



News from the Minehead Group

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Actions you can take this month:

- ✓ **Email your MP** and ask him/her to call on the Foreign Secretary to do more to protect **human rights defenders**. These are ordinary people who put themselves on the frontline to stand up for freedom and the rights many of us take for granted. HRDs often face imprisonment, harassment and even death at the hands of those who want to silence them. Go to the AIUK website www.amnesty.org.uk and find the action on the home page.
- ✓ **Take action** concerning the **illegal Israeli settlements** in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the human rights abuses taking place there. Sign the on-line petition to the UK Foreign Secretary at <http://50yearstoomany.uk/> demanding that our Government bans the sale of Israeli settlement products in UK markets and stops British companies from operating in settlements or trading in settlement goods.
- ✓ **Join us** for our next **letter writing session** on Thursday 8 November 1400-1530 at the Quaker Meeting House in Minehead. Materials and guidance on what to write, all provided. Plus refreshments!
- ✓ **Offer to decorate our Amnesty Xmas Tree** for the Festival in December. Email Susan Mew if you can help.

Round up of September & October group news



The main item at our October meeting was a presentation and discussion on AI's global campaign '**Ban Israeli Settlement Goods**'. Since Israel occupied the West Bank of the River Jordan 50 years ago, more than 100,000 hectares of Palestinian land have been appropriated for use by ever-expanding – and illegal – Israeli settlements. These settlements were condemned in 2016 by the UN as '**a flagrant violation of international law**'.

To make way for the 600,000+ settlers who now live on occupied lands, 50,000 Palestinian homes and structures have been demolished. Thanks to favourable subsidies and tax breaks from Israel, farms and light industry established by settlers on occupied land are highly profitable. But while the settlers prosper, Palestinians deprived of land, water and infrastructure struggle to survive. They face regular abuse and harassment from the settlers and military, and nearly 5 million face daily restrictions on their movements, making it difficult to work, trade, travel to school, visit family etc. AI wants governments, including our own, to stop enabling the economy that supports these illegal settlements. We are calling on our Government to ban Israeli settlement goods from entering our markets, and to stop British companies from operating in settlements or trading in their goods. Find out more at: <http://50yearstoomany.uk/>

Campaigns news

WRITE FOR RIGHTS: this annual campaign will be launched on 1 November and the focus will be on women human rights defenders. As well as our usual card/letter signing still (on Friday 14 December) we are also hoping to take the campaign out to more venues. We are starting in Carhampton on Saturday 3 November at the church coffee morning when we will have a small stall from 1000-1200. Suggestions of other possible venues or events are welcome. Please email Alison or Susan with details and we'll see what we can do.

Diary Dates

The Minehead Group aims to meet at least once a month, either for a fund-raising or awareness-raising event, or for a group meeting that might include a speaker or film. Meetings take place at the Quaker Meeting House, Bancks Street, Minehead. We also hold a couple of social events each year. All Amnesty supporters are welcome to join us!

Saturday 3 Nov

Card/letter signing stall at Carhampton Church coffee morning 10-12.

Thursday 8 Nov

Letter writing at the Quaker Meeting House 1400-1530, followed by a short group meeting to plan future events.

7 – 12 Dec

Xmas Tree Festival at Avenue Methodist Church, Minehead.

Friday 14 Dec

Write for Rights stall and coffee morning 1000-1200 at the Avenue Methodist Church, Minehead.

Sat 12 January

Winter Social: from 1230 at Alison & Roy's home in Roadwater

Sunday 27 January

Holocaust Memorial Day: details tba

Friday 22 Feb

Fund-raising Quiz: 1930 at the Minehead & District Social Club.

BRAVE: As part of this global campaign, AI is calling for the increased recognition and protection of human rights defenders. This follows a continuing increase in attacks, intimidation and killings of those on the frontline. 2017 was the deadliest year yet with over 300 human rights defenders killed, according to the organisation Frontline Defenders. See the first action in the list overleaf.



I WELCOME REFUGEES: The West Somerset Refugee Support Group is organising more visits to Minehead during the October half term for refugee families living in Taunton. In 2019 we plan to continue supporting this group's activities where we can.

WOMEN'S ACTION NETWORK [Cherry Bird reports]

It seems the misogyny of **US** President Trump knows no bounds. Of particular concern is his rolling back of abortion rights, both overseas (through re-imposition of a global gag rule that prevents agencies who support abortion reform from getting funding from the US government for any of their work) and in the US, with availability of abortion services already reduced in many states and possible enactment of a domestic version of the global gag. These changes will be furthered by his controversial nomination of the very conservative judge, Brett Kavanaugh, to the Supreme Court, in the news for alleged sexual misconduct. Worse, the Attorney General has declared domestic violence and gang rape to be a 'private matter', making it harder for victims to claim asylum in the US on these grounds.

Mohammad Lofty, Executive Director for Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms and an HR researcher has written a powerful blog about the arrest and detention of his wife for speaking out against sexual harassment in **Egypt**. He writes of his shock, saying '*She didn't commit any crime at all. She was just speaking out against sexual harassment. But in Egypt, if you speak out as a survivor, you're the one who will be punished, not the perpetrator.*' Read more at the link

https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/egypt-sexual-harassment-amal-fathy_uk_5b75ab5ee4b0182d49b1c1f3



But there is some **good news**: More women than ever are standing for election across the world. In Europe, 17 states have more than 30% women in national legislatures. Sweden tops the list with 44%, Britain comes 16th with 33% and Germany 17th with 32%.

SOUTH ASIA [Cherry Bird reports]

Members of AIUK undertook their annual Embassy Crawl in September, visiting a number of embassies in London to hand over letters related to campaigns. These included a letter I submitted on behalf of **Salima Memcha**, founder member of the Extrajudicial Execution Victim Families Association Manipur (EEVFAM), who has just been approved as a casefile and for whom our group will be campaigning.

Another piece of good news is that **Chandrashekhara Azad**, campaigner for the rights of India's Dalits (formerly known as untouchables) and founder of 'The Bhim Army' which seeks to empower Dalits through education, has been released from prison, 15 months after his arrest without charge. However, it seems the story may not be over as he told Amnesty India staff he is sure he will be arrested again by the Uttar Pradesh Government for his efforts to challenge entrenched caste and gender based discrimination.

Good news again is that the proposed amendment to the Whistleblowers Protection Act, which would have weakened it, was not passed in the summer session of the Indian Parliament. There is, however, still a danger that it could be passed during the winter session, so Amnesty India is asking us to keep up the pressure. Take action at <https://amnesty.org.in/take-action/together-truth-whistle-blowers/>



Book recommendation: to understand more about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, our members recommend *The Lemon Tree* by Sandy Tolan, published by Bloomsbury.

How to contact the Minehead Amnesty International Local Group:

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