



Actions you can take this month:

- ✓ **Sign the petition** calling on the UK government to secure the release of British-Iranian **Anoosheh Ashoori** and bring him home. Anoosheh Ashoori is a retired British-Iranian who has been arbitrarily imprisoned in Iran for almost four years. His family are worried for his health and want him back home with them in London. Go to the home page of the AIUK website to sign the petition – www.amnesty.org.uk
- ✓ **Send a letter by post or email to the President of Venezuela.** On 10 February, five staff members from **Azul Positivo**, a medical and humanitarian NGO in Zulia (Western Venezuela), were conditionally released from detention. Johan León Reyes, Yordy Bermúdez, Layners Gutiérrez Díaz, Alejandro Gómez Di Maggio and Luis Ferrabuz remain charged with financial crimes and ‘association to commit crimes’ and must report themselves to court every 30 days. AI considers them to be **prisoners of conscience** as their prosecution appears to be solely based on the humanitarian work they do for Azul Positivo. [Sample letter attached to emailed and delivered newsletters.]
- ✓ **Come along to our picnic** in Blenheim Gardens on 29 May at 3 pm to celebrate **AI’s 60th birthday**. Join us to meet up with Amnesty friends that we haven’t seen face-to-face for a long time and enjoy a slice of Alison’s special fruit cake! Bring your own drinks and anything else you’d like to eat.



News from our group

At our **April group meeting** via Zoom, we considered ideas for fund-raising and other events later in the year, if/when Covid restrictions are eased. Plans are in hand to reschedule the Hummingbirds Concert, which had to be postponed from last autumn. We hope to have an AmnesTea – somewhere, sometime (probably August) and we may even have a small stall at the Roadwater Fete (24 July) if there are people available to help.

Alison and Cherry recently listened to an inspiring on-line presentation on the **Schools Human Rights Conference 2021**. *Alison writes:* Peter Radford, Founder of Beyond This (www.beyondthis.co.uk), is an Amnesty school speaker and former head teacher who works to promote understanding of human rights within schools and organisations. He spoke of his vision to supplement the ‘academic machine’, that our education system has become, to help young people better prepare for life in terms of responsible citizenship and political awareness. One of the ways he has promoted this is through the UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools award, for which he is an assessor.

In 2019 Peter organised a ‘Stand Up’ conference for secondary schools on human rights, with the aim of engaging young people and empowering them to use their voice in constructive ways. He wants to break away from the polarisation created by social media ‘echo chambers’ and enable debate and understanding based on listening. He is organising another on 21 September this year, which will focus on racism and equality. [*Alison has written to our local college about this, but has had no response as yet.*]



Amnesty member and letter writer *extraordinaire*, **Philippa Gerry**, is currently ‘scooting’ around Blenheim Gardens 100 times, raising money for Children in Need. If you’d like to support Philippa, here is the link: www.justgiving.com/fundraising/pipin-in-the-park



Diary Dates

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

Thursday 13 May

Group meeting

1700 via Zoom. Talk on Kashmir. Contact Alison to receive the meeting link.

Saturday 29 May

60th birthday picnic

Meet in Blenheim Gardens, Minehead, at 1500. All welcome!

Thursday 10 June

Group meeting

Time/venue tbc (in case we can meet indoors!)

14-20 June

Refugee Week

Events to be confirmed.

Saturday 19 June

AIUK AGM

The meeting will be on-line again this year.

Saturday 16 October

Fundraising concert at

1500 with The Hummingbirds. Other details to be confirmed.



News from the West Somerset Refugee Support Group

Jenny Gateau writes: we are now actively organising for five Syrian family holidays in the Baptist Holiday Apartments on Minehead sea-front, as we did last year. The first one will hopefully be in half term, 29 May to 5 June. Four more holidays will take place between 23 July and 19 August. I am looking for help with meet and greet, accompanying to shops, inviting out for tea, sharing a beach picnic, going paddling etc – all five times! If you can help, please ring me on 01643 708 471. Thank you!

Campaign News

India and Nepal *Cherry writes:* **Amnesty India Office Shutdown** - The office remains closed and Amnesty is continuing to work globally for release of their assets, with no progress to date. At the European Parliament, Rajat Khosla, Senior Director for Research, Advocacy and Policy at AI, expressed grave concerns about the increasing clampdown by Indian authorities on human rights, with civil society under more pressure and human rights defenders facing harassment, intimidation, arrest and detention under 'anti-terror' and foreign funding laws. Students, activists, journalists, lawyers and peaceful protestors critical of the government are targeted. Meanwhile impunity is granted to the police and army. Concerns have been expressed by a number of NGOs, including Amnesty, about the invitation extended to India to join the **G7 gathering** in June as a member of the 'democratic 10' invitees. This is particularly relevant as one of the priority themes of the meeting is open societies!

Modern slavery in India: Currently, debt slavery or bonded labour is the most common method of enslavement globally, with more than 8 million people bonded to labour illegally. The practice is prevalent in south Asia, even though most countries in the region are party to the UN convention on the abolition of slavery. Bonded labour produces goods ranging from frozen shrimp to bricks, diamonds and clothing. Estimates range from 20-40 million workers, mainly children, working through debt bondage in India alone, with some 40,000 working as brick kiln workers. The International Labour Organisation estimates that more than \$51 billion is made annually in the exploitation of workers through debt bondage.



Information Technology Bill Threatens Freedom of Expression

In a country that, not so long ago, was envied across the region for its openness to different opinions and criticism of authorities, it is sad to see that **Nepal's** proposed IT Bill will empower the government to censor online/ social media content, punishing offenders with up to five years in prison and fines equivalent to around \$13,000. It has provoked widespread criticism from civil society, which is calling for amendments to bring it into line with international standards and ensure it is not used to criminalise peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression.

Changes at the top of Amnesty International

At the end of March, a new **Director General of AI** was appointed – **Dr Agnes Callamard**, a French national, who has had a distinguished career in the international human rights and humanitarian sectors, working across NGOs, academia, and the United Nations. Recently she was the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions. Dr Callamard worked with AI from 1995-2001, including as Chef de Cabinet for then-Secretary General Pierre Sané. She has led human rights investigations in more than 30 countries and published extensively on human rights, women's rights, freedom of expression, refugee movements, and the methodology of human rights investigations.



Kate Allen, Director of AIUK, has recently announced her retirement in September, after 21 years leading the UK Section. We have sent her a card (a picture of Minehead by local artist Leo Davey) from the group, thanking her for all her work for Amnesty over the years.

How to contact the Minehead Amnesty International Local Group:

Website: www.amnesty.org.uk/minehead

Facebook: www.facebook.com/amnestyminehead

Email: amnestyminehead@gmail.com

Instagram: [@amnestyminehead](https://www.instagram.com/amnestyminehead)

Chair & group contact: Alison Dietz: Tel. 01984 641603 Email: aledietz7474@gmail.com

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