



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

January 2019

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

Facebook page: Manchester Amnesty International

Facebook group: Manchester Amnesty

Twitter: @amnestymanc

Coming up

Please remember that our regular monthly meetings will now be held on the second Monday of every month at Cross Street Chapel on Cross Street in the centre of Manchester. Post code M2 1NL. All welcome!

Group Meeting

N.B. Now on 2nd Monday of the month: 7.30 – 9.30pm.

Monday 14th January – Planning our campaigning

Cross Street Chapel

Cross Street M2 1NL - Look for the Amnesty Candle

Some of us will meet at Chaophraya (Thai restaurant) on Chapel Walks just round the corner from the chapel at 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

Letter Writing Drop-in

Saturday 26th January, The Eighth Day Café, Oxford Road, M1 7DU

We will be holding our next informal letter writing session at the end of January and all are invited to come along to write some letters in support of Amnesty cases. Paper, pens, envelopes and case details all provided. Just turn up to make a difference! N.B. Due to our change of group meeting date, we have moved our bimonthly letter writing drop-in (i.e. once every two months) to the last Saturday in the month.

Amnesty Quiz

Thursday February 7th, The Lloyds, Chorlton M21 9AN

We are joining up with the Stockport Amnesty Group to take part in the Great Amnesty Pub quiz. During the first week in February Amnesty groups around the country will be holding quizzes with both local and national prizes. Final details to follow – but get your teams together NOW. Invite family and friends and come along for a great night of quizzing.

Darwin Day conference stall

Wednesday 13th February 2019 - 6.30 - 9pm. Manchester Conference Centre. The speaker this year will be palaeontologist Julia Heathcote. As in previous years, we have been invited to have a stall at this event and this year plan to feature the Ban Israeli Settlement Goods campaign. We can arrive from 5.30pm to set up our stall, and the doors will be open to the public from 6.30pm. Anne Walker is happy to set it up but would appreciate another volunteer to help on the stall. Any volunteer would be able to stay and listen to the presentation.

North West Conference

Saturday March 2nd, Brownhill United Reform church, Brownhill Road, Blackburn, BB1 9QY.

We are delighted that the date and venue for the North West conference have been confirmed. This year's theme is 'Human Rights under Threat – Fighting Back' with speakers, a panel discussion, workshops and stalls. See the attached flyer for more details. Booking details available soon.

AIUK Annual General Meeting and National Conference

Weekend of 13-14th April, East Midlands Conference Centre, Nottingham, attendance free

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. Several of us hope to go – so we will try and arrange car sharing. For more information and to book your place please see <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/agm2019>.

Subscriptions please!

Annual donations from members are vital to keep the Group going. The suggested sum is £20 if you have a wage, £5 otherwise, or whatever you can afford to give. Please bring your cash or cheque to the next meeting or contact Treasurer Sean Dunne (Sean.a.dunne@btinternet.com) and he will tell you how to get the money to him.

Thanks!

UAE case update

"The silent days of Christmas have been used to again silence prisoners of conscience in the UAE.

Four days before Christmas we received information that Nasser Bin Ghaith's health had deteriorated sharply and that he had started to lose his eyesight. Nasser Bin Ghaith has been on hunger strikes for various lengths of time over the past 75 days in protest at his jail sentence and prison conditions. On 29 March 2017, human rights defender and prominent academic Dr. Nasser bin Ghaith was sentenced to 10 years in prison under the Cybercrime Law and the 2014 Counter Terrorism Law for tweeting about human rights violations committed by the Egyptian authorities and for criticising the politicisation of the judiciary in UAE. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/12/uae-fears-grow-for-health-of-unjustly-imprisoned-academic/>

One day later, we were informed that the appeal of Ahmed Mansoor was set to be heard at the Federal Supreme Court in the UAE on Christmas Eve. The court hearing was rescheduled for the 30th December and, unfortunately, the Federal Supreme Court in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) upheld the conviction and the 10-year prison term for prominent Emirati human rights defender Ahmed Mansoor. Following this, the UN human rights office has called for his release.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/12/uae-10-year-prison-sentence-upheld-for-prominent-human-rights-defender-ahmed-mansoor/>

Take Action

Appeal to the UAE authorities on behalf of Ahmed Mansoor and Nasser Bin Ghaith

We are extremely concerned about the human rights defenders in the UAE and would like to ask you to take action on their behalf and call for their immediate release. You can find the addresses of UAE authorities in this urgent action: <https://www.amnestyusa.org/urgent-actions/urgent-action-update-possible-verdict-for-human-rights-defender-ua-200-15/> which is attached with this newsletter.

Review of 2018

Apart from our first meeting of the year when Kate Allen, AIUK director, came up to talk to us and over 30 members came along to meet her, we have struggled with getting people to our regular meetings in 2018, exacerbated by changes in venue. However, we have still managed an eventful year and have generally been well supported when out and about. Here is a summary of our main activities.

Thanks to all who have helped us in our campaigning and fundraising over the last year.

UAE campaigning

We have continued to work on behalf of two human rights defenders currently imprisoned for speaking out for human rights – human rights lawyer Mohammed al-Roken and blogger Ahmed Mansoor.

We started the year by holding regular vigils outside the Town Hall before our group meetings to draw attention to their plight. These drew a lot of interest from passers by but, unfortunately, we had to stop doing these on a regular basis when Henrike changed her place of work.

In March, some of us attended the public meeting "Is Manchester living up to its radical past, and how do we continue to make positive progress" which focussed on the case of Ahmed Mansoor and was chaired by Nicholas McGeehan, an ex Human Rights Watch researcher and academic. The meeting sparked a great discussion of how Manchester citizens can further support Ahmed Mansoor and led to a couple of signed letters on behalf of Ahmed Mansoor. In addition, the UAE subgroup also attended the film screening "The workers cup" where the case of Ahmed Mansoor was again raised and the links between Manchester and the UAE discussed.

At the beginning of the autumn, we also started a regular letter writing rota to the UAE authorities and so far have sent some 37 letters on behalf of Mohammed al-Roken and Ahmed Mansoor



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 and got a great article in Mancunian Matters.

Lastly, Henrike had a stall at the public meeting From Housing to Human Rights which looked at the partnership between Manchester City Council and Abu Dhabi at which Oscar Jenz, the AIUK UAE country coordinator gave a talk.

Brave Campaign

Our main contribution to the BRAVE campaign for Human Rights Defenders has been our work on the UAE. However, we ran a stall featuring the BRAVE campaign appeal cases at the Darwin Day event on February 12th at Manchester Conference Centre and we also had a letter on the Manchester Evening News viewpoints page drawing attention to the suffragette Spirit initiative.

Crisis and Tactical

This area of campaigning concerns countries such as Syria and Palestine.



In February we held a screening of the Oscar winning documentary 'The White Helmets' in conjunction with the Rethink Rebuild Syrian community Society. This was followed by a very moving Q&A session via Skype with the Director, Orland von Einsiedel, and a member of the Syrian Civil Defence (the White Helmets).

We also took part in a silent protest in Piccadilly Gardens against the relentless bombing of Eastern Ghouta, alongside Rethink Rebuild. During the protest, a recording of

bombing that took place the day before was being played.

In May, AIUK staff member Jonathan Cornejo came to talk to us about the 'Ban Israeli Settlement Goods' campaign which prepared us for a silent vigil the following month alongside the Quakers of Manchester, outside their building in the city centre. We also featured this campaign at our stall at the Didsbury Festival and the Whalley Range Peace and Justice Group Write for Rights event.



Refugee Campaign

Our main involvement in this aspect of Amnesty's campaigning was centred around Refugee week in June when a full theatre watched the Ice and Fire theatre company's production 'This is who I am' at HOME. This gave moving personal

accounts of LGBT refugee's experience of going through the UK asylum application process and 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.



At the end of Refugee Week 2018, we 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. Our gig took place at Niamos in the Hulme district of Manchester and featured a range of artists including Munta Valdo – Sawa Blues, Rihab Azar and My Name is B. £55 worth of donations were received for Amnesty and a clothes collection was held.

LGBTI campaigning

We had a stall at Sparkle in the Park over the weekend of 7/8th July, an event to celebrate the trans community where we got 94 cards signed on behalf of Kupila Sakris in Finland and 101 signatures on a petition for Alejandra in Brazil and we raised the profile of Amnesty's work.

We had a great presence at the Manchester Pride Parade with some 35 supporters turning out to march with us under the strap line 'Love is a Human Right'.

Many thanks to Sen and Lil for masterminding it this year.





Trump Visit

A group of us, along with a couple from the Fylde Coast group, took part in the Manchester Against Trump demo during Trump's visit to the UK in July. Our three Statues of Liberty stood together against hate.

Individuals at Risk

Every two months we held drop in letter writing sessions at the eighth Day café, writing letters on behalf of individuals at risk around the world – some 120 letters were written, and much cake was consumed.

We also took an active part in this year's Write for Rights campaign in the run up to the festive season. Between us we held stalls at Central Library, Birch Community Fair, Sunday Assembly in Hulme, St Clements Church, Chorlton and St Andrews Church Dearnley in the run up to Christmas and got 132 cards signed in total with an additional 28 appeal letters.

We also held a stall at the marvellous Write for Rights event run by the Whalley Range Peace and Justice group – we sold Christmas cards and garnered signatures for the Ban Israeli settlement goods campaign whilst the local community wrote some over 800 messages of support to the Write for Rights cases.



Other activities

The above is just a snap-shot from our main campaigns. We should also mention the talk by our member Necmettin on Turkey, attending the National conference in force, another successful Acoustic Amnesty, £173 raised at our city centre street collection

*Happy New Year
to All Our Activists*

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