



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

June 2020

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

Facebook page: Manchester Amnesty International

Facebook group: Manchester Amnesty

Twitter: @amnestymanc

Online Group Meeting

6.30pm Monday 8th June

Our regular Group meeting will again online. It will feature Refugee Rights this month as Refugee Week is 15th - 22nd June. We will have Claire, from #CitiesMustAct, speak about her experiences in the Greek refugee camps and their campaign (see article under Refugee Rights) and Liz will fill us in on what's happening around Refugee Week.

We also plan a photo action on behalf of Ahmed Mansoor (see UAE below). Please prepare a small placard that you can hold up whilst online and we will make a recording of us all to use on Facebook.

We will have our usual business discussions as well – please let Hazel know if you want anything adding to the agenda.

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

Campaigning

Weekly Actions.

We are keeping going with the Weekly Actions, at least until we can start face to face events again. They will appear in your inbox Friday morning and we ask you to do them during the following week. This week we featured a couple of actions on the Occupied Palestinian Territories on social media. We are planning actions on the UAE and Refugee Rights in the coming weeks.

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!

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. Both are sentenced to 10 years in prison in the UAE for their human rights work. If you aren't familiar with the cases, you can find out more at

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/03/uae-ahmed-mansoor-unlawfully-detained-in-solitary-confinement-for-three-years-must-be-released/>

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde25/1374/2019/en/>

Photo Action

At our online Group Meeting in June, we will attempt a photo action calling for Ahmed's release. Please prepare a message that you can hold up whilst at the online meeting. Something along the lines of 'Free Ahmed Mansoor, or #FreeAhmed' would be fine. We will record the images and use them on social media.

New Coordinator

Lil has had to step back from coordinating our UAE work as she is on the hospital frontline. Kathryn Fletcher has stepped forward – thanks Kathryn! Kathryn has been working on this with Lil for a while. If anyone else feels like getting more involved in planning this aspect of our work, please drop Kathryn an email at: bussk@btinternet.com.

Letter Writing

We continue to send regular appeals to the UAE authorities. If you want to join the rota to write regular appeal letters drop Anne Walker an email and she'll send you details: anne.walker9@ntlworld.com.

We've had a few people drop out of the rota and it would be really good to get some new volunteers. PLEASE consider whether you can put your name on the list – we usually ask you to take action roughly 4 times a year and it can be anything from a quick tweet to detailed letters – whatever you have time to do. A mixture of approaches probably stands the best chance of ensuring our message gets through. **The more people we have letter writing / emailing / tweeting, the more effective we will be.**

Refugee Rights

As lockdown measures begin to ease across the UK, it's important to remember that not everyone wants things to go back to the way they were.

Lockdown, for some, has bought a reprieve and a sense of safety and security unknown before. For asylum seekers, many of whom have had two months free from the threat of deportation, have been released from detention centres and no longer have had to report to the Home Office, they are requesting that there is a rethink around the UK's immigration policy.

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/may/25/lockdown-gives-asylum-seekers-relieve-and-hope-for-change-in-policy>

However, this hasn't been the case for everyone. For some, lockdown has made already tense, challenging and life-threatening situations worse. 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.

Our governments have a responsibility to protect us - and the most vulnerable must come first. 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>

Last week we saw how coming together can make a real change. Hassan Akkad, a Syrian refugee, called out how migrant workers for the NHS were left out of the government's bereavement scheme and were facing another raise of the surcharge they have to pay in order to access healthcare. Through united voices, the government made u-turns on both decisions, expanding the scheme to include all NHS support staff and their families, as well as scrapping the surcharge for migrant staff.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

#CITIESMUSTACT

Last week the UK government drafted plans for Family Reunion following the Brexit transition period. Worryingly the plans would mean that the UK would not be obliged to ensure children are reunited with their families, as they currently are in the Dublin III agreement. The government's stance towards those seeking asylum is increasingly hostile. In order to tackle people smuggling networks, the government has announced strengthening of border control in the channel and the Aegean sea. However, the move away from the safe route of Family Reunion will only increase people's desperation to make dangerous journeys

and, as Safe Passage put it provide 'a blank cheque for people smugglers'.

As described in our May newsletter, #CitiesMustAct is a 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>.

This campaign does not have official Amnesty backing but covers issues that are close to many of our members' hearts.

A campaign has been started in Greater Manchester and they managed to get an article in the Bolton News last week see

<https://www.theboltonnews.co.uk/news/18480162.teachers-story-volunteering-refugees-bolton/>

You can find out more out more by joining their Facebook group

(<https://www.facebook.com/groups/235827920834529/>), and following them on twitter @GM_Must_Act Last

Individuals at risk

We held our regular bimonthly letter writing session on Saturday – as a virtual Facebook event. At least 6 joined in and more than 41 appeals were sent for the current Urgent Action and Real Lives cases. If you forgot to join in, you can still do the actions. Go to www.amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions.

We are still looking for someone to take on overseeing our involvement in Write for Rights in the run up to Christmas. This is a global campaign run annually to send messages of support to people suffering human rights abuse. If you feel that you could help, please email our secretary anne.walker9@ntlworld.com.

Crisis and Tactical

MYANMAR

Myanmar defies International Court of Justice ruling

In January 2020, the ICJ (International Court of Justice) ruled that Myanmar should take 'provisional measures' to prevent all acts that may amount to or contribute to genocide against the Rohingya minority. This ruling followed a case filed in Nov 2019 by the State of the Gambia against Myanmar for their atrocities against the Rohingya. The ruling of the ICJ was provisional, while the case is being adjudicated, and established the 23rd May 2020 as deadline for the implementation of such measures.

Regrettably, Myanmar has made no progress in this implementation. Nicholas Bequelin, Amnesty International's Southeast Asia Regional Director, said:

“They [Rohingya] are still denied their rights to nationality, freedom of movement and access to services - including healthcare. They are also caught in an escalating armed conflict between the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army.

The reality remains that no meaningful steps to end atrocities - including the crime of apartheid - have been taken.”

Amnesty International renews its call for the UN Security Council to urgently refer the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court.”

“They shot first and everyone started running from their houses”.

Rohingya refugee fleeing ethnic cleansing in Myanmar



PALESTINE Update

At May's meeting we had two speakers from Amnesty UK: Rebecca Nguyen van Thuy, Crisis and Tactical campaigns, and Peter Frankental, Economic Relations Programme Director, who gave us an update on Amnesty's work in Palestine.

Having visited Palestine a few months ago, Rebecca was able to witness first-hand the abuse of Palestinian's human rights by the hands of Israeli settlers in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), such as limited access to their land and to water.

Rebecca has stated that the Covid-19 pandemic has been under control so far in Palestine. However, given Palestinian's limited access to water, medication and resources, a spread of the virus could quickly lead to a humanitarian crisis. (On Friday 29th May 20, an update from the charity Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP) confirmed the first death for Coronavirus in Gaza.)

In May 20 the two contenders for the position of Prime Minister in Israel, Netanyahu and Gantz, reached an agreement, which includes the formal annexation to Israel of all Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank and the Jordan Valley from July 2020. The occupation of Palestinian land is unlawful, under international law, therefore a formal annexation would perpetrate this unlawful situation, which has very real and serious consequences for Palestinians. If you want to find out more, please read Rebecca's blog:

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/blogs/campaigns-blog/why-uk-needs-challenge-israels-plans-annex-west-bank>

Open campaigns:

Ban Israeli Settlement goods.

This campaign has the objective of banning all goods produced and all services provided by Israeli companies settled in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (services can include banking, real estate agents, utilities companies among others). This is because Israeli settlements are illegal; therefore no-one should be allowed to profit from an illegal situation. Through this campaign we will contact local authorities, asking them not to buy products or services from these companies and/or to divest from them. This campaign is being launched in Wales initially, with Scotland to follow and finally England at the end of 2020. **Watch this space!**



Tell TripAdvisor to check out.

TripAdvisor is one of the companies that is profiting by the illegal occupation of Palestinian land. They do this by advertising on their website amenities located in the OPT (hotels, restaurants, touristic activities).

The fact that the occupation of Palestinian territories is illegal is a widely known fact. Businesses cannot hide behind the principle of profit; they are subjected to international standards, such as the UN's Guiding Principles/ Business and Human Rights (2011). A lot of you have already signed this petition, but please share with friends and family:

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



TAKE ACTION!

SYRIA

Torture trials

The trials of Anwar Raslan and Eyad al-Gharib, two former intelligence officials in the Syrian regime charged with crimes against humanity, continue in Koblenz, Germany. Mansour Omari is covering the trial for AIUK blog, which you can read here: [amnesty.org.uk/blogs/kristyan-benedict](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/blogs/kristyan-benedict). Omari worked on documenting Raslan's crimes and was previously detained and tortured by the regime. His insight into the importance of this trial for victims and their families and his personal response to facing his torturer makes for a powerful read.

Action: Share Omari's blog posts with your networks to raise awareness of the campaign and the experiences of detainees in Syria.

Meanwhile, **Families for Freedom** have been peacefully protesting outside the trial for the release of all those detained by the regime, you can follow them on Twitter,



Meanwhile, **Families for Freedom** have been peacefully protesting outside the trial for the release of all those detained by the regime, you can follow them on Twitter,

@FamiliesSyria, and read about their urgent action to protect Syrian detainees <https://bit.ly/covid-19-protect>



Wafa Mustafa in Koblenz with photos of those detained, photo from [@TheSyriaCmpgn](https://twitter.com/TheSyriaCmpgn)

European Council sanctions against Syria regime extended

Despite attempts from Assad's regime, Russia and supporters to lift EU sanctions, the EU has extended restrictive measures against the regime for another year, a result of the continued repression of civilian populations by the regime and its supporters. These sanctions also target companies and business people benefitting from their ties with Syria's war economy. Restrictive measures include: a ban on oil imports, restrictions on investments, and export restrictions on equipment and technology that might be used for internal repression and monitoring of internet and phone communications. The EU states that it is 'committed to finding a lasting and credible political solution to the conflict in Syria'.

Group News

Group Meetings

We will be continuing with meeting on line for the next few months at least. So far, we have used Zoom reasonably successfully. However, Amnesty has concerns regarding its security and have advised us to try other more secure platforms such as Jitsi. If anyone has experience of online meetings and can give advice, please contact our chair Hazel – hazelerrey@gmail.com.

We tried Jitsi for a meeting of the group coordinators last week, with only partial success. However, we planned the topics for our forthcoming meetings:

- July – UAE with the UAE country coordinator invited
- August – LGBT issues to coincide with Manchester Pride (sadly cancelled this year1)
- September – Syria, speaker to be invited.

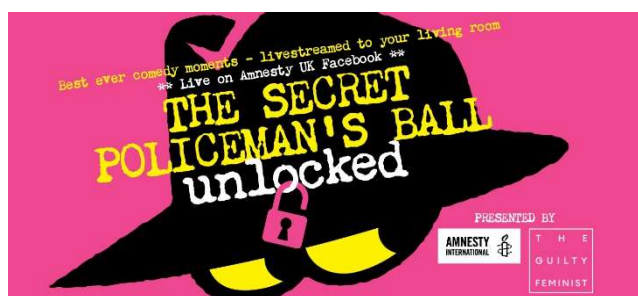
Subscriptions please!

Annual donations from members are vital to keep the Group going. The suggested sum is £20 if you have a wage, £5 otherwise, or whatever you can afford to give. Please contact Treasurer Sean Dunne and he will tell you how to get the money to him.

[\(Sean.a.dunne@btinternet.com\)](mailto:Sean.a.dunne@btinternet.com)

Thanks!

Other News



Join Amnesty UK from 1 - 5 June as they unlock our comedy vaults! They're joining forces once again with the brilliant Deborah Frances-White, from acclaimed podcast The Guilty Feminist, to bring you a series of livestreamed comedy events that celebrate iconic sketches from The Secret Policeman's comedy archives.

You can join much loved comedians, in their homes, as they revisit iconic sketches and answer your questions in a

live Q&A.

They'll also be streaming a full show from their archive featuring legends like Eddie Izzard, Dawn French, Harry Enfield, Meera Syal, U2 and Stereophonics. All three shows will be livestreamed on the Amnesty [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#) pages, with questions for the Q&A taken on Facebook. Find out more and sign up at https://www.amnesty.org.uk/secret-policemans-ball-unlocked?utm_campaign=MCFR790_LG_MM_June_1&utm_content=12926&utm_source=amnestyuk&utm_medium=email

Isle of Man

The Isle of Man Amnesty Group have been very active locally regarding the misuse of emergency powers at the beginning of lockdown and breaches of Human Rights on the Isle of Man.

See this article in the Guardian for more information:
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/27/isle-of-man-accused-authoritarian-lockdown-measures?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

Online courses

Do you 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