



# News from the Minehead Group

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## Actions you can take this month:

- ✓ **Take urgent action** in support of **Melike Balkan** and **Özğur Gür**, who organised a peaceful sit in **Ankara** after the university banned their Pride march. The university called the police and Melike and Özğur were arrested along with 16 students and one academic. Their trial is on **10 December**, Human Rights Day. Send an urgent email to the Turkish authorities by following this link, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/write-for-rights> or you can follow the guidance in the 2020 Write for Rights (W4R) booklet, emailed last month.
 
- ✓ **Mark International Human Rights Day** on 10 December by writing letters at home on behalf of the 10 cases featured in this year's **W4R campaign**. You can download a PDF version of the WfR leaflet (sent with emailed versions of the November newsletter) or ask us to send you a leaflet. Sadly, we had to cancel the planned event at the Beach Hotel because of Covid Tier 2 restrictions.
- ✓ **Visit** the 2020 version of the **Minehead Christmas Tree Festival** from 12 to 19 December. There will be a **Festive Forest** of wooden trees outside the Avenue Methodist Church, including one dedicated to Amnesty. The message on the **Amnesty tree** will be *'In solidarity with the many people around the world who need our support in defending their basic human rights'*.
 

## Round up of November/December group news

As stated above, we felt we had no choice but to **cancel** the planned **W4R** event at the Beach Hotel on 10 December because of the latest Covid Tier 2 restrictions. However, staff at the Beach Hotel are keen to help, so hopefully we'll be able to organise a letter writing session there sometime in the spring.

AIUK continues to host **on-line speakers and panel discussions**.

Susan listened to a very interesting **talk** on 26 November by Donatella Rovera, AI's senior investigator on **crisis response**. This role takes Donatella to the world's most dangerous and desperate areas. From armed violence in Syria and Libya to the conflicts in Gaza and Sudan, as well as the crises in the Ivory Coast and Algeria, she has investigated and reported on many cases of serious human rights abuse. The bravery and determination of Donatella and her team is astounding and inspirational. If you are interested in other AIUK on-line talks, search the AIUK website to see what's coming up.

## Campaign News



### WRITE FOR RIGHTS (W4R) 2020:

members have been busy writing letters, and hopefully you've seen the photo and article in the WSFP on 4 December. But here is the photo again, in case you missed it! The campaign continues until the end of December so there is still plenty of time to write more letters. Alison attended a **webinar** on the campaign and here are her notes of the panel discussion.

**Kate Allen, Director of AIUK**, thanked all AI members for taking part in the W4R campaign. Last year 6.5 million letters were written worldwide,

## Diary Dates

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

**Tues 8 December**  
Talk on Human Rights and the Law

1930 on-line. Contact Cherry for the link.

**Thurs 10 December**  
Human Rights Day

Choose an individual action to mark this special day.

**12-19 December**  
Minehead Christmas Tree Festival

Look out for our Amnesty Tree!

**Thurs 14 January**  
Group meeting

1700 via Zoom (tbc). Contact Alison to receive meeting link.

and this had positive results. For example, Magai Matiop Ngong, on death row in South Sudan, had his death sentence quashed.

**Geraldine Chacón**, from Venezuela, whom some of us heard speak at the SW regional conference in March (see our March newsletter) spoke about her experience of being featured in the 2018 W4R campaign. Geraldine said that the campaign had changed everything for her. The thousands of letters that arrived showed that the world was watching and that she had not been forgotten. She believes she is living proof that W4R makes a difference.



**Sena Atici**, Individuals at Risk campaign coordinator, was asked how AI measures the impact of the campaign; she said it was through feedback from the individuals and their families and occasionally through feedback from governments. Sena explained that action is not always about letter writing. For example, this year, Gustavo Gatica, blinded by police at a protest, is going to be sent a music CD chosen by Amnesty members for his birthday. Selecting the ten cases is a long and complex process. All Sections of AI suggest cases, and then the International Secretariat researches access to the country and to the individual. They assess the possible impact of action, undertake a thorough risk assessment, get the consent of the individual (perhaps via family and friends), and select the final ten cases. It is very important to check that the individual is content to work with AI, that they share in the decision-making and that they agree the campaign materials.

**I WELCOME REFUGEES** [*Jenny Gateau*]: Despite these troubled times, all our refugee friends in Taunton have been keeping and coping well. An unknown person who read about the success of the summer holidays in Minehead, has donated the cost of a family holiday for next year. So on the strength of that, four weeks of self-catering has been booked at the Baptist Holiday apartments for summer 2021. There would normally have been a fund-raising event this autumn, so instead, donations can be sent to Jenny Gateau at 1 Middle Staunton Cottages, Minehead TA24 6EP (cheques payable to Kate Warren). Jenny is also donating the proceeds from her poetry book '*On the Sea of Life*' on sale from her at £5.

**INDIA** [*Cherry Bird*]: **BK11 now BK16**: Five more human rights defenders have been arrested, supposedly linked with the Bhima Koregaon incident, bringing the total number of arrests in the case to 16. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) claims to have found direct links between the detainees and the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist). But despite some of them having been in jail since 2018, their court trials have not yet started. There are no signs of progress with the promised investigation or solid evidence against them. All are HR activists, lawyers and/or academics with a long history of working to defend the rights of the poorest and most marginalised people in India. Meanwhile, over 1,000 Indian academics and members of the scientific community from across the world released a joint statement expressing concerns over the NIA's tactics: 'It appears to us that the NIA's claims of investigating the 'conspiracy' in the Bhima Koregaon case are actually a flimsy cover for cracking down on 'urban naxals' - who, in reality, are only dissident intellectuals - and keeping them in prison indefinitely'. Meanwhile, the **Amnesty India office** remains completely out of action, which makes it very difficult for Amnesty globally to achieve any progress in the investigation that should prove that Amnesty India has not broken any financial regulations. Meetings are continuing between Amnesty, governments and high commissions.

**NEPAL: World toilet day** was covered extensively in the Nepal media. Stigma and discrimination against sanitation workers is widespread across South Asia and has worsened during the pandemic. These workers belong to the lowest (Dalit) caste in the Hindu system and have no choice in inheriting this work. On World Toilet Day, AI, WaterAid and the International Dalit Solidarity Network called on the authorities in Nepal, India, Bangladesh and Pakistan to take immediate action to protect the sanitation workers who have been risking their lives as Covid-19 frontline workers. According to a joint statement, workers cleaning toilets and streets, emptying latrine pits and maintaining sewers [face serious health and safety risks](#).



### ***How to contact the Minehead Amnesty International Local Group:***

**Website:** [www.amnesty.org.uk/minehead](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/minehead)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/amnestyminehead](https://www.facebook.com/amnestyminehead)

**Email:** [amnestyminehead@gmail.com](mailto:amnestyminehead@gmail.com)

**Chair & group contact:** Alison Dietz: Tel. 01984 641603 Email: [aledietz7474@gmail.com](mailto:aledietz7474@gmail.com)

**Treasurer:** Cherry Bird Tel. 01984 641052 Email: [cherryebird@gmail.com](mailto:cherryebird@gmail.com)

**Meeting notes, newsletter & website:** Susan Mew Tel. 01643 821209 Email: [brightmanmew@btinternet.com](mailto:brightmanmew@btinternet.com)



**We wish everyone a Happy Christmas and Good Health in 2021!**

