



News from the Minehead Group

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at the AIUK AGM

Actions you can take this month:

- ✓ **Send an email to Egypt** asking President al-Sisi to drop the charges against **Azza Soliman** and restore her freedom immediately. Azza Soliman is a women's rights defender who has been persecuted by the Egyptian government for almost 30 years. Her crime? Simply fighting for the basic human rights of Egyptian women. She faces years in prison on dubious charges and her freedom is already severely limited by an asset freeze and travel ban. Go to the AIUK website home page www.amnesty.org.uk and follow the links.
- ✓ **Come along** to 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!
- ✓ **Join us** on Thursday 10 May at 1930 for the screening of the 50 minute documentary film, **Syria's Disappeared: the case against Assad**. It's about how tens of thousands of men, women & children have been disappeared by the Assad regime into a network of clandestine detention centres.
- ✓ **Offer to bring cakes or scones**, or help in other ways, to 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). Please note the date in your diary and invite your friends.



Round up of March and April group news



Our April meeting began with a moment's quiet reflection for our fellow member and friend, **Andy Lewis**, who very sadly died at home on 7 April. Andy had been an active member of our group since 2010. He was a great supporter and helper with our stalls in Minehead and at village fetes, which he always seemed to enjoy. We will miss his intelligent and thoughtful contributions to our discussions and campaigns, and we'll also miss his quiet sense of humour. We have sent our condolences from the group to his family.

The main items at our **April meeting**, were reports back from the SW regional conference and the AIUK AGM/conference which three of our members had attended. Some of the key points from both are set out overleaf. At the regional conference, Cherry Bird ran a well-received workshop on human rights in India and Nepal, and she will be repeating this for us at our July group meeting. Susan Mew has also been out and about running workshops on the Brave campaign for the Taunton and Weston-Super-Mare groups. It is always good to meet members from other groups and share information and ideas. And conferences and inspiring speakers are good for revitalising our enthusiasm for campaigning, letter writing and fund-raising! The best surprise at the AGM was that the Minehead Group was awarded the **Local Media Prize** for our excellent and regular coverage in the local press! This took place at a fun 'awards ceremony' where people dress up and do crazy things. Our prizes included a saucepan (to be donated to the refugee group) and a bottle of wine which we've given to our hard-working press officer (Jill Walmsley).



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.

Wednesday 9 May
Letter writing afternoon: 1400-1530 at the Quaker Meeting House, Minehead.

Thursday 10 May
Group meeting: film – Syria's Disappeared

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.

News from the Regional and National Amnesty International Conferences

Here are a few key points from all our notes of the main sessions and workshops that we each attended. Ask Alison, Cherry, Susan or Karen if you want to know more! A copy of the AGM decisions can be downloaded from the AIUK website.

- **Salil Shetty**, AI's Director General, opened the Conference and lit the candle. He spoke about the refugee crisis, the worsening situation in Syria and the escalating violence against human rights defenders (HRDs). He had met the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, asking him to guarantee that **Rohingya** people would not be returned to Myanmar until it was safe. **Kate Allen**, Director of AIUK, had also visited Bangladesh earlier in the year and seen the plight of Rohingya refugees first hand.
- AIUK currently has 776,000 people engaged in its campaigns. It is aiming to get 2% of the population involved. The 2017 **Write for Rights** campaign resulted in 5 million letters and messages being sent from AI supporters around the world.
- The **BRAVE campaign** featured strongly in both regional and national conferences. Both had actions for Azza Soliman. This campaign is now moving into a new phase with members asked to lobby their governments to ensure that their embassies abroad work consistently and coherently to protect HRDs. In the UK we will be writing to the FCO via our MPs.
- A panel of **women HRDs** drew attention to the on-line abuse of women, the healthcare and abortion rights of women in Northern Ireland and the campaigns by women in Poland. AI is calling on Twitter to take steps to end the on-line harassment of women, particularly female journalists and MPs. (See the email to Jack Dorsey on the AIUK website.) Women in Poland are marching to stop a proposed total ban on abortion – amending an already severely restrictive law. Politics in Poland is dominated by the powerful and traditional Catholic Church. (See the petition on AIUK website.)
- The **Football Welcomes Refugees** campaign is being very successful. Last year 30 league clubs organised activities to help refugees and so far 50 clubs are doing the same in 2018.
- **Death penalty**: AIUK has launched a new report, *Death Sentences and Executions 2017*. This reveals that the number of executions declined by 4% compared to 2016 and the number of death sentences fell by 17%. However, more than 21,000 people remain on death row around the world and several countries resumed executions. AIUK aims to make the UK government the global leader in calling for the abolition of the death penalty.
- A workshop on **Brexit** explained how AIUK is putting enormous amounts of staff time and resources into ensuring our HR are protected after Britain leaves the EU. This is very technical and detailed work, and focuses on damage limitation to our HR as we leave. AIUK's approach is totally apolitical.



Campaigns and other news

Ethiopia: while at the AGM we received the awful news that Eskinder Nega had been re-arrested. However, on 12 April, Cherry heard that he had been released again. This is a clear indication that his safety is continually under threat, so we'll need to keep campaigning. More news next month.

I Welcome Refugees [Jill Walmsley]: Good news that enough MPs (though not ours) had attended on 16 March to support the Refugee Family Reunion Bill at its second reading. Next is the committee stage on a date yet to be announced. Two Syrian families, settled in Taunton, came to Minehead for a three-day stay over Easter, and had a wonderful time despite the weather. I met one mum and her two boys enjoying meals at the Beach Hotel where they were staying, the children desperate to get back on the beach. The next one-day visits are planned for May, and volunteer hosts are welcome to contact Jenny Gateau. Our group has discussed plans for Refugee Week in June and to mark the 20th anniversary we are hoping to collect 20 bags of toiletries to send up to RAFT - lists of suitable contents will be provided. Of course, we need not stop at 20!

Israel: the Weston-super-Mare group asks us to support the work of B'Tselem who have published ads in Israeli media asking Israeli soldiers to refuse unlawful orders to open fire on unarmed demonstrators in Gaza. You can find out more about this human rights organisation at <https://www.btselem.org>

Torture: It was reported in The Guardian and by Reprieve that Britain's torture policy is being secretly re-written and possibly watered down by our government. Find out more from their websites.

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

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