



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

May 2020

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

Facebook page: Manchester Amnesty International

Facebook group: Manchester Amnesty

Twitter: @amnestymanc

Online Group Meeting

6.30pm Monday 11th May

Our regular Group meeting will again be over Zoom and will feature a link up with Rebecca Nguyen van Thuy, AIUK's Crisis & Tactical Campaigner, who will be talking to us about the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, discuss the relaunch of the Ban Israeli Settlement Goods campaign, and how our group can support it.

We will send out a link over the weekend. Keep an eye out for it.

Campaigning

Weekly Actions.

We hope that you have found time to participate in our Weekly Actions – launched to keep us active and involved in Amnesty work during lockdown. Each week one of the group's campaign coordinators is choosing an action and we are emailing it out to our yahoo group members and posting it on Facebook and Twitter. So far, we have had actions on behalf of Seán Binder and Sarah Mardini who are facing prison in Greece for helping refugees, on TripAdvisor's involvement in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, on behalf of UAE prisoner of conscience Ahmed Mansoor and, most recently, Turkish political prisoners at risk from COVID and Russian journalist Elena Milashina.

If you have any ideas for future actions, please drop Anne Walker an email with your suggestion – anne.walker9@ntlworld.com.

Please take part and make a difference!

Refugee Rights

REFUGEE ACTION PETITION

As the lockdown progresses, there continues to be a lot of challenges faced by refugees and asylum seekers nationally, but also locally in Greater Manchester. Here's a link to a really important appeal from Refugee Action:

People seeking asylum arrive in the UK fleeing war and persecution. They should find safety and support here, and not be exposed to more danger and hardship. However, while people wait for a decision on their asylum claim, they

are banned from working and forced to be wholly reliant on asylum support of just £37 per week.

This support has always been utterly inadequate to meet people's needs. During a pandemic, it makes it impossible to stay safe. Whilst Universal Credit has been increased by £20 per week, there has been no increase in asylum support.

Write to your MP and ask them to tell the Home Secretary that asylum support must be increased as a matter of urgency.

<https://act.refugee-action.org.uk/page/59805/action/1>

#CITIESMUSTACT

As you may know the living situation for people in the camps on the Greek Aegean islands is inhumane and desperate. Many people's shelters in the camps on Lesbos, Chios, and Samos have been devastated by recent fires and, due to severe overcrowding and an insufficient water supply, it is impossible for people to follow government recommended Covid19 measures. Hence it is more urgent than ever for Europe to step up and change current migration policies which threaten or ignore human rights, such as the right to seek asylum, and enable unlawful border control practices.

#CitiesMustAct is a bold new campaign asking the citizens, councils, and mayors of European towns and cities to pledge their support for the immediate relocation of asylum seekers on the Greek Aegean islands – see <http://www.europemustact.org/citiesmustact>.

A campaign has been started in Greater Manchester. Find out more by joining the Facebook group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/235827920834529/>), follow on twitter @GM_Must_Act, and take action by signing the petition <http://chnq.it/P9h77BtXwq>. You can also email gmanchester@europemustact.org or contact the campaign via social media, if you would like to get more involved.

Read Amnesty's explanation of the situation at the Greek-Turkish border and their demand to evacuate the Greek islands:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/03/greece-turkey-refugees-explainer/>

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/04/greece-with-camps-on-fire-transfer-of-vulnerable-asylum-seekers-to-mainland-must-urgently-resume/>.

UAE (Mohammed al-Roken & Ahmed Mansoor)

We have not received any updates on our two adopted prisoners, Mohammed al-Roken and Ahmed Mansoor, and we remain gravely concerned for their safety.

We continue to send regular appeals and also featured Ahmed in one of our Weekly Actions. If you want to join the rota and write regular appeal letters on behalf of both Mohammed and Ahmed, drop Anne Walker an email and she'll send you details: anne.walker9@ntlworld.com.

We are also encouraged to take a photo of our letters and Tweet them as this makes our campaigning more visible.

The more people we have letter writing / emailing / Tweeting, the more effective we will be.

Individuals at risk

We are due our regular Letter Writing Drop-In on Saturday May 30th. We won't be meeting at the Eighth Day Café but we'll be setting up a virtual Facebook meeting to encourage people to dedicate an hour or two to writing appeals.

Look out for it on our Facebook page - <https://www.facebook.com/amnestymanc/>

Crisis and Tactical

MYANMAR

Rights activists excluded from largest prisoner release in years

On 17 April 20, Myanmar's president released 24,896 prisoners to mark Myanmar's New Year. However, several prisoners of conscience and activists whose cases have been documented by Amnesty were **not** included.

Clare Algar, Amnesty International's Senior Director for Research, Advocacy and Policy, said: "*It's appalling that*

prisoners of conscience and peaceful activists were largely excluded from yesterday's presidential amnesty. They should not be in prison in the first place and are victims of repression, harassment and arbitrary arrests by the Myanmar authorities, both the civilian-led government and the military. Moreover, crowded prisons and detention centres are a very dangerous hotspot for COVID-19 outbreaks".

Myanmar is heading for elections in November. While the authorities have made some efforts to amend or repeal repressive laws, many still fall far short of complying with international human rights standards. Myanmar's legal framework still comprises laws that arbitrarily restrict the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

Myanmar's prisons are crowded, unsanitary, and lacking in health services.

SYRIA

Justice for Syria

On 23rd Apr 2020 the trial against two former officials of the Syrian government security service began in Koblenz, Germany.



Anwar Raslan*, charged with torture, including rape and sexual violence and Eyad al-Gharib, charged with torture, have undergone trial at Koblenz's Higher Regional Court.

This is the first trial of former officials of the Syrian government and it is a huge step towards justice for the Syrian people and the world.

Mansour Omari, a Syrian human rights defender, who was forcibly disappeared for more than a year and tortured while in prison in Syria is observing the trial for Amnesty and other organisations. He will report to us from the court, therefore keep an eye on our social media and watch out for our next newsletter. Or you can read his blog on this link: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/blogs/campaigns-blog/syrian-torture-trial-koblenz-germany-part-1>

**Anwar Raslan is suspected of being complicit in the torture of at least 4,000 people between 2011 and 2012. This torture resulted in the death of 58 people and included cases of sexual violence.*

Justice for Syria

The way towards 'Justice for Syria' according to Amnesty:

- For years Amnesty has documented the Syrian government's arbitrary detentions, torture, enforced disappearance and the inhuman conditions in Syrian jails.
- Amnesty has always maintained that universal jurisdiction is the only way to bring Assad's government to justice and has repeatedly called on the United Nations Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court at The Hague.



- Amnesty has offered support to human rights activists (Mansour Omani among them) and organisations, which are gathering evidence of war crimes in Syria. Without such evidence, no trial can take place.
- Amnesty is calling on other countries to follow Germany's example.
- In the UK, Amnesty is calling on the UK government to offer financial support to Syrian human rights groups, so that they can carry on gathering evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

ANOTHER BIG THANK YOU!

Can we say a huge thank you to everyone who has made a donation to the group for Amnesty's work in Syria. After even more donations in April, we have now collected the incredible amount of £2,880! And, even better, this total is being matched by Amnesty major donors, bringing our total to **£5,760!**

An incredible amount, thank you to you all.

This money will go towards Amnesty's work in bringing justice to Syrians through documenting human rights abuse and supporting Syrian justice groups in bringing torturers and war criminals to account in court.

PALESTINE

Ban Israeli Settlement Goods

Amnesty is re-launching the 'Ban Israeli Settlement Goods' campaign in May, watch this space! We're lucky enough to have Rebecca, AIUK's Crisis & Tactical Campaigner, coming to our next virtual group meeting on Monday 11th May to discuss the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, discuss the campaign, and how our group can support it. Hope to see you there, it should be a really interesting talk!



Take Action!

Thank you to everyone who took part in the weekly action, demanding that TripAdvisor stop promoting tourist attractions in illegally occupied land. It's not too late to take part in the action! Add your voice

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/checkout>.

Update from Palestine Solidarity Campaign: In April 20, the UK Supreme Court has ruled in favour of PSC, in a case that saw them challenge regulations put in place in 2016 by the UK Government, which would have stopped Local Government Pensions Schemes from divesting from companies involved in Israel's discriminating policies towards Palestinian and from the UK defence industry. PCS were supported in their battle by the Quakers, CAAT (Campaign Against Arms Trade) and War on Want.

Amazing victory!

Europe Regional Action Network

Our Weekly Action last week featured two urgent actions on European countries. If you haven't already taken action, there is still time.

Turkey: Release those unfairly imprisoned and most at risk

As COVID-19 spreads at an alarming rate across Turkey, the lives of thousands of prisoners and staff in overcrowded and unsanitary prisons are at increased risk. On 13 April, the Turkish Parliament passed a law that would allow the early release of up to 90,000 prisoners. However, the law excludes many prisoners that should qualify for early release, including journalists, human rights defenders and others imprisoned unfairly under anti-terror laws simply for exercising their rights, and people in pre-trial detention

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions/release-those-unfairly-imprisoned-and-most-risk>

Russia/Chechnya: Journalist at risk after receiving death threat

On 13 April, Chechnya's Head Ramzan Kadyrov posted a video on Instagram in which he issued a death threat aimed at Russian journalist Elena Milashina. The threat followed the publication of her article about the spread of COVID-19 in Chechnya. She is in grave danger and Russian authorities must take urgent steps to ensure her safety.

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions/journalist-risk-after-receiving-death-threat>

Online Talk

There are growing concerns about human rights violations in Central Europe, especially in Hungary and Poland. In particular, Roma communities are suffering discrimination and persecution and refugees continue to be badly treated. On **Wednesday May 13th at 7.30pm, Ulrike Schmidt of Amnesty International UK** will be giving an online talk about shrinking spaces for human rights in Central Europe. This event is free, and anyone is welcome to attend. You do not need to be an Amnesty member. This talk is the latest in Hammersmith & Fulham Amnesty Group's Spotlight talks where we explore the state of human rights in various parts of the world.

To attend, please email the group secretary, Virginia Brignell at secretaryhammersmithamnesty@outlook.com by 4pm on May 13th and she will send you the zoom link.

When Home is a Dangerous Place

Domestic abuse has soared since the lockdown with helplines like Refuge reporting a 120% jump in calls. For migrant women however, the situation can be even more dire. Without access to government support or funds, Women's Aid estimates that 4 in 5 migrant women are turned away from refuges. At the same time, they are

prevented from reporting domestic abuse to the police because of the well founded fear of being reported to immigration enforcement and ending up in detention.

Tell the government to protect anyone for whom staying home isn't safe - regardless of immigration status.

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/protect-most-vulnerable-during-covid-19-pandemic-test-version-domestic-abuse?from=issue>

What would you do if you were locked up with your abuser, and needed help? How can you call 999 if you cannot speak? How can you ask for information from a helpline if your attacker is in the room with you?

Follow the links below to find out how. Be aware that domestic violence can happen in any part of society – it could be happening to someone you know. If it is happening to you, these links could help you find a way out.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-and-domestic-abuse/coronavirus-covid-19-support-for-victims-of-domestic-abuse>

<https://www.womensaid.org.uk/covid-19-coronavirus-safety-advice-for-survivors/>

Group News

Twitter

Steve held a tutorial on Twitter last week over Zoom. It proved very useful for Twitter newbies like Hazel and myself (Anne) and if you would like a look he's recorded it – email anne.walker9@ntlworld.com for the link.

It appears that using Twitter is a good way of getting through to the authorities in many countries, including the UAE. We would like to make more use of it and would encourage you to join, even if only to follow @amnestymanc and take part in our Twitter appeals.

Volunteers still needed!

We need someone to organise our regular city centre street collection (currently scheduled for 26th September). Sean has done this for quite a few years now and would like to step down. However, he will be around to show you the ropes.

We will also need someone to coordinate our Write for Rights campaigning in the run up to Christmas.

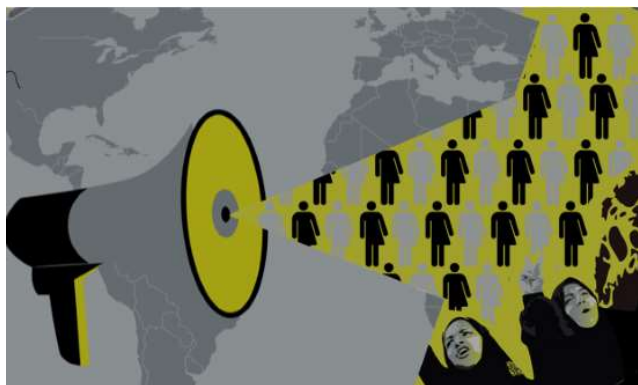
Get in touch with Hazel (hazelerrey@gmail.com) or Anne (anne.walker9@ntlworld.com) to discuss what is involved.

Happy News

We've just heard that Henrike, a long-standing member of the group who relocated to Liverpool a year or so ago, has just given birth to a baby boy, named Oscar. He made a slightly early appearance but is doing well.



Other News



Online courses

Want to develop your knowledge of human rights, and get the skills and confidence to defend?

Amnesty has a whole range of on-line learning

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/online-learning>

N.B. If you wish to subscribe to, or unsubscribe from, this newsletter and other general group emails from the Manchester Group of Amnesty International, please email manchestergroup@amnesty.org.uk