mailto:jillwalmsley09@btinternet.com)

**Meeting notes, newsletter & website:** Susan Mew Tel. 01643 821209 Email: [brightmanmew@btinternet.com](mailto:brightmanmew@btinternet.com)