




# News from the Minehead Group



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

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

## Actions you can take this month:

- ✓ **Sign the on-line petition** calling on the Iranian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release **Nasrin Sotoudeh**, and overturn the extremely harsh sentence against her. Nasrin is an Iranian HR lawyer who has been sentenced to 38 years in prison and 148 lashes for protesting against Iran's discriminatory and degrading forced veiling laws. Nasrin was defending women's right to wear what they want. Find the action on AIUK's home page or follow this link: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/free-nasrin-sotoudeh>
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- ✓ **Take action** for the release of human rights researcher **Idris Khattak** (featured in the 2020 Write for Rights campaign). Idris was investigating cases of people who disappeared in Pakistan, and was himself disappeared in November 2019. Following intensive campaigning by his daughter and AI, the Pakistan authorities admitted they had him in custody, though they won't say where. Here's the link <https://www.amnesty.org/en/get-involved/take-action/w4r-2020-pakistan-idris-khattak/>
  - ✓ **Support your local group** by coming along to our **Minehead Group AGM** on Thursday 11 February at 1730. We need eight people to be quorate! Contact Alison Dietz at [aledietz7474@gmail.com](mailto:aledietz7474@gmail.com) if you'd like to receive the Zoom link. If you're not able to Zoom do send us in advance any feedback or ideas for the future.
  - ✓ **Make a date** to join us on Thursday 11 March at 1900 for a **talk** by Ben Grant of the Taunton Group on the **UK Overseas Operations Bill**. The Bill seeks to restrict prosecutions against British soldiers for offences committed overseas by introducing a '*statutory presumption against prosecution*' after five years to apply to all military personnel, including for torture and war crimes. It will also introduce a six-year time limit for civil claims against the MoD. Kate Allen, Director of AIUK, says: '*This Bill will do irreparable damage to the reputation of the armed forces of this country, undermines basic principles of access to justice and sends a bad message internationally.*' If you would like to join us on Zoom, please email Cherry on [cherrybird@gmail.com](mailto:cherrybird@gmail.com) in order to receive the link.

## Round up of December/January group news

At our **January group meeting**, held via Zoom, we shared updates on current campaigns and heard about the **on-line talks** that several of us have listened to over the last two months. These have included 'Human Rights and the Law' (see separate notes), Digital Campaigning, the Uygur people in China and Guantánamo Bay (see report overleaf). The **digital campaigning** training session emphasised the importance of including the use of social media when planning a campaign. It was said that Instagram is now the social media of choice for 18 to 25 year-olds, so we are grateful to Hannah and Cherry for working on setting up an account for us!

The talk on the **Uygur** people was hosted by the Banbury Group. Nabila Ahmed, who has recently taken on the voluntary role of AIUK's country coordinator for China and Taiwan, described the historical and geographical context of the current situation in Xinjiang Province. She spoke about the cultural genocide that is being perpetrated by the Chinese authorities to deliberately destroy Uygur language, religion and cultural identity, through mass internment of over one



million Uygur people, mass rape, torture and constant surveillance. The Province is in the remote north west of China but is of strategic importance. The Chinese Government is using the 'Global War on Terror' as an excuse for its actions, saying that China's security is threatened by terrorism in the Province.

## Diary Dates

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

### Thurs 11 February

#### Group AGM

1730 via Zoom.

Contact Alison to receive meeting link.

### Mon 8 March

#### International Women's

Day: let's all find an action to take as we won't be able to have our usual street stall.

### Thurs 11 March

#### Group Meeting at 1930

via Zoom. Talk on the UK Overseas Operation Bill. Contact Cherry for the link.

**Guantánamo Bay** [Alison Dietz]: this talk was hosted via Zoom by Lewes Amnesty Group, and was attended by 78 Amnesty members. It was part of the group's continuing campaign to get the prison at Guantánamo Bay in Cuba closed. Their speaker was **Mohamedou Ould Salahi**, a Mauritanian, who was detained without charge in Guantánamo Bay from 2002 until his release in 2016. While there, he was interrogated and tortured. Three years into his detention, when the interrogators threatened to harm his mother, he agreed to confess to anything. Prior to his arrival at Guantánamo, he thinks he was kidnapped by the CIA because of a number of unfortunate coincidences. The CIA transported him to a Jordanian prison through its 'extraordinary rendition programme'. He was held there for eight months, during which he was tortured by the Jordanians. After being flown to Afghanistan and held for two weeks, he was transferred to military custody and then to Guantánamo Bay on 4 August 2002. He was subjected to sleep deprivation, isolation, temperature extremes, beatings and sexual humiliation at Guantánamo. In one documented incident, he was blindfolded and taken out to sea in a boat for a mock execution. In a Military Commission in 2003, the officer in charge refused to prosecute Mohamedou. He said that the defendant's 'incriminating statements - the core of the Government's case - had been taken through torture, rendering them inadmissible under U.S. and international law.' Mohamedou wrote a memoir in 2005 while imprisoned, which the U.S. government declassified in 2012 with numerous redactions. The book, called 'Guantánamo Diary', was not published until 2015. It became a bestseller. In his talk to Amnesty members, Mohamedou came across as a thoughtful and peace-loving individual who showed no signs of bitterness at the inhumane treatment he had suffered and the loss of 14 years of his life.



## Campaign News

**WRITE FOR RIGHTS (W4R) 2020:** members and friends achieved the great result of 110 letters and cards being written, plus a few on-line actions. So a big thank you to all of them and to Peter Atherton for putting stamps on all the letters and posting them for us. We still have some booklets left so if anyone would like to have a last minute go at writing more before the end of January, please let Susan know.

**I WELCOME REFUGEES** [Jenny Gateau]: We sent Christmas cards to all the refugee families and got some lovely messages back, including emails, a bunch of virtual roses, cards and even two paintings from Aheen's degree course at Bath University which she started in September! We have received some kind 'Christmas presents' of donations, with the result that we have now managed to book holidays at the Baptist Holiday Apartments for five more families this year, hopefully starting with one at the May half term. Lockdown is particularly hard for our families, given their culture of sharing meals and visits all the time. We are also distressed by the fact that RAFT cannot be operating just now, with no onward dispatches of aid possible yet, just when it is most needed.

## SOUTH ASIA [Cherry Bird]:

**India:** The Amnesty India office remains closed, but the High Court has approved release of some funds for immediate expenses, giving grounds for cautious optimism, though the amount (£60,000) is not enough for activities to resume. Advocacy efforts are continuing.

**Kashmir:** Remains very tense, with full communications still not restored. Turnout for local elections in December was poor.

**Afghanistan:** The situation is very sensitive. While efforts to progress peace talks between the government and Taliban continue, there are frequent reports of the Taliban targeting and killing officials and people associated with the government, particularly women. Take action in support of women:

[https://www.amnesty.org/en/get-involved/take-action/women-must-be-at-the-heart-of-peace-talks-in-afghanistan/?fbclid=IwAR3B8SGGcPb0z6tJP\\_pSjvSyLncsDpfJWMeQTW1AlwLLsQIH7Mr2IvTbzCU](https://www.amnesty.org/en/get-involved/take-action/women-must-be-at-the-heart-of-peace-talks-in-afghanistan/?fbclid=IwAR3B8SGGcPb0z6tJP_pSjvSyLncsDpfJWMeQTW1AlwLLsQIH7Mr2IvTbzCU)

**Bangladesh:** Take action to stop relocation of Rohingya refugees to the remote inhospitable island of Bhashan Char: [https://www.amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions/rohingya-refugees-detained-remote-island?fbclid=IwAR3uSV1s30o-ovvicCaNow-uLeLGXtKAEWhu4B-sU9sMqeyn4\\_7IngPgjIQ](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions/rohingya-refugees-detained-remote-island?fbclid=IwAR3uSV1s30o-ovvicCaNow-uLeLGXtKAEWhu4B-sU9sMqeyn4_7IngPgjIQ)

## 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)

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