



AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL Bromley & Orpington Group June 2019 Newsletter



COME TO OUR NEXT MEETINGS

Tuesday 9 June

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Speaker – to be confirmed (Central America)

Campaign Meeting

No meeting in August

Our thanks to Neville White of Orpington for sponsoring this month's Newsletter

Last Call.

Bromley Little Theatre Charity Preview

"We Happy Few"

by Imogen Stubbs

Thursday 6th June 2019 at 7.45pm

Tickets £12

We have a few remaining tickets available from David Howkins

01689 823793

We are Ordinary People: Sevenoaks Refugee Group

We were delighted to welcome **Humphrey Pring**, Chair of 'Sevenoaks Welcomes Refugees'. Formed in 2017 by volunteers, the Group was founded to lobby Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) to be more responsive to the Government resettlement program to welcome Syrian refugees. Whilst both Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells councils had responded positively, Sevenoaks did not initially agree to take and resettle Syrian refugees. Humphrey reminded us that the Syrian conflict has claimed half a million lives, displaced a further 6 million that have fled the country, with up to 6 million more displaced internally. Syria represents the greatest refugee crisis in living memory. The UK Government scheme, introduced in 2015, sought to offer 20,000 places to the most vulnerable – women, children or those needing medical help. 15,000 have subsequently arrived, but SDC had failed to take any families. Beginning as a 1,000 strong petition, SDC were finally persuaded to accept one family which has since grown to three – located in Swanley, Eynsford and Sevenoaks town; this compared with 10 families resettled in Tunbridge Wells and four in Tonbridge. 'Sevenoaks Welcomes Refugees' has grown to a 300 strong network of supporters who will befriend, support, provide transport and give practical 'resettling' advice to the Syrian families including language skills. They have also been able to draw on experience of German friends via the town-twinning programme. More widely, as an advocacy group they have secured the support of some local businesses, Sevenoaks School and social housing landlords. Housing was a particular challenge as rent under the Government scheme is around 25% less than is commercially available, so altruistic landlords are needed! Funding has come from donations that allow the Group to offer other support. Whilst there had been some hostility, given the pressure on local housing, Humphrey pointed to the kind and generous support from many in the community. We were all deeply inspired at just how much 'ordinary people' doing extraordinary things had so far achieved. More information can be found on Facebook (search Sevenoaks Welcomes Refugees) or by emailing sevenoakswelcomesrefugees@gmail.com Is there such a scheme in Bromley – we wondered?

Knit for Naz

Members of the Group took part in the 'Knit for Naz' campaign on behalf of the British/Iranian prisoner, **Nazarin Zaghari-Ratcliffe**. Naz has been detained since 3rd April 2016, and is currently serving a five year prison term on politically motivated espionage charges. Cardiff Amnesty has asked activists to 'knit for Naz' as among her only activities is being able to knit small items for her daughter. Cardiff has been overwhelmed with submissions – small knitted strips in bright colours, which will be used on 7th July at a massive rally to mark her 1,190 days in custody. A big thanks to the ladies of Bromley & Orpington for involving us in this action!

Speaker

“Human Rights in Central America”

We hope to welcome the Amnesty country-co-ordinator for Central America to talk about Amnesty's concerns in the region.

Tuesday 9th June at 7.30pm

At the time of writing this talk had not been confirmed and may take place in July.

Recognition for Bromley & Orpington

We did not attend this year's Amnesty AGM and National Conference, but we understand we were publicly recognised alongside the wonderful Blackheath & Greenwich Group for our fund-raising achievements. Blackheath & Greenwich is the biggest Amnesty fundraising Group in the UK owing to their annual book sale – however our contribution of £4,372 in 2018 placed us second out of all the 200+ Amnesty Groups in the UK. Thank you to all our wonderful supporters!

Monthly Action: Saudi Arabia

We wrote to the Saudi authorities in solidarity with women rights in the Kingdom, who continue to suffer and be persecuted, despite a supposed softening of some of the restrictions on their lives. Whilst the ban on women driving was lifted some time ago, women arrested and detained for campaigning in favour of the right to drive continue to be imprisoned. Amnesty views their detention to be purely in respect of their peaceful campaigning. Women held in prison can be subjected to torture, beatings, sexual and predatory attacks and even flogging. We wrote demanding the release of the remaining women activists without delay.

Western Sahara

Western Sahara is one of those mysterious places that is never on the news! Officially a disputed territory, it is partly controlled by the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), and partially occupied by Morocco, which claims the entire territory. A non-self-governing territory since 1963, the exit of the colonial power (Spain) led to a protracted conflict as Western Sahara was fought over by Mauritania, Morocco and the native Sahrawi people. Since 1997, Morocco controls two-thirds of the largely empty desert region, and the SADR the remaining third. Whilst Western Sahara is a vast empty desert, it has rich phosphate resources that Morocco licenses for extraction – despite the UN warning this to be illegal. There is a rare opportunity to find out more about this forgotten human rights conflict when **Aminatou Haidar**, (often called the Sahrawi Gandhi) a native human rights activist will speak at the AI HRAC on June 26th. Neville will attend on behalf of the Group and there will be a report in a later Newsletter.

Present on 14th May: Neville White; Vivien Glanz; David Howkins; Rindy Baaker; Vivienne Andrews; Wendy Simmons; Ted Burke; Peter Martin; Gladys Edmonds. Humphrey Pring was welcomed. **Apologies:** Margaret Coppard; Patrick and Carolyn Nield.

Meetings are held in the Wesley Room, Orpington Methodist Church, Sevenoaks Road, Orpington commencing at 7.30pm. **E-mail** amnestybromley@gmail.com **Website:** www.amnesty.org.uk/bromley

Neville White (Chairman) 01689 896368
Neville.white@waitrose.com

Vivien Glanz (Secretary)
vivienglanz@hotmail.com