

# Newsletter: June 2020

## Bognor Regis, Chichester & District Group



Dates for your diary	TUESDAY 10/12/2020 Human Rights Day
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Dear writers,

Those of you deemed especially vulnerable to the virus should be nearing the end of your twelve weeks lockdown; two weeks was amply long enough for me. We are still waiting for further government/Amnesty UK guidelines about when we can begin Amnesty meetings again, so I'm afraid even the Pumble has had to be postponed. However, there is even more Amnesty work to be done – see over.

### Local events

None (see above).

### Other events

- **Refugee Week 15-21 June:** Refugee Week is a time when we can all celebrate the contribution refugees make to the UK. The theme of this year's event is 'Imagine', and most activities will take place online this year. To find out how you can take part, have a look on the [Refugee Week website](http://refugeeweek.org.uk) at [refugeeweek.org.uk](http://refugeeweek.org.uk). There are many **Simple Acts**, such as sharing a song, or watching a film and posting about it on social media. You can also join online events or take a virtual exhibition tour.
- You can get **The Secret Policeman's Ball Unlocked** on [amnesty.org.uk/unlocked](http://amnesty.org.uk/unlocked) (and the 2019 tour in Manchester etc on [amnesty.org.uk/secret-policemans-tour](http://amnesty.org.uk/secret-policemans-tour)).
- **Pride 28 June - 5 July:** this year more than 220 Pride events worldwide have been cancelled due to coronavirus. Amnesty are creating an online event called Pride Inside with a number of UK partners; launch date is the anniversary of the Stonewall riots in 1969 and Pride Inside will include an online series of gigs, comedy shows, panel discussions and arts-based events. Please take action for [Elzbieta, an LGBTI Polish human rights defender](#) and keep an eye on the [Amnesty UK website](#) for information about events. Contact Amnesty's Rainbow Network or (Twitter) @AmnestyUK\_LGBTI or (Instagram) @amnestyuk\_lgbti
- Hold a virtual tea party for Amnesty! All you need is a video conference platform. Ask people for a donation to join and bake biscuits or cake. Free party kits at [amnesty.org.uk/tea](http://amnesty.org.uk/tea) I fear the calories will NOT be virtual, or virtuous, but we all need a break.
- **Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe:** Thank you to everyone who lit candles for Nazanin, or sent their best wishes. We are grateful for all your care, and her husband Richard and the Free Nazanin campaign have sent their thanks for the solidarity. Nazanin's furlough was due to end on 20 May and we were relieved to hear that [her release has been extended](#), though we are not sure for how long. This 'conditional liberty' is far better than outright jail, but we're worried that the Iranian authorities are still playing games with Nazanin and her family.

Carry on writing!

*Bob Dewick, Amnesty*

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### Amnesty action: campaigns & letter-writing

#### Update on Egypt

Our Egypt campaign co-ordinator, Margaret Robertson, writes: *"Many thanks to all of you who have continued to use your 'enforced leisure' during lockdown to write on behalf of our Egyptian prisoners of conscience. Sadly, the pandemic continues to aggravate the already desperate situation of prisoners in Egypt and elsewhere. I know you will be very sorry to hear that the situation of our two prisoners, **Aser Mohamed** and **Patrick Zaki George** is causing great concern because of the serious deterioration in their physical and mental health.*

*In addition to urgent actions for Egyptian prisoners, we have received several appeals for action on behalf of an Algerian opposition politician, **Karim Tabbou**, facing a jail sentence after an unfair trial, and a Tunisian blogger, **Emna Chargui** who was charged with 'incitement to hatred or violence' because of a humorous blog and faces a 3 year jail sentence. Please take action in response to these appeals if you are able."*

#### Action: EGYPT: Aser Mohamed



**Aser Mohamed**, is a teenager with chronic respiratory problems, who was only 14 years old at the time of his arrest in 2016 so he has already been held in detention for over four years. Whilst in detention he alleges that was subjected to torture to extort a 'confession' on the basis of which he was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment. He is currently awaiting the outcome of an appeal. His trial in October 2019 fell far below internationally recognised standards of justice.

He is particularly vulnerable to the Covid 19 virus which is currently widespread in the overcrowded and insanitary conditions in the jail. Since March 2020 he has not been allowed visits from family nor the right to bi-monthly phone calls as specified by Egyptian law. His family have only been allowed to send him food and a

letter on two occasions and have not received any response from him causing them grave concern about his well being.

#### What you can do:

Please send appeals to **President al-Sisi** and **copies to the Egyptian ambassador** (H.E. Tarek Ahmed Ibrahim Adel, email: [egtamboff@gmail.com](mailto:egtamboff@gmail.com)) using the template attached either as a letter or an email using the addresses provided.

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi  
Office of the President  
Al Ittihadia Palace  
Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt  
email: [p.spokesman@op.gov.eg](mailto:p.spokesman@op.gov.eg)

Dear President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi

**Re : Aser Mohamed**

I am extremely concerned about the case of Aser Mohamed, a teenager with chronic respiratory problems, who is currently held in Wadi al-Natrum prison. He was only 14 years old at the time of his arrest in 2016 so he has already been held in detention for over four years. Whilst in detention he alleges that was subjected to torture to extort a 'confession' on the basis of which he was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment. He is currently awaiting the outcome of an appeal. His trial in October 2019 fell far below internationally recognised standards of justice.

In view of his poor mental and physical health, I regard him as particularly vulnerable to the Covid 19 virus which is currently widespread in the overcrowded and insanitary conditions in the jail. Since March 2020 he has not been allowed visits from family nor the right to bi-monthly phone calls as specified by Egyptian law. His family have only been allowed to send him food and a letter on two occasions and have not received any response from him causing them grave concern about his well being.

I appeal to you to use your power to extend a presidential pardon to this young man who has suffered so greatly and to recommend that the Court of Cassation orders his sentence to be quashed. Furthermore, I call upon you to order a thorough and immediate investigation into his enforced disappearance and allegations of torture and to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice. Pending his release, I ask that he be allowed to communicate freely with his family and lawyers. At this very dangerous time in the midst of the pandemic, I urge you to do all in your power to guarantee that all appropriate measures are in place to protect the health and well being of prisoners and to release all those who do not pose a threat to the Egyptian public.

Yours sincerely

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### Action: Egypt - human rights defender Patrick Zaki George



There are similar fears for the health of George Zaki Patrick, a human rights researcher arrested after his return from Italy. As an asthma sufferer, he is particularly vulnerable to Covid 19. He is also suffering from the effects of torture he suffered during detention. Like Aser Mohamed, he has been denied visits and the bi-monthly phone calls permitted by Egyptian law.

#### What you can do

Please send appeals for his immediate and unconditional release, using your own words or the template message below, to the Public Prosecutor Hamada al-Sawi at [m.office@ppo.gov.eg](mailto:m.office@ppo.gov.eg) and copies to the Egyptian Embassy in the UK (H.E. Tarek Ahmed Ibrahim Adel at [egtamboff@gmail.com](mailto:egtamboff@gmail.com)). If possible, please send before 22/06/2020.

Dear Counsellor,

I am writing, amid rising fears over the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in Egypt's overcrowded prisons, to appeal to you to release Patrick Zaki George, immediately and unconditionally. I believe him to be a prisoner of conscience who should never have been detained for his legitimate work as a human rights defender in the first place. His asthma puts him at a higher risk from the virus according to the World Health Organisation's list of vulnerable groups. There are well-documented concerns about the overcrowded, unhygienic and unsanitary detention conditions in Egyptian prisons which aggravate risks of the spread of COVID-19 infections.

Patrick's last family prison visit was on 9 March 2020. The following day, the Egyptian authorities suspended all prison visits as a measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19. However, the authorities failed to introduce regular alternative means of communication between detainees and their families and lawyers, including bi-monthly phone calls as prescribed by Egyptian law. Some, but not all, inmates have been able to send and receive letters.

On 7 February 2020, immigration officers at Cairo airport arbitrarily arrested human rights researcher Patrick Zaki George at 4:30 am upon his return from Italy where he had been doing an Erasmus study programme in Bologna. According to his lawyers, Egyptian National Security Agency (NSA) officers asked him about his human rights work during his time in Egypt and beat him on his stomach and back and tortured him with electric shocks on his upper body during interrogation. The following day, prosecutors in al-Mansoura ordered his detention for 15 days pending investigations on "terrorism"-related charges. Prosecutors said they were relying on Facebook posts as evidence but did not allow him or his lawyer to examine them.

I therefore ask you to release Patrick Zaki George immediately and unconditionally as his detention stems solely from his human rights work and political opinions he has expressed on social media. I also urge you to open an independent investigation into his torture allegations. I further call upon the Egyptian authorities to release all prisoners of conscience immediately and unconditionally. All detainees in Egypt must be guaranteed access to lawyers, family and adequate healthcare, especially if they are at high risk of COVID-19. Please respond to this humanitarian appeal with compassion at a time of such danger.

Yours sincerely

#### Want to do more?

If you have the opportunity, there are a number of Urgent Actions you can take in support of individual human rights defenders, here: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions>, including the following in the wider Middle East.

#### Urgent Action: TUNISIA: Emna Chargui - blogger prosecuted for humorous post

On 2 May 2020, 27-year-old Tunisian blogger Emna Chargui shared a Facebook post that she found on social media of a humorous text that imitates the verses of the Quran to make fun of the COVID-19 situation. The text was void of any incitement to hatred or violence. It was intended to be funny and it even included a call to stay at home and to wash hands. Emna now faces up to three years in prison for this post. On 6 May 2020, the Court of First

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Instance in Tunis charged her with inciting hatred between religions through hostile means or violence and "offending authorised religions" under articles 52 and 53 of the Tunisian Press Code. She has received death threats against her and her family. Her trial last week was adjourned until 2nd July.

Please take action here: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions/blogger-prosecuted-humorous-post> This action can be posted only.

### Urgent Action: ALGERIA: Karim Tabbou

Amnesty have issued an **URGENT ACTION** for the leader of the Algerian opposition party, **Karim Tabbou**. He is in poor health and is in prison following an unfair trial which found him guilty of "undermining the morale of the army". He now faces further charges of "*inciting to commit acts of violence with the intention of harming national defense*" and "*harming national unity*" by preparing and publishing videos on social media.

Since February 2019, millions of Algerian citizens marched in overwhelmingly peaceful protests known as the "Hirak" ("*movement*" in Arabic) calling for an end to decades of autocratic rule and the establishment of the rule of law and social justice. The Algerian authorities are now taking advantage of the COVID crisis to conduct a campaign of repression against activists and journalists involved in the Hirak.

Please take action here: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions/political-leader-imprisoned-speech-0> This action can be posted or emailed.

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