



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

November 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 MOHAMMED AL-ROKEN

The Manchester group of Amnesty International is working on behalf of human rights blogger Ahmed Mansoor and the human rights lawyer Mohammed al-Roken, who are both imprisoned in the UAE because they have spoken critically about the UAE government. On 3rd November we held a public celebration of Ahmed and Mohammed's birthdays in St Peter's Square to mark another year in prison. We collected messages of support on a giant card and more than 130 signatures for a petition to the UAE. We experienced fantastic support from councillors and MPs who came along or showed their solidarity if they were unable to attend. More information can be found in the article in Mancunian Matters: https://www.mancunianmatters.co.uk/content/141177765-amnesty-uk-throws-birthday-party-manchester-two-activists-locked-uae?fbclid=IwAR0cv5xGTI65iYQNH4565mvROfRVt8Tnzls_B-hnocJ1EtJjUsico0o8qk0



LETTER WRITING

Twenty-one people are now on our rota writing letters regularly to the UAE authorities on behalf of Mohamed and Ahmed. Since we started this initiative, we have sent at least 26 letters.

N.B. if you have written but haven't told Anne, please email anne.walker9@ntlworld.com.

If you want to take part, please email Anne and she will provide details and a prompt when it is your turn.

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

FROM HOUSING TO HUMAN RIGHTS

**A PUBLIC MEETING ON THE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN
MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL AND ABU DHABI**

**Saturday 8th December
Methodist Church, Oldham St, M1 1JQ**

All are invited to the above public meeting which will be a panel discussion on the partnership between Manchester City Council and Abu Dhabi, including artistic performances and an audience led workshop." It is Co-hosted by The Public Meeting, GMHA (Greater Manchester Housing Action), and Amnesty UK.

The event is for free, but please sign up at:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/from-housing-to-human-rights-tickets-52453101639>

Write for Rights

Amnesty's annual Write for Rights campaign in the run up to the festive season is the world's biggest letter-writing event. As many people as possible are encouraged to write a message of 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 features 12 women 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 will be writing solidarity cards at our November Group meeting as part of this campaign. If possible, please bring along some small non-religious cards to use.

We are still discussing with Central Library the possibility of holding a stall on December 8th. but nothing is yet confirmed however we already have some stalls organised at the following:

Birch Community Fair Saturday Dec 1st

Sunday Assembly, Hulme, Sunday Dec 9th

St Clements Church, Chorlton, Sunday in December tbc.

St Andrews Church Dearnley, Sunday in December tbc.

Can you help at any of the above?

Do you know of any other events where we can have a stall?

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

Contact our chair, Hazel Errey at hazelerrey@gmail.com asap.

In addition, on Saturday December 1st the marvellous Whalley Range Peace and Justice group are organising a lovely event at St Margaret's Church in Whalley Range when they take over the whole of the church with tables for card writing and stalls with music and food.

We will have a stall promoting the group, selling Christmas cards and featuring the 'Ban Israeli Settlement Goods' campaign.



Crisis and Tactical

MYANMAR

Rohingya to be repatriated to Rakhine State

On 30th October, the governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh announced their decision to repatriate some of the 720,000 Rohingya people, who fled to Bangladesh in search for safety against the violence by the hand of the Myanmar military, which includes rape and brutal killings.

According to the agreement, the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) must 'vet' families before their repatriation. However, according to Amnesty, refugees were not consulted. The announcement caused panic among them, leading to some of them trying to escape from the refugee camps, go into hiding or even attempting suicide.

Nicholas Bequelin, Amnesty International's Regional Director for Southeast Asia, said: "These women, men and children would be sent back into the Myanmar military's grasp with no protection guarantees, to live alongside those who torched their homes and whose bullets they fled. 'A population traumatised by Myanmar's deadly campaign is now terrified of what their future holds – and when. Returns at this time cannot be safe or dignified and would constitute a violation of Bangladesh's obligations under international law."

Amnesty has called on the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar to halt their plan.



50 organisations call on the immediate release of two Reuters journalists

On 5th November more than 50 human rights organisations issued an open letter addressed to Aung San Suu Kyi, calling on her to intervene for the release of 2 Reuters journalists, arrested in September for investigating military operations in northern Rakhine State. The journalists were specifically looking into summarily executions of ten Rohingya men and boys in the village of Inn Din at the hands of Myanmar military forces. Aung San Suu Kyi publicly supported the convictions, claiming that they were made according to the law.

The 50 organisations, which include Amnesty, Human Rights Watch, International Press Institute (IPI), PEN Myanmar and Reporters Without Borders (RSF) consider these arrests as attempts to stem freedom of expression. According to the organisations, the law applied for these convictions is broadly worded and has been used conveniently.

Amnesty strips Aung San Suu Kyi of the 'Ambassador of Conscience' award!

On 12TH November, Amnesty announced that a letter had been sent to Aung San Suu Kyi stripping her of the 'Ambassador of

conscience' award given to her in 2009. This comes following Aung San Suu Kyi's failure to make a clear statement condemning the treatment of the Rohingya people in Myanmar.

In his letter, Kumi Naidoo, Amnesty's new Secretary General, wrote: "As an Amnesty International Ambassador of Conscience, our expectation was that you would continue to use your moral authority to speak out against injustice wherever you saw it, not least within Myanmar itself. Today, we are profoundly dismayed that you no longer represent a symbol of hope, courage, and the undying defence of human rights. Amnesty International cannot justify your continued status as a recipient of the Ambassador of Conscience award and so with great sadness we are hereby withdrawing it from you."



Kumi Naidoo -Amnesty's new Secretary General

PALESTINE

Destruction of village Khan al-Ahmar postponed

In October, the Israeli authorities ordered the destruction of the Bedouin village Khan al Ahmar, in the West Bank. Amnesty defined this decision as "heartless", "discriminatory" and "illegal". The inhabitants were offered two other locations as alternatives: one near a former municipal garbage dump and one near a sewage plant.



An update from Palestine Solidarity Campaign, dated 19th Oct 18, reads: "Israeli bulldozers stormed the Palestinian village of Khan al-Ahmar earlier this week accompanied by soldiers and police. Activists protesting against the imminent demolition of the community were violently removed, and several arrested."

Meanwhile, a nearby illegal Israeli settlement flooded Khan al-Ahmar with waste water and sewage in an attempt to drive out residents and activists. This has not worked, and the week has seen global condemnation of Israel's actions - including from UK Prime Minister Theresa May. Maintaining international pressure is essential".

A further update issued on 23rd Oct 18, through the petition site Change.org, states that protesters against the destruction of this village were tasered by the Israeli army. However, the international pressure has brought the Israeli government to postpone the destruction



Tension in Gaza escalates

During November, the tension between Israeli and Palestinian armed forces in Gaza escalated, causing civilian deaths. Amnesty called on both parties to stop the violence, since the situation for civilians in Gaza is already dire. Gaza has about 2 million residents, who live in poverty and constant deprivation of basic rights, like access to water and electricity. A ceasefire was agreed by the parties on 13th Nov.

ANTI-FLAG GIG

On Friday 2nd November we were invited by American punk rock band Anti-Flag to fund raise at their gig at Academy 2 Manchester. The band are serious supporters of Amnesty International!



We featured the Ban Israeli Settlement Goods on the stall and held a bucket collection.

During their gig, they mentioned the work of Amnesty, and thanks to their support and that of their fans we collected over £100! This money will go to Amnesty International UK. Thanks!!!

SYRIA

French government issues arrest warrants for 3 top Syrian officials

On 5th November it was announced that French prosecutors issued arrest warrants for: Ali Mamlouk, Director of the National Security Bureau, Jamil Hassan, Head of Airforce Intelligence (already subject of an arrest warrant by the German authorities) and Abdel Salam Mahmoud, Head of the Airforce Intelligence Investigative branch at Mezzeh military airport. The charges are of torture, enforced disappearances, crimes against humanity and war crimes.



Since the start of the conflict, Amnesty has been calling on international leaders to support a UN Security Council referral of the situation in Syria to the ICC (International Criminal Court) and to co-operate with the IIIM (International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism) set up by the UN for the investigation and prosecution of crimes committed in Syria, under international law.



An image of Syrian people at the beginning of the conflict in 2011

YEMEN

New petition

The conflict in Yemen, which started in 2015, has had an enormous impact on civilians: at least 16,000 have been killed, thousands have been injured and many of those who survived are facing starvation. The UN has defined the current situation in Yemen as the 'world's worst humanitarian crisis'.

The conflict is being fought between Yemen's government forces and its opponents, the Huthis. Yemen's government is being supported by a military coalition led by Saudi Arabia, which has bombed residential streets, hospitals, schools and mosques.

Amnesty reported that on 12th November an attack reportedly carried out by the Saudi Arabia/UAE-led military coalition nearly hit al-Thawra hospital, the largest in the Hodeidah region. Some medical staff and many patients, still in their robes and in very poor health conditions, fled the hospital in terror.

Amnesty has collected evidence that the Saudi Arabia-led military coalition has been using UK-made cluster munitions, which are banned under an international treaty.

In October, Amnesty launched a new petition called 'UK stop arming Saudi Arabia'. If you have not signed it, please do now. <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/uk-must-stop-arming-saudi-arabia>.

PLEASE HELP US REACH 40,000 SIGNATURES!



On Friday 16th November the UN's Security Council met to discuss Yemen's conflict and Amnesty called on the UN to press the warring parties to protect civilians and ensure access of humanitarian resources.

Refugee Rights, Children's Rights Women's Rights – no update this month

Europe (inc Turkey)

There are currently two actions on Amnesty websites concerning Turkey:

STOP Erdoğan's attack on human rights!

Since a violent coup attempt in 2016 the Turkish government has unleashed a crackdown on human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers, academics and many others seen as opponents. Many of the abusive emergency decrees put into place after the coup attempt have now been made permanent. These include extraordinary powers to arbitrarily dismiss judges and other public officials, restrict people's travel within Turkey, ban public assemblies, and empower police to hold suspects for extended periods without charge.

Those on the frontline of defending human rights have faced great personal cost, but there is also hope. This summer defiant LGBTI activists and allies took to the streets in Istanbul for Pride, despite a citywide ban. In August, Amnesty Turkey's Taner Kilic was released on bail after spending over 14 months imprisoned simply for doing his job as a refugee rights lawyer.

As Turkey faces both political and economic uncertainty, a strong civil society, a free press and an independent judiciary is more important than ever. President Erdoğan's government must not be allowed to continue this destruction of human rights. Sign the petition to demand that President Erdoğan take steps to end human rights abuses in the name of 'national security' in Turkey

TAKE ACTION – SIGN THE ON-LINE PETITION

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/get-involved/take-action/speak-out-for-people-in-turkey/>

STOP silencing the Saturday Mothers

In August, police descended on a peaceful protest in Istanbul. They shot tear gas, water cannons and plastic bullets. The protestors – a group of mainly women, some in their 80s – were forced to flee.



The group are the 'Saturday Mothers', who have been holding a regular vigil to protest the disappearance of their relatives for over 20 years. That morning marked their 700th vigil. The Turkish authorities have allowed this vigil to happen for years. The ban is yet more evidence of a worrying crackdown on human rights in Turkey.

TAKE ACTION – SEND AN EMAIL

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/turkey-peaceful-protest-saturday-mothers>

Europe/Turkey newsletter

We have also received a detailed newsletter from the Europe (inc Turkey) country coordinators – please find it attached with this newsletter.

November Group Meeting

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

Monday 26th November - Write for Rights Social

Send greetings cards with messages of support to this year's Write for Rights cases
(N.B. if possible, please bring along some small non-religious greetings cards
and some festive fare to share)

Amnesty Greetings Cards will be on sale!

Cross Street Chapel

Cross Street M2 1NL

Look for the Amnesty Candle

Some of us will meet at 1847 on Chapel Walks (where *The Grinch* used to be) about 6pm to get a bite to eat before the meeting – if you plan to join us please email anne.walker9@ntlworld.com as we need to book a table.

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.

AIUK Annual General Meeting and National Conference

This is your opportunity to debate and vote on key issues, share your ideas and experiences, learn from and network with other inspirational activists, members, staff and partners and contribute to our upcoming campaigns

Date: 13-14th April

Venue: East Midlands Conference Centre, Nottingham

Attendance: Free

Breaking the Occupation of the Mind - Arts & Culture in Palestine

ARTS & CULTURE IN PALESTINE

Sat 1 December 2018 17:45 – 20:45pm, £9

An evening to talk all things Arts & Culture in Palestine, taking place at Manchester Museum. The event will be a discourse surrounding how Arts & Culture can thrive and progress amongst conflict. Guest speakers include Lowkey and Dr Ilan Pappé.

For more details and booking see:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/breaking-the-occupation-of-the-mind-arts-culture-in-palestine-tickets-51547091739?ref=eios&aff=eios>

The Ground Beneath Your Feet

16 November 2018 — 3 February 2019* (*Closed for the festive season)

In the context of the refugee crisis, rising homelessness, environmental catastrophes, right-wing populism and the tragedies caused by deterritorialised capitalism many people see themselves, their identities and sovereignty under threat. This has led to the now familiar demand for stronger borders, rather than a call to work across them to deal with the global challenges we face. With artists from Israel, Ecuador, Iran, Scotland and England, working with film, sculpture, demonetised currency, political campaigns and fungi: this exhibition aims to keep the conversation nuanced at a time when simple lies win out against complex truths. Asking how we relate to, learn from and are affected by the ground beneath our feet.

Artists: Omid Asadi, Tulani Hlalo, Keep It Complex, Jane Lawson, Roe Rosen, Oscar Santillan, Michael White, and The Museum of Homelessness

The Ground Beneath Your Feet launches at Castlefield Gallery as part of The With One Voice International Arts and Homelessness Summit & Festival.

This Evil Thing

My name is Michael Mears, I am a professional actor and playwright - and AI member - and am contacting you to tell you about the solo play I have written and been performing on tour around the UK, **THIS EVIL THING** -telling the compelling, shocking and inspiring story of Britain's WW1 conscientious objectors.

I am going to be performing it again in November to tie in with the end of the WW1 commemorations and am bringing it to a venue in Manchester on November 30th, at the end of that very significant month.

The details are:

Nov. 30th Friday 7.30pm at Cross Street Unitarian
Chapel Cross Street, Manchester M2 1NL
Tickets: (£7/£6) online at
<https://www.trybooking.co.uk/GRY> or <https://www.trybooking.co.uk/4522> or on the door

The play lasts about 80 minutes then there will be a Q and A afterwards as well.

The play premiered at the Edinburgh Festival in 2016 where it received four star reviews, and extremely positive audience feedback:

'Magnificent storytelling' - (Amnesty International judges, Freedom of Expression Award - longlisted)

'A moving and dynamic retelling of a hidden story' (The List)

'An inspirational and disturbing work' - (Festmag)

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