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Actions you can take this month:

- ✓ **Send an email to Syria:** The Syrian government, backed by Russia, is bombing its own people. Right now, over 700 patients needing urgent medical care are trapped in **Eastern Ghouta**, an area of Syria currently under siege. They need treatment for heart disease, kidney failure, cancer and more. People are being deliberately killed and maimed every day. A small handful have recently been medically evacuated - but it's not good enough. Urge the Syrian government to take action now. Go to the AIUK website home page www.amnesty.org.uk and follow the links.
- ✓ **Take part in the AIUK AGM & Conference** by using your proxy vote by 0900 on 5 April and listening/watching proceedings on line on 7/8 April.
- ✓ **Make a date to join us** for our next **letter writing** afternoon on Wednesday 9 May 1400-1530 at the Quaker Meeting house on Bancks Street. Case sheets, materials and advice on what to write all provided!
- ✓ **Offer to make cakes or scones** for our **AmnesTea** on Sunday 3 June at the home of Gian and Chris Zucchelli in Minehead. Offers of help to Alison Dietz (dietz@btinternet.com). And please note the date in your diary.

Round up of February and March group news

Our annual **quiz** on 23 February was a very successful and enjoyable evening. The Humber family once again organised eight rounds of interesting and challenging questions, and generously covered the costs, such as the team prizes. The evening was well attended with 13 teams taking part, and we were particularly pleased to welcome members from the Taunton AI group. The evening made a total of £470, including the raffle, and helped raised awareness of



our group's activities. We are already looking forward to the 2019 quiz which Jean has kindly offered to organise for us again! [Photos show the Humber family hard at work and the winning team.]



For **International Women's Day** we held a street stall in Minehead on 9 March. Although one day late, we chose to do it on Friday as this is usually the busiest day in Minehead when people come along to the farmers market etc. We chose three cases to feature: Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, Azza Soliman and Tep Vanny. We invited passers-by to sign solidarity greetings cards to each person and also a letter about each to the relevant embassy in London. We were very pleased with the response and collected approximately 90 signatures on each card and letter.



Although we got the usual range of negative reactions to our invitation to look at our stall,

on the whole, most people were positive and encouraging. And perhaps some were attracted by the large photo of Nazanin and her husband Richard on the beach in Minehead, which a kind local had found on a website and passed on to us!



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.

7/8 April

AIUK AGM & Conference. Take part in the democratic process!

Thursday 12 April

Group meeting: reports back from regional & national conferences.

Wednesday 9 May

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

Thursday 10 May

Group meeting: Syria film (tbc)

Sunday 3 June

AmnesTea: 1500-1700 at Gian & Chris's home in Minehead.

Thursday 14 June

Group meeting: focus on the Ban Israeli Settlement Goods campaign.

Thursday 12 July

Group meeting: talk on South Asia.

At our **March meeting**, we signed letters in support of **Shakelia Jackson**, a human rights defender from Jamaica, who speaks out against the unlawful killings perpetrated by police and the impunity that prevents families securing justice for their loved ones. We also discussed the AIUK AGM resolutions and shared our views with Alison who will hold the group's vote. Cherry and Susan will also be attending.

Celebrating the Suffragette Spirit 1918 - 2018

Alison writes: The incredible work of the suffragettes paved the way for a century of women's rights in the UK. 100 years ago, British women finally won the right to vote (initially it was women aged 30 plus who owned property). Last month AIUK asked members to nominate modern-day suffragettes so it could put online a map of women in the UK who challenge racism, sexism, homophobia, corruption, and injustice of all kinds. This suffragette spirit map went live on International Women's Day, 8 March. And on this map – please look for yourselves at www.amnesty.org.uk/suffragettespirit – are two of our AIM members: Susan Mew and Philippa Gerry. This is great news. Their unfailing commitment, knowledge, fine judgment, enthusiasm, and good humour provide role models for the rest of us. They do so much to make the world a better place.



Campaign News

Ethiopia [*Cherry Bird*]: Despite the wonderful news about Eskinder, and also Bekele Gerba (opposition politician) being released, there is still no news about Andy Tsege. But it is good to know that the current British Minister for Africa, Rory Stewart, is active and supportive. However, a new state of emergency has been declared in Ethiopia and it seems that the government is very unstable and the position of current PM, Hailemariam Desalegn is insecure. It is likely that the Oromo issues are a big factor in this.

I Welcome Refugees [*Jill Walmsley*]: many of us will have written to our MP, asking him to attend on 16 March to vote for the Private Members' Bill on amending Refugee Family Reunion restrictions (one of the actions in our February newsletter). However, by the time of our last meeting no-one had received a response. **Refugee week** is 18-24 June and 2018 is the 20th anniversary of marking in this way the contribution refugees make in the UK. We are encouraged to make '20' special in our activities – 20 things we can do, what we can do in 20 minutes, 20 objects, 20 hopes. On the weekend of 22/23 June we are invited to do something 'football related' (something to do with the World Cup??) For example, we could set up a match, make contact with football clubs locally etc. If we do, it could be a good event to involve our visiting Syrian families from Taunton? If you have any suggestions or offers, please contact Jill at jillwalmsley09@btinternet.com

The **Minehead Refugee Support Group** had a fundraising lunch on 15 February, and has opened a bank account. Donations are welcome. Progress has been made in planning visits from Syrian families settled in Taunton to our area – two families are coming to stay for three days at Easter, and days out are planned from May onwards. Offers of meals, and help are welcomed. Contact Jenny Gateau jenny.gateau408@btinternet.com

Women's Action Network [*Cherry Bird*]: There is some partially good news in that the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women report condemns N. Ireland abortion laws and criticises the UK government for being '*in breach of UK HR obligations Devolution does not absolve UK government from responsibility to uphold HR in N. Ireland*'. AIUK has welcomed the report and is calling on the UK government to introduce abortion law reform legislation in Westminster. We were also glad to hear that Teodora Vasques (El Salvador) has been freed (sentence commuted), after 11 years in prison for a stillbirth. However, at least 27 other women are still in prison.

South Asia: major current issues are: use of pellet guns in India; the rape and detention of two indigenous girls in Bangladesh by the army; and the detention of opposition politicians in the Maldives.

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: cherrybird@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