



News from the Minehead Group

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Actions you can take this month:

- ✓ **Call upon the UK Home Secretary** to make sure **domestic abuse** laws don't discriminate against migrant women. Migrant survivors must be able to access the specialist services they need in a safe environment and free from discrimination. Follow this link to find the action: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/domestic-violence-bill-migrant-women-survivors>
- ✓ **Come along to a talk** by John Dickinson on 23 January on **modern-day slavery** - 1930 at the Quaker Meeting House, Minehead.
- ✓ **Make a date** to support our group's **AGM** on 13 February, and hear a review of the past year and help us plan for the future. We need 8 to be quorate!
- ✓ **Invite your friends** and make up a team of six to come to our annual **quiz** on 28 February. And help publicise this amongst local quiz teams.

Round up of November and December news

In the last two months of 2019 we were busy with the annual global campaign 'Write for Rights', which runs every year from 1 November to 31 December. The first event was a **letter writing afternoon** on 13 November when, despite the appalling weather, eight people made it to the Meeting House and wrote 39 letters in an hour and a half. Here's a photo. Judith and Philippa continued writing at home and managed another 17 letters. Hannah got some friends together and they wrote 18 letters and sent an email. What a fantastic effort. Well done everyone!



The second event was a **coffee morning** in the Avenue Methodist Church on 13 December. We invited everyone to sign cards and letters on behalf of four individuals or groups who put their own lives in danger in order to help others: Marinel Ubaldo, working on climate change in the Philippines, Yasaman Aryani in Iran, sentenced to 16 years in prison for removing her headscarf and promoting women's rights, Yiliyasijiang who disappeared in Egypt and is believed to be in a 're-education camp' in China, and Grassy

Meadows Youth in Canada – a group of First Nations people campaigning for compensation and healthcare after their river was contaminated by mercury in the 1960s. The Mayor of Minehead, Cllr Sandra Slade, kindly came along, took great interest in all the cases and signed each of the cards and letters. Again, the awful wet and windy weather kept people away from the town, but we still collected around 40 signatures on each of the cards and letters, and these have been posted with stamps generously provided by Peter Atherton.

The other event in December was the Minehead **Christmas Tree Festival**. The theme this year was around the centenary of Save the Children. So we decorated our tree with pictures of the young people featured in this year's Write for Rights campaign.



Diary Dates

The Minehead Group aims to meet at least once a month, either for a fund-raising or campaigning event, or for a group meeting that might include a speaker or film. Meetings take place at the Quaker Meeting House (QMH), Bancks Street, Minehead. We also hold a couple of social events each year. All Amnesty supporters are welcome to join us!

Wed 8 January

Informal get-together to plan the 2020 programme and future events. Meet in the bar at 1500 at the Beach Hotel, Minehead.

Thurs 23 January

Talk on Modern Day Slavery 1930 at the QMH followed by short planning meeting.

Thurs 13 February

Group AGM 1930 at the QMH.

Friday 28 February

Annual Quiz 1930 at Minehead Social Club. £4 per person.

Saturday 7 March

SW Regional conference at the Mint Methodist Conference Centre, Fore Street, Exeter. 1000-1600.

Campaign news

I WELCOME REFUGEES: *Jill Walmsley writes:* Lord Dubs, campaigner for child refugees expressed his dismay and disappointment that the Withdrawal Agreement Bill which was passed in Parliament on 20 December included a watering down of the pledge to allow unaccompanied refugee children being assisted to join their parents in the UK. And the Home Office has ignored fostering agencies who say they have spaces to place vulnerable children immediately. Conferences to share ideas and make plans for Refugee Week 2020 are being held in London and Bristol on 10 and 13 February. It costs £10 if a Group are sponsoring you, or free if you book as an individual. Contact me (Jill) if you are interested in going. *Jenny Gateau tells us* that a speaker is coming to talk about the work of RAFT (Refugee Aid from Taunton) to the LETS Group in February. Everyone who would like to know more is welcome. The provisional date is Saturday afternoon 15 February in St. Michael's church hall, Alcombe.

GENERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN: In the run up to the General Election, Jill Walmsley wrote on behalf of the group to all the candidates asking them how they would try and support human rights issues in Parliament if they were elected as our MP. The Labour and Liberal Democrat candidates responded, pledging support of Amnesty's campaigns. Our elected MP did not answer. We must continue to raise human rights issues, including those that affect refugees, with our new government.

INDIA: *Cherry Bird reports:* **Citizenship amendment act:** Street protests across India are being highlighted by media around the world. These were prompted by passage of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act by India's Parliament, which protesters say legitimises discrimination on the basis of religion and violates the Constitution of India and international human rights law. The Act amends the 1955 Citizenship Act to enable 'irregular' migrants to acquire Indian citizenship more quickly through naturalisation and registration. However, eligibility is limited to Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan who entered India on or before 31 December 2014. Muslims are excluded. Although India also shares borders with Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal and Sri Lanka, the amendments do not include Sri Lankan Tamils, who form the largest refugee group in India, or Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar, the Ahmadiyyas of Pakistan, Bihari Muslims of Bangladesh and Hazaras of Pakistan who have suffered systematic persecution over many years. The exclusion of these communities indicates a further move towards ethnic and religious bias by the Modi government, which does not conform to India's secular constitution nor to international human rights. It also follows on from the National Register of Citizens recently enacted in Assam, which potentially excludes many Muslims who have been resident there for generations. There are plans to extend this exercise to all states. These developments are another sign of the alarming changes in India, a secular country which has traditionally been welcoming to refugees of all creeds. Interestingly, although Muslims are the most affected and are out on the streets in the largest numbers, they have been joined by Indian citizens of all faiths, who are alarmed at the implications of the new law. Indian authorities have been heavy handed in their response, using tear gas, arresting protestors and imposing curfews in parts of many states, including Delhi. Mobile and internet services were also suspended.

BK9: Latest news is that bail pleas for all nine activists were rejected by the Mumbai High Court and they remain, without formal charges, in Yerawada prison in Pune.

Harassment of Amnesty India: In November the Amnesty India office in Bangalore was again subject to searches by the Central Bureau of Investigation. In a press release, Amnesty India noted a pattern of harassment over the last year every time they speak out against human rights violations in India, stating that '*Amnesty International India stands in full compliance with Indian and international law. Our work in India, as elsewhere, is to uphold and fight for universal human rights. These are the same values that are enshrined in the Indian Constitution and flow from a long and rich Indian tradition of pluralism, tolerance, and dissent.*'

Kashmir: Although Kashmir has dropped off the news lately and the Indian government insists that 'normalcy' has returned to the state, people are still cut off from the internet and dozens of political leaders remain in detention. Food shops are only open for a few hours each day and no public buses or taxis have operated since the clampdown. Protests are held regularly. Only a few days ago two people were killed in a violent incident involving Indian troops.

How to contact the Minehead Amnesty International Local Group:

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