



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

September 2018

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

Facebook page: Manchester Amnesty International

Facebook group: Manchester Amnesty

Twitter: @amnestymanc

Coming Events

Letter Writing Drop-in

Saturday 8th September, 2-4 pm Eighth Day Café, Oxford Road

We have our regular bi-monthly letter writing drop in session on Saturday 8th. We will be writing letters to cases featured in the Real Lives leaflet, to the UAE authorities and some Urgent Actions. All details will be provided, including pens, paper and envelopes. Help will be on hand for regular writers for anyone new to sending Amnesty appeals. All with the added advantage of tea and cakes from the lovely eighth Day Café.



Come along and make a difference!

If you can't make it but would still like to write a letter or two, you can download the Real Lives case details at:

https://www.amnesty.org.uk/resources/real-lives-autumn-2018?utm_campaign=MCFR571_LG_Local%20groups%20monthly%20mailing%20Sept&utm_source=Email&utm_medium=Groups&utm_content=2277

Street Collection

Saturday 29th September, Manchester City Centre

We will be holding our annual street collection in Manchester at the end of September. We will go out into the streets in the City Centre to ask the public to donate to Amnesty International. Every year we send any surplus funds, including money raised by the street collection, to Amnesty International UK. Every penny collected helps AIUK to campaign effectively for human rights. It is also a useful occasion to engage with the public and to seek their support.



We are seeking volunteers to come out with us for an hour and a half between the hours of 10 and 4 on Saturday 29th September. If every supporter reading this newsletter could come to help the collection it would be fantastic; if we got 40 collectors, it would be marvellous.

If you would like to volunteer, please email Sean Dunne at sean.a.dunne@btinternet.com with your preferred time slot (10 to 11.30, 11.30 to 1, 1 to 2.30 or 2.30 to 4), and he will send you full details.

Group Meeting

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

Monday 24th September

Sergei Nikitin

Former Director of the Amnesty International representative office in Russia



Sergei worked for Amnesty in Moscow for 14 years and will talk about his experience of being a human rights defender in Russia as well as shrinking space for human rights in Russia, former Soviet Union countries and elsewhere

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

Campaigns

United Arab Emirates

MEETING WITH THE UAE COUNTRY COORDINATOR

At the end of July, four of us met with Oscar Jenz, AIUK country-co-ordinator for UAE. We discussed plans for future campaigning on behalf of Mohammed al-Roken and Ahmed Mansoor, both prisoners of conscience in UAE. We talked about ways of building up positive lines of communication with our MPs and councillors over time and not trying to rush this aspect of our work. Oscar also told us that Ahmed writes poetry and that this might be another idea for an awareness-raising activity i.e. a poetry event. We talked about next steps and Henricke has started to plan an event in the city centre on **Saturday 27th October** to mark both Mohammed and Ahmed's birthdays, which fall in the autumn. **More details to follow but please put this date in your diary.**

LETTER WRITING

We have set up a letter writing rota to ensure that letters are regularly sent from Manchester to the UAE authorities, both on behalf of Ahmed Mansoor and the human rights lawyer Mohamed al-Roken.

We only have 9 people on the rota so far – it would be good to have more. If you want to take part, please email anne.walker9@ntlworld.com indicating how often you would like to write. This is likely to be a long-term endeavour so please be realistic in what you offer to do. Anne will then send you a reminder with letter writing details when your turn comes up.

*Please volunteer
to write regular letter to the UAE authorities.*

Refugee Rights

Home Office: Stop blocking children's rights

15-year-old Daniel didn't even know he wasn't British until he was denied the chance to join his friends on a school trip. Daniel has a right to apply for citizenship - but only if he pays the Home Office £1,012. If he can't, he may not be able to study, work or even get hospital treatment. And he isn't alone.



There are thousands of children in the UK being priced out of their rights. Please call on the Home Office to stop blocking children's rights by taking the **online action** at: https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/home-office-stop-profiteering-childrens-rights?utm_campaign=MCFR571_LG_Local%20groups%20monthly%20mailing%20Sept&utm_source=Email&utm_medium=Groups&utm_content=2277

We will also have paper copies of a petition at our next group meeting.

I Welcome Refugees Families Together photo Album

UK rules are keeping refugee families apart – the Home Secretary has the power to change this. We want to show him that Britain is a country which values family by creating the Great British Family Album.

Family photos can capture a moment of love and togetherness which lasts a lifetime. A childhood holiday, time spent together across generations or with lost loved ones. These are the kind of moments refugees living in the UK, who are separated from those closest, miss every day.

Take part in the #FamiliesTogether campaign by sharing a family photo which is important to you. This can be recent or from your past, emotional or light-hearted: any memory or moment that matters to you. All we need is your photo, along with a brief explanation of why it is important to you by October 1st. Upload your family photos from 3 Sept.

https://www.amnesty.org.uk/great-british-family-photo-album?utm_campaign=MCFR571_LG_Local%20groups%20monthly%20mailing%20Sept&utm_source=Email&utm_medium=Groups&utm_content=2277

Crisis and Tactical

MYANMAR

800 Political prisoners freed! - GOOD NEWS!

In Apr 18, 800 political prisoners were freed following a Presidential amnesty.



Those freed included prisoner of conscience Lahpai Gam, arrested in 2012, and two pastors, arrested in 2016, for helping organise a visit by journalists to an alleged site of military airstrike.

1st Anniversary of the Rohingya crisis - New report from the UN

Late August 18, the UN Fact-Finding Mission (FFM), a body of independent experts appointed by the Human Rights Council, released a new report on the atrocities committed by Myanmar's security forces towards the Rohingyas. Tirana Assan, Director of Crisis response at Amnesty International, stated that the report shows that "the Myanmar authorities are incapable of bringing to justice those responsible. "The UN Security Council must refer the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court as a matter of urgency."

Online Petition

A local individual member of Amnesty International has started an online petition via change.org in response to the plight of the

Rohingya. The UK is one of Myanmar's larger trading partners and by imposing harsh financial sanctions, he believes that this will send a clear message that the Rohingya genocide is intolerable and will not be allowed to continue without consequences.

<https://www.change.org/p/foreign-commonwealth-office-impose-financial-sanctions-on-myanmar-in-response-to-the-rohingya-genocide>

PALESTINE

Ahed Tamimi released! – GOOD NEWS

On 29th July 17-year old activist Ahed Tamimi was released 21 days short of completing her 8-month sentence. She was arrested for assault and other charges after having kicked two Israeli soldiers, who seriously injured her cousin during a protest. Amnesty considered her arrest as overreaction by the Israeli authorities, considering that the soldiers were armed.

Ahed is considered by some as a symbol of resistance against Israeli occupation of the West Bank, since she has often confronted Israeli soldiers directly. She has been described as the 'Rosa Parks of Palestine'. It is possible that her high profile contributed to her 'early' release, which was asked for by many organisations, and apparently including famous stars.

In the last few weeks, Amnesty had re-launched their petition, making use of momentum building.

Thank you to all who have signed the petition! Every signature does count!

Regrettably about another 350 children and teenagers are currently held in Palestinian prisons and detention centre. Their prosecutions are subjected to military courts. While in detention they undergo intimidating interrogations, which might include threats, blindfolding, all without the presence of a lawyer. Sometimes they are subjected to physical violence and solitary confinement.



SYRIA

In the words of Amnesty's Crisis Response Team

In July we reported that Amnesty's research into the US-led Coalition's 2017 operation in Raqqa concluded that such operation caused the deaths of thousands of civilians and the destruction of many civilian buildings. The conclusions of this report have initially been rejected by the US-Coalition, which stated that great measures were taken to avoid civilian deaths.

In the words of one member of Amnesty's Crisis Response Team:

"Just hours after we published our report, the Coalition issued a statement rejecting our findings. This shows that our target audience were paying attention and so actually

care about how our work makes them look – whatever they say is their public bluster."



One member of Amnesty's Crisis Response Team during her research in Raqqa

On 24th July the US-led coalition then made a U-turn and acknowledged that its aerial bombardments, carried out between June and October 18 killed 77 civilians, including 25 women and 24 children. This admission is a piece of good news, despite the fact that it is only a tiny step towards justice for Syrians. Amnesty research and information has proved to be reliable once again. Following the US-led coalition admission, Amnesty asked the US-led coalition for "thorough, independent investigations to uncover the full scale of civilian deaths and compensate the victims and survivors".

In the words of a member of the 'Darayya Youth'

" I would rather be killed than be a killer"

These are the words of Yahya Sharbaji, an activist part of the "Darayya Youth" group. On July 23rd 2018 Yahya's family was informed by the Syrian authorities that both he and his brother Mohammad had died in 2013, while in detention in Saydnaya prison. Their death is likely to have been caused by extrajudicial execution.

Darayya Youth aimed to bring about social change through non-violent action, counteracting the regime's repressive and violent methods of governance. Yahya was considered the mastermind of non-violent protests in Darayya's revolutionary movement. Amnesty has campaigned for him in the past.

Haytham Alhamwi, Managing Director of Rethink Rebuild, was part of this group. Early this year, Haytham gave us a touching account on how small groups of civilians started the revolution in Syria in 2011, by doing community work, like cleaning their streets.

Recently the regime has confirmed in public record the death of 161 people who were subjected to enforced disappearance. In a press release Amnesty has called for the return of their remains to their families for a proper burial and for a full disclosure of the circumstances concerning their deaths.

Rethink Rebuild feels that the regime's recent tendency of revealing the fate of long lost detainees, is an attempt to close the 'detainees file' without making too much noise. The tacit support of the international community is allowing the regime to avoid accountability for its war crimes.

According to the Syrian Network of Human Rights, since 2011 at least 82,000 have disappeared.

(Information partly provided by Rethink Rebuild)



Yahya Sharbaji during a peaceful protest

Amnesty has organised a petition to help find Syria' disappeared. **Please, sign it if you have not done so already.**

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/get-involved/take-action/help-us-find-the-disappeared-in-syria/>



Women's Rights



In May this year, after the promise that, after years of campaigning, Saudi women would win the right to drive from June this year, several women human rights defenders, who had campaigned on this issue (and against other restrictions of the rights of women and girls in Saudi Arabia), were arrested, including Loujain al-Hathloul, Iman al-Nafjan and Aziza al-Yousef. They are still in prison, faced with accusations of being traitors, and under the threat of a 20-year prison sentence. The Saudi media have been running a smear campaign, sharing pictures of the activists with the word "Traitor" stamped in red across their faces. They are also described as "Agents of Embassies",

Meanwhile Mohammed Bin Salman portrays himself as a reformer, now that women are allowed to drive. However, in other ways, human rights in Saudi Arabia are more than ever under threat. In July, for example, two more prominent women activists, Samar Badawi (sister of the jailed blogger Raif Badawi) and Nassima al-Sada, were also arrested for their human rights work. Both have previously been targeted, harassed, and placed under travel bans for their human rights activism.

You can take action on this by following this link to a prepared email action which Amnesty has set up to email the Saudi embassy.

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/free-saudi-women-who-fought-right-drive>

Turkey – GOOD NEWS!



Taner Kılıç, the Honorary Chair of Amnesty Turkey, was released from jail on 16th August after 432 days in prison.

The court in Istanbul conditionally released him on bail – he is still charged with "membership of a terrorist organisation".

Millions of people worldwide have taken action on this case, which has no doubt pressured the authorities, helping to secure Taner's release.

Kumi Naidoo, Amnesty International's new Secretary General said:

"We are overjoyed at this news. It has taken us more than a year of campaigning and struggle to get here, but it appears that Taner will finally be freed. Whilst we rejoice at this decision, our celebrations will only truly begin when he is safely back at home in the arms of his wife and daughters.

"But beneath the smiles of joy and relief there will be sorrow, anger and a steely determination. Sorrow for all the things Taner has missed during his cruel incarceration. Anger that the baseless charges against him and the Istanbul 10 have not been dropped. And determination to continue our fight for human rights in Turkey and for the release of all other human rights defenders who have been unjustly jailed in the vicious crackdown.

"Today we take a moment to celebrate, but tomorrow our struggle will continue, re-energized by the example set by Taner himself - a man who knows the importance of human rights and is willing to dedicate his life to defending them."

Children's network No updates this month

Other News

THE MANCHESTER PRIDE PARADE 25 August 2018

We had a great presence at the Manchester Pride Parade with some 35 of supporters turning out to march with us. Many thanks to Sen and Lil for masterminding it this year.



Volunteers needed in October

We have 2 events on 13th October – one is a stall at a Christmas card sale in Heaton Moor, the other is a stall at an event organised by the challenge Project in the City Centre. We already have people to lead but it would be good to have one or two to lend a hand. If you can help, email anne.walker9@ntlworld.com

North West Conference

The North West Conference is scheduled for Saturday November 10th in Preston. It is entitled Human Rights Under Threat – Fighting Back. More details will be available shortly. SAVE THE DATE!

Bodnant Garden event

26th September onwards.

This is an event organised in conjunction with Colwyn Bay Amnesty Group. It will be a grand affair and lots of fun! The National Trust has invited 150+ visitors and amongst those have included Farshid Talaghani, who looks after us so well from Amnesty HQ; Ruth Breddal, our Chair, is also making the journey from Surrey to be with us, and they are also hoping that a member of the Senior Management team will come (Kate cannot make it unfortunately) and also perhaps Maggie Paterson, editor of the Amnesty magazine.

There will be a 'rally' with speeches and placards, drama and music. Local group members will have the opportunity to give out fliers about Amnesty and local activities as well as contributing to the singing and the drama.

Bodnant Season - this will continue from the 26th September to the end of November.

Colwyn Bay Amnesty Group plan a continuous presence in the Garden. Throughout this time there will be a representation of the Amnesty Suffragette Spirit map outside the Poem <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/suffragettespirit>, and an action table in the Old Mill at the bottom of the Dell. The former will be unmanned and will provide information about local modern day suffragettes. The latter needs your help!

We shall have a table with information about Azza Soliman, the Egyptian lawyer who is at risk of a lengthy prison sentence for her work with poor women in Cairo slums. For over 2 decades she has provided an advocacy service for them in the courts and police stations: these women are often the subjects of domestic violence and sexual assaults. The increasingly repressive regime in Egypt has, in recent years, targeted human rights defenders, and Azza is one of those most at risk.

They need volunteers to talk members of the public about Amnesty and Azza and encourage them to sign action cards for her and also to send solidarity messages. If you feel that you could help out for a day, get in touch with me (anne.walker9@antworld.com) and I'll put you in touch with the organiser.

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