



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

February 2019

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

Facebook page: Manchester Amnesty International

Facebook group: Manchester Amnesty

Twitter: @amnestymanc

Coming up this month!

Greater Manchester Great Amnesty Pub 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 over 40 Amnesty groups around the country will be holding quizzes.

Max team size is 6 (no min). Team registration starts at 7.30pm, we hope to commence the quiz at 8pm. The Quiz prize is a £50 tab at the Lloyds plus we have raffle and stand up bingo prizes. There will also be national prizes – highest score, most money raised, most teams, smallest quiz etc.

If you don't have a team to bring, come along anyway and we'll form teams on the night.

Come along for a great night of quizzing!

Group Meeting

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

Monday 11th February – Yemen

Cross Street Chapel

Cross Street M2 1NL - Look for the Amnesty Candle

Ahmed and Ameen, from Yemen and Saudi Arabia, will speak about the conflict in Yemen and Saudi Arabia's and the UK's involvement in it.

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

Coming up soon

North West Conference

Saturday March 2nd, Brownhill United Reform church, Brownhill Road, Blackburn, BB1 9QY, 10am – 4pm.

Preparations are now well advanced for this year's North West conference. This year's theme is 'Human Rights under Threat – Fighting Back' with speakers, a panel discussion, workshops and stalls. This is a great opportunity to meet other activists from around the North West as well as hear stimulating talks and discussion. See the attached flyer for more details.

Book at place via Eventbrite:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/amnesty-international-north-west-regional-conference-2019-tickets-54617655879>

There is a £6 (FREE for those in full time education/unwaged) fee to cover refreshments.

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!

Campaigning

UAE

Human rights in the United Arab Emirates: Behind the facade of glitz and glamour

by International Campaign for Freedom in the UAE

If you are in London on February 14th there is an evening of film screenings and talks highlighting the appalling human rights record which lurks behind the UAE's glitzy image.

See <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/human-rights-in-the-united-arab-emirates-behind-the-facade-of-glitz-and-glamour-tickets-55275438324>

Letter Writing Rota

After a short pause over Christmas, we've restarted the letter writing rota to make sure that the UAE authorities are regularly reminded of the prisoners of conscience, Mohamed al-Roken and Ahmed Mansoor.

If you want to join the rota, email anne.walker9@ntlworld.com.

Crisis and Tactical

YEMEN

Talk on Yemen -Monday 11th Feb at 19.30 pm -Cross St. Chapel, Manchester, M2 1NL

The war in Yemen has had devastating effects on Yemeni civilians, since its start in 2015. The UK has contributed to this, by selling weapons to a Saudi Arabia-led coalition, which is supporting the Yemeni government against the Houthis rebels. Ahmed and Ameen will tell us how the situation in Yemen developed, its effects on the population and the role of Saudi Arabia.

Ahmed is a Yemeni citizen who worked for Daso, an organisation with the aim of ending the tribal conflicts in Yemen. Ahmed worked this organisation until before the war broke out in Yemen in 2015.

Ameen is a UK-based human right activist from Saudi Arabia, who writes and delivers talks about Saudi Arabian policies and its motives.

Amnesty have launched a petition asking the UK Government to stop arming Saudi Arabia. If you cannot make it to the meeting, please, sign it here:

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/uk-must-stop-arming-saudi-arabia>



MYANMAR

Rohingya people still in precarious situation

In November 18 the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar announced that they were planning the repatriation to Myanmar of 720,000 Rohingya people, who fled to Bangladesh in search for safety against the brutality of Myanmar's armed forces.

In panic, hundreds of Rohingyas hid in camps, like Cox's Bazar (Bangladesh), to avoid repatriation.

Their journey to Bangladesh has been more than any of us could take. For many of them the only option was to get away on foot, taking with them whatever they could put together. Many of them died of starvation along the journey, or succumbed to their wounds and illness. Many Rohingya refugees have still not recovered from the trauma they experienced during this journey and do not want to go back to a country where they do not feel safe.



Today Cox's Bazar is the largest refugee camp in the world, with nearly one million Rohingya refugees stretched across 6,000 acres. The camps are densely populated with 60,000 to 95,000 people per square kilometre even more than the most densely populated cities in the world today. They live in temporary bamboo shelters. (Amnesty source)

Amnesty has stressed the importance for the international bodies to continue their efforts to bring the perpetrators of the crimes committed against the Rohingya people in Myanmar to accountability. Furthermore, Amnesty has put forward the suggestion of a third country relocation for the Rohingya, given that Bangladesh's limited resources, despite the country's generosity so far, could lead to a premature repatriation.

PALESTINE

Ban Israeli Settlement Goods -54,220 signatures!



In December 18, Kate Allen, Amnesty UK's Director, delivered Amnesty's petition calling on the UK government to ban Israeli settlement goods to the Foreign Office. The petition was signed by 54,220 people. The petition was accompanied by a special Christmas hamper filled with olive oil, wine, dates and oranges all labelled with specially created "Delicious but tainted" stickers.

We must keep the pressure on, until the ban is in place!

New campaign

In 2019 Amnesty will launch a new campaign, targeting businesses that profit from Israel's policy on the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT).

Other organisations have already started this campaign and some progress has been made:

- Nov 18 - Airbnb announced that it would withdraw 200 property listings in the occupied territories;
- Dec 18 - HSBC confirmed that it has divested completely from Israeli weapons manufacturer Elbit Systems*. This petition was organised by 'War on Want' and led over 24,000 people to email HSBC expressing their concern.

*Elbit Systems has been a leading force in militarised walls, state surveillance on civilians, and deadly drones in Palestine and the U.S.-Mexico border.

However, in its new report '[Destination: Occupation](#)', Amnesty states that Airbnb is still profiting from over 100 settlement listings in East Jerusalem, also part of the OPT. Amnesty also lists TripAdvisor, Expedia and Booking.com among companies that are contributing to the existence and expansion of Israeli's illegal settlements, by attracting tourism to them.

Keep an eye out for the new campaign!



SYRIA -no update this month

Refugee I Welcome

Families together action

Refugees in the UK often find themselves separated from their families following brutal experiences of conflict or persecution, but restrictive Home Office rules prevent many families from being together just when they need each other the most.



Last year groups around the country lobbied their MP to call on them to support the Refugees Family Reunion private members bill. Over 100 MPs supported the bill in Parliament, and now we need their support again.

There are two opportunities to change the rules on refugee family reunion; the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill and The Refugee Family Reunion Bill, which

remains in Parliament. It's important that MP's hear from as many of their constituents as soon as possible, as they will be deciding by 29th March.

Please write to your MP.

Further guidance including an MP briefing and template letters can be found at:

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/resources/families-together-action>

Individuals at risk

Letter Writing Drop-in

Only 3 of us turned up for our last letter writing drop in at 8th Day Café and wrote 11 letters to Azerbaijan (PoC), Mozambique (journalist), Bahrain (man deported to Bahrain from Netherlands) and the Russian Federation (homophobic crackdown in Chechnya).

The next session will be **Saturday 30th March**.

Mikhail Benyash

At our September meeting with Sergei Nikitin, we took action on a UA on behalf of Mikhail Benyash, (a lawyer detained on 9 September after meeting his client who had taken part in a peaceful protest against pension reforms in Krasnodar, Russia). He was released on bail on 23 October 2018 however, the politically-motivated criminal charges against him are still pending. He faces up to five years imprisonment if found guilty.

Sergei contacted Mikhail after his release and told him about the AI Glossop and AI Manchester groups who signed the UA. Mikhail has sent us the following message:

Please tell the Amnesty International activists that my recognition as a prisoner of conscience was shocking news for the administration of the Temporary Detention Centre and the Remand Prison. And of course, the daily visits of lawyers and members of the Public Observance Commission was an unpleasant surprise for them too.

What Amnesty International does is very, very important.

I felt this personally - as an individual who has twice been in Russian prisons, I know it for sure. The first time I was arrested was in 2010, by order of the chairman of the Krasnodar Regional Court. The second time it happened in 2018.

My first imprisonment went publicly unnoticed, but the second case had significant public coverage and I entered the Remand Prison as a prisoner of conscience.

The difference is huge.

And most importantly, Amnesty International has added me inner strength and confidence that what I was doing was right. And I could not allow myself to break down.

I do not know how my fate will turn out and how the court will end, but I can say that if Amnesty International needs the help of a lawyer in the Krasnodar Territory, then I'm at your service.

A colossal number of innocent people are imprisoned in Russia. The conditions of detention in prisons are terrible, and political repression is being taken to a higher level, becoming more widespread and harsh.

We do what we do and we will never stop fighting for justice. The way we have chosen is very, very difficult and very often it is scary. But we are not afraid. I'm not afraid.

It is very hard for us, but because of your support it feels a little bit easier.

While in prison I had time to think over many things (it happens to many of those who find themselves behind bars). I understood that I should give people more, I ought to change the very system of their defence.

And now my friends and I are busy with what we call the "awakening of the Russian legal profession". It seems to be working. Lawyers from all over the country write that they see my story as an example of disinterested assistance to both ordinary people and among lawyers themselves.

We have been able to give lawyers hope that not everything has been lost, that there are still good, real people, and that good can win.

Amnesty International helped me to survive with dignity. To a large extent, credit for the appearance of this hope is yours too.

I want to thank you once again.

Mikhail Benyash:

LGBTI Rights

CHECHNYA

Many of you will be aware of the increase in arrests, torture and killings of LGBTI people in Chechnya, with the authorities torturing people to disclose the names of others, who are in turn arrested. Many – it is impossible to be sure how many, probably hundreds – were tortured and killed in 2017, and no one was ever held to account. Now it is happening again.

Amnesty has an urgent action to try to persuade President Putin to take action: any improvement in the present situation would be worthwhile. The URL for the action is

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/resources/urgent-action-homophobic-crackdown-chechnya-resumes>

and this URL includes a template letter, though of course you can write in your own words

https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/2019-01/UA00219_0.pdf?HoWJweQRJSwcNuLZCIFS6zLQwgLjufxB=&utm_campaign=UA00219_Russian_Federation&utm_source=Email&utm_medium=Networks&utm_content=3320

Other News

People's History Museum Consultation

Here is a message from the People's History Museum:

In 2020 People's History Museum will be exploring the themes of migration and identity through a year of events, exhibitions and learning sessions.

We would like our local community to be involved in this programme from the very start so we are inviting you to attend a consultation meeting where we will be asking questions such as:

What do the words migration and identity mean to you?

- *What stories should we be telling?*
- *What questions should we be exploring?*
- *What should we try to achieve?*

The feedback gathered will influence the early stages of our planning and help us decide what direction to take. Throughout 2019 we will continue consulting and collaborating with a variety of community groups and partners to develop the 2020 programme.

Consultation meetings will take place on:

- *Thursday 14 February 6.00pm - 8.00pm*
- *Saturday 23 February 2.00pm – 4.00pm*

Anyone is welcome to attend these meetings; we embrace diversity and value contributions from a range of different people.

If you are interested in attending, please contact Abir Tobji on abir.tobji@phm.org.uk or 0161 838 9190. If you are unable to attend either of the meetings but would like to contribute to the consultation, please get in touch.

Hebden Bridge Film Festival Hebden Bridge, 22nd – 24th March

With over 500 years of non-conformism in the valley it seems fitting that the Hebden Bridge Film Festival theme is "The Other". The festival will be celebrating films by or about those who "dare to be different", whether they exist in the margins, sit outside the mainstream or just plain don't fit in.

HBFF promise a dazzling programme of World cinema, UK and US Independent Film, as well as supporting and fostering new talent. It will be a packed weekend of exciting new films that will engage, challenge and delight you.

Please see the letter attached to this newsletter for more information or go to <https://www.hebdenbridgefilmfestival.org/>.

Barber Shop Chronicles Royal Exchange Theatre, 7th – 23rd March

The Royal Exchange have contacted us offering free tickets to this show and involvement in workshops. If you are interested, email anne.walker9@ntlworld.com.

See:
<https://www.royalexchange.co.uk/whats-on-and-tickets/barber-shop-chronicles>

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