**Amnesty International**

**East Devon Group**

**Annual General Meeting Feb 21st 2019**

**Annual Report for 2018**

This has been a good year for the group, probably the highlights were the Branscombe Concert ‘Puddings and Protest’ and the ‘ Quilt For Syria’.

**Letter Writing and Monthly Actions**:

Letter writing and campaigning on behalf of people detained, intimidated, tortured or killed for their human rights work remains our core work. In 2018 the group sent letters and cards to many countries and governments, including China, Vietnam, USA , Egypt, Myanmar, Equador, Finland, Cambodia, Iran, Indonesia, Chile, El Salvador, Eritrea, Israel, Turkey, United Arab Republic, Russia, Sudan, Maldives, Burundi, Mexico, Colombia, Ukraine, Saudi Arabia, Cuba, Brazil and Thailand. Some countries occur repeatedly, especially China and Egypt. Regular letters are sent for our own Group cases, including Ilham Tohti, in China, coordinated by Kate Stanley, and the photo-journalist Shawkan in Egypt, coordinated by Tony McFarlane.

We have sent letters to our own UK government and MPs about the Human Rights Defenders Campaign, and reuniting refugee families. We noted that we have received two positive responses about human rights issues from Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt, whereas none had been received from Boris Johnson.

AND SOME SUCCESS !

El Salvador released Theodora del Carmen Vasques (one of our chosen group cases) after 10 years. She was convicted under the strict abortion law after suffering a miscarriage. Another group case, Shawkan in Egypt, is on the brink of success with his release due (hopefully) at the end of February. Also Israel agreed not to deport back Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers, and USA commuted the death sentence for William Montgomery.

**Publicity:**

Martin MacDonagh has maintained our Group Website, adding new pictures and information. His article on the Branscombe Concert and Maureen Thurlow’s article for the Christmas Write for Rights featured in the Sidmouth Herald.

An exciting project by Gretchen Danckwardt was the making of ‘A Quilt For Syria’ following Ellis Brook’s Talk on Syria in June. Using old fabric scraps inscribed with the names of many ‘disappeared’ Syrians, Gretchen created a stunning quilt. This has received much attention, including the Sidmouth Herald, Amnesty Group Magazine, and at Amnesty venues in London before an appearance in the Houses of Parliament.

For Ilham Tohti in China, in October the group created a special ‘butterfly’ birthday card, which was sent to him together with a photo of the group; the photo was also sent to AI HQ to the China Coordinator.

**Fundraising:**

The Grizzly Run on March 18th, organised by the Axe Valley Runners in Seaton, was hit by bad weather - ‘The Beast from the East’ - and even Seaton was snowbound . The run went ahead in a shortened version so the group performed their usual luggage duties, and we received a generous donation of £700.

On June 30th Gretchen Danckwardt did a sponsored walk on the Cotswold Way, making £550.00, an amazing sum.

Our Concert “Puddings and Protest’ in Branscombe Village Hall on Nov 10th was a great success – over 90 people enjoyed great music and super puddings – and over £700 raised. Angela Lambert worked very hard to make this such a success.

**Events**

Amnesty South West Regional meeting Exeter March 17th. Barbara Dustan-Smith, Gretchen Danckwardt and Angela Lambert attended. This is a useful annual event for local groups to meet together. There were informative talks on India, Nepal, Eritrea and Australia.

The “Effective Campaigning’ Workshop April 17th (at Blue Ball Topsham) was organised by Kate Stanley. Members from Exeter and Mid Devon groups joined us, together with Amnesty trainer Graham Whitford who led the evening. This resulted in a good exchange of ideas, and agreement to maintain more contact. Following Exeter Group’s advice, Gretchen has set up a Group Facebook page.

Refugee Week June 18th -24th: three successful events: Tina Lunt organised a letter writing coffee morning at Honiton Library, Angela put an Amnesty Refugee photo display and petition in Branscombe Church, and Gretchen staged a similar photo display in Sidmouth Library, all well received.

Honiton Charter Day July 21 stall and two petitions organised by Tony Mcfarlane

Sidmouth Folk Week Aug 4th All day stall, with four petitions organised by Tony,

at Sidmouth Unitarian Church, a popular event, always well supported.

**Meetings:**

We are still operating the system of three monthly rotating Chairperson. We still hope for a member to take on the post of Chair for the full year.

Attendance varied from six to seventeen , with an average of nine. Letters about individual Amnesty cases are brought by members for group signing, and some time in each meeting is given to discussing these particular cases.

Syria Talk : At the June meeting Syria Coordinator Ellis Brooks talked about the Syrian situation– interesting and moving information, and thus instigating Gretchen’s ‘Quilt for Syria’.

Israel Talk: At the September Meeting Annie Pfingst gave an informative question and answer session on Israel, Zionism and Semitism; attended by some Exeter Group members, this was an excellent session.

Tony McFarlane receives regular updates from the North Africa regional Coordinator on the group’s behalf, and Angela Lambert similarly receives regular updates from the South and Central America Coordinator .

Data Protection issues have had to be dealt with this year, many thanks to Angela and Tony for doing this.

**Christmas Write For Rights** :

Twenty four people attended our annual Card writing evening on Dec 6th, a convivial event organised by Maureen Thurlow, and wrote a total of 175 cards and 13 letters while enjoying some seasonal refreshment.

Finally, a huge vote of Thanks to our marvellous committee, Angela, Martin, Gretchen, and all rotating chairs, Maureen, Tony, and everyone else for their help and contributions in the past year. Although we are a small group, we are high achievers in terms of activities and fundraising, all due to our brilliant members. Thank you !