



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

January 2021

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

Facebook page: Manchester Amnesty International

Facebook group: Manchester Amnesty

Twitter: @amnestymanc

January Online Group Meeting

6.30 pm Monday 11th January

We will be focussing on Amnesty's work on Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. We will be joined by 2 or 3 local Jewish people who are involved in organisations that are critical of the occupation and support justice for Palestinians, including Jews for Justice for Palestinians and Manchester Jewish Action for Palestine.

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

N.B. Our regular group meetings will be at 6.30pm online on the second Monday of the month until further notice.

Campaigning

2020 has been a very peculiar year for everyone. For many people it has been incredibly challenging. However, throughout this turbulent year Amnesty members and supporters have not stopped campaigning for human rights.

For example, thousands of us in the UK, petitioned the government to provide more protection and support for care home residents and their families during the pandemic. Together, in 2020, we also achieved great results for individuals at risk. For example, our actions contributed to the release of wrongly imprisoned human rights defenders, like Tran Thi Nga, Wang Quanzhang and Narges Mohammadi. Unfortunately this did not include Ahmed Mansoor and Mohammed al-Roken, human rights defenders in prison in the UAE and for whom our group has specifically been working.

We will have many more challenges to face and many actions to take in 2021. In the meantime, enjoy a video celebrating Amnesty's successes in 2020.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fif4Bz_fVr0&feature=youtu.be&ab_channel=AmnestyInternationalUK



Write for Rights

This year's Write for Rights campaign is coming to an end. We hope that you all took part and sent greetings cards with messages of solidarity and appeals to the authorities on behalf of the ten cases.

It was good to see some of you at our December group meeting discussing the cases, showing us the cards that you were preparing to send and taking part in photo solidarity actions for some of the cases.

The action for Nassima al-Sada, in prison in Saudi Arabia, involving posing with an animal or plant was particularly memorable – see the picture.. Thanks to all who took part, especially to those who introduced a WfRs case.



We contacted many other local organisations asking them to take part. Several responded, including Manchester Quakers, Manchester City of Sanctuary, the LGBT Foundation and Manchester Extinction Rebellion.

Jo also gave a talk to the Diocese of Manchester Mother's Union.

It would be good to get a rough idea of the total number that our group generated for this year's WfRs.

Please let Anne Walker (anne.walker9@ntlworld.com) know how many solidarity messages and appeals you were able to send.

The Whalley Range Peace and Justice group ran a Write for Rights event (somewhat curtailed compared to their usual extravaganza) and, combined with excellent community outreach, managed to get over 1000 messages sent.

A huge well done to them!

Campaign for the release of Dr Mohamed al-Roken and Ahmed Mansoor, imprisoned in the UAE.

We have received no recent news of either of the prisoners of conscience that we work for. They remain in prison in the UAE for defending human rights in their country.

The UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs recently declared the intention to launch the UAE National Human Rights Plan that will “strengthen the legislative system and promote civil and human rights”. Yet many human rights defenders continue to languish in UAE jails including 14 who have completed their sentences but remain in prison.

Twitter Storm for Ahmed

We will, once again, join other organisations and Amnesty groups in a Twitter Storm **on Wednesday 20th January**, calling for the release of Ahmed Mansoor. The UAE is sensitive to its social media profile and it's thought that Twitter is an excellent platform to get our message through.

Please write as many tweets as you can, on that day. We'll send out a reminder with more information with suggested Tweets in the Weekly action on the previous Friday.

Refugee Rights

Deportation

At the beginning of December, we heard the distressing news that the UK was bringing in new rules that would mean that homeless and rough sleeping non-British citizens could be deported.

Kate Allen said: *“It is shockingly cruel and inhumane to threaten someone with deportation simply because they have been driven into rough sleeping. People who sleep rough are often already extremely vulnerable, in many cases having been forced onto the streets because of violence or exploitation – and sometimes because of injustice and error in Home Office decision-making.*

It is especially appalling that this heartless policy is being introduced during a pandemic when life for those without a proper place to live is already incredibly difficult.”

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/uk-new-immigration-rules-targeting-rough-sleepers-cruel-and-inhumane>

Football Welcomes

In preparation for April's Football Welcomes event, we're looking for schools and community groups that are interested in learning more about how to welcome those seeking sanctuary in the UK, especially football clubs and teams. Whilst we're at the preliminary planning stages, something that keeps being hampered by the changes in Covid restrictions, we're currently gauging interest while we

work with AIUK to see how we can mark the occasion and what events we might be able to host.

For some background info take a look here:

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/football-welcomes-2020>

If you know anyone who might like to get involved please let me know on lizhibberd@yahoo.co.uk

In recent news, we heard the positive report that Refugee status has been granted because of a person's non-binary status for the first time in a UK court, following a landmark ruling. The judgment, in the upper tribunal, was decided in the case of Arthur Britney Joestar from El Salvador after concluding that they would face persecution for their identity if they returned to their home country.

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/30/i-felt-like-i-was-born-again-first-non-binary-person-granted-uk-refugee-status?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Other&fbclid=IwAR1Vx36B8N0z8GK-Xdf6D3AKNTh43fs6_7qKH0XeDA_IP2Wsk8PdCY83G8U

Manchester City of Sanctuary

Our friends at Manchester City of Sanctuary are hosting their first virtual 'Big Conversation' via zoom. More details to follow, but keep an eye out on our social media platforms for the zoom link and activities.

Save the Date: 14th January, 6-8pm

Crisis and Tactical

Occupied Palestinian Territories

Airbnb's flotation on the New York stock market

The online travel giant Airbnb Inc has made its debut on the Nasdaq stock exchange in New York with great fanfare, its share price rocketing from \$68 to more than \$150 within hours.



Though a minuscule 200 listings from its vast portfolio of more than five million properties, Airbnb's refusal to discontinue listings for accommodation located on land that is internationally recognised as belonging to dispossessed Palestinians rather than Israeli settlers, is a major ethical failing. Investors should pause and seriously consider what this entails.

Airbnb's [registration statement](#) with the US Securities and Exchange Commission ahead of the IPO makes no mention of its operations in the Israeli settlements or the fact that the company appears in the UN database. This information is missing from the "risk factor" section of the

documents, which informs shareholders of a company's legal, reputational and other risks.

Read Director of AIUK, Kate Allen's blog post here:

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/blogs/campaigns-blog/how-should-investors-view-airbnbs-recent-flotation-new-york-stock-market>

And Amnesty's press release here:

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/airbnb-share-listing-company-deeply-compromised-israeli-settlement-properties>

Jews for Justice for Palestinians

In January's group meeting we will hear from representatives from Jews for Justice for Palestinians - have a look at their website to find out more about their campaigns:

<https://jffjp.com/>

SYRIA

Why Did Austria Protect an Assad Regime Torture Chief?

Syrian human rights activists want states to hold Austria to account for violating the Torture Convention

Read Mansour Omari's post about the 'strange and troubling protection' of Lieutenant General Khaled Halabi. 'Syrians who are fighting against impunity and paving the way for a comprehensive justice process for Syrians are angry and disappointed with Austria countering their efforts. We want action from states to hold Austria accountable, including by challenging its compliance with the UN Convention Against Torture, by reporting its actions to the [UN Committee against Torture](#) and questioning them in UN periodic reviews. Austria has a lot of questions to answer and we won't stop asking them until we get satisfactory answers.'

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/blogs/campaigns-blog/why-did-austria-protect-assad-regime-torture-chief>



YEMEN

Journalist on death row denied medical treatment

Recently journalists all over the world have seen their human rights grossly abused, simply for reporting facts.



Tawfiq al-Mansouri was imprisoned in 2015 together with other journalists by the de facto Huthi authorities. During these five years, all the journalists remained in detention without trial and have been subjected to forced disappearance, intermittent incommunicado

detention and solitary confinement, and deprived of access to medical care. In 2020, following a grossly unfair trial, Tawfiq al-Mansouri was sentenced to death on trumped-up charges including “spying for Saudi Arabia.”

Tawfiq al-Mansouri suffers from diabetes and heart disease and due to the terrible detention conditions, he has suffered from additional chronic illness, including kidney

failure, prostate inflammation and asthma. Recently Amnesty received information that he contracted COVID-19 in June, and that since October, his health condition has further deteriorated as he is being denied crucial treatment for his heart problems.

Lynn Maalouf, Amnesty International’s Deputy Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, said: “He (Tawfiq al-Mansouri) should never have been imprisoned in the first place, let alone sentenced to death. Pending his overdue release, al-Mansouri must immediately be granted access to the medical care he so desperately needs by doctors of his choosing. We further call on the Huthi de facto authorities to immediately quash the death sentences issued to the four journalists after an unfair trial, to drop all pending unfounded charges and to release them without delay.”

TAKE ACTION!! Please, join Amnesty in calling for the unconditional and immediate release of the four journalists on death row and invites you to take action [here](https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE3121392020ENGLISH.pdf):
<https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE3121392020ENGLISH.pdf> .

Group News

Group Meetings

Our group meetings will continue online for the next few months at least.

We have recently reverted to using Zoom for our online group meetings, following accessibility & user problems with Skype. Zoom is a platform that people seem to be most familiar and comfortable with.

However, we must be aware that Amnesty UK continues to have some concerns about Zoom, particularly regarding security. Apart from occasional 'gatecrashing' of meetings, Zoom is not encrypted and there are close links to the Chinese military from their development team. As an Amnesty group, we were concerned that we may be putting other HRDs at risk but in fact the risk is mainly to ourselves, e.g. it is possible that if one of us was planning a holiday to China next year, we might not be let in. Although Amnesty UK cannot say with any certitude that this would happen and the risk is relatively low, they rightly feel that it's important to make us aware of the possibility of this type of privacy violation.

Amnesty UK have given very clear advice that we should not use Zoom if we are planning to discuss China in any

way and probably other countries that have strong ties with the Chinese Communist Party such as Mongolia or North Korea. We will follow this advice and therefore will not be discussing these countries in any meetings on Zoom.

Subscriptions please!

It's the time of year when we ask all our supporters for an annual donation to the group.

These are essential to cover routine expenditure such as postage and room hire (although the latter will be much reduced but hopefully not ruled out entirely this year), and we have paid for a non-time-limited Zoom licence.

Payment will have to be by bank transfer or cheque this year, so please contact our Treasurer, Sean Dunne, sean.a.dunne@btinternet.com, for our bank details or address if you don't already have them. The suggested sum is £20 if you have a wage, £5 otherwise, or whatever you can afford to give.

Other News

Policing and Racial Equality.

Mary Gibbs, one of our members, has a friend who is an experienced worker in health and social care in Greater Manchester, and who has become aware of the effects of racial profiling by the police. She has made repeated requests for information on what measures Greater Manchester Police are planning to take to address racial disparities in policing, but has received no reply.

Mary's friend is very concerned that GMP have not responded to the Black Lives Matter protests by taking specific actions to tackle racism within the police force, unlike the Metropolitan Force, and is asking as many people as possible to contact their MPs to ask them to put pressure on Greater Manchester Police to provide this information.

We are aware that AIUK have been looking at the issue of racial bias and equality and have contacted them to ask for any information that they might have and any planned actions. We are yet to receive a reply. We are hoping to discuss this issue at our February group meeting and have invited a speaker from Rainbow Noir (a Black LGBTI group) to join us.

In the meantime, please contact Mary Gibbs, gibbs.mary@gmail.com, if you would like to take part in this action by writing to your MP. She is happy to provide a draft letter that can be used as a basis for your letter.

Online talk on Reproductive Rights

Chiara Capraro, the Director of Amnesty International UK's Women's Human Rights Programme, will be giving an online talk entitled 'What's happening to reproductive rights?' on **Wednesday January 13th at 7.30pm**.

This event is free, and anyone is welcome to attend. You do not need to be an Amnesty member. It is organised by Hammersmith and Fulham Amnesty International Group.

To attend, please email secretaryhammersmithamnesty@outlook.com by the end of Jan 11th and she will send you the video conferencing link.

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