

Minutes of Amnesty International Reading Group Meeting, 14th January 2020

Acting Chair: Peter Howe

This meeting was held via Webex.

1. Welcome and introductions

Fourteen people joined the meeting: Amanda, Anne, Durga, Helen, Hilary, Iona, Liz, Mel (new), Michael, Peter, Ruth, Simon, Sue & Vin (new)

2. Cuba Update – Sue Bingham, AIUK Country Co-ordinator

Sue provided a review of the situation in Cuba during 2020. The main concerns remain around freedom of expression and state sponsored control. Two major reports – from Freedom House and Freedom on the Net – have scored Cuba 20 or less out of 100. Mobiles phones can be confiscated simply for posting something on social media that the government does not like.

One of Cuba's major exports is its doctors. 1,500 have been sent abroad during the COVID-19 pandemic so far, in addition to those already overseas. However, these individuals are under strict restrictions and most of their pay goes to the government. The doctors can be disciplined for fraternising with anyone who seems critical of Cuba.

The San Isidro Movement was created in 2018 in protest over artistic restrictions defined under Degree 349. Approval is needed for all performances and their content.

Amnesty has limited resources to do research in Cuba. In fact, Amnesty officials are not allowed into the country. When Sue started as country co-ordinator there were 75 PoCs; now there are only 4. An additional 138 prisoners have been identified, but Amnesty is currently only able to investigate 7 of these, due to limited capacity & capability.

20% of Cuban citizens live in the USA. They generally support the opposition and provide income and smuggled goods. \$20m pa is received into Cuba through USAid. The older generation supported Trump because they thought that the restrictions imposed by him would lead to an uprising. There has been a catastrophic reduction in tourism as a result of Trump's policies and COVID-19 resulting in the worst financial crash since the fall of the Soviet Union.

3. Photo actions

#NoToDecree349 (Cuba related action – see above)
#WhereIsIdrisKhattak (South Asia Action (see below))

4. Campaign Updates

Death Penalty – Two urgent actions had been included in the group mailing:

- One relating to the federal executions that are scheduled before the end of the Trump administration the USA. Neither of the two cases stand up to scrutiny.
- One for Ahmadreza Djalal an Iranian-Swedish academic in Iran. His execution was originally scheduled for November but did not take place. Amnesty believes the execution may take place at any time.

South Asia - Idris Khattak is a Pakistani HR worker. He was one of the cases in the WfR campaign. He was abducted by the authorities and there is a petition and action to have him released.

The group newsletter also highlighted an action calling on the Afghan government to ensure that the peace process protects women's rights and promotes women's involvement. Much progress has been made in women's rights in Afghanistan but there are still 2.2million girls that don't go to school.

5. AI Central England Regions Festival of Social Justice

Some thoughts were shared about our proposed HR Train and poetry activities. Two small groups would be set up to take these forward. It is possible that Football Welcomes may take place during the festival period, which would provide an opportunity for a third 'event'.

6. AoB

Our income and outgoings for 2020 were virtually zero. During lockdown, other groups have been doing some fundraising on-line. It was agreed that Reading Group should also do an online 'street collection' for the non-charitable section (ie through the group, and for activism work). Members would email Peter if they were interested in taking part.

Next meeting: Thursday 11th January 2021 – Impact of the Movement & Community Activism