



News from the Minehead Group

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Actions you can take this month:

- ✓ **Send an email to Sudan's Ministry of Justice** asking for justice for 19-year-old **Noura Hussein** who has been sentenced to death for killing her rapist in an act of self-defence. Having already endured rape by the man she was forced to marry at just 16, she used a kitchen knife to protect herself when he tried to rape her again. Now, because of an outdated law that doesn't recognise marital rape, she has been sentenced to death. Go to the AIUK website home page www.amnesty.org.uk and follow the links.
- ✓ **Come along and bring your friends** to our **AmnesTea** on Sunday 3 June from 3-5pm at the home of Gian and Chris Zucchelli, at Jacaranda, Clanville Road, Minehead, TA24 5PD. Offers of help to Alison Dietz (dietz@btinternet.com).
- ✓ **Send the letter** included with emailed versions of this newsletter, to the Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh, concerning **Chandrashekhra Azad**, a prisoner of conscience detained purely for his peaceful support for the rights of Dalit people and their empowerment through education.
- ✓ **Make a date** to help with our stall at the Roadwater Fete on the afternoon of Saturday 28 July. **We need more helpers!** Offers to Alison please.

Round up of April and May group news

The main item at our **May meeting**, was the showing of the film 'Syria's Disappeared: the Case against Assad'. The film tells the story of tens of thousands of people disappeared during the 2011 Arab Spring uprising. It was a very moving and disturbing account told by people who had been tortured themselves or by those whose relatives and friends had been tortured and executed in Syrian prisons. It also told of the work being undertaken by special investigators to amass the evidence against Assad. We were silent at the end of the film; none of us knew what to say about the continuing, appalling situation in Syria.



On a positive note Jenny Gateau told us about plans to bring more **Syrian families** on a day out from Taunton to West Somerset, and several of our members are involved in these events. We have also been collecting toiletry bags which will be taken to refugee camps around the Syrian borders. **Refugee Week** is 20 years old this year, so we set ourselves the target of putting together 20 bags of toiletries which are much needed by refugees. We have already exceeded this target and 22 bags have been taken to RAFT (Refugee Aid from Taunton). If anyone would like to add to this total, see the list below of items to include. Bags can be taken to St Michael's Alcombe (open 9-4 each day) and left behind the organ for later collection.

On 9 May we held another successful **letter writing afternoon** at the Quaker Meeting House. Fourteen people wrote 53 letters about 11 cases in 9 different countries. Well done everyone!

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.

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.

18-24 Refugee Week

Week: collecting bags of toiletries for refugees

Thursday 12 July

Group meeting: talk on South Asia.

Saturday 28 July

Stall at Roadwater Fete: set up in morning; fete in afternoon.

Tuesday 28 August

Summer social: at Mayhill, Carhampton (date tbc at next mtg).

Toiletry bags - items to include:

soap, toothbrush/paste, flannel, soap dish, wet wipes, bacterial hand gel, comb/brush, shampoo, small packets of tissues.

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Campaigns and other news

I Welcome Refugees [*Jill Walmsley*]: There is a **letter** on the AIUK website you can send to the US Government about an Iraqi refugee 'Sam', who has worked as an US Army interpreter and who, though he has been accepted for re-settlement in the US, is stranded in Egypt and not allowed entry, a legacy no doubt of Donald Trump's ban. As noted overleaf, we are supporting local initiatives to help refugees. The theme of Refugee Week is Families Together. Tim Farron MP has tabled an Early Day Motion to mark the 20th anniversary and asks MPs to support the campaigning work that organisations such as Amnesty International are doing to welcome refugee children to the UK. We can **write to our MP** asking him to support the Motion.

Brexit and human rights [*AIUK news*] The House of Lords made a series of key amendments Amnesty has been calling for to make sure we all keep our rights as we leave the EU. On 23 April, the House of Lords voted to keep the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights after the UK leaves the EU by a majority of 71. The same day, there was a majority of 57 to keep rights of action based on the general principles of EU law – including those on non-discrimination and equal treatment. On 25 April, the Lords voted by a clear majority of 128 to restrict the Henry VIII powers so that ministers can only make the changes 'necessary' to implement the withdrawal, helping make sure these powers aren't used to erode rights. This is a victory for human rights in the UK. The Lords have sent a clear message to the Government – leaving the EU shouldn't mean leaving rights behind.

Ethiopia [*Cherry Bird*] Eskinder was released (with other activists, bloggers & journalists) without charge on 5 April, after 12 days' detention. There is a new prime minister, Abiy Ahmed. Many challenges remain, especially in the east of the country, where there is still unrest. Can he address longstanding ethnic divisions? He is from the Oromo ethnic group, a long-oppressed majority, and chair of Oromo People Democratic Organisation, one of four ethnically based parties in the ruling EPRDF coalition. He is highly educated, a reformist and has the support of parliament and the population but may be limited by the long-established control of 'the deep state' ie military and security establishment, who will resist the sweeping reforms demanded by the people. Watch this space!

India: Current major focus is on Chadrashekhkar Azad, founder of the 'Bhim Army' in Uttar Pradesh, which campaigns for Dalit rights and their empowerment through access to education. He was arrested, discharged on bail due to lack of evidence then re-arrested and held under an administrative law (National Security Act) which is used to target unwanted activists, as it enables their detention without charge or trial for up to 12 months. He is included in India's Brave campaign and they have applied to have him included in AIUK campaign. [*See list of actions overleaf.*]

Nepal: three years after the huge 2015 earthquake (over 9,000 people died, 500,000 houses completely destroyed and many more badly damaged) the Amnesty report **Building Inequality** says only 16% of those in need have received assistance, because the 'Build Back Better' model adopted for reconstruction does not take into account escalating costs, shortages of skills and resources and the nature of Nepali land tenure. To qualify for a grant, families must provide proof of ownership of the land on which they live. This discriminates against the people who need it most, as the poorest and most marginalised people have no documentation and/or do not own land. Up to 25% of Nepal's population is estimated to be landless. As a result of this thoughtless bureaucracy, many of the poorest people face another monsoon season living under makeshift shelters.

Women's Action Network: some points to think about from the latest network newsletter:

- Migration is a feminist issue (women often migrate alone; women face particular risks; women face double discrimination (gender and race); pregnancy; no treatment for female health problems).
- Alarm raised about cuts to Hague-Jolie plan to end sexual violence in war (cut in number of experts in team, slow deployment for support to Rohingya).
- Can a woman's voice ever be right? Widespread and historic criticism of women's voices (too high, too soft, too shrill etc) means they are not taken seriously in public oratory.

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: cherryebird@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