



News from the Minehead Group



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Actions you can take this month:

- ✓ **Sign the petition** calling on the Supreme Leader of Iran to release immediately **Nasrin Sotoudeh**, an award-winning human rights lawyer. Nasrin has been sentenced to 38 years and 148 lashes for her work defending others, including women who peacefully protest against Iran's degrading forced hijab laws. Go to the AIUK website and follow this link: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/free-nasrin-sotoudeh>
- ✓ **Come along** to our '**Voices of India**' event on Saturday 18 May, 1000-1130 at the QMH in Minehead and hear about freedom of speech and women's rights in India, listen to readings and poetry, take action and join us for refreshments on an Indian theme.
- ✓ **Pen a poem** for Refugee Week in June, with 'families together' as a theme.
- ✓ **Offer to help** with our fund-raising **AmnesTEA** on Thursday 20 June. We need books to sell and cakes/produce to eat or sell.
- ✓ **Make a date** to come along to our next **letter writing** session on 18 July and our fund-raising **harp concert with tea** on 22 September.

Round up of March/April group news

International Women's Day (IWD): we were very lucky with the weather on 8 March this year and our stall attracted a good number of visitors. We had letters concerning three cases. (1) **Salima Memcha** (India), whose husband was taken from their house and shot one night by security police. Salima was left with four young children and is campaigning for justice for her family and other victim families. (2) **Leila de Lima** (Philippines) is a human rights lawyer and senator, critical of President Duterte. She has been imprisoned, facing a life sentence on trumped up politically motivated charges. (3) **Ciham Ali Ahmed** (Eritrea) has dual US/Eritrean nationality. At age 15 she was arrested and imprisoned for trying to cross the border out of Eritrea into Sudan. Over five years later, Ciham is still in jail without charge and her family do not know her whereabouts. We collected around 100 signatures on each of the three letters so it was well worth doing. Plus it brought IWD and the work of AI to the attention of passers-by.



Letter writing afternoon: thanks to the 14 people who sat quietly on 10 April writing letters. Although we also use emails and social media nowadays, we continue to send hand-written letters to those in power, urging them to observe human rights. To give just one example: a 15 year old girl, Ciham Ali Ahmed, of dual American and Eritrean nationality, was imprisoned five years ago. She has never been charged with any offence, and even her parents do not know where she is being held. We wrote to the President of Eritrea, Isaias Afewerki, to ask for her release. In the space of one and a half hours we wrote 52 letters on behalf of nine people.



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!

Saturday 11 May
SW Regional conference in Exeter

Saturday 18 May
Voices from India (music, readings, actions) at QMH 1000-1130 followed by short planning meeting

17-22 June
Refugee Week – library exhibition in Minehead

Thursday 20 June
AmnesTEA 1430-1630 in Susan's garden at Mayhill, Woodland Close, Carhampton, TA24 6PE.

Thursday 18 July
Letter writing afternoon: from 1400 followed by a planning meeting at the QMH.

Tuesday 30 July
Amnesty social at 1700. Bring and share supper. Venue tba.

Sunday 22 Sep
Harp concert with tea 1500. Carhampton Village Hall.

AIUK Annual conference and AGM

Alison, Cherry and Susan represented the group at this year's AGM in Nottingham. Here's a photo of us at Cherry's country coordinators' stall.

Alison begins the report: Our new Secretary General, **Kumi Naidoo**, began his talk with 'Can we speak truth to power?' and spoke of the need for Amnesty to take risks. It was encouraging that many more young people attended the conference than in the past, and the **Keynote Panel** was made up of three young activists who spoke about their activism. One had

developed internet access first for refugees in the Calais 'Jungle', then in refugee camps. The second is working to bring about free, safe and legal abortion access in Northern Ireland. The third is one of the Stansted 15 who were accused of terrorist offences for preventing the deportation of a number of asylum seekers. We agreed with the outcomes of voting on all the **resolutions** apart from one. That resolution called on the Board to go ahead with online streaming and voting next year. We and others felt this should not happen just yet, as it will cost at least £10,000 p.a. and systems are not well tried and tested.



The three of us attended different **workshops**. I went to an excellent one on the Anti-Death Penalty Project, and we are hoping to have a speaker on this campaign in November.

Cherry writes: An additional session provided an opportunity to feed into future directions in which Amnesty might work. We looked at whether we should campaign against human rights violations in **areas under military occupation**. While Amnesty cannot take a position on the fact of military occupation, as this has political connotations, we could do more effective

campaigning on how this is implemented, ensuring it is in line with internationally agreed standards. It is a fine line, with some people feeling we should and could do more, as the violations in such contexts can be so extreme, while others felt we already had the tools needed, since HR violations are still HR violations whatever the context. Examples included Occupied Palestinian Territories, Indian Occupied Kashmir, Tibet and many others. Annexed territory would not be included (eg Crimea) and this is differently categorised.

Susan notes: I went to a workshop called 'Transforming our Activism'. The basis for this work is that 'more of the same won't achieve the change we need' and that we need to do things differently – eg making local links, using new software to build connections, and trying new actions/activities to engage with more people. AIUK currently has 623,933 supporters, but aims to increase that to 1.3 million.

Campaign news

I WELCOME REFUGEES: *Jill Walmsley reports:* Desperate children waiting in refugee camps are resorting to hunger strikes while the process of being reunited with family in the UK takes months - way over stipulated guidelines.

Look at the excellent short spoof video on the Amnesty website telling families in UK that they are entering a 'family-free zone' and must part with their children. Jill and Rita attended a meeting organised by Safe Passage in Taunton on 18 March where, together with other groups from all over Somerset, plans were discussed to support the recruitment of foster carers and those offering supported accommodation to unaccompanied refugee children - likely to be boys aged 15-17 years. The Lord Dubs initiative and resettlement scheme ends in 2020, and the good will of Councils pledging places must not be allowed to lapse. Somerset County Council have said they do not have enough foster carers and would welcome help to recruit. Lots of ideas were suggested and Melanie Hudson will keep in touch with us. Jenny Gateau has reported that two Syrian families from Taunton had respite holidays in Minehead during the Easter holidays, and dates have been fixed for day visits in June, July and August. She asks Amnesty members to spread the word that welcomers, guides, play volunteers and cream tea givers are again sought - plus any suggestions or offers of holiday accommodation for respite holidays. Tel Jenny on 01643 708471.

How to contact the Minehead Amnesty International Local Group:

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