



# MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

March 2019

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

Facebook page: Manchester Amnesty International

Facebook group: Manchester Amnesty

Twitter: @amnestymanc

## Campaigning

### Campaign Planning

We have received this year's planning pack with details of all the ways that we can get involved in Amnesty campaigning – you should find it attached with this newsletter.

The menu includes the following:

- BRAVE campaign for human rights defenders,
- I WELCOME Refugee campaign
- Human Rights in the UK, including the possible effect of BREXIT on our rights
- Individuals at Risk, including Write for Rights in the run up to Christmas.
- Crisis and Tactical covering such countries as Syria, Myanmar and Israel/Palestine.
- World Regional Campaigning – we currently work on, the Middle East (mainly UAE) and Turkey.
- Thematic networks e.g. LGBTI, Children's and Women's

We cannot possibly do everything and it is always difficult to know what to prioritise. We need to know what you want to get involved in.

**Come along to our March group meeting and tell us what you really want to do.**

### UAE UAE (Mohammed al-Roken & Ahmed Mansoor)

#### Letter Writing Rota

We are continuing our letter-writing rota with at least 44 letters being sent to the UAE authorities since we started.. If you would like to take part in this action please email Anne ([anne.walker9@ntlworld.com](mailto:anne.walker9@ntlworld.com)) and she will add your name to the rota.

#### People's History Museum event

We are liaising with the People's History Museum and Young Identity (a spoken word collective for young people in Manchester) in order to put on an event in the PHM's commemoration of the Peterloo Massacre, 'The Past, present & Future of Protest'. We are hoping to hold a spoken word/poetry event involving young people and linked to Ahmed Mansoor's poetry. We are discussing funding and have applied to AIUK for a grant from the annual Marsh Awards.

#### Contacting Manchester City Councillors

Our next action involves contacting Manchester City Councillors to ask them to support a motion calling for the release of

Mohammed al-Roken and Ahmed Mansoor. We will have more impact if individual members contact their own councillors and so we need as many members as possible to take part in this action.

Please contact Hazel ([hazelerrey@gmail.com](mailto:hazelerrey@gmail.com)) with the names of your councillors or the ward in which you live if you are able to help with this action. If you are unsure who your councillors are please follow this link to find out

[https://www.manchester.gov.uk/site/custom\\_scripts/councillors/index.php](https://www.manchester.gov.uk/site/custom_scripts/councillors/index.php)

We will send you a draft letter/email which you can adapt and personalise before sending to your councillors.

### Crisis and Tactical

#### MYANMAR

##### New evidence of more violations in Rakhine State



In February 19, Amnesty stated that there is new evidence of more violations in Rakhine State by the hands of Myanmar's security forces.

These violations include shelling villages, looting valuables from bombed properties, blocking civilians from accessing food and humanitarian assistance and using vague and repressive laws to detain civilians in the area.

These violations follow a crackdown that began following armed attacks on four police posts in Northern Rakhine by the Arakan Army, ethnic Rakhine armed group, in early January. Reportedly 13 police officers were killed in these attacks.

According to Amnesty, the security forces involved in the crackdown include soldiers from the 99th Light Infantry Division (LID), which Amnesty implicated in the atrocities against the Rohingya people in 2017 and against ethnic minorities in Northern Shan in 2016.

Following these attacks and reprisals, more than 5,000 civilians, including children, women and elderly, have been displaced and have very little food and cash to rely on.

The Myanmar authorities have also imposed restrictions on humanitarian access in Rakhine. All UN agencies and international humanitarian organisations, except the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and World Food Programme (WFP), have been barred from operating in five conflict-affected townships.

## PALESTINE

### Check Out Campaign

In February Amnesty launched a new petition against online tourism company

TripAdvisor, which has been identified by Amnesty as one of the main businesses profiting from the OPT (Occupied Palestinian Territories). With more than 70 different attractions based in the OPT, TripAdvisor is contributing to finance Israel's illegal settlements. Amnesty is asking TripAdvisor to 'check out' of Palestinian land.



**Please, sign the petition !**

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/checkout>



Back in January Amnesty issued a press release also naming Airbnb, Expedia and Booking.com as businesses profiting from tourism in the OPT. See link:

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/israelopt-online-tourism-giants-profiting-illegal-settlements-new-report>

### Update from Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC)

In January 19, the organisation Palestine Solidarity Campaign received the news that they have won the right to appeal to the Supreme Court against the judgement that made it legal for the UK Government to stop Local Government Pension Schemes from divesting from companies complicit in Israel's violations of human rights in Palestine. This year they will take the UK Government to the Supreme Court and are looking for financial support. If you wish to do so, please go to:

<https://palestinecampaign.nationbuilder.com/donation>

PSC has also campaigned for businesses to stop profiting from Israel's activities in the OPT (Occupied Palestinian Territories).

One of these businesses is HSBC, which is investing in companies directly involved in Israel's policy on Palestine. One such investment has approximately £100 million worth of shares in Caterpillar, which is manufacturing specially designed bulldozers for the demolition of Palestinian homes and villages.



## SYRIA

### Amnesty support for Syria

Despite the complex situation in Syria, Amnesty will carry on offering support in this severe crisis by:

- Supporting Syrian human rights activists to develop strategy and campaigns through training programmes and ongoing advice and assistance;
- Exposing human rights violations and hold perpetrators to account;
- Demonstrating solidarity with imprisoned activists.



## YEMEN

### The UAE is arming unaccountable militias with weapons from Western countries

*Extract from Amnesty's Press Release dated 6<sup>th</sup> Feb 19:*

"A new open-source investigation published by Amnesty International today has highlighted how the United Arab Emirates is arming out-of-control militias operating in Yemen with a range of advanced weaponry - much of it sourced from Western countries, including the UK.

The investigation - "[When arms go astray: Yemen's deadly new threat of arms diversion to militias](#)" - shows how the UAE has become a major conduit for armoured vehicles, mortar systems, rifles, pistols, and machine guns - which are being diverted to

unaccountable militias accused of war crimes and other serious violations.

According to publicly-available data, since the outbreak of the Yemeni conflict in 2015, Western countries have supplied the UAE with at least US\$3.5billion worth of arms. These include heavy conventional weapons - including aircraft and ships - small arms, light weapons, and associated parts and ammunition. Despite the serious violations attributed to the UAE and militias it supports, the following countries, among others, have recently supplied the Emiratis with arms: Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, the UK and the USA. Meanwhile, Denmark, Finland, Norway and the Netherlands have announced suspensions in arms transfers to the UAE.

Amnesty is calling on all countries to halt arms transfers to all parties to the Yemen conflict while there is a substantial risk they would be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

#### UK role



Since the start of the Yemen conflict, the UK has licensed nearly [£600 million worth of arms](#) to the United Arab Emirates - including military vehicles and their parts and components worth £150 million, small arms and light weapons valued at £25 million, and £243million of military aircraft and their parts and components.

Oliver Sprague, Amnesty International UK's Arms Expert, said:

"According to its own arms export rules, the UK should long ago have halted the sale of all weapons to all parties to the conflict in Yemen because of the clear risk they would fuel further human rights abuse."

**If you have not signed Amnesty's petition asking the UK Government to stop arming Saudi Arabia, please do so now:**

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

**Please, also write to your MP asking to present a motion in Parliament.** Sample letter attached with the newsletter.

## Refugee I Welcome

### Refugee Week 17 - 23 June 2019

Refugee Week Is On 17-23 June! Each Year Amnesty Groups Come Together To Celebrate The Continued Contribution That Refugees Make To The UK. The Theme For 2019 Is **You, Me And Those Who Came Before**, Focusing On The Story Of Generations.

We had a very busy Refugee week last year and we need to give some thought to what we will do for 2019. If you have any contacts with events happening around Manchester that we can be involved in, do let us know.

### Individuals at risk

#### Letter Writing Drop-In

We have our regular bi-monthly letter writing drop in session on **Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> March**. We will be writing letters to cases featured in the Real Lives leaflet, to the UAE authorities and some Urgent Actions. All details will be provided, including pens, paper and envelopes. Help will be on hand for regular writers for anyone new to sending Amnesty appeals. All with the added advantage of tea and cakes from the lovely eighth Day Café.



**Come along and make a difference!**

If you can't make it but would still like to write a letter or two, you can download the Real Lives case details at:

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/resources/real-lives-spring-2019>

## Women's Rights

### International Women's Day – March 8th

This year, like every year, we are living in a world that is unfair and unsafe for women. Women remain less free, less valued, less in charge of their own bodies purely by virtue of our gender or our sex. Women continue to be demonised and abused when they raise their voices, or demand recognition of our identities, or call themselves 'feminist'.

The Women's Action Network has renamed itself Amnesty Feminists and has published a toolkit full of actions to mark International Women's Day. See attached with this newsletter.

**Mark International Women's Day by doing one of the actions yourself.**

We will also take action at the group meeting on 11<sup>th</sup>.

## Group News

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# Group Meeting

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

## Monday 11th March – Campaign Planning and AGM

### Cross Street Chapel

Cross Street M2 1NL - Look for the Amnesty Candle

We will be using the information in this year's Local Groups Planning Pack to decide our campaigning priorities for the coming year. Come along and have your say on what we should be doing. We will also have our Group AGM and confirm officers and campaign leads for the coming year – Please don't be shy, come and get involved.

*Some of us will meet at Sandinista on Old Bank Street off St Ann's Square about 6pm to get a bite to eat before the meeting – all welcome!*

## Group Officers

We have our AGM this month and one of the tasks will be to elect new officers and campaign leads for the group. The discussion around the planning pack should help inform which areas of campaigning we will need leads for. However, we are definitely in need of a membership secretary (this involves meet and greet at meetings and keeping the yahoo group updated – could be a job share) and a lead for our UAE and Refugee campaigning.

It would be great if you could give some thought to stepping up and getting more involved. If you are interested and want more info do have contact either Anne on [anne.walker9@ntlworld.com](mailto:anne.walker9@ntlworld.com) or Hazel ([hazelerrey@gmail.com](mailto:hazelerrey@gmail.com)) for a chat.

## 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](mailto:Sean.a.dunne@btinternet.com)) and he will tell you how to get the money to him.

**Thanks!**

## Other News

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### Staff Problems at the IS

Some of you might have seen reports of a worrying culture within the work practices at the International Secretariat (who carry out the bulk of the research undertaken by Amnesty International). Independent reviews have been commissioned by AI and a report has recently been published which has been widely reported. See <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/feb/22/amnesty-international-leaders-offer-to-resign-over-bullying-workplace-culture>

Kate Allen report that our new secretary general, Kumi Naidoo is acting quickly on the report's recommendations. 'We need to look after each other and develop compassion and mutual care to help Amnesty International to become the uplifting community it needs to be'. Kumi will be a keynote speaker at the UK section National Conference in April and we will be very interested to hear his proposals for dealing with the issues raised.

### 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.

Email [anne.walker9@ntlworld.com](mailto:anne.walker9@ntlworld.com) if you want to car share.

For more information and to book your place please see <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/agm2019>.

## Hebden Bridge Film Festival

Hebden Bridge, 22<sup>nd</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> March

The first Hebden Bridge Film Festival theme is "The Other, 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.

One of the films showing is Rafiki, a 2018 Kenyan drama film directed by Wanuri Kahiu which was banned by the Kenya Film Classification Board (KFCB) "due to its homosexual theme and clear intent to promote lesbianism in Kenya contrary to the law".

Both the Amnesty LGBTI network and LISG (Lesbian Immigration Support Group) from Manchester, which has mostly African women among its membership, will be supporting this film. We hope to have a stall as well.

Go to <https://www.hebdenbridgefilmfestival.org/> for more information.

## Barber Shop Chronicles

Royal Exchange Theatre, 7<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> March

The Royal Exchange have contacted us offering free tickets to this show. If you are interested, email [anne.walker9@ntlworld.com](mailto:anne.walker9@ntlworld.com).

See:

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



## A celebration of our Human Rights

AIUK have teamed up with the Whalley Range Justice and Peace Group to mark the 20th year of the Human Rights Act with a public meeting in Manchester, they'll be hosting incredible speakers, including some of the people who have used the Act in their fight for justice.

- **Where:** St Margaret's Church Whalley Range, Rufford Rd, Manchester M16 8AE
- **When:** Tuesday 30 April - 7:00pm

The Human Rights Act is the unsung hero of UK life, holding powerful people and institutions to account when ordinary people are let down. Please join us to learn more about how the Human Rights Act has positively impacted all of our lives and to celebrate our human rights together. Supported by LIBERTY, Stonewall, Rights Info, Amnesty International and Equality and Diversity Forum.

Register at:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/celebrate-our-human-rights-manchester-tickets-56317456027>

## North West Conference

Some of us attended the North West Conference in Blackburn last Saturday. A great day exploring 'Human Rights under Threat – Fighting Back' with a panel discussion on human rights in the UK, Women's rights and refugee rights, reports from the AIUK board, workshops on Syria, Palestine, UK and death penalty and a final key note speech by Sergei Nikitin, ex director of the Moscow office of AI. Definitely worth a trip up to Blackburn. We did photo action in support of the Stanstead 15 and missing Ethiopian politician Aster Fissehatsion.



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](mailto:manchestergroup@amnesty.org.uk)