



News from the Minehead Group

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Actions you can take this month:

- ✓ **Send the attached letter** to the Indian High Commission, as soon as possible, calling on the **Indian Government** to stop the crackdown on civil society, immediately release from detention all peaceful human rights defenders and unfreeze the bank accounts of Amnesty India.
- ✓ **Take action and sign the on-line petition** to support Amnesty India and help it continue with its human rights work. You can find the petition here: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/get-involved/take-action/protect-our-human-rights-work-in-india/>
- ✓ **Join the regional talk on human rights in the UK** via Zoom on Wednesday 17 February at 1900. Contact Cherry for the link at cherrybird@gmail.com
- ✓ **Make a diary 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**. If you would like to join us on Zoom, please email Cherry in order to receive the link.

Round up of January/February group news

We held our group's **AGM** on 11 February via Zoom. Alison presented her annual **chair's report** on the group's activities and thanked everyone for their various contributions during an unusual year. Despite the restrictions, we have still kept active as a group – meeting via Zoom, listening to on-line talks, signing petitions and writing letters. If anyone would like to read Alison's report, please contact her or Susan.



Cherry gave her **treasurer's report** on the accounts, and we were pleased to hear that we had managed to send £500 to AIUK, despite the lack of opportunities for fund-raising since March and the cancellation of some planned events. This amount came mostly from our successful quiz held just before the first lockdown, and donations received during the year.

Our officers were re-elected for another year, with Alison as Chair, Cherry as Treasurer, and Susan as meeting notes secretary. We agreed not to have a named vice-chair but to rotate the role around the group as needed.

Plans for 2021: of course it is difficult to plan anything definite yet. But we hope we will be able to meet up in person at some point and resume our usual activities such as street stalls and letter writing afternoons. We also need to come up with some innovative ideas for **fund-raising**. So do send us your ideas please!

Campaign News

WRITE FOR RIGHTS (W4R) 2020: our final total of cards and letters written was 118. So well done everyone and thank you!



INDIA [Cherry Bird]: There is plenty to think about in India at the moment. With the Amnesty India office still closed, AI is calling on the Indian government to:

- stop the crackdown on civil society and immediately release all human rights defenders who were arrested for their dissenting voices; and
- immediately unfreeze the bank accounts of Amnesty India and let the organisation continue its human rights work.

See our 'Actions you can take this month' above for details of what you can do to help.



Diary Dates

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

Wed 17 Feb at 1900: Human Rights in the UK: regional talk.

Mon 8 March International Women's Day: we hope to send around an action we can all take, as we won't be able to have our usual street stall.

Thurs 11 March Group Meeting at 1900 via Zoom. Talk on the UK Overseas Operation Bill. Contact Cherry for the link.

Thurs 8 April Group meeting 1700 via Zoom. Contact Alison to receive meeting link.

Meanwhile, protests by huge numbers of farmers continue. They made a big splash on India's Republic Day (26 January) storming through police barricades to enter Delhi's historic Red Fort complex. On foot and on tractors, they created havoc, with police using tear gas and government suspending mobile phone services in an effort to control the situation. Farmers have been gathering in tens of thousands on the outskirts of Delhi since early November, demanding repeal of recently introduced agricultural 'reforms'. These are another example of a high-handed government introducing measures without consulting the people likely to be most affected. Farmers' incomes will be significantly affected



by proposed changes but they have been given no voice in the matter. This is despite the fact that agriculture remains a mainstay of the Indian economy, with more than half of Indians working on farms. The food they produce is essential to feed an enormous population.

Having been rather cool, relations seem to be warming between the Indian and UK governments. PM Boris Johnson was invited to the India Republic Day celebrations, though was unable to attend because of Covid restrictions. In response, Johnson has invited PM Narendra Modi to attend the G7 summit in UK in June. Why? Well of course there is the potential for lucrative trade agreements. Could this be a window for Amnesty to advocate for improvements to human rights in India? Or is that over-optimistic ...

NEPAL [*Cherry Bird*]: In a surreal move to address the problem of women trafficking, the Nepal government has proposed that all women under the age of 40 be obliged to obtain the permission of their families before travelling overseas!! Needless to say, this has provoked a massive backlash, bringing women of all ages out onto the street. Amnesty Nepal has condemned the idea as an affront to the dignity of women. Sadly, this reflects an entrenched mind set amongst the traditional ruling class about the status of women, despite improved opportunities and increased freedoms in recent years.

ISRAEL AND THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES: Having given a first vaccination to more than a quarter of its population, Israel has been hailed as the country that has to date achieved the widest vaccination coverage in proportion to its population size. But Israel's vaccination campaign has so far ignored the 5 million Palestinians living under its control in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Meanwhile, Israeli settlers living in illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank, sometimes just a few metres away from deprived Palestinian villages, have already received the vaccine. Amnesty is calling for the Israeli government to stop ignoring its international obligations as an occupying power and immediately ensure that COVID-19 vaccines are equally and fairly provided to Palestinians living under its occupation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

BRAVE campaign: on 10 February, AIUK launched *On the Human Rights Frontline – how the UK government can defend the defenders* – a report which makes the case for a UK government strategy to improve support and protection for defenders. It draws on interviews carried out by AIUK in 2020, with 82 human rights defenders (HRDs) across seven countries, and on the experience of 12 other UK and international organisations. The report outlines the risks and threats HRDs are facing, but also what the defenders themselves would like the UK to do. We have written to our MP about the report and asked him to raise the issues with the UK Government. For the full report and country briefings, visit: www.amnesty.org.uk/onthehumanrightsfrontline.

News from AIUK

AIUK is reducing the scope of the work it's expecting to deliver this year because of the impact of Covid restrictions, reduced staff capacity and financial pressures. Its revised **organisational priorities** are: 1. Human rights campaigns 2. Becoming an anti-racist organisation 3. Preparing for a new Strategic Period 4. The Amnesty movement in the UK 5. Fundraising and financial resilience.

How to contact the Minehead Amnesty International Local Group:

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