



# MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

**July 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 8<sup>th</sup> July**

**Cross Street Chapel**

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

### Amnesty's LGBTI work explained

Group members Sen Raj and Liam Johnston will outline Amnesty's current LGBTI work to get us clued up before our involvement in Sparkle and The Manchester Pride Parade. Sen is on the AIUK Board and is an active member of AIUK's LGBTI Network. Liam is also a member of the LGBTI Network and is coordinating Amnesty's Pride involvement across the country this year.

We will also catch up with our current campaigns and event planning.

*A few of us will meet up at Sandinista on Old Bank Street for a bite to eat about 6pm before the meeting.  
All welcome to join us.*

## Campaigning

### Individuals at risk

#### Letter Writing Drop-In

We regularly meet up to write letters appealing on behalf of Amnesty cases (and eat cake). Paper, pens, envelopes and case details provided. Guidance is on hand if you are new to this.

Our next session will be on:



**Saturday 27th July  
2 – 4 pm  
Eighth Day Café  
Oxford road**

**Come along and make a difference!**

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

#### URGENT ACTION - Ahmed Mansoor ends hunger strike

In mid-April 2019, human rights defender and prisoner of conscience Ahmed Mansoor ended a month-long hunger strike. Since then his detention conditions have slightly improved: he has been allowed a few more family visits and was also granted a phone call to his mother.



*To keep up the pressure, please write to the Emirati authorities calling on them to quash Ahmed Mansoor's conviction and sentence, and release him immediately and unconditionally.*

You can find the urgent action attached with this newsletter or online at:

[https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE2504412019\\_ENGLISH.pdf](https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE2504412019_ENGLISH.pdf). The expiry date given is 10 July, but you can keep writing until the beginning of August

We will be keeping up with weekly letter writing and sending in petitions. Thanks for all your support!

## Background material

### ***The most powerful Arab Ruler Isn't M.B.S. It's M.B.Z*** - New York Times

Excellent NYT article explaining the motivations of Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince and the ruler of the UAE, Mohammed bin Zayed (MBZ). It gives background to MBZ's crackdown on dissent both at home and across the Arab world, from Yemen to Libya and Sudan. All this feeds into the long-standing argument that after Trump, MBZ is arguably the most powerful man in the Middle East.

See: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/02/world/middleeast/crown-prince-mohammed-bin-zayed.html>

### ***Abu Dhabi is trapped in a nightmare of its own making*** - Middle East Eye

Article explaining the position that the UAE finds itself in in relation to the escalating US-Saudi-Emirati conflict with Iran, and the geopolitical position that Abu Dhabi and MBZ find themselves in.

See <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/abu-dhabi-trapped-nightmare-its-own-making>

### ***Inside the UAE's Secret Hacking Team of American Mercenaries*** - Reuters

Besides large NATO countries plus Russia and China, the UAE probably has the world's most sophisticated cyber-espionage program, run by former NSA contractors. Some of the many targets of the program include(d) Ahmed Mansoor, the Emir of Qatar, senior Turkish officials, and a BBC journalist. They also considered hacking [The Intercept](#), a US-based news organisation.

See <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/usa-spying-raven/>

## Refugee I Welcome



Refugee Week was a whirlwind of activities; with film screenings, art exhibitions and drama activities taking place around the city. One of the key events was the Refugee World Cup where we held our stall.

Taking place in Albert Park, Salford, around a dozen teams competed to win the award. Everyone took part with great gusto and you could hear the cheering for miles!

Our stall was well attended throughout the day, with 62 signatures collected imploring the Foreign Secretary to reunite

families. If you haven't signed yet, you can do so here:

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/home-secretary-reunite-refugee-families>

We raised some money, gave out badges, took photos and engaged with a wide range of people informing them of how best to support and welcome refugees – we received a really positive response and certainly enjoyed the good weather

#welcomerefugees

## Crisis and Tactical

### MYANMAR

#### **More war crimes in latest military operation in Rakhine State**

Following a recent investigation in Myanmar's Rakhine State, Amnesty International has gathered new evidence showing that the Myanmar military is committing new war crimes and other human rights violations through a new ongoing military operation.

In a new report called "*No one can protect us: War crimes and abuses in Myanmar's Rakhine State*", Amnesty details how the Myanmar military have carried out extrajudicial executions, arbitrary arrests, torture and other ill-treatment, and enforced disappearances of civilians, including the Rohingya, since January 2019.

The military operation follows coordinated attacks on police posts by the Arakan Army (AA), an ethnic Rakhine armed group, and aims at eradicating it.

Nicholas Bequelin, Regional Director for East and Southeast Asia at Amnesty International, stated: "The new operations in Rakhine State show an unrepentant, unreformed and unaccountable military terrorizing civilians and committing widespread violations as a deliberate tactic."

In one instance, on 3 April 2019, a military helicopter opened fire on Rohingya labourers cutting bamboo, killing at least six men and boys and injuring at least 13 others.

More than 30,000 people have been displaced in this latest violence, however the Myanmar authorities have blocked humanitarian access to the affected areas. "The authorities are compounding the misery of civilians by blocking the supply of medicine, food and humanitarian relief to those in need, including children," said Nicholas Bequelin. "Civilians in Rakhine State are paying the heaviest price from the military's assaults and their aftermath – yet the government continues to choose to remain silent about this spiralling crisis."

In the absence of any domestic accountability, Amnesty International is calling on the UN Security Council to urgently refer the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court and impose a comprehensive arms embargo. Myanmar's international partners must also rethink their relations with the Myanmar military leadership and implement

targeted sanctions against senior officials through multilateral bodies like the European Union and the Association of South East Asian Nations.



### Threats to freedom of expression

As reports of military violations mount, the security forces have resorted to tried and tested tactics to silence critical reporting, filing criminal complaints in recent months against the editors of three local Myanmar-language news outlets.

"While earlier this month the authorities finally released Reuters journalists Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo after arbitrarily detaining them for more than 500 days, the global indignation over their case hasn't stopped the authorities using the same fear tactics to make an example of others," said Nicholas Bequelin. "The NLD-led government has the power to change this. It holds a parliamentary majority and must use it to repeal or reform the repressive laws so often used against journalists."



Children belonging to the Rohingya community

## SYRIA

### Lebanon: Wave of hostility exposes hollowness of claims that Syrian refugee returns are voluntary

Since July 2018 the Lebanese authorities have been arranging returns of refugees to Syria, claiming that these returns are wholly voluntary. However, Amnesty International's [analysis](#) shows that people are being pushed back to Syria through a combination of restrictive government policies, dire humanitarian conditions and rampant discrimination.

One of the difficulties that Syrian refugees face in Lebanon is obtaining or renewing valid residence visas barring them from fully accessing essential services, as well as their lack of access to objective and updated information about the current human

rights situation in Syria. Lebanese authorities are imposing on them conditions that effectively force them to leave Lebanon.

A recent attack in the informal camp Deir al-Ahmar, in the Bekaa valley, is a clear example of the escalating hostility, which is driving many refugees to leave Lebanon and return to Syria despite ongoing violations of international humanitarian law there. According to some NGO workers, this recent attack involved local men who attacked the camp, set three tents on fire and used a bulldozer to demolish another two, all along threatening to burn all tents.

"The Lebanese authorities are fuelling an environment that effectively coerces refugees to return to Syria, where they could be at risk of interrogation on arrival, torture, enforced disappearance and other violations and abuses," said Lynn Maalouf, Amnesty International's Middle East Research Director. \*

This means that the Lebanese authorities are in breach of their obligation of *non-refoulement* (that is not to return refugees to a place where they would be at real risk of persecution or other serious human rights violations).

On 30 November 2018 Amnesty International wrote to Lebanon's General Security to ask about how the lists of returnees are produced, coordination with the Syrian government and whether they follow up with refugees who return. GS responded on 18 December 2018 stating that refugees apply for return at registration offices across Lebanon and then the names are compiled and sent to the Syrian government for pre-approval before their return to Syria is permitted. Transportation is then organized by bus to the Syrian border.

"The Lebanese government must urgently eliminate any coercive factors such as refugees' inability to obtain official residency papers and other restrictions or stop returns of refugees to Syria altogether. For its part the international community must provide sufficient funding and resources, resettle refugees, and press the Lebanese authorities not to return refugees to Syria until it is clear that the situation there is safe and that the rights of returnees will be protected," said Lynn Maalouf.

\*To date, civilians returning to their place of origin are requested to go through a "security clearance" involving interrogation by Syrian security forces responsible for widespread and systematic human rights violations and abuses constituting crimes against humanity, including the use of torture, extrajudicial executions and enforced disappearances.



**'I WANT A SAFE PLACE'**

REFUGEE WOMEN FROM SYRIA UPROOTED AND UNPROTECTED IN LEBANON



## YEMEN

### Huge step forward ! (but ...)

On 20<sup>th</sup> June 19 the UK Court of Appeal ruled that arms sales from the UK to Saudi Arabia for the use in the war in Yemen are unlawful on the grounds that the UK government has not thoroughly ensured that their use would not breach International Humanitarian Law. This means that new licenses for arms export to Saudi Arabia cannot be issued.

The legal case was presented by CAAT (Campaign Against Arms Trade) in 2017 and was initially rejected by the Court. This amazing organization decided to appeal against this decision, and they won!! Amnesty International, which has also been campaigning for the UK to stop arming Saudi Arabia, and Human Rights Watch provided essential testimonies during the trial, confirming the gross abuses of human rights that have been taking place because of this arms trade.

This is a victory for CAAT, all human rights defenders, but most of all for the Yemeni people. Our hearts go out to them!

We have been informed that the UK government has already appealed against the Court's decision. Therefore, we cannot stop campaigning. We have to keep the pressure onto your MPs. You can use the CAAT's link below to e-mail them:

[www.caat.org.uk/unlawful](http://www.caat.org.uk/unlawful)

We will have letters to sign at our next monthly meeting.



## LGBTI

On Saturday 13th and Sunday 14th July, Amnesty Manchester Group will be holding a stall at Sparkle in Sackville Gardens. The event raises awareness and celebrates the lives of transgender, non-binary, and gender diverse people in our

communities. The event will be co-hosted with the Amnesty Rainbow Network.

If you are able to volunteer any time on either Saturday or Sunday, please email Sen Raj ([sen.raj@amnesty.org.uk](mailto:sen.raj@amnesty.org.uk)).

## Women's Rights

### Dominican Republic: Police routinely use rape and commit other forms of torture to punish women sex workers

Although selling sex is not, in itself, illegal in the Dominican Republic, it is common for the police to stop women sex workers – both cis-gender and trans-gender – and threaten or abuse them, sometimes extorting money from them ("protection") or assaulting and raping them, often at gunpoint. Rarely do the women feel able to report such abuse, and often (especially if they are trans-gender, or single mothers, as many are) they cannot easily get other work. Sex workers working on the streets are particularly vulnerable. Who can they report to, other than the police? They expect to be ignored, or, worse, to suffer reprisals.

Police in the Dominican Republic (and many other places) have a deeply ingrained culture of machismo, and they often feel free to unlawfully abuse their powers and punish women who engage in sex work, as a form of social control. As in many other countries, trans-gender women are heavily represented in sex work, because of the discrimination against them which limits their access to other employment. They are also often marginalised from women's organisations, and experience extreme violence linked to their gender identity. Many sex workers feel that the government and society view them as less than human, and therefore "deserving" of the violence they experience.

Sex workers in the Dominican Republic are calling for an anti-discrimination bill which would be a first step towards addressing the root causes of this extreme form of violence and discrimination.

Click on this link and sign your name to this petition demanding that the Dominican Republic government approve an anti-discrimination bill and other concrete measures to protect these women from gender-based torture and ill-treatment. (You can do it on your phone!)

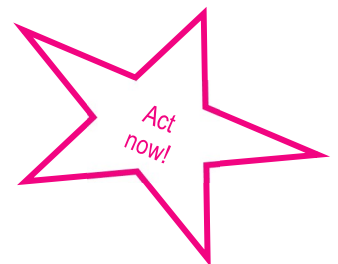
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/get-involved/take-action/demand-sex-workers-protection-in-the-dominican-republic/>

If you want to read more information, click on this link first, which also has a link to the petition itself.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/03/dominican-republic-police-routinely-rape-torture-women-sex-workers/>

## Turkey

No update this month



## Group News

### Last Month

During President Trump's visit to the UK, a group of us took part in the Against Trump demo at Cathedral Gardens in Manchester. We also had a stall at the Didsbury Festival (in the rain!!) garnering some 150 signatures on petitions to the UAE authorities and getting appeal cards signed as part of the Families Reunite campaign. Lastly, we held a stall at the Refugee World cup event during Refugee Week (see above).

*Thanks to all who organised or helped out.*



### 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

### THE F WORD: Stories of Forgiveness

The  
**FORGIVENESS**  
PROJECT

An exhibition of words and photographs at Cross Street Chapel from Monday 1st July to Sunday 7th July inclusive

"I believe with every fibre of my being that every human being has the right to live without the pain of the past." Eva Kor, Auschwitz survivor

A powerful photographic exhibition exploring the idea of forgiveness in the face of atrocity and telling the stories of victims as well as perpetrators. THE F WORD: Stories of Forgiveness is the brainchild of journalist Marina Cantacuzino and photographer Brian Moody who in January 2004, tired of a climate where revenge and retaliation dominated the headlines, resolved to present the public with an alternative view.

Travelling to places including the United States, South Africa, Northern Ireland, Romania, Rwanda, Israel and Palestine, as well as the UK, they collected stories from people whose lives had been shattered by violence, tragedy and injustice - and who

had chosen to take the challenging and often painful journey towards forgiveness.

The exhibition's subjects include **Eva Kor**, a survivor of the medical experiments carried out by Dr Josef Mengele in Auschwitz; **Pat Magee**, the man behind the IRA Brighton bomb and **Jo Berry**, whose father was killed in the blast; and **Linda Biehl**, whose daughter was killed in South Africa and now works alongside her daughter's killers.

The week-long exhibition will conclude on **Sunday the 7<sup>th</sup> July at 12:30** with a talk by **Figen Murray**, whose son Martyn Hett was a victim in the Manchester Arena attacks. Figen will talk about her efforts to promote peace in the wake of tragedy.

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)