



# MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

**November 2019**

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

Facebook page: Manchester Amnesty International

Facebook group: Manchester Amnesty

Twitter: @amnestymanc

## October's Events

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

#### Week of Action for Ahmed Mansoor

On Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> October, prisoner of conscience, Ahmed Mansoor spent his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday in prison in the United Arab Emirates. Activists around the world took action during that week, calling for his release. Some of us travelled down to join other AIUK activists, including members of the Reading and the Bayswater groups, to demonstrate outside the UAE embassy. Some of us then went on to a very informative public meeting at the Human Rights Action Centre where we learnt how the UAE is interfering in both Yemen and Libya to stifle any moves towards a free and open civil society.



## Refugee I Welcome

We've had a really busy October which saw us getting involved in two big events in conjunction with Manchester City of Sanctuary and Journeys Festival International Live. On Saturday 12th, our stall was in Cathedral Gardens as part of JFI Live, a day-long celebration of refugees, migrants and those from elsewhere but who call Manchester home. Alongside other organisations, we were able to engage with the wider public and explain the work we're doing on the #reunitingfamilies and #refugeeswelcome campaigns.

Last weekend was the quarterly Big Conversation, an event that Manchester City of Sanctuary hosts as an opportunity to meet, connect and share a conversation over a meal or a cuppa. With almost 100 people there, we raised awareness of the campaigns, raised some funds and enjoyed some great food from 4lunch – a social enterprise enabling refugees and asylum seekers to share their cooking skills.

Through both events, we raised £44 and 42 people signed our reunite families petition.



## Events coming Up

# Next Group Meeting

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

**Monday 11<sup>th</sup> November**

**Cross Street Chapel**

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

## Write for Rights

The next meeting clashes with an event organised by the Manchester Peace History conference: Banned: Books for Peace which is happening in the main chapel area. We will still have our meeting in the usual room but, as some of our members want to go to the competing meeting, we will not have our usual agenda but will be signing cards for the cases featured in the Write for Rights campaign. We will also be encouraging conference participants to sign cards and buy Amnesty Christmas cards in their refreshment break.

N.B. No meeting in December so we can concentrate on the PHM Poetry Event.

*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.***



## Letter Writing Drop-in, Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> November

Our next drop in session will be on the last Saturday in November 2-4pm at the Eighth Day Café on Oxford Road. We will concentrate on writing letters on behalf of the cases featured in this year's Write for Rights campaign. Pens, paper etc all provided.

**All welcome – just turn up and make a difference!**

## Whalley Range Write for Rights, Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> December

The marvellous Whalley Range Peace and Justice Group are holding their annual Write for Rights event and have offered us a stall. This is a super busy event and gives us the opportunity to collect lots of signatures and sell all our remaining Christmas cards.

Anne usually sets this up but will be giving a talk in Blackburn (for Amnesty) in the morning and so won't be able to get there in time. Is there anyone who could stand in to set up? Anne will provide all the stuff for the stall, but you would need access to a car to get it there.



## People's History Museum Events, Thursday December 12<sup>th</sup>

On December 12<sup>th</sup> we will be joining with Young Identity to present an evening of poetry and spoken word in solidarity with prisoner of conscience, Ahmed Mansoor. Ahmed is himself a poet and the evening will include readings of his poems alongside new work created by Young Identity and young Amnesty members. This event is part of the PHM Thursday Lates programme and will be called **Screams, chants and tight-lipped silence: poetry and protest**.

We had also hoped to have a **Have Your Say** event on the same evening. However, as this is the day of the election and we had hoped to attract some MPs and Councillors, this has been postponed to the new year., date still to be confirmed.

## Campaigning

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

#### New Address for UAE Embassy

Thank you to all who sent urgent appeals to the UAE embassy when we heard about Ahmed's new hunger strike. We have not heard any more news on the health of Ahmed Mansoor or any news concerning Mohammed al-Roken. Both prisoners of conscience remain in prison in the UAE.

We will continue with our regular letter writing to the UAE authorities. If you want to be on the rota, drop Anne an email ([anne.walker9@ntlworld.com](mailto:anne.walker9@ntlworld.com)) and she will send you details and will also prompt you when it is your turn to write.

Please note that we have a new name for the UAE Ambassador to the UK and also a new address for the UAE embassy:

**His Excellency Mansoor Abdullah Khalfan Juma Abulhoul**  
**Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates**  
**The Embassy of the United Arab Emirates**  
**1-2 Grosvenor Crescent**  
**London**  
**SW1X 7EE**

The previous address remains a consul of the UAE, so any letters sent recently should still have reached the ambassador.

### Crisis and Tactical

#### SYRIA



#### The recent Turkish military offensive in northeast Syria could lead to further humanitarian crisis

The recent development in the already complex situation in Syria has raised fears that civilians in Syria might be put at further risk.

In Oct 19, the USA have recalled their troops from Syria, leading Turkey to believe this gave them the green light to carry out a military operation against Kurdish forces in northeast Syria.

A new report from Amnesty has provided evidence as to how the Turkish authorities spent the months leading up to the country's current military offensive forcibly deporting hundreds of Syrian refugees back to war-torn Syria. The report contains accounts from people who had been beaten or threatened by Turkish police into signing documents declaring they wish to return to

Syria. Others were misled and told they were signing a registration document for the detention centre, or a form that expressed their desire to remain in Turkey. Witnesses reported being sent across the border on buses filled with dozens of other people who were handcuffed with plastic ties and were also seemingly being forcibly deported.

Anna Shea, Amnesty International's Researcher on Refugee and Migrant Rights, said:

*"Turkey deserves recognition for hosting more than 3.6 million women, men and children from Syria for more than eight years, but it cannot use this generosity as an excuse to flout international and domestic law by deporting people to an active conflict zone. The Turkish authorities must stop forcibly returning people to Syria and ensure that anyone who has been deported is able to re-enter Turkey safely and re-access essential services."*

*The European Union and the rest of the international community, instead of devoting their energies to keeping people seeking asylum from their territories, should dramatically increase resettlement commitments for Syrian refugees from Turkey."*

## YEMEN

### The UK Government has breached the Court of Appeal's ruling on stopping selling arms to Saudi Arabia

In September 2019, during a session in Parliament, the Government admitted breaches of a Court ruling that imposed a stop to arms sales to Saudi Arabia for use in the Yemen war. This followed an earlier admission in the same month, that the Government had approved two new licences for military equipment for use in Yemen. The Government has also added that it is possible that even *"more cases will come to light."*

As a result, the UK Department of International Trade has commissioned an independent investigation to establish the circumstances behind these breaches and new procedures for issuing new licenses.

On 4<sup>th</sup> Oct 19 Amnesty International's Director of Strategic Litigation wrote to the current Secretary of State for International Trade (MP Elizabeth Truss) to state that the organisation is looking forward to receiving the result of such an investigation and attached all the reports produced by Amnesty providing evidence of how the Saudi Arabia-led coalition has used arms against Yemeni civilians, in violation of international humanitarian law.

## TAKE ACTION!

**As a group we will carry on sending letters to our MPs, reminding them of the Government's duty to abide to the UK's Court ruling and to international humanitarian law. If you cannot come to meetings, a sample letter can be e-mailed to you on request.**



Children among destroyed civilian building in Yemen

## MYANMAR

### Amnesty's new report highlights atrocities against civilians

In October, Amnesty released a new report called 'Caught in the middle: Abuses against civilians amid conflict in Myanmar's northern Shan State', which highlights how civilians from the ethnic groups Kachin, Lisu, Shan and Ta'ang are caught in the fighting between the military and ethnic armed groups.

Soldiers have detained civilians indiscriminately, held them incommunicado, often tortured them or subjected them to other forms of ill-treatment. They have also fired indiscriminately in civilian areas, killing and injuring civilians, as well as damaging homes and property.

At the same time, ethnic armed groups have abducted civilians suspected of being members of rival groups and have subjected them to forced labour, have extorted food and money from them threatening physical violence.

The fighting between these parties has caused thousands of civilians to flee their homes. This can make it difficult for humanitarian workers to access people in need, a situation made worse by government and military restrictions on humanitarian access.

Amnesty is calling on all sides to respect international humanitarian and human rights law, protect civilians, and ensure humanitarian access. It is also calling onto the UN Security Council to refer the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court.



Civilians in Myanmar under military surveillance

## Women's Rights

### NORTHERN IRELAND

Great news that abortion has been decriminalised in Northern Ireland. This means that anyone who accesses an abortion service will not be prosecuted.

See <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/abortion-rights-northern-ireland-timeline>

REPEAL THE 8TH  
THE NORTH IS NEXT



As of 22 October 2019 abortion is decriminalised in Northern Ireland.\*

Speak to your healthcare professional about the options available to you.

More information at:

[www.amnesty.org.uk/abortion](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/abortion)

AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL



\*Relates to offences under the Offences Against the Person Act



Urgent Actions are issued by AI when a case requires prompt worldwide action. Such cases can feature someone who has disappeared, is threatened with execution, is in poor health or is thought to be at risk of torture.

To try and make it easier for our supporters and activists to access the current selection of urgent action cases AIUK have now launched a new section of the website dedicated to all the current actions. Some actions have online components but all the actions there will have a letter action that you can print out at the bottom of the action's page.

See: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions>

## Group News

### Secret Policeman's Ball



In cahoots with one of the Amnesty Ambassadors, the sizzling Deborah Frances-White, the revered Secret Policeman's Tour is landing for its final stop of the year in Manchester on Tuesday 3 December.

Following a sell-out show at the Hackney Empire in June and a raucous evening at the iconic Edinburgh Playhouse in August, they are back with the final show of the year on 3 December at Palace Theatre in Manchester.

Hosted by **Deborah Frances-White** with very special guests: **Juliet Stevenson, Nish Kumar, Suzi Ruffell, Shappi Khorsandi, Tiff Stevenson, Jackie Hagan, Sunetra Sarker, Bridget Christie and Johnny Cochrane!**

Tickets available at: <https://www.atgtickets.com/shows/the-secret-policemans-tour/palace-theatre-manchester/>

We have a stall and a bucket collection – I've already got enough volunteers!

### Christmas Cards

We have lots of Christmas cards for sale. Come along to our November meeting and stock up.



If you know of any Christmas Fairs etc that we could have a table to sell Amnesty products, please let Anne know - [anne.walker9@ntlworld.com](mailto:anne.walker9@ntlworld.com)

## Other News

### Banned: Books for Peace,

The Manchester Peace History Conference group's latest offering. Monday 11<sup>th</sup> November, Cross Street Chapel. This evening event will include a film about Theodora Wilson Wilson an author and member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, who's two books on peace 'The Last Weapon' and 'The Weapon Unsheathed' were banned and pulped by the government.

Maxine Peake features in this film which was made especially for the conference. Dr Paul Anderson will speak about Censorship in Wartime and Dr Alison Ronan will introduce a discussion on Repressing the Radicals. Very apt today.

Book at <https://bannedbooksforpeace.eventbrite.co.uk>

Flyer attached with this newsletter.

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