



News from the Minehead Group

www.amnesty.org.uk/minehead

www.facebook.com/amnestyminehead



We hope you are all keeping well in these difficult times. Sadly, we've had to cancel some of our forthcoming events but there is still plenty we can do to campaign for human rights. If you have time on your hands, please think about sending some letters for Amnesty. Details are below.

Actions you can take this month:

- ✓ **Sign and send the attached letter** to the President of Bangladesh asking him to halt the imminent execution of **ATM Azharul Islam**.
- ✓ **Write some letters** from the Spring issue of **Real Lives Matter**, attached to this newsletter. But check the Royal Mail website (international incidents) before posting overseas, as some services are currently suspended, eg to India and the United Arab Emirates. If you'd like help with postage, the group will refund up to £6 per person. Contact Cherry Bird if you'd like to do this.
- ✓ **Follow the link below** to send an email to the Indian High Commission in London demanding the release of the **BK9**. You can adjust the wording of the email to reflect the increased risk to their lives posed by COVID-19.
<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/bhima-koregaon-BK9-india>

Some good news!

- Just over two weeks ago **Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe** was released on furlough amid the ongoing spread of coronavirus in Iran. She was temporarily released and has been with her parents in their family home in Tehran. A few days ago, Nazanin's release was extended for another two weeks. However, Amnesty is still calling on the Iranian authorities to end Nazanin's ordeal and finally allow her to return to her family in the UK, as soon as she can travel.
- On 27 March the Home Office announced that it will stop evicting people **seeking asylum** from government accommodation for three months, while the UK remains in lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic. This is something the Refugee Council and other charities have been calling for since well before this current crisis.

Round up of February/March news from our group

We had a busy few weeks before the 'lockdown'! On 28 February, we held our **annual quiz** which was again organised brilliantly for us by the Humber family. It was an enjoyable evening which raised £352.

On 7 March, we were very lucky with the weather and set up our usual stall to mark

International Women's Day. In just an hour and a half we achieved around 70 signatures on the letters we had prepared. We highlighted two cases: the Tehran-3 and the Amazon Women's Collective. More details about these cases

are overleaf.

On 8 March, four of us attended the **SW**

Regional Conference. There is a report overleaf and a picture of us during the lunchtime action in front of Exeter Cathedral. And on 10 March, Susan visited the Taunton Group to lead a session on **Human Rights and Climate Change**, which she hopes to repeat for our group sometime in the future.



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!

All future events for the next few months are cancelled.

But please hold the following dates in your diaries, in case we are able to go ahead by then.

Sat 12 September

Fundraising concert

1500 at St Andrew's Church, Minehead. Tickets £7 to include tea and cake.

Sat 10 October

World Day against the Death Penalty vigil in Minehead.

Friday 6 November

Letter writing afternoon

1430 at the QMH Minehead. Start of the 2020 Write for Rights Campaign.

South West Regional Conference 7 March 2020

Alison Dietz reports: the conference consisted of a range of speakers and workshops, with a lunchtime action. The key note speaker was Alice Venn, a law lecturer, who spoke on 'Climate change, Rights and Roles of the Courts'. Many parts of the world are very vulnerable to climate change, not only because of geographical factors but also socio-economic ones. Poverty will be exacerbated, and there will be new issues of social justice and human rights. Governments have a role to play in mitigating the effects of climate change, but so do multi-national corporations and civil society. Alongside the rights already enshrined in law we have to make sure that indigenous rights are acknowledged and protected. One of the workshop speakers was Geraldine Chacón, a Venezuelan lawyer and HR activist whom we supported in the 2018 WfR campaign. Geraldine was a young lawyer with a social conscience, who spent a day a week educating disadvantaged children about their rights. Because of this work she was arrested and kept in prison for months. She said that the worst feeling for anyone in this situation is that you are invisible. Hence the 2018 WfR campaign had a huge impact on her, knowing that she was not alone, that people all over the world were writing letters on her behalf. Other speakers included Kate Allen, Director of AIUK, who spoke about how the context for our work is changing – both in the UK and internationally. In the UK, with our new government, the Human Rights Act is still under threat, Brexit will bring big changes and the Windrush scandal has not gone away. Kate urged us to engage actively with all our MPs. As Amnesty activists we have to be seen as not related to any political party.



Campaign news

Women's Human Rights: here are more details about the cases we featured at our stall on 7 March. In



Iran, Yasaman Aryani, Monireh Arabshahi and Mojgan Keshavarz were campaigning against forced veiling. For taking off their headscarves in a women-only train carriage and walking through giving out flowers they were charged with 'inciting prostitution' and sentenced to a total of 42 years in jail between them. With no access to lawyers, their trial was a sham – they were verbally abused and

threatened by the judge. Our letter to the Iranian Embassy in London demanded their release. In **Ecuador,** the Amazon Women's Collective are working to defend the Amazon river area (home to many indigenous communities, thousands of wildlife species and half the world's rainforests), and defying powerful political and economic interests based on mining, logging and oil exploitation. As a result, they have been the target of violent attacks. Our letter to the Ecuadorian Embassy in London called on the authorities to protect the rights and lives of these people, and to bring their attackers to justice.



India: *Cherry Bird writes* - With media focus on the economic and social effects of COVID-19 in western countries, we should remember how much worse things are in countries such as India. People in prisons are particularly at risk, due to inhumane and unsanitary conditions and low health resilience and nutrition. Other high-risk groups include huge numbers of people with no home, either living on the streets of major cities or at their workplaces, from which they are being evicted as industry shuts down. Many people gain a precarious livelihood in the informal sector, with no safety net or employer obligations to protect them and their families from destitution. Refugees have few rights or facilities at the best of times, and are even more vulnerable now.

I WELCOME REFUGEES: *Jenny Gateau writes:* I feel for our Syrian and Kurdish friends having this (COVID-19) to add to all their other concerns, especially those with vigorous boy children and tiny gardens. However, they are among the most resilient people I have ever met, and certainly know a thing or two about being indoors to avoid danger. It will be especially hard for them later this month when Ramadan starts. Sadly, the Easter visits to West Somerset can't take place, and we don't know yet about the summer ones. **RAFT** has had to close because of volunteer safety and also because the onward journeys for crates of goods are no longer possible at present.

How to contact the Minehead Amnesty International Local Group:

Website: www.amnesty.org.uk/minehead

Facebook: www.facebook.com/amnestyminehead

Chair & group contact: Alison Dietz: Tel. 01984 641603 Email: aledietz7474@gmail.com

Treasurer: Cherry Bird Tel. 01984 641052 Email: cherryebird@gmail.com

Meeting notes, newsletter & website: Susan Mew Tel. 01643 821209 Email: brightmanmew@btinternet.com