 **Amnesty Mid-Warwickshire Group**

 **Chair’s Report for 2019**

The committee and helpers have continued to show dedication to the work of Amnesty UK, even though the focus of the national group changed this year.Our committee met monthly in 2019 at Warwick Space, the exceptions being January, when a sub-committee was preparing for the concert in St Mary’s Church, and August when we benefited from a summer break!As ever, we have raised the issue of Human Rights abuses in many different ways:

* Denise and Hilary have continued to run the very productive Letter Writing evenings, held approximately bimonthly, at Jo’s Oken Tearooms.
* Marta started her work as ‘holder of the scrapbook archive’ and continues to welcome contributions from members throughout the year.
* In **January**, we supported yet another of Antoine’s concerts in St Mary’s which raised over £1,000 for Amnesty.
* In **February**, we supported a local charity helping Syrian refugees by collecting warm clothing for them.
* In **March** we became involved with Campaigns Against the Arms Trade. Victoria and I went to their conference and I went to protest against the DSEI Arms fair at the Excel Centre, London in September.
* In **April**, we held our AGM. All officers were re-elected: myself as Chair, Simon as Secretary, James as Treasurer, Denise as Vice-Chair, John as press officer.
* Denise, Fiona and Chrissie represented our group when they attended the Amnesty UK conference weekend in Nottingham. Kate Allen announced that groups of people affected by issues such as climate change and poverty should be the main target of our work and we should work with other organisations. Our committee continues to hold mixed views on this.
* In **May** we held our street collections. A £400 total was collected from Warwick, Leamington and Kenilworth, less than previously, but we still thought it worthwhile because of the publicity.
* In **June**, we again ran a stall in a marquee at the Leamington Peace Festival. The main theme was to support young campaigners around the world by asking the public to sign cards and petitions to their governments. The Sunday parade highlighted the plight of the hundreds of journalists arrested in Turkey, with John giving a talk on the subject from the stage.
* Denise Fowler, one of our longest-standing members, was invited for lunch

at Amnesty UK headquarters where four interesting talks were given.

* Another highlight of the month was hearing the moving talk given by guest speaker, **Amjad Rihan**, ex Ernst Young worker and whistle-blower regarding conflict gold.
* In **July,** the sad story of Nazanin’s imprisonment continued with the Iranian government’s further refusal to release her. The actions of President Duterte in the Philippines also drew our attention, particularly to the case of Senator Leila de Lima whom we continued to support throughout the rest of the year, by following the rota of letter/email writing drawn up by Simon.
* At the end of the month, a social with food and a quiz was held at my house.
* In **August**, we supported The Pride Festival for the first time by running a stall from a borrowed gazebo. Great fun – a bit like a mini Peace Festival.
* In **September**, we welcomed back Sonia from India who immediately intensified her efforts with our website, welcoming any info and pics. We also welcomed Iris to our meeting. Having been a stalwart organiser of Kenilworth events for a few years, she kindly agreed to take over as Treasurer following James’ election as a Green Councillor in May.
* We congratulated Chrissie and Annie on becoming qualified school speakers.
* It was proposed that our committee meetings should spend less time on business and then, hopefully, have a talk either from a guest speaker or one of our committee.
* In **October**, Sonia kicked off as our first speaker with a very interesting talk on the dire situation in Kashmir.
* In **November,** John gave an illuminating talk, with many anecdotes, about the school talks which he and Will had given over the years.
* At the end of the month, we held our Leamington Writes for Rights Stall under the porticos of The Pump Rooms.
* In **December,** Denise gave a talk on Modern Day Slavery. It included some staggering statistics and alerted us to the probability of it happening in our local area. We welcomed Ilene to our meeting.
* The Kenilworth group ran their Write for Rights stall in Talisman Square. Roger and friends again sold Xmas cards in Barclays Bank, Kenilworth.

**Finance** During the year we ordered 8 new tabards from Amnesty. A £340 projector was bought, 2 new poles for our stands (£100+) and £80 was spent on a large poster (a colourful ‘patchwork’ of human faces organised by Chrissie) for the Peace Festival. We donated £1,000 to Amnesty UK.

I would like to give my thanks to all of you who have contributed so much during 2019. As ever, our strength as a group lies in the joint efforts of **all our members** and I thank everyone for giving their time so freely. In particular, I need to acknowledge the work done for so many years by **James**, particularly in his role as Treasurer. A mention also to Victoria who for two years has been an extremely helpful committee member but has needed to step back due to distance travelling to meetings. Despite being unable to be ‘front-line’ members of our group, I know both James and Victoria continue to support the work we do. We wish James well in his Council work and Victoria with the work she does in Coventry, teaching refugees.

Jane Sault

January 2020