



## MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

**April 2021**

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

Facebook page: Manchester Amnesty International

Facebook group: Manchester Amnesty

Twitter: @amnestymanc

### April Online Group Meeting

6.30 pm Monday 12<sup>th</sup> April

#### Talk from Rainbow Noir

Tolu Ajayi from community action group Rainbow Noir, a volunteer led social, peer support group which celebrates and platforms people of colour who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans\*, Queer and/or Intersex (LGBTQI).

+ Catch up on our Campaigning Activities

**We will send out an agenda and link beforehand. 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.

### Covid-19: Are we really all in this together?

Manchester Oxfam Campaigns Group, Global Justice Manchester and Manchester Amnesty International are hosting two evenings on global access to Covid19 vaccines.

#### Any Questions: Wednesday 14 April, 6:00-7:00pm – webinar

An expert panel including Dr Rory Horner from the Global Development Institute, and Anna Marriott, Public Services Policy Manager for Oxfam, discuss the practicalities and pitfalls of a fair and equitable distribution of vaccines.

#### Any Answers: Wednesday 21 April, 6:00-7:00pm – open forum

The profit motive may be a powerful force for innovation but will greed and capitalism get the vaccine to every corner of the world? You have your say.

More details and to register: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/covid-19-are-we-really-all-in-this-together-tickets-146720002477>.

## COVID 19: Are we really all in this together?

6-7PM, 14 APRIL 2021

Speakers discuss the practicalities and pitfalls of a global solution to a global pandemic.

#PeoplesVaccine



[tinyurl.com/peoplesvaccine](https://tinyurl.com/peoplesvaccine)



# Campaigning

## Football Welcomes

**Football Welcomes** is an initiative which celebrates the contribution players with a refugee background make to the game, and the positive role football can play in bringing people together and creating more welcoming communities. Every April, football clubs across the UK come together to celebrate the contribution players from a refugee background make to the game. Read more about it <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/football-welcomes-refugees>.



**To celebrate and take part in Football Welcomes, we are working in conjunction with the National Football Museum and refugee organisations within the North West.**

You are invited to record a short audio clip of 1-2 mins approx. or share a photo with short write up that addresses the questions below. The National Football Museum will use the stills to create a digital exhibition on the museum's platform which will soon go live.

- What does football mean to you?
- How does football bring people together?
- Share a football memory that means something to you

Liz has created the attached examples to give you an idea of what is needed. Even if you aren't into football, you are bound to know someone who is. Please get them to take part.

**\*Send clips and stills to [lizhibberd@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:lizhibberd@yahoo.co.uk)**

### Event

We will be part of a panel discussion to close the month of Football Welcomes that includes ambassadors and/or players that will discuss the same questions as above. See our social media for more!

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

### Ahmed Mansoor and Mohammed al-Roken

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the activities around the 4<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ahmed Mansoor arrest on 20<sup>th</sup> March. While we have no news of any change in his situation, there has been some media exposure of his situation. Senator Dick Durban made a speech in the senate calling on the UAE Authorities to release several prisoners of conscience, including Ahmed Mansoor.

<http://www.icfuae.org.uk/news/us-senator-calls-release-political-prisoners-languishing-uae-jails>

### Writing to MPs

We will be asking members to write to their MPs soon regarding Ahmed Mansoor and Mohammed al-Roken to urge the Minister for the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to raise them with the UAE

Authorities. More details as soon as we have further guidance from AIUK.

### Letter Writing Rota

We take turns to write regular letters/emails/tweets to the UAE authorities on behalf of Ahmed Mansoor and Mohammed al-Roken. If you'd like to take part email [bussk@btinternet.com](mailto:bussk@btinternet.com) and Kathryn will let you know when it's your turn and will provide background information and writing guidance.

## Europe

### Turkey & Poland: Istanbul Convention Withdrawal

We participated in the Twitter / Facebook / Instagram storm on Saturday 27 March to support women in Turkey protesting against the withdrawal of the country from the 'Istanbul Convention' – the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (so called **Istanbul Convention**).

The Polish parliament voted on Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> March to send a bill called "Yes to Family, No to Gender" to parliamentary committees for examination; the text of which proposes a withdrawal from the Istanbul Treaty. The 2011 treaty, signed by 45 countries and the European Union, requires governments to adopt legislation prosecuting domestic violence and other forms of abuse against women.

### Turkey & Europe: 5th Anniversary of EU-Turkey Deal

The 18th March brought the 5th Anniversary of the shameful EU-Turkey deal, designed to stop Refugees asking for asylum in Europe, leaving thousands of vulnerable women and unaccompanied children in inhumane, overcrowded, unhealthy and dangerous conditions. The 'containment policy' has left asylum seekers remain trapped in camps on the Greek islands in the Aegean while they wait for a decision on their asylum claims. This has caused severe overcrowding and inhumane living conditions on the islands, with 846 people going missing in their attempt to reach relative safety since 2016.

**Please read the statement and open letter issued by Amnesty EU and signed by several NGO's including Oxfam and Caritas Europa:**

<https://www.amnesty.eu/news/five-years-after-the-eu-turkey-statement-european-civil-society-demands-an-end-to-containment-and-deterrence-at-the-eu-external-borders/>

### Erdogan Unveils "Human Rights Action Plan" & Does Not Free Osman Kavala and Selahattin Demirtaş

Turkish President Erdogan Recep Tayyip Erdogan revealed on 2<sup>nd</sup> March a new human rights "action plan" to strengthen the rule of law and judicial independence. It commits to the presumption of innocence and a shorter judicial process & pre-trial detention. This new "action plan" is to lay the groundwork for a 'new constitution' that Erdogan has promised by 2023.

Human Rights groups are sceptical that Erdogan's action plan is veiling continuing human rights abuses in the country (such as **the detention of Osman Kavala and Selahattin Demirtaş**). Amnesty Europe Director Nils Muižnieks has called for the pair to be released immediately in line with binding Court decisions and called for European countries to join the demand.

A further announcement from Turkish prosecutors is the call for **two-year jail term for Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu**, a leading opposition CHP party member, for insulting a former regional governor in 2019. Prosecutors are also investigating the pro-Kurdish opposition HDP party, in a bid to impact election results in 2023. An assessment of the "Action Plan" is available through IFEX (International Freedom of Expression Exchange) document: <https://ifex.org/makeup-on-a-bedridden->

[patient-rights-experts-assess-turkeys-new-human-rights-action-plan/](#)

## Crisis and Tactical

### PALESTINE

#### Update on current campaign -Local Authorities

Amnesty is asking local groups to contact local authorities and invite them to ensure that their procurement policy excludes those tenderers which are located in or have connections with the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The occupation of Palestinian land by Israel is unlawful under international standards and subjects Palestinians to human rights abuses, as documented by Amnesty. Dealing with suppliers who have direct or indirect links with the Occupied Territories perpetrate this unlawful condition and contributes to its normalisation.

As a group, since January 2021, we have contacted the following authorities:

- Manchester City Council;
- Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA);
- Stockport Council;
- Salford Council;
- Rochdale Council

So far, GMCA has responded that their policy excludes any potential supplier who might be involved in human rights abuses. We will try and obtain more information. Also, a councillor from Salford has expressed his support for the cause and said he would verify with the Head of the Council.

We will chase the other authorities and keep the communication going. We will keep you updated.



### TAKE ACTION!

If you are a resident in an area which has not be listed above, please get in touch with Simona ([smattanza8@gmail.com](mailto:smattanza8@gmail.com)) and she will provide you with a sample letter/email to send to your local council.

**The more councils we contact, the better!**

### SYRIA

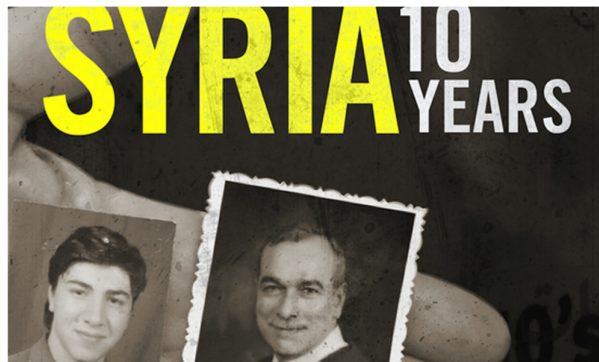
#### 10th Anniversary of the Syrian conflict

The 15<sup>th</sup> March 2021 marked the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Syrian uprising. These 10 years have been characterised by destruction, unimaginable suffering for the Syrian

people and by the lack of accountability for government officials and members of the army, who committed war crimes and crimes against humanity. These include “unlawful ground and air attacks, widespread and systematic arbitrary detention, torture leading to deaths in detention, enforced disappearance, sieges leading to starvation, and forced displacement”.

In 10 years, the UN Security Council has not managed to approve a resolution to stop these atrocities, mainly due to Russia and China, which have vetoed such resolutions at least 15 times.

Lynn Maalouf, Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa at Amnesty International stated: “For far too long, states have shamelessly put political allegiances and interests before the lives of millions of children, women and men—effectively enabling the horror story in Syria to continue with no end in sight”. “Russia and China have repeatedly abused their veto powers to [restrict the provision of life-saving cross-border humanitarian aid](#), to [stop a referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court](#), and to block resolutions that would impose arms embargoes or targeted sanctions against individuals on all sides responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity.”



#### Glimmers of hope for justice

- In 2016, following successive failures at the UN Security Council, the UN General Assembly established an international mechanism to investigate and prosecute some of the most serious crimes under international law committed in Syria since March 2011.
- In February 2021 a Syrian government official was convicted of crimes against humanity in Germany. Eyad al-Gharib, a Syrian security officer, was sentenced to four-and-a-half years in prison for his role in aiding and abetting the torture of detained protesters in Damascus.
- There are more investigations ongoing, and there will be more trials. It is expected that there will be more guilty verdicts with much stiffer sentences than that received by al-Gharib - including in the case of Anwar Raslan later this year.
- On 4 March 2021, Canada requested formal negotiations under the UN Convention Against

Torture to hold Syria accountable for human rights violations. The Netherlands made a similar request in 2020.

- One of the regime’s greatest threats - Syria’s human rights community - is now far more robust than it was in 2011. Compared to the eve of the revolution, Syria’s human rights community is now more organised, more connected, and more equipped.
- Syria’s human rights community is not just petitioning and protesting against atrocities; they’re also hunting down torturers and war criminals, and finally, starting to secure guilty verdicts.

Amnesty invite all countries to follow Germany’s example by investigating and prosecuting individuals suspected of committing crimes under international law through their national courts under the principle of ‘universal jurisdiction’.



#### Online talk

The distinguished journalist Jonathan Steele, former Chief Foreign Correspondent with The Guardian, will be giving an online talk entitled “News or Propaganda: lessons from a decade of war in Syria” on **Wednesday April 14th at 8pm**. This event is organised by Hammersmith and Fulham Amnesty International Group, is free and anyone is welcome to attend. To attend, please email their secretary for the link: [secretaryhammersmithamnesty@outlook.com](mailto:secretaryhammersmithamnesty@outlook.com)

#### MYANMAR

##### Amnesty calls on arms embargo on Myanmar and involvement of the ICC

On 27th March 2021, following reports that at least 91 people, including a five-year-old boy, were killed by Myanmar security forces to stop protests, Ming Yu Hah, Amnesty International’s Deputy Regional Director for Campaigns, said:

“This is just the latest example of the military authorities’ determination to kill their way out of nationwide resistance to the coup. These abhorrent killings again show the generals’ brazen disregard for the inadequate pressure applied so far by the international community. The cost of international inaction is being counted in bodies, including children shot dead in their homes.”

“UN Security Council member states’ continued refusal to meaningfully act against this never-ending horror is contemptible.”

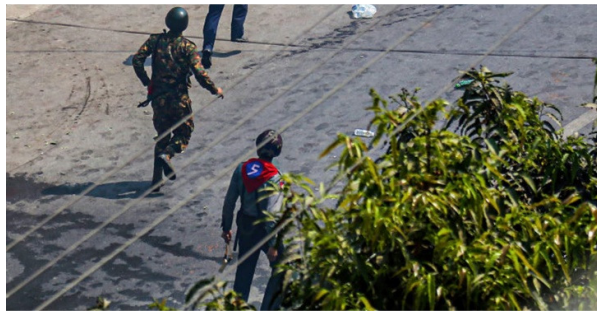
Amnesty is calling on the UN Security Council to impose a comprehensive global arms embargo on Myanmar and



refer the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court.

The Security Council must also impose targeted financial sanctions against Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing (Myanmar's military chief now in charge of the country) and other military leaders responsible for atrocity crimes against various ethnic minorities across the country, including the Rohingya.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/03/myanmar-five-year-old-killed-among-hundred/>



## YEMEN

### States must cease the use of explosive weapons in civilian areas

In recent years, Amnesty International investigators have spent months on the ground in conflict zones, including Yemen, where they witnessed first-hand the impact on civilians of explosive weapons with wide-area effects. Thanks to their work, Amnesty has documented evidence of militaries using explosive weapons that were inappropriate for the military objective – for example they had too large a payload or were too inaccurate. Such attacks have killed and injured very large numbers of civilians, destroyed key civilian infrastructure, and forced hundreds of thousands to flee.

Warfare in the 21<sup>st</sup> century increasingly takes place in urban areas, causing unspeakable suffering for civilians trapped under relentless bombardment from ground and air-launched explosive weapons.

Donatella Rovera, Amnesty's Senior Crisis Response Adviser, stated: "In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is no excuse to use explosive weapons haphazardly near civilians. Militaries often have much more accurate and precise munitions at their disposal but use cheaper options instead. This may cut costs for the fighting forces but fundamentally it's civilians who pay the ultimate price, with their lives".

At the beginning of March many states held a virtual consultation on the topic, hosted by the Irish government. Amnesty International and other NGOs joined in the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW) in calling for the strongest possible agreement to come out of these consultations.

Donatella Rovera, said: "The international community must not normalize the devastation we've seen in war-ravaged cities in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Gaza and elsewhere." "It is high time for states to commit to stop using explosive weapons designed decades ago for open battlefields – such as artillery, rockets and heavy, air-delivered bombs – in populated civilian areas,"

This video shows the destruction caused by explosive weapons.

<https://youtu.be/hnvhdqFit2Y>



## Group News

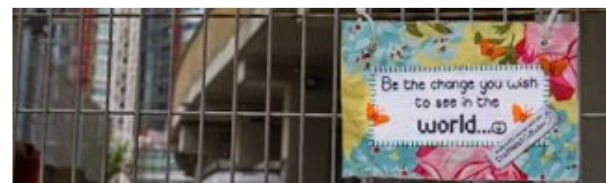
### Craftivism subgroup

Sewing, printing, knitting, papier-mâché, let's get creative!



We would like to set up a subgroup to explore using craft in our campaigns, maybe making banners, or small items to gifts to enhance our impact. All ideas welcome. For inspiration watch 'Craftivism: Making a Difference' on BBC i-player.

We will discuss it at the next meeting. Let Kathryn know if you want to be involved: [kathrynbuss@gmail.com](mailto:kathrynbuss@gmail.com)



### Group AGM

We held our Annual General Meeting during our March meeting. Please see the attached minutes. There were no major changes to the group officers and general admin roles although Alison Wearden volunteered to help Anne

Walker produce the newsletter and Rebecca Shaw agreed to coordinate our approaches to MPs.

Pascal stood down from keeping an eye on our Facebook account – so a **new volunteer is needed**. If you could spend a few minutes every month to post items of interest to our Facebook Page and Group and generally keep an eye on them, please get in touch with [anne.walker9@ntlworld.com](mailto:anne.walker9@ntlworld.com).

We accepted the accounts (Thanks Sean!) and agreed the Data Protection Policy circulated last month. We also reviewed our areas of campaigning for the coming year and agreed the following:

Campaigns	Comments	Lead
Crisis and tactical	Main emphasis on Israel/Palestine with watching brief on Syria, Myanmar and Yemen.	Simona Mattanza/Rebecca Shaw
Refugee Rights	Main focus Football Welcomes and Refugee Week	Liz Hibberd/Rebecca Barnes
UAE (IaR)	To continue our PoC case work	Kathryn Fletcher
World Region - Europe (i.e. Turkey+)	To continue reacting to Actions on this region from CCs group	Fatih Segman/Cia Risbridger
Human Rights in the UK	To expect action on Human Rights Act	Anne Walker
Women's rights	Watching brief only	Mary Gibbs

Thanks to Pascal and Catherine (who is stepping back from helping Simona with Crisis and Tactical) for their past contributions and thanks also to those who have stepped up and taken on new roles – Alison, Cia, Rebecca Shaw and Rebecca Barnes. Thanks to you all!

If you would like to get involved in a subgroup to support a particular area of work, email [Anne.walker9@ntlworld.com](mailto:Anne.walker9@ntlworld.com) and she will put you in touch with the relevant group lead.

## Subscriptions please!

Our treasurer is still open to receiving your 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 Zoom Pro 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](mailto: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. If it helps, Sean can provide details for setting up a standing order – that way it won't slip your mind in the future.

## Other News

### Background to the COVID 19 meeting



Here is the text that Oxfam have provided in support of the COVID 19 meeting:

If you ask any politician anywhere in the world you will get the same answer: a global pandemic requires a global solution. Yet a throw-away remark by Boris Johnson to the 1922 Committee of backbench Conservative MP's painted a very different picture. "The reason we have the vaccine success is because of capitalism, because of greed my friends."

He might be right. The profit motive is a powerful thing. But it is a safe bet that capitalism and greed will not get the vaccine to the poorest countries of the world.

When Dr Jonas Salk was asked who owns the patent for the polio vaccine he famously replied, "Well, the people, I would say. There is no patent. Could you patent the sun?"

Not taking out a patent cost Dr Salk an estimated \$7billion but polio has been all but eradicated from the face of the earth.

India, South Africa and many poorer nations have called on the WTO (world trade organisation) to suspend TRIPS (trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights) for the production of Covid-19 vaccines. They argue that by sharing the science, Covid-19 vaccines could be produced cheaply and effectively right across the world.

But is it really as simple as that?

Without the profit motive, would the big pharmaceutical companies invest £100's millions developing vaccines with no guarantee of success?

But then again, the Covid-19 vaccines were developed thanks to massive investment in research, production and distribution by governments around the world. If the taxpayer made the investment, who owns the patent?

The UK Government alongside other members of the G7 group of developed nations are blocking the TRIPS waiver. Instead they are major contributors to the international COVAX programme providing hundreds of millions of doses to less developed countries.

Meanwhile China's Sinovac and Russia's Sputnik V vaccines being offered as political bargaining chips while "Big Pharma" calculates the price per dose with poorer countries paying the most.

Perhaps the biggest risk to the pharmaceutical industry is that a truly global response to Covid-19 would work. If they shared the science now would they have to do the same later; for malaria, influenza, cholera, tuberculosis

and Aids... heart disease, stroke, cancer, Alzheimer's... and where would they be then?

**Register for the webinar on 14<sup>th</sup> April to hear experts discuss the issues :** <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/covid-19-are-we-really-all-in-this-together-tickets-146720002477>

## Festival of Social Justice



Join the Central Region Amnesty Groups as they host a Festival of Social Justice. Taking place between April 16 and May 31, the festival sees 40 local Amnesty International groups creating an exciting online programme of speakers, music, poetry evenings, photography exhibitions, theatre and panel discussions. Plus there's the chance for local activists to 'stand' on a virtual soapbox and share what social justice means to you.

All events for the Festival of Social Justice are free but advance booking is recommended. Find a full programme and booking information <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/groups/central-england/festival-social-justice-event-programme>

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](mailto:manchestergroup@amnesty.org.uk)