



News from the Minehead Group

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We hope you are all keeping well in these difficult times. While it is impossible to plan future events with any certainty at present, there is still plenty we can do to campaign for human rights.

Actions you can take this month:

- ✓ **Sign and send the attached letter** to President Putin concerning the Russian journalist, **Elena Milashina**. The Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov posted a video on Instagram in which he issued a death threat aimed at her because of an article she wrote about the spread of Covid-19 in Chechnya.
- ✓ **Send an email** on behalf of prisoners of conscience, the Bhima Koregaon11 (BK11) by using the link <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/bhima-koregaon-BK11-india> See overleaf for more information on this case.
- ✓ **Sign the petition** calling on the Prime Minister of **India** to immediately end all harassment, intimidation, and attacks against activists, students and journalists across India. See overleaf for more information. You can sign the petition at <https://amnesty.org.in/take-action/covid-19-pandemic-crackdown-on-dissent-putting-lives-at-immediate-risk-in-india/>
- ✓ **Sign up to receive urgent actions** from AIUK or, if you prefer, just go to the website and choose some actions to take. These are set out on the AIUK website: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions>

Human Rights News from AIUK

Here are some items from the May monthly mailing to groups.

- Good news! A **Moroccan** individual at risk, Ali Aarass, imprisoned and tortured in spite of no evidence against him, has been released after 12 years in prison for alleged terrorism offences.
- In Germany, two former **Syrian** security service officials have appeared in court charged with crimes against humanity. This is the first trial of its kind and Amnesty has a Syrian human rights defender and torture survivor observing the trial in court. His dispatches can be seen on the AIUK website
- In the **UK**, there has been an increase in domestic abuse during lockdown. The helpline Refuge has reported a 12% jump in calls. AIUK commissioned a survey which has shown that most of the UK public want more protection for victims irrespective of their immigration status.



Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe's furlough was due to end on 20 May, so we were all relieved to hear that her release had been extended, although we don't know how long for. This 'conditional liberty' is far better than outright jail, but 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. You can find an action on the AIUK website. It's interesting that they are still using a photo of Nazanin and Richard in Minehead!!

Round up of April/May news from our members

On 14 May, we held our first **group meeting** using Zoom. This was a trial run so we only invited those who normally attend our meetings. Four of us took part and we felt it was very successful. So we have arranged another get-together on 11 June at 1600. Please email Alison Dietz if you'd like to join this meeting. Notes of the May meeting will be circulated to those on our mailing list.

Diary Dates

The Minehead Group aims to meet at least once a month. All Amnesty supporters are welcome to join us!

Thurs 11 June

Group meeting via Zoom at 1600. Contact Alison if you'd like to receive an invite.

All other 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.



Chris Lawson sent us this **book review** which he wrote for the Lewes Amnesty magazine. *Chris writes:* I've been avidly reading **'The Prosecutor' by Nazir Afzal** (Ebury Press 2020). It's the autobiography of the former Chief Prosecutor in North-West England. His childhood and first experiences of racist violence and police indifference were in inner-city Birmingham. That set him on his path of wanting to see justice done. He's still active in sharing his sharp views on the legal system but felt restricted in what he could do and say within the Crown Prosecution Service so left it in 2016. For the previous decade he'd been involved with two issues of particular interest to Amnesty members - violence against women and modern day slavery. We could only help raise general awareness but Nazir was able to bring key cases to court. He took on the prosecution of the Rochdale sex-trafficking gang with determination, knowing all the sensitivities about it. He was willing to risk taking initiatives in pursuit of the truth. When the guilty verdicts came, the racists had difficulty in pursuing their anti-Muslim agenda as the man who'd achieved the result was himself a Muslim of Pakistani origin. With similar determination he then took up a modern slavery case which showed up many failings in the immigration and other systems and had a ground-breaking outcome with the victim being entitled to financial reparations as well as seeing her captors in jail. At the heart of his work is the motivation of seeking justice.

Susan Mew has taken part in two Zoom meetings with AIUK staff and other **Local Group Trainers**. AIUK staff are working from home and paid tribute to the IT team who have enabled this to happen. The **Human Rights Education** team is still getting requests for training and it is developing a range of on-line courses and training sessions. AIUK is continuing to campaign on international issues such as the impact of the lockdown in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the conditions in Syrian prisons. But AIUK is also focusing on Covid-19 and its impact in the UK on vulnerable groups, domestic abuse and migrant rights. Work on the Human Rights and Climate Change campaign is delayed pending the publication of a report by the International Secretariat.

INDIA: Cherry Bird has been continuing with her volunteer role as Country Coordinator for India and Nepal. *Cherry writes* - With the arrest in Maharashtra state of a further two activists, **Anand Teltumde** and **Gautam Navlakha**, the BK9 has become the **BK11**. Like the rest of the group, these two have a long history of using legal means to fight for the rights of India's most disadvantaged groups. But they have been arrested without charge under the draconian Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA). Both are over 65 years of age and the crowded and unsanitary conditions in India's prisons are notorious for the spread of disease, putting all 11 activists at high risk, especially as many of them have underlying health conditions. The case for releasing these prisoners of conscience is stronger than ever.



Freedom of Expression: While the world is distracted by COVID-19, the Indian government is continuing to harass journalists and activists, using the UAPA to silence criticism and repress free speech. Students Safoora Zargar, Meeran Haider and Shifa-Ur-Rehman are detained in Tihar jail, Delhi, one of the most overcrowded in India, arrested for taking part in anti-CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act) demonstrations in February. Amnesty is particularly concerned about Safoora as she is pregnant.

Inequality: COVID-19 has highlighted the impact and extent of inequality in Indian society, with the poorest facing starvation as a result of loss of their meagre daily wage. Their access to healthcare is limited because there are too few healthcare facilities and providers available and they receive little or no accurate information about the effects of COVID-19 and treatment. Meanwhile false, often dangerous, information abounds, especially in rural areas.

Violence against women: Following the recent execution of the Delhi rapists, Amnesty India issued a statement that the death penalty is not an effective means of preventing violence against women. It published a piece by Nayantara Raja and Fatema Diwan on whether women are any safer as a result of measures introduced after the 2012 rape. The results do not make good reading – figures from the National Crime Record Bureau show a 17% increase in crimes against women between 2012 and 2018, and a 1.5% increase in reported rapes (many are not reported).

How to contact the Minehead Amnesty International Local Group.

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