



News from the Minehead Group

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Actions you can take this month:

- ✓ **Send an email** to the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement Director, Mark Moore, calling on him to urgently reunite Brazilian mother, **Valquiria** with her son. Valquiria knew drug traffickers would kill her and her son if they stayed in Brazil – so they fled to the **USA**. But instead of supporting them, US border officials took her son away and sent Valquiria to a detention centre in Texas. They've not seen each other now for almost a year. Go to the AIUK website www.amnesty.org.uk and follow the links.
- ✓ **Help us** to mark **International Women's Day** on Friday 8 March by visiting our street stall outside Iceland in Minehead between 1030 and 1230. Come and sign a letter or card about individual women at risk.
- ✓ **Add these two fund-raising events** to your diary: Thursday 20 June at 1430 for an **AmnesTEA** and Sunday 22 September at 1500 for a **harp concert** and tea, both in Carhampton.

Round up of January and February group news

Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) 2019: *Alison reports:* 27 January is called Holocaust Memorial Day because on that day in 1945, the concentration camp at Auschwitz was liberated by Russian soldiers. On 24 January our group held a lunchtime event in the Quaker Meeting House to remember the millions of people killed in the Holocaust and in subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur. The theme this year was 'Torn from Home'. As well as reflecting on the past, we read the stories of five survivors and wrote 39 cards which were sent to them via



the HMD Trust. Refugees from Syria and many other countries have also been torn from home, and we sent cards to the UK Minister for Immigration calling on the Government to allow children recognised as refugees in the UK to be reunited with their families. In addition, we contributed to a special two-week exhibition at Minehead Library. The exhibition included a display of HMD Trust materials, information about Amnesty and a linked selection of books. The library staff were very pleased with the interest shown by library users.



Annual Quiz: *Alison reports:* Three generations of the Humber family gave us another quiz night to remember. The usual warm atmosphere, the broad span of interesting questions delivered with clarity and just the right speed; the rapid no-nonsense marking of the answers, and great prizes for the winners. The youngest generation made a wonderful contribution to the evening by helping with the raffle and announcing the winning tickets. Many people came up to me at the end to say how much they had enjoyed the evening. Our thanks go to Jean, Matt, Ellen and the children for running this super quiz which raised £361



for Amnesty. Thanks go also to all those who donated raffle prizes, in particular to Alcombe Seafare and The Regal for donating vouchers, and to the Minehead & District Social Club for their friendly welcome.

Diary Dates

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

Friday 8 March

International Women's Day Stall: 1030-1230 outside Iceland on The Avenue, Minehead.

Wednesday 10 April

Letter writing afternoon: from 1400 followed by a planning meeting at the QMH.

13/14 April: AIUK AGM & Conference in Nottingham

Saturday 11 May

SW Regional conference in Exeter

Saturday 18 May

Voices from India (music, readings, actions) at QMH 1000-1130 followed by planning meeting

17-22 June

Refugee Week – library exhibition

Thursday 20 June

AmnesTEA 1430-1630 in Carhampton

Campaign news

I WELCOME REFUGEES: *Jill Walmsley reports:* We are writing again to Ian Liddell-Grainger MP asking him to support the Refugee Reunion Private Members Bill and any amendment to the Immigration (EU Withdrawal) Bill which addresses refugee families being separated. Adult refugees in the UK cannot sponsor children over 18 years or elderly parents to join them. We took the letter to our quiz on 22 February, and collected lots more signatures.

After a hugely rewarding start last year, the Minehead and District Refugee Support Group are planning more days out and holidays, starting at Easter, for Syrian families settled in Taunton. Help from new volunteers is always welcomed. Links have been made with a similar group in South Somerset, with Safe Passage UK, and with Citizens UK. A meeting together is planned in March to discuss the way forward after Somerset County Council's announcement that shortage of foster carers means they cannot offer care to any unaccompanied refugee children.

INDIA AND NEPAL: our member, Cherry Bird, is a volunteer country coordinator for AIUK. She is part of the South Asia team, and in January she had meetings with representatives from the FCO and DFID to discuss sharing information about human rights issues in India and Nepal. Through these kinds of meetings, Amnesty aims to provide input to UK ambassadors and government representatives who may be visiting these countries. Below, Cherry provides updates for us on these two countries.

India: The past few months have been difficult for Amnesty India. After the October 2018 raid by security forces on their offices and freezing of their assets and bank accounts, it has been a struggle to continue their work. The workforce has been reduced by 30%, leading to redundancies and closure of some programmes. Other NGOs have suffered similarly under Narendra Modi's right-wing government. Now another crisis has emerged in the form of complaints of sexual and caste discrimination, both highly sensitive issues in India - some of you may have read the article in the Guardian. In response, Amnesty India has instigated a full enquiry using external agencies and anonymous surveys. Kumi Naidoo, recently appointed Secretary General of Amnesty International has released a statement expressing his full support for Amnesty India, its work and the process of investigation under way.

Nepal: As in India, Nepal is also seeing an increasing trend of repression and reduction in the space for civil society, including restrictions on the operation of NGOs. The latest development is a proposed new Information Technology Bill giving sweeping powers to authorities to block social media platforms, potentially curtailing freedom of speech and increasing surveillance of personal data. Existing laws already address posting of 'improper material' and enable prosecution where appropriate, so critics say this new Bill goes well beyond what is needed for online protection, seeking to 'criminalise free speech by looking at it through the lens of morality'. Those most affected are likely to be groups and individuals who are already marginalised, such as LGBTI communities.

Message from Amnesty International UK

The Chair and Director of AIUK have recently circulated a joint letter about the recent negative media coverage of two parts of the global Amnesty International organisation - the culture and management practice at the International Secretariat and allegations of caste-based discrimination at Amnesty India. The letter makes it clear that the reports are not referring to Amnesty International UK. They refer only to our International Secretariat, which is in a different part of London, and to Amnesty India. AIUK has its own building, board of trustees, charity number, senior management and staff team. Independent reviews were commissioned to look into these two issues and the letter from AIUK states: *'We are all one Amnesty family, and there must be lessons that we can learn at AIUK from the reports, and we too will prioritise work on staff wellbeing and welfare. We completely share Kumi Naidoo's commitment to put wellbeing at the heart of our work across the Amnesty movement and his view that we need to look after each other and develop compassion and mutual care to help Amnesty International become the uplifting community it needs to be.'* If you'd like to read the whole letter, please contact Susan Mew.

How to contact the Minehead Amnesty International Local Group:

Website: www.amnesty.org.uk/minehead

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