



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

May 2019

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

Facebook page: Manchester Amnesty International

Facebook group: Manchester Amnesty

Twitter: @amnestymanc

Next Group Meeting

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

Monday 13th May

Cross Street Chapel

Cross Street M2 1NL - Look for the Amnesty Candle.

SYRIA: 8 YEARS ON

Come to our May meeting and find out what the current situation in Syria is and what the future holds for this war-torn country. We will also hear about what Amnesty has been doing to defend human rights in Syria. We will have a speaker from Rethink Rebuild, an organisation for Syrian refugees in Manchester, and hopefully the campaign lead from Amnesty International, London.

Campaigning

UAE (Mohammed al-Roken & Ahmed Mansoor)

Ahmed on Hunger strike.



Last month we heard the disturbing news that Ahmed Mansoor had commenced a hunger strike although there are now reports that he might have ended it after going six weeks without food.

See <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/uae-health-fears-hunger-striking-human-rights-activist-ahmed-mansoor>

And <http://icfuae.org.uk/news/ahmed-mansoor-ends-his-hunger-strike>

Letter Writing Rota

We are continuing our letter-writing rota on behalf of both Mohammed al-Roken and Ahmed Mansoor, both human rights activists imprisoned in the UAE, with at least 55 appeals being sent to the UAE authorities since we started.

If you would like to take part in this action please email Anne (anne.walker9@yahoo.co.uk) and she will add your name to the rota.

People's History Museum event

We continue to work with the People's History Museum to put on a poetry event, inspired by the fact that Ahmed is a published poet as well as a human rights blogger.

At the National Conference last month, we were delighted to be presented with a Marsh award which will go towards funding this event.



If you want to get involved in planning this event, email hazelerrey@yahoo.com.

Refugee I Welcome

We were part of the well-attended 'Big Conversation' with Manchester City of Sanctuary at the end of April. It was great to be part of such a wonderful event with so much positivity and genuine interactions, really proving that refugees are welcome in Manchester. Thanks to Hazel, Quyen and Simone for joining the event.



Upcoming events for the Refugee campaign:

Didsbury Festival – Saturday June 8th

Refugee Week – 17th – 23rd June

Refugee World Cup – Event on Saturday 22nd June in conjunction with Red Cross

There will be more opportunities to get involved with many of the events happening across the city during refugee week. More information will be available soon.'

Refugee Week Poetry Action

This Refugee Week, AIUK are asking groups to celebrate through the 'write a poem' **simple act**. We're all encouraged to write about the topic of family to tie into the **Families Together Campaign**. The poems will be collated for a hand-in to the Government – so get creative!

Email your poems to lizhibberd@yahoo.co.uk and post them on social media with hashtags #FamiliesTogether and #RefugeeWeek2019.

Individuals at risk

Letter Writing Drop-In

This month we have our regular bi-monthly letter writing drop in session at the Eighth Day Café. Pens, paper and instructions all provided. Just drop in, write a letter and eat cake!

Saturday 25th May

2 – 4 pm

Eighth Day Café

Oxford road

Come along and make a difference!

Crisis and Tactical

IN SYRIA'S PRISONS

**Talk at our monthly meeting - Mon 13th
May from 7.30 pm -Cross St. Chapel -M2 1NL**

Although the world has gone silent on the oppression taking place in Assad's prisons, the suffering, the brutality and executions continue on a daily basis.

Dr Haytham Alhamwi from Rethink Rebuild will give us a first hand account of what life is like in the prisons of Assad.

We are hoping to have a representative from Amnesty UK to give us an update of what Amnesty is doing for Syria.



MYANMAR

GOOD NEWS - Reuters journalists released!

In December 17, Reuters journalists Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo were arrested in Myanmar after having reported the atrocities committed by Myanmar's army in Rakhine State. In April 19 Myanmar's Supreme Court ruled to uphold their conviction and seven-year prison sentence. However, on Tuesday 7th May 19 they were released!

Upon their release, Nicholas Bequelin, Amnesty International's East and Southeast Asia Director stated: *"Today marks an important victory for press freedom in Myanmar. While all those who campaigned for their release (of Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo) welcome the government's decision, the reality is the country retains a range of repressive laws used to detain journalists, activists and any perceived critic of the authorities. Until these laws are repealed, journalists and activists remain under a permanent threat of detention and arrest."*



PALESTINE

Airbnb

Last year Airbnb announced that it would remove listings from the Occupied Palestinian Territories. However, recently Airbnb have announced that they will no longer be removing them following a lawsuit by Israeli lawyers.

Mark Dummett, Amnesty International's Business and Human Rights Researcher, said: *"Airbnb are trying to absolve themselves by stating they will donate the profits from these listings to charity, but that fails to change the fact that by continuing to drive tourism to illegal settlements they are helping to boost the settlement economy."*

Airbnb had a clear opportunity to make the right decision to uphold human rights and use their influence to set a precedent in the tourism industry. Instead, they have chosen to bury their heads in the sand - ignoring blatant evidence that they are helping to fuel violations that cause immense suffering to Palestinians.

Airbnb's reversal demonstrates why we can't just rely on companies to take the right decisions, and that we need governments to fulfil their obligations by intervening and passing laws obliging their companies to respect human rights."



Image from a stunt organised by Amnesty in London

ACTIONS!

► Write a letter to **Airbnb** CEO Brian Chesky following the following guideline advised by Amnesty:

- Say that you welcome Airbnb's decision in November 2018 to pull around 200 listings in Israel's illegal settlements but call for the decision to be implemented immediately.
- Say that you are concerned to discover that Airbnb will continue to promote properties located in illegal Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem and call on them to remove these listings from their service.
- Under international humanitarian law the settlements are illegal and have a devastating impact on the human rights of Palestinian people

Address:

Brian Chesky
CEO Airbnb
AirBnb UK
Compton Courtyard
40 Compton St
London EC1V 0BD

► You can also ask **Tripadvisor** to check out of Palestinian land <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/checkout>.

Rally for Palestine

In April we had a stall at a rally organized by PSC (Palestine Solidarity Campaign) and STW (Stop The War Coalition) in support of Palestine. In their speeches, both organisations highlighted how public support for the Palestinian cause has increased in the past few years. This is good news!



Image from the rally on 25th Apr 19 in Manchester's Mechanics Institute

They also reminded us of how the accusations of anti-semitism, which are aimed at anyone who supports the Palestinian cause, are a tool to stem this growth in support. The message from both organisations is to carry on in our support and remind people of the 3 key requests from Palestinians:

- 1-Right to return;
- 2-End of occupation;
- 3-Equality for all Israeli citizens

SYRIA

Raqqa: rhetoric versus reality

A new investigation from Amnesty International and Airwars has revealed that more than 1,600 civilians were killed as a direct result of thousands of US, UK and French airstrikes and tens of thousands of US artillery strikes during the US-led Coalition's military assault on the Syrian city Raqqa in 2017. Many of the cases documented by Amnesty are likely to amount to violations

of international humanitarian law and warrant further investigation.

The findings are contained in a new interactive website - [Rhetoric versus Reality: How the 'most precise air campaign in history' left Raqqa the most destroyed city in modern times](#), which forms the most comprehensive investigation into civilian deaths of any modern conflict. The website combines photographs, videos, 360-degree immersive experiences, satellite imagery, maps and data visualisations to highlight the cases and journeys of civilians caught under the Coalition's bombardment. Users can also access data on civilians who were killed, many of them after having fled from place to place across the city.



Amnesty and Airwars have frequently shared their findings with the Coalition and with the US, UK and French governments. In response, the Coalition has admitted responsibility for killing 159 civilians - around 10% of the total number - but has routinely dismissed the remainder as "non-credible." In July 2018, UK Defence Secretary [Gavin Williamson](#) said in the House of Commons that Amnesty's findings were "unfounded", "deeply disappointing and disgraceful", while praising the "amazing professionalism of our Royal Air Force".

Amnesty's and Airwars's research in figures:

-2 years analysing open-source evidence, both in real time and after the battle;

-more than 1,000 civilians killed during the attacks named (Amnesty has directly verified 641 of those on the ground in Raqqa, and there are very strong multiple-source reports for the rest);

-2 months spent on the ground in Raqqa on the from Amnesty's researchers since the battle;

-200 strike locations investigated by Amnesty's staff;

-more than 400 witnesses and survivors interviewed by Amnesty's staff;

-3,000 digital activists in 124 countries took part, analysing more than two million satellite image frames.

The much higher than previously reported civilian death toll reflects the Coalition's relentless barrage of munitions that were

inaccurate to the point of being indiscriminate when used near civilians. During the four-month bombardment (June to October 2017), almost 80% of the city was left uninhabitable (including more than 11,000 buildings), and Raqqa is widely considered the most-destroyed city of modern times.

Despite their best efforts, NGOs like Amnesty and Airwars will never have the resources to investigate the full extent of civilian deaths and injuries in Raqqa. The organisations are urging Coalition members to establish an independent, impartial mechanism to effectively and promptly investigate reports of civilian harm, including violations of international humanitarian law, and make the findings public. Additionally, Coalition members must create a fund to ensure that victims and their families receive full reparation and compensation.

Donatella Rovera, Amnesty International's Senior Crisis Response Adviser, said: "Amnesty International and Airwars call upon the Coalition forces to end their denial about the shocking scale of civilian deaths and destruction caused by their offensive in Raqqa."

LGBTI Rights

International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia is on 17th May, when AI sections around the world will be taking part in a global petition hand-in to the Russian authorities calling for an end to the persecution of LGBTI people in Chechnya. Two people have been tortured to death in new attacks on LGBTI people in Chechnya. Around 40 men and women have been abducted and detained in a government building, based on their alleged sexual orientation.

Tell President Putin to investigate these reports and to ensure that anyone found guilty or complicit in these crimes is brought to justice. We're aiming to reach 100,000 signatures, so **please sign and share before 17th May**.

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/stop-abducting-and-killing-gay-men-chechnya>

Women's Rights

Stand with Saudi Women's Human Rights Defenders

15th May 2019 will mark one year since the first wave of arrests targeting prominent Saudi women's rights activists, including Eman al-Nafjan, Aziza al-Yosuef and Loujain al-Hathloul. Since then, most of these activists remain in detention, having been subjected to torture, sexual harassment and ill-treatment, and are now facing trial on charges relating to their activism.

We need to see these women immediately and unconditionally released.

Take action online, contact your MP and tweet @Jeremy_Hunt with #SaudiArabia and #1YearIsEnough.

See <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/free-saudi-women-who-fought-right-drive>

Turkey

No update this month.

Group News

Trump visit

We're sure that you are all aware that President Trump will be making a state visit at the beginning of June. Given Trump's disdain for human rights issues, we hope to join in with the anti-Trump demo in Manchester, bringing our own messages to the protest.



See <https://www.facebook.com/events/367038847238924/?ti=icl>

Didsbury Festival

We have a stall at the Didsbury Festival on Saturday 8th June and will be featuring in the Reunite Families campaign with some craft opportunities to draw the families in. This takes place in Disbury Park and is always a very busy affair (even if it pours with rain!).

We need help to put up and man the stall. Putting up will be from 9.30am to 11am, we then need people on the stall from 11am to 2 pm, and from 2pm to 4pm. If you can help, please email hazelerrey@gmail.com.

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!

AIUK Annual General Meeting and National Conference

Several of us attended the UK Sections National Conference and AGM in April. As always, we learnt a lot and came away feeling inspired.

Of particular note was the speech and Q&A session with the new Amnesty International Secretary General, Kumi Naidoo. He is an eloquent speaker and really stirred the audience.

He started off by stating that times are such that if we tried to pass the Human Rights Declaration today, we would probably fail. For Amnesty to be really effective, to really be listened to by politicians, we need to reach 17 million members (currently 7 millions). We need to loosen up and take risks, if we want to

attract more people. He highlighted Climate change (the clock is ticking !), Inequality and Technology (threat to jobs) being the biggest causes of today's social tensions.

In the Q&A one member of the audience asked him about Amnesty's stance on political impartiality. His answer was: *'Impartial to political parties yes. Impartial to injustice never. Xenophobia, racism, sexism: this is injustice and we will not be impartial on this'*



He ended by inviting the student groups up on stage to highlight their concerns on climate change.

We also had a superb panel discussion on People Power which included Lyndsay Burtonshaw, one of the Stanstead 15 and was chaired by Amal Azzudin, one of the Glasgow girls who

campaigns against detention and deportation of asylum seekers in Glasgow. The overall message was that although some people sometime associate Amnesty with long-term and abstract campaigns and this can be off putting. If they taste People's Power, they will stick with us. We need to empower people. There were many more excellent speeches, not least from Kate Allen (AIUK director), Ruth Breddall (retiring Board chair) and Tom Chigbo (chair of Activism sub committee).

And lastly, here is a pic of our very own Sen on stage to wave his flag for Amnesty.



Other News

International Conscientious Objectors' Day

On Wednesday, 15th May, Quakers and the Friends of Manchester Peace Garden will hold a vigil on the steps of the Friends' Meeting House, Mount Street, central Manchester, to commemorate International Conscientious Objectors' Day, from 12.30 pm to 2.0 pm. They will be holding placards with messages, including, 'Resist All Wars', 'Honour COs', 'Stop the Arms Trade', and 'It Takes Courage to be a CO' and giving out explanatory leaflets. They would welcome support.

A Peace Trail around central Manchester, led by Steve Roman, will start at 2.15 and finish at 4.00, at the Friends' Meeting House. The walk will cover Manchester as a centre for peace and radical political activity, including John Dalton, MAG and the Nobel Peace Prize, the Nuclear Ban Treaty, Peterloo, Gandhi and campaigns against slavery.

National Demo for Palestine

This is a national rally organised by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign with a coach going down from Manchester. More



details at <https://www.palestinecampaign.org/events/national-demonstration-for-palestine-11-may/>

A History of Land Rights.

TUESDAY MAY 21st 2019, from 7pm at St.Margaret's Church, Rufford Road, Whalley Range, Manchester M16 8AE. For the bicentenary of Peterloo, Whalley Range for Peace and Justice present **Three Acres and a Cow**, a performance (<https://threeacresandacow.co.uk>) examining Land Rights in the U.K.

'Three Acres and a Cow' connects the Norman Conquest and Peasants' Revolt with Brexit, fracking and our housing crisis via the Enclosures, English Civil War, Irish Land League and Industrial Revolution. The show draws a compelling narrative through the people's history of England in folk song, story and poem. Part TED talk, part history lecture, part folk club sing-a-long, part poetry slam, part storytelling session... Come and share in these tales as they have been shared for generations.

Tickets from Eventbrite £10. <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/3-acres-a-cow-a-history-of-land-rights-protest-in-folk-song-story-tickets-59592109604>

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