

Newsletter: July/August 2020

Bognor Regis, Chichester & District Group



Dates for your diary	Tuesday 10/12/2020 Human Rights Day
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Dear Amnesty members

Even if we now must wear face-coverings when we shop, the easing of lockdown does help us all. Now that the libraries have partly re-opened, those who like a good long read might borrow Timothy Garton Ash's book *Free Speech: Ten Principles for a connected world* to update our views on this key Amnesty idea.

Local events

None while we await further guidance from Amnesty. We have not ruled out an autumn PUMBLE, depending on the latest rules and the British weather. Thelma Percy's obituary is in the national Groups' Newsletter.

Other events

Our Group has sent £300 to UK Amnesty. If you would like more **fundraising** ideas, contact amnesty.org.uk/virtualfundraising. There is also an **online course** "Covid-19 and human rights" at academy.amnesty.org/learn.



Taner Kilic, the honorary Chair of Amnesty International Turkey, was convicted on 3 July of being a member of a terrorist organisation and sentenced to 6 years and 3 months in jail.

Idil Esler the former Director of Amnesty Turkey and two other members of the [Istanbul 10](#) were also given prison sentences for assisting.

This is an outrageous miscarriage of justice; it is also frightening to think of the signal that it sends to human rights defenders in Turkey. If even members of Amnesty International, with all of our strength as a global movement, aren't safe, then who is? Read [more about this on the Amnesty website](#).

Social distancing forced a change of approach for Refugee Week earlier this month, with a variety of inspiring activities and events taking place. Here is a link to the events run by [Amnesty for Refugee Week](#)

Good news update: we reported in our April Newsletter that after 12 long years in prison, Moroccan-Belgian citizen **Ali Arraas** had finally been released following his extradition on 14 December 2010, when Ali was forcibly returned to Morocco from Spain, where he had been caring for his aging father. At the time of his release, we reported that Ali couldn't leave Morocco because of travel restrictions and was not talking to the press. The good news is that Ali arrived in Paris on 15 July, before travelling on to Brussels. Thank you for helping write on his behalf.

Carry on writing!

Bob Dewick, Amnesty

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Amnesty action: campaigns & letter-writing

Action: EGYPT UPDATE

Our Egypt campaign co-ordinator Margaret writes:

A big thank you to all those loyal members who have continued to write and email on behalf of our Egyptian prisoners of conscience throughout lock down. We have recently received some significant updates about a couple of our long standing cases as well as further appeals for action. Thank you for your continued support!

Azza Soliman

As you know, we have been campaigning on behalf of Azza Soliman, women's rights lawyer and campaigner, since 2018 so I know that many of you will be interested to hear that, with Azza's consent, future action on her behalf will be part of the general campaign relating to Case 173 rather than her individual situation. Azza's Centre for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance was just one of 12 NGOs in Egypt charged with receiving funds from abroad 'to harm national interests' and Azza, along with 66 other NGO staff from various organisations, faces charges under Case 173 which could carry a 25 year prison sentence. In addition, travel bans and asset freezes have been imposed on Azza and other NGO staff. Azza is currently awaiting the outcome of her appeal against the travel ban and asset freeze. Details of further action will be included in future newsletters.

- **The main aim of AI's campaign on Case 173 is to call on the Egyptian authorities:** to end any measures that arbitrarily restrict the legitimate activities of non-governmental organisations, drop investigations into Egyptian Human Rights Defenders in Case 173 and lift travel ban and asset freezes on Azza Soliman and 30 other individuals and organisations.

Aser Mohamed

I have received an encouraging response from the Foreign Office in reply to a recent letter raising concerns about conditions in Egyptian jails during the Covid 19 crisis in general and the highlighting concerns about teenager Aser Mohamed in particular. We were assured that the FO were aware of the specific case and had also made specific recommendations for improvements in human rights during the UN 's Universal Periodic Review of Human Rights in Egypt in November 2019. It remains to be seen whether the Egyptian government will implement these recommendations, though 7,000 prisoners were released in May 2020.

Ramy Shaath, political activist

Ramy Shaath is a peaceful political activist who has been arbitrarily detained for over a year, and falsely accused of links to terrorism. Like so many other political prisoners, he has been denied regular visits and communication with his family and held in overcrowded and insanitary conditions since the outbreak of Covid 19.

Please use the template letter to write or email appealing for his release and the dropping of charges against him and send it to:

- Public Prosecutor, Hamada al-Sawi, Office of the Public Prosecutor, Madinat al-Rehab, Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt.
- Email m.office@ppo.gov.eg

Dear Counsellor,

Prisoner of conscience **Ramy Shaath** has been arbitrarily detained for a year, since 4 July 2019, pending investigations into the so-called "Hope Case" (Case 390/2019), which involves at least 105 individuals, including politicians and journalists.

In May 2020, the Egyptian authorities finally allowed Ramy's wife, Céline Lebrun Shaath, to speak to Ramy on the phone for 45 minutes for the first time since his arrest. Ramy, who is held in Tora Prison, told Céline that he is detained in a 25 square metre cell with 17 other detainees, amid the absence of adequate measures to prevent the spread of Covid -19 among the guards and detainees. Céline, who is based in France, also received assurances from the Egyptian authorities to grant her the possibility to return to Egypt for an in-person visit, once the "health situation allows" and air borders reopen.



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The Egyptian authorities suspended all prison visits on 10 March as a measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19, but failed to introduce alternative means of regular communication between detainees and their loved ones. Ramy's last visit by Egypt based relatives was on 4 March 2020. In June 2020, the Egyptian authorities finally allowed Ramy's relatives to send him food and clothes after refusing to admit packages. On 18 April 2020, a terrorism circuit in Cairo's Criminal Court decided to arbitrarily include Ramy on Egypt's "terrorist list" in his absence for a period of five years along with 12 other individuals including detained human rights lawyer and former parliamentarian Zyad el-Elaimy.

I therefore ask you to immediately and unconditionally release Ramy Shaath as he is a prisoner of conscience whose detention stems solely from the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression and his right to participate in public affairs. I also call on you to ensure that all charges against him are dropped and the decision to include him on the "terrorist" list is rescinded. Pending his release, I urge you to ensure that he and all others detained in Egypt have regular access to their families and lawyers.

Yours sincerely

Action: IRAN: Free human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh



Lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh has been sentenced to 38 years and 148 lashes for her work defending women's rights. Nasrin was given the harshest sentence possible after two grossly unfair trials, and is separated from her husband and two children - just for saying women should be able to wear what they want.

Now, in prisons across Iran, there have been confirmed cases of COVID-19. This raises grave fears that prisoners, like Nasrin, are at risk of contracting the virus. Prisoners are at particular risk because they are unable to take the same social distancing and hygiene measures as those outside of prison to protect themselves.

Women and girls in Iran are not allowed to leave their homes unless they cover their hair with a headscarf and cover up their arms and legs with loose clothing. A movement against the compulsory hijab erupted in Iran in 2017 when one woman staged a solo act of resistance. She removed her headscarf and silently waved it on the end of a stick. Countless women across the country joined her, staging their own protests. They become known as the "Girls of Revolution Street." Nasrin defended some of these women and is now paying the price.

This isn't the first time Nasrin has been targeted. In 2010 she was sentenced to six years in prison for her human rights work. But when thousands of people like you stood up to demand her freedom, she was pardoned and released. Our campaign worked then, it can work again for Nasrin now. Nasrin is not a criminal. She is a human rights defender.

What you can do:

Together we can free Nasrin. Join thousands calling on the Supreme Leader of Iran to release her immediately, via the online petition on the Amnesty website: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/free-nasrin-sotoudeh>

Want to do more?

[Urgent actions](#) are small actions that you can take that make a big difference. Plenty of these actions can be taken as email only, if you currently are unable to post actions, such as these two actions:

- **Belarus: stop the execution of two young brothers.** On 22 May, the Supreme Court of Belarus upheld the death sentences of young brothers Stanislau and Illia Kostseu, aged 19 and 21 respectively. They have appealed to President Lukashenka for clemency. The President has granted clemency only once since coming to power in 1994. If clemency is denied, Stanislau and Illia Kostseu will be executed imminently. Link to [email action](#).
- **Rohingya people stranded at sea.** As many as 400 Rohingya refugees are believed to be stranded at sea, with dozens of deaths having already been recorded. Fleeing violence in their home state, South and Southeast Asian governments are using COVID-19 pandemic-related restrictions to block them from landing safely and seeking asylum. The Indonesian Government, as co-chair to the 2016 Bali Process, has a responsibility to manage a regional response to this crisis and co-ordinate search and rescue operations to locate and assist boats in distress, in line with regional declarations and international law. Link to [email action](#).

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