



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

October 2018

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

Facebook page: Manchester Amnesty International

Facebook group: Manchester Amnesty

Twitter: @amnestymanc

Campaigning

United Arab Emirates

BIRTHDAY PARTY FOR AHMED MANSOOR AND MOHAMED AL-ROKEN

On **Saturday 3rd November** the Manchester Amnesty group will hold a public celebration of Ahmed and Mohammed's birthdays to mark another year in prison. This will provide an opportunity for local Manchester citizens to show their solidarity with the campaign for Mohammed's and Ahmed's release, hear more about the campaign and engage in an important local event. So please come along and celebrate their birthdays with us. If you have any questions and or if you want to receive more information, just contact henrikegreuel@gmx.de

Date: Saturday 3rd November

Time: 1.00pm – 4.00pm

Place: St Ann's Square

*Come along
And join in the fun!*



LETTER WRITING

We now have 18 people on our letter writing rota to ensure that letters are regularly sent from Manchester to the UAE authorities, both on behalf of human rights blogger Ahmed Mansoor and the human rights lawyer Mohamed al-Roken, who are both imprisoned in the UAE. We have now sent at least 16 letters (if you have written but haven't told Anne, please email anne.walker9@ntlworld.com).

However, it would be great to get more sent. If you want to take part, please email anne.walker9@ntlworld.com and she will provide details and a prompt when it is your turn.

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

Write for Rights

Amnesty's annual Write for Rights campaign is the world's biggest letter-writing event. It runs through November and December, when we encourage as many people as possible to write a message. Whether it's a card, photo or drawing expressing solidarity or a letter appealing to the authorities to stop the abuse, a message can make the difference to someone's life.

This year the campaign will feature 12 human rights defenders from around the world as part of the BRAVE campaign. People who face harassment and persecution, threats and even death for being brave enough to raise their voices.

We have ordered material (posters and leaflets) so that we can run Write for Rights stalls at events in the run up to Christmas.

Do you know of an event where we can have a stall?

Would you like to run your own event at work or home for colleagues, friends and family?

Do you know of a friendly café or other location where we could run a stall?

If you have an idea, contact our chair, Hazel Errey at hazelerrey@gmail.com asap.

Refugee and Children's Rights

Join the UK's Biggest Family Photo Album



Add your family photo
#families-together

Family photos can capture wonderful moments of love and togetherness - the first day at school, a holiday snap, or a shared family meal. But for refugees separated from their families by unfair UK rules, these photos are often their most cherished possession.

The Home Secretary Sajid Javid could change these rules and make a lasting difference to refugees in the UK. We have the power to make this a reality.

How to get involved

AIUK are creating the UK's biggest collection of real family photos to show the Home Secretary that the UK believes in keeping families together. **Submit a photo of your family below** - and they'll add it to a giant album to be displayed at Parliament in October. It will also be added to an online digital version of the photo album, so you'll be able to see your action online.

https://www.amnesty.org.uk/uk-biggest-family-photo-album?utm_campaign=MEMA1813_CHRN_OCT_2018&utm_source=Email&utm_medium=Networks&utm_content=2531

Crisis and Tactical

MYANMAR

Here is a summary of what has been happening throughout Sep and Oct 18:

→3rd Sep: **Two Reuters journalists sentenced to 7 years in jail for breaching Myanmar's Official Secrets Act.** The two journalists were investigating the atrocities committed by Myanmar's Security Forces.



Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo being arrested

→6th Sep: **The ICC confirms that it can prosecute Myanmar for alleged crimes against humanity.** Myanmar is not a signatory to the ICC, but ICC's prosecutors state that "even though the allegedly coercive acts that forced the Rohingya to flee took place in Myanmar, the crime would not have been completed until the refugees entered Bangladesh, which is a part to the Rome statute that governs the court". (The Guardian on 6th Sep 2018)

→13th Sep: **Aung San Suu Kyi defends Myanmar's decision to arrest the two journalists**, stating that decision has 'nothing to do with freedom of expression' This statement, delivered at the World Economic Forum has been condemned by Amnesty International.

→15th Sep: **Amnesty UK calls on Jeremy Hunt to show the UK's commitment to human rights during his planned visit to Myanmar.** In Amnesty's press release, Kate Allen, states that the UK must back the UN's call to refer the situation in Myanmar to the ICC (International Criminal Court).

→18th Sep - **Joint oral statement by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch** to the UN Human Rights Council

stating that unless an accountability mechanism is put in place, the crimes committed by Myanmar's Security forces towards the Rohingya are going to be repeated. Both organisations have called for an independent, impartial mechanism to be established to investigate the terrific crimes.



→19th Sep: **The chief prosecutor at ICC announces she is launching a preliminary investigation into the deportation of the Rohingya to Bangladesh.**

→20th Sep – **Amnesty calls on Japan to join in the call for justice in Myanmar.** According to Amnesty, Japan has a "significant role in Myanmar's affairs". The two countries have strong military co-operation and Japan has invested substantial capitals in Myanmar (in Jan 18 Japan donated US\$ 20 million in humanitarian aid and assistance for Rakhine State). Japan has never condemned the actions of Myanmar's military forces. On the contrary, they have kept carrying on diplomatic meetings.

→25th Sep - **Amnesty make their call for accountability in Myanmar visible!** A lorry with images of General Min Aung Hlaing, the Commander-in-chief of Myanmar military drives through New York city. and this image has been shared on Facebook and Twitter.



→27th Sep – **The UN's Human Rights Council passes a resolution calling for an accountability mechanism to collect and preserve evidence of human rights crimes in Myanmar;**

→10th Oct – **Three more journalists are jailed** for writing an article criticising financial management by the Yangon Regional Government. If charges and convicted, they will each be spending two years in prison. Amnesty has issued a press release calling for their release.

→12th Oct – **Amnesty release a public statement calling on the Myanmar's authorities to release human rights lawyer Khin Khin Kyaw** accused of 'contempt of court'. Amnesty believes Khin Khin Kyaw has been targeted by Myanmar authorities for her role as a defence lawyer for 58 student protesters and activists who were detained in March 2018 during a violent police crackdown on peaceful protests in Letpadan, Bago Region.

Report from Amnesty: "We will destroy everything"

Back in June, after nine months of extensive research, Amnesty produced a new report, which names 13 military officials involved in the atrocities committed against the Rohingya community. Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, commander in-chief of the armed forces, is one of the people named. Amnesty has called on the UN Security Council to refer the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court. *This report can be sent to you by e-mail, if you wish so. Let us know.*



PALESTINE

Ban Israeli Settlement Goods - Progress in Ireland

On 11th July the Upper House of the Irish parliament voted in favour of the Control of Economic Activity (Occupied Territories) Bill, which aims at banning the import of products produced in the OPTs (Occupied Palestinian Territories). The Bill will now go through the committee stage.



The petition sheet and cards are always available to sign at our monthly meetings.

Destruction of Bedouin village approved

On 5th Sep 18 the Israeli Supreme Court approved the demolition of the Bedouin village of Khan al-Ahmar, in the West Bank (part of the OPT). The destruction will allow more space for Israeli settlements, which carry on despite the international outcries. To prevent the local school from being demolished, the Palestinian Ministry of Education set the reopening of the school after the summer holidays two months earlier than planned. However, this did not persuade the Israeli authorities. Khan al-Ahmar, established more than 60 years ago, is surrounded by Israeli settlements, a settlement industrial area and an Israeli army base.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/09/the-palestinian-children-who-went-back-to-school-early-to-stop-it-being-demolished/>



The school of Khan al-Ahmar, housing 150 students aged 6-15 years.

*Palestine Solidarity Campaign has organised a petition to prevent the destruction of this village
Only a few days left! Please, sign:*

https://palestinecampaign.iparlsetup.com/lobby/khan_al_ahmar

SYRIA

Idlib – De-militarisation needed to protect civilians

The 15th October marked the deadline for the set-up of a de-militarised zone in Idlib, the last remaining stronghold of the opposition to the Syrian government. This de-militarisation would give protection to civilians living in the area.

Amnesty international has called on Turkey, Russia and Iran to prevent a catastrophe of civilian lives and ensure the set-up of this area.

Back in Aug 18, eleven NGOs including Amnesty International, Rethink Rebuild and Human Rights Watch issued an open letter addressed to the Astana Working Group* on Syria, which

planned its third meeting early Sep 18. In their letter, the organisations invited the working group to include in their discussion how to address the question of “the fate and whereabouts of those the [Syrian] Government continues to arbitrarily detain and those it has forcibly disappeared, and those who have died in detention”.

*The Astana Working Group includes representatives of foreign ministries of Turkey, Russia and Iran and meet to discuss the Syria conflict.



Our message of solidarity with Syria

Women's Rights

Support for women seeking abortions during anti-abortion vigil outside clinic

People may remember that some of us helped to provide a pro-choice presence to support women seeking abortions at the Marie Stopes International clinic in Fallowfield in spring this year. The anti-abortion campaigners are demonstrating again and will be doing so until early November.

Mary Gibbs, our Women's Rights lead, believes that this is at MSI in Fallowfield again and that it will be taking place over slots from early morning till lunchtime from Tuesdays through to Saturdays. She knows that Sister Supporter are organising it again, and are asking for volunteers. They are also keen to get a PSpO (Public Space Protection Order) put in place, after the refusal by the government to allow the implementation of nationwide buffer zones outside abortion clinics earlier last month, so they want any reports of the anti-abortion campaigners' actions which can be provided.

Please email her if you are interested in helping to provide a supportive presence for women coming to the clinic, and she will provide more information, including how to sign up for shifts. Mary Gibbs at gibbs.mary@gmail.com

Consultation on the Gender Recognition Act

The government has launched a consultation on the Gender Recognition Act (GRA). This was enacted in 2004, and allows (some) trans people to change their legal gender on birth certificates. For trans people, having their gender legally recognised is critical to be able to live freely, authentically and openly. Trans is an umbrella term which includes non-binary and gender variant people, although not all of them would identify as trans.

There are several layers of bureaucracy and barriers within the current process; the process is also costly and so inaccessible to some because of this.

Amnesty's position is that:

- A new GRA must be based on human rights standards
- Children and young people should have access to legal gender recognition
- Non-binary people need legal recognition

For a detailed explanation of the AIUK position see

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/have-your-say-gender-recognition-act>

To complete the consultation, go to:

<https://consult.education.gov.uk/government-equalities-office/reform-of-the-gender-recognition-act/consultation/intro/>

Make your voice count!
The deadline for responses is 11pm on 19 October
- that is this coming Friday!

Europe (inc Turkey) – no update this month

Group News

October Group Meeting

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

Monday 22nd October

Catch up with our current campaigns and event planning

MadLab/Plant Noma

Dantzig Street, M60 0AE

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

Letter Writing. Saturday 8th September

At the beginning of September, we had our regular bi-monthly letter writing drop in at the Eighth Day Café. Only 3 of us turned up but we wrote letters to all 12 cases featured in the autumn Real Lives leaflet.



If you couldn'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

September's Group meeting – Monday 24th September

We had a fascinating talk from Sergei Nikitin about his time as director of the Amnesty International Office in Moscow.

At the end of his talk we all signed letters on behalf of Mikhail Benyash, the Krasnodar lawyer. On 9 September, lawyer Mikhail Benyash was arrested, beaten and detained by police after meeting his client who had taken part in a peaceful protest in

Krasnodar, a city in the south of Russia. A court convicted and sentenced Mikhail Benyash to 14 days in administrative detention -

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur46/9069/2018/en/>



Street Collection. Saturday September 29th

A big thankyou to everyone who helped with our street collection in Manchester City Centre on Saturday 29th September.

In the sunny weather we improved on last year's amount collected to reach a total of £173. Our thanks also to St Ann's Church for letting us use the church vestry for our headquarters on the day.



The money raised has been sent to Amnesty International UK to help fund its many activities.

Ignite. Saturday 13th October

On Sat 13th Oct we took part to an event called 'Ignite' organised by the charity The Challenge, as part of the NCS (National Citizen Service) programme, which motivates 15-17 year olds to engage in social activity, whether at a local, national or international level. We had a stall with general information about Amnesty and the campaign BRAVE. Mary Gibbs also run workshops on human rights.



Most of the people we talked to had heard of Amnesty International but did not know exactly what the organisation does. We are delighted to have had the opportunity to participate! Thanks to Simona, Pascal and Mary for getting involved.

Heaton Moor Christmas Card Fair. Saturday 13th October

We had a successful stall at a local Christmas card fair, with total taking of over £200. Thanks to Steve Roman and Anne Walker for getting it together.

Other News

North West Conference

PLEASE NOTE: The North West Conference has had to be postponed due to difficulties in getting a venue. A new tentative date has been set for March 2nd – WATCH THIS SPACE.

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