



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

June 2018

<http://manchester.amnesty.org.uk/>

Facebook page: Manchester Amnesty International

Facebook group: Manchester Amnesty

Twitter: @amnestymanc

Coming events

Secret Gig

With Sofar Sounds and Help Refugees



Sunday 24th June, 7pm, Secret location!

For Refugee Week 2018, Amnesty has teamed up with Help Refugees and Sofar Sounds – a global movement which brings the magic back to live music by hosting gigs in intimate spaces around the world – to host a very special, secret gig. Every Sofar Sounds gig takes place in an intimate space – like someone's living room or an after-hours shop – and typically features a few artists playing three or four songs each. Every lineup is specially curated to give our audiences a diverse show.

Apply for tickets now – and if you're successful, you'll be sent all the details a day before the show!



We'll be hosting a donation drop off at the gig – so bring old clothes, sleeping bags, tents and more – and these will be delivered to those who really need it in Calais! For further information, please email Rebecca Barnes at rebeccabarnes5@gmail.com

Apply for tickets now at
www.sofarsounds.com/manchester

Sparkle in the Park

We have a stall at Sparkle in the Park on **Saturday 7th and Sunday 8th July** at Sackville Gardens in Manchester. We will feature campaigning on behalf of Sakris Kupila, one of the cases featured internationally in the BRAVE campaign.



This is a weekend event to celebrate the trans community, see <https://www.sparkle.org.uk/sparkle-in-the-park>

Volunteers needed to help man the stall.
Can you spare a couple of hours?
Email sen.raj@amnesty.org.uk to volunteer.

Trump Visit

On Friday 13th July 18 Donald Trump is expected to carry out his first official visit to the UK. Given the numerous concerns with human rights that have arisen since he has started his term as President of the USA, millions of people will take the opportunity to say out loud what they think. We will be joining a march in Manchester. Details will be sent out via Facebook and email. Watch this space.....



Next Letter Writing Drop In

Saturday July 14th 2-4pm
The Eighth Day Café, Oxford Road
Come along to our regular letter writing session and make a difference
Just turn up!

Manchester Pride

We will have a walking float in the Pride Parade through Manchester City Centre. A marvellous opportunity to be seen by many thousands and have a great time.

Save the Date - Saturday 25th August!

Group Meeting

N.B. Usually on the 4th Monday of the month - 7.30pm.

Monday 25th June

Featuring a discussion on making the best use of social media and planning for our UAE work

MadLab/Plant Noma
Dantzig Street, M60 0AE

PLEASE NOTE OUR NEW VENUE – JUST BEHIND THE PRINTWORKS

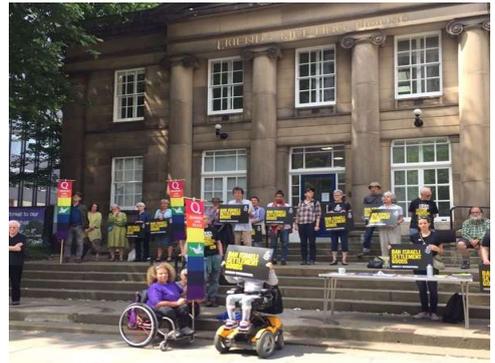
Some of us will meet at Trof about 6pm to get a bite to eat before the meeting – you are welcome to join us

Recent events

'Ban Israeli Settlement Goods' Vigil

On Sunday 10th June we held a silent vigil alongside the Quakers of Manchester, outside their building in the city centre. We managed to collect quite a few signatures for our petition. Thank you to the Quakers, who have shown a lot of enthusiasm for this petition and were very active in promoting it to passers-by. More events will follow.

Thank you again to all those who took part!!



Didsbury Festival

On Sat 16th June we had a stall at Didsbury festival, featuring Amnesty's campaigns 'Ban Israeli Settlement Goods', 'I welcome Refugees' and the case of individual at risk 'Ahmed Mansoor, UAE'.

We had a good turnout of people signing our petitions and taking pictures. Jeff Smith, MP for Withington, and councillors Kelly Simcok, Andrew Simcock, and John Leech paid a visit to our stall. Many thanks for their support!

Thank you also to all the volunteers!!!



'This is who I am'

A full theatre watched the Ice and Fire theatre company's production at HOME on Wednesday 20th. This gave moving personal accounts of LGBT refugee's experience of going through the UK asylum application process.

This was followed by a lively Q&A session featuring Moud Goba from Micro Rainbow International, Estelle Worthington from Asylum Matters and our very own Sen Raj representing Amnesty International and the Amnesty UK's LGBTI Network.



In addition, we had a stall outside the theatre collecting signatures on a petition calling on the government to limit the use of immigration detention for those going through the asylum process.



Acoustic Amnesty

Lastly, on Thursday 21st June, Steve Lindsay put on another great night of local musicians and poets to raise money for both Music Action International and Manchester Amnesty. We had a great laid-back night and raised over £300 for the causes.

Many thanks to Steve for getting it together, to all the artists who gave their time and talents and not forgetting the lovely Sacred Trinity church who let us use their facilities.

Campaigns

United Arab Emirates

AHMED MANSOOR SENTENCED

On 29 May, the State Security Chamber of the Federal Appeal Court of Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) capital, sentenced human rights defender Ahmed Mansoor to 10 years imprisonment and a fine of 1,000,000 Emirati Dirham (approximately USD \$270,000). The court also ordered placing him under surveillance for three years following his release. Ahmed Mansoor was tried and convicted on charges including "insulting the status and prestige of the UAE and its symbols" including its leaders, "publish[ing] false information to damage [the] UAE's reputation abroad" and "portray[ing] the UAE as a lawless land." He had also been charged with "cooperating with a terrorist organisation operating outside the country" but was acquitted on this charge.

According to information received by Amnesty international, the trial of Ahmed Mansoor began in March and his second trial session took place on 11 April in a court in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the UAE. A third hearing may have taken place on 9 May but there has been no confirmation of this. On 29 May, the State Security Chamber of the Federal Appeal Court in Abu Dhabi issued the verdict and sentence. He can appeal his sentence to the State Security Chamber of the Federal Supreme Court.

Ahmed Mansoor's whereabouts remain unknown. According to Amnesty International's information, Ahmed Mansoor has been held in prolonged solitary confinement, which can amount to torture or other ill-treatment.

Please take Urgent Action – see case sheet attached with this newsletter or download at <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE2585102018ENGLISH.pdf>

'I Welcome' Refugee Campaign

Collection

At our June group meeting we'll be hosting a donation drop off – so bring old clothes, sleeping bags, tents and more – and these will be delivered by Help Refugees to those who really need it in Calais.

PLEASE BRING STUFF!

Refugee Week

We have had a hectic Refugee week with all the events featured above. In addition, some of us took time out for a photo outside HOME with Manchester Welcomes Refugees placards and this has been added to pictures from around the North West – see



Crisis and Tactical

PALESTINE

Israel to slash electricity supply to Gaza Strip

This month the Israeli authorities have decided to slash the electricity supply to the Gaza Strip, restricting it to between two and three hours a day.

Amnesty International has warned that this could have catastrophic humanitarian consequences. The lives of thousands of people will be endangered, including those of hospital patients with chronic conditions or in intensive care, including babies on life support.

This month marks 10 years since Israel began its land, sea and air blockade of Gaza. Under this illegal blockade, movement of people and goods are severely restricted and the majority of exports and imports of raw materials have been banned. Meanwhile, Egypt has imposed tight restrictions on the Rafah crossing, keeping it closed most of this time. This has virtually cut off all access to the outside world for more than two million residents of Gaza. Unemployment rates have skyrocketed and many families have been forced into extreme poverty leaving approximately 80% of the population dependent on humanitarian aid.

In these 10 years, this blockade has also led to three armed conflicts between Israel and Palestinian armed groups in the Gaza Strip. During these conflicts, all sides have committed violations of international humanitarian law, including war crimes.

In each of these wars, Israel targeted civilian infrastructure, including electricity, water, sewage and sanitation plants as well as destroying tens of thousands of civilian properties, including homes, shops and factories. Israel has subsequently refused to allow into Gaza much of the construction materials needed to rebuild the civilian infrastructure.

"As the occupying power, Israel has obligations to ensure the basic needs of the civilian population are met. At the very least, Israel must not continue to cut off access to essential supplies. The Israeli authorities must immediately lift the illegal blockade and end their collective punishment of Gaza's population," said Magdalena Mughrabi, Amnesty's Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa.



At our May's meeting, Jonathan Cornejo, Amnesty UK's coordinator for the campaign on Palestine informed us that the situation in the Gaza Strip has become so untenable that in 2015 the UN warned it would become "uninhabitable" by 2020.

SYRIA

Some justice.....at last!

(news provided by Rethink Rebuild)

On 8th June 18 the German magazine 'Der Spiegel' has reported that German prosecutors have officially issued an international arrest warrant for Jamil Hassan, the Syrian regime's head of Airforce Intelligence, on charges of 'crimes against humanity'.

Prosecutors accuse Jamil Hassan of being responsible for hideous crimes committed by his intelligence branch, including torture, rape and murder of hundreds of people.

This step by Germany is the most significant yet for justice taken by the international community. Such accountability has the potential to deter crimes of torture committed in regime detention centres. This step can hopefully set a precedent for the indictment of other perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity and encourage the UK and other countries to follow suit and activate its principle of 'universal jurisdiction'. The prosecution case was largely based on photographs taken by 'Caesar', the military photographer who defected from the regime and smuggled thousands of photos of tortured corpses outside the country. Earlier in 2018, Rethink Rebuild Society arranged for the visit of 'Caesar' and his team to the UK to convey some of this evidence to Government officials and Members of Parliament.



'Caesar' presenting photographs to the UK's authorities-photo provided by Rethink Rebuild

IDLIB: More civilian casualties

Responding to reports that Russian aircraft carried out an attack in Idlib province on 7th June 18 killing at least 44 people, Lynn Maalouf, Amnesty International's Middle East Research Director, said:

"Among those killed were at least six children, and the death toll is expected to rise as the wounded succumb to their injuries. Deliberately attacking civilians violates international humanitarian law and is a war crime.

"We are deeply troubled by reports that this was a 'double-tap' strike, in which aircraft follow up on an initial attack with a second strike which generally hits rescue workers and others coming to the aid of casualties. These cruel attacks have happened time and again in Syria, and demonstrate utter disregard for the lives of civilians and for fundamental principles of international humanitarian law.

"The area where this attack took place is part of a de-escalation zone agreed on by Russia, Iran and Turkey last year at peace talks in Astana. Russia and Syria must immediately end direct attacks on civilians and indiscriminate attacks.

"There must be an independent investigation into this airstrike and those responsible for war crimes in Syria must be brought to justice."

New property law punishes the displaced and could obstruct investigation of war crimes

A 2012 Decree allows the Syrian government to demolish informal settlements in Damascus to convert them into residential areas and public spaces. Under new 2018 regulations, once a development zone has been designated, the authorities must publicly notify home and land owners, who have only 30 days to assemble the necessary paperwork and claim their property.

Amnesty highlighted the following shortcomings of this new legislation:

- With more than 11 million Syrians displaced, either within Syria or in other countries as refugees, assembling documents is likely to be a near impossible feat.
- Those Syrians who return home to claim their property will be subject to "security clearance" by government agents. It is not clear what this process entails.
- While the legislation provides some provisions that ensure the right of home owners in designated zones to apply for alternative housing and financial compensation, it fails to protect the rights of people who had been living in informal settlements and whose residence is most likely not recorded in the land registry.
- No provisions are in place to provide reparation to owners whose homes were looted by security forces in areas designated for redevelopment.
- Women whose husbands or fathers have been killed or missing face serious obstacles in claiming their property as the deeds are often in the name of males. They might lack the required official documentation to prove the whereabouts or status of their male relatives, preventing them to take action.

Amnesty also highlights that implementing this new law could result in covering up evidence of war crimes: the bulldozing and rebuilding of areas raises deep concerns about the destruction of evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Amnesty stated: "The authorities must ensure everyone who has been arbitrarily or unlawfully deprived of housing, land or property has access to legal remedies including challenging decisions of the government before an independent and impartial body."



Individuals at Risk

Letter Writing

We will hold our regular bi-monthly letter writing session at The Eighth Day Café on Oxford Rd on Saturday July 14th, 2-4pm. Do pop along and write some letters in convivial company. Pens, paper, case sheets all provided.

Write for Rights

This year Amnesty UK are piloting having an activist reference group to support Write for Rights and are looking for people to apply. They want a good cross-section of activists, so you don't have to be Write for Rights veterans at all, just planning to get involved this year.

Please see the attached document for terms and how to apply. This has only just been sent out due to some confusion at HRAC

so, although the documents says that the deadline was last Monday but it has been extended until end of Thursday 28th June.

Children's network, Women's Rights, Europe/Turkey No updates this month

N.B. If you wish to subscribe to, or unsubscribe from, this newsletter and other general group emails from the Manchester Group of Amnesty International, please email manchestergroup@amnesty.org.uk