



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

7th February 2022

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

Facebook page: Manchester Amnesty International

Facebook group: Manchester Amnesty

Twitter: @amnestymanc

February Online Group Meeting

7.00 pm Monday 14th February

Focus on human rights in the United Arab Emirates

This session will be led by Kathryn Fletcher, UAE Manchester co-ordinator, who will provide a brief overview of Human Rights concerns in the United Arab Emirates, and the history of the link between the UAE and the city of Manchester. She will also talk about our recent and current campaigning work and plans for the future.

+ Catch up on our Campaigning Activities

Everyone is welcome to attend this meeting including new members.

If you have ideas & experience to contribute that is great but we welcome everyone, whatever your knowledge or experience.

We will send out an agenda and link beforehand. Keep an eye out for it!

N.B. Our regular group meetings will be at 7.00pm online on the second Monday of the month until further notice. Don't forget that in March, we will have our Annual General Meeting. Details in "Group news".

COMING SOON AND DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

7th & 11th February, online. Refugee Week planning conferences

For anyone wanting to contribute to this year's Refugee Week (June 20-26). See "other news" section.

25th February 1pm and 7pm. Stories, poems and songs.

Freedom from Torture events to shine light on state sponsored torture. See "other news" section.

Saturday 26th February, 7.30pm, St Andrew's Church, Cheadle Hulme

Amaretti Chamber Orchestra concert in aid of Stockport Amnesty. See "other news" section for details.

Central Library Saturday March 26th 2-4pm. Amnesty letter writing

Letter writing drop-in session to support and campaign for individuals at risk. Details in "group news."

Human Rights in the UK

Nationality and Borders Bill

Thank you if you contacted your MP about the Nationality and Borders Bill, as requested in our December newsletter. This Bill is currently being scrutinised by the House of Lords. Amnesty believes that the Bill seeks to largely shut down the UK's asylum system and criminalise and punish refugees from around the world.

You can read more about Amnesty's concerns in the latest briefings:

Nationality and Citizenship concerns

https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/2021-12/NBB%20BriefingFINAL16Dec2021_0.pdf

Asylum related concerns

https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/2021-12/Joint%20MV%20AIUK%20NBB%20Lords%20R_0.pdf

We understand that there will be a further online action in the next week or two and we'll feature that in the weekly action email.

Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill

The House of Lords has voted out some of the restrictions on protest in the Policing Bill – the government lost every single vote. This is a huge victory so thank you to all of you who have already taken action on this issue.

Amnesty is concerned that a few of the amendments (especially ones banning noisy or annoying protests) could still be put back when MPs debate the Bill in February.

We are asked to, once more, write to our MPs and urge them to speak up against the bill. You can do this very quickly using this link:

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/policing-bill-demand-action>

Thanks to those who attended the Kill the Bill protest in Manchester on 15th January – some coming straight from the refugee demonstration (see below).



Human Rights Act

In December, the government announced a consultation on the future of the Human Rights Act (HRA). Their proposals go far beyond the recommendations from their own panel of experts and Amnesty believes that they threaten to undermine human rights protections in the UK for everyone. This is a power grab by the government.

The proposals would dramatically weaken people's ability to hold the executive to account and defend themselves from rights violations by the state. They would place huge power in the Executive, at the head of a large parliamentary majority, and would put the less powerful or influential in society in a vulnerable position.



AIUK are busy preparing a defence of the HRA and we will hear more shortly.

However, the government is asking through their consultation what people think about these proposals and we will be encouraged to tell them! More details on how to do this will appear on the AIUK website from 14 February and we'll let you know through the Weekly Action email.

If you want an update on why we need to keep the HRA, read Tim Gee's blog at:

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/blogs/campaigns-blog/23-reasons-why-we-need-human-rights-act>

Human Rights UK Subgroup

This campaign is on-going. We expect to be asked to take more actions over the coming weeks.



We have a group of members who are specifically working on this campaign. If you want to get involved email anne.walker9@ntlworld.com

UAE Update

Members of the European Parliament have written an open letter to the Emirati government calling for indefinite detention to be stopped in the UAE.

As of April 2021, nine prisoners of conscience have continued to be detained in the UAE after serving their full sentences. Instead of being released as is their right in both international and UAE law, they are transferred to 'Munasaha centres'. These are 'counselling' centres and are based within the prison facility. They remain unable to leave or receive calls or visits from outside. It is thought that the Emirati authorities are using these centres as political tools to silence all forms of criticism.

Sportswashing

Listen to this very interesting interview by Jessica Sharkey for Mancunian Matters, in conversation with Kathryn Fletcher, Manchester Amnesty's UAE coordinator, and Harvey Simpson, a Newcastle United fan. In the interview, Kathryn talks about how sports sponsorship and other deals are used to improve the image of countries with appalling human

rights records, with particular reference to the UAE. The interview can be accessed on the Mancunian Matters website, here:

<https://www.mancunianmatters.co.uk/sport/04022022-listen-sportswashing-and-newcastle-united/>

Mohammed al-Roken will be coming to the end of his 10-year sentence in 2023. We are concerned that he will not be released but face ongoing detention.



Read more at:

<https://icfuae.org.uk/press-releases/open-letter-emirati-government-members-european-parliament-calling-indefinite>

Further feedback on December 'Write for Rights' event

We have received the final totals of letters and cards written at the December Write for Rights event in Whalley Range, organised by the Whalley Range Peace and Justice Group. As in previous years, we were invited to have an Amnesty stall at which we sold Christmas cards and other seasonal goods, and highlighted the plight of Uyghur children separated from their families with a letter that people could sign.

We would like to thank Whalley Range Peace and Justice for inviting us and congratulate them for putting on such a successful "in person" event. Far exceeding the rough calculation mentioned in the December newsletter, a total of 797 actions were taken in relation to the 10 cases in the Write for Rights booklet. Of these, 511 were letters, cards or messages of support to the individuals under threat, and there were 286 letters to authorities demanding action. Thanks to our members who supported this event.

Crisis and Tactical

Syria

In light of the successful Amnesty Manchester event on Syria last year, an update on the campaigns discussed and the situation in Syria:

The Amnesty International UK campaign 'Justice For Syria' continues (although we note that the website is not regularly updated), and more information can be found here:

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/issues/syria>

Relatedly, the first worldwide case of torture in Syria was held in Germany. In January 2022, the Koblenz Higher Regional Court convicted a senior Assad government official, Anwar Raslan, to a life sentence for crimes against humanity in Syria. He was linked to the torture of over 4,000 people in a jail known as "Hell on Earth". Raslan was found to have "verifiably overseen" the murder of at least 27 people and the torture of over 4,000 people. Also listed in Raslan's crimes against humanity are 25 cases of dangerous bodily harm, two cases of rape and sexual coercion, two cases of sexual abuse, 14 cases of deprivation of liberty lasting longer than a week, and two cases of kidnapping. (continued on next page)

Following the verdict, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa, Lynn Maalouf, called on states around the world to

"follow Germany's lead and initiate similar proceedings against individuals suspected of committing crimes under international law. With domestic criminal prosecutions in Syria inconceivable and no pathway for referring cases to the international criminal court, universal jurisdiction is the only way to achieve justice."

Content warning for all of the below: descriptions of torture and other crimes against humanity

Amnesty International press release:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/01/germany-syria-conviction-of-syrian-official-for-crimes-against-humanity-a-historic-win-for-justice/>

BBC coverage:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-59949924>

Guardian coverage:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/13/german-court-jails-former-syrian-intelligence-officer-anwar-raslan-for-life>

and

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/jan/13/jailing-former-syrian-secret-police-officer-anwar-raslan-germany-first-step-justice>

Coverage from the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights:

<https://www.ecchr.eu/en/case/first-criminal-trial-worldwide-on-torture-in-syria-before-a-german-court/>

Amnesty International country page on Syria:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/syria/>

Kristyan Benedict, one of the speakers at our recent Amnesty Manchester Syria event, has shared the reflections of Mansour Omari, a Syrian human rights defender, here:

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/blogs/campaigns-blog/reflections-syrian-torture-trial-koblenz>

Refugees



We had an excellent turnout of 27 people at our demonstration outside the Polish consulate in Manchester on 15th January. Thanks to all who supported this event. We were protesting against the suffering of men, women and children trapped outside in the freezing cold, without shelter, food or access to health care, in the forested and swampy area between Poland and Belarus. Many of these people have fled war and persecution in

Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen and Iraq, and include pregnant women, small children, elderly and injured people. In the absence of legal routes to flee, they have been enticed to enter Belarus in the hope of entering the EU, only to find themselves unwanted, trapped in a no-man's land, subject to brutal treatment and push-backs by the Belarussian and Polish forces alike. We demonstrated to demand immediate access to these vulnerable people by NGOs and humanitarian organisations, and the recognition of their right to apply for asylum.



Palestine



ISRAEL'S APARTHEID AGAINST PALESTINIANS

CRUEL SYSTEM OF DOMINATION AND
CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY



Amnesty have recently launched a major new campaign with the publication of a report entitled "Israel's Apartheid against Palestinians."

The decision to use the word "apartheid" came after intensive research and expert legal analysis. The new

report details how Israel enforces a system of apartheid against Palestinians wherever it has control over their rights. This includes Palestinians living in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, as well as Palestinian refugees currently in other countries.

You can find out more about the campaign and access the full report here:

https://www.amnesty.org.uk/resources/EndIsraelsApartheid?utm_campaign=MCFR1020S_Local%20groups_Jan&utm_content=89462&utm_source=amnestyuk&utm_medium=email

Tell Israel: Demolish Apartheid, Not Palestinian Homes

The first action in this campaign relates to the Palestinian experience of being denied a home. For over 73 years, Israel has forcibly displaced entire Palestinian communities and demolished hundreds of thousands of Palestinians' homes, causing terrible trauma and suffering. Today, *over 6 million Palestinians are refugees*. At least another 150,000 are at real risk of losing their homes.

Palestine (continued). Every week, the Israeli authorities forcibly evict Palestinians from their homes, demolishing their houses and seizing their land for Israeli settlers. These acts form part of a systematic and widespread attack against the Palestinian population.

We will be following this campaign and will bring you more news of future actions over the coming months.

Afghanistan

Amnesty has announced that it will be supporting an activist-led campaign on human rights in Afghanistan. At the moment, there are three strands to the campaign.

These are: 1) a focus on the rights of Afghan women, with a demonstration planned outside the Afghanistan embassy in London on 8th March – international women's day; 2) holding the government to its promise to resettle 20,000 Afghan refugees in the next 5 years via the Afghanistan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS), while also

You can take action by clicking on this link:

https://www.amnesty.org.uk/EndIsraelsApartheid?utm_campaign=MCFR1020S_Local%20groups_Jan&utm_content=89462&utm_source=amnestyuk&utm_medium=email

arguing that this scheme is nowhere near sufficient; and 3) a scheme to encourage local groups to sponsor refugee families.

Amnesty are also supporting calls for governments of the world to make a concerted effort to use their influence to require the Taliban to respect the rights of the women and girls. Click this link to sign a petition about this:

https://www.amnesty.org/en/petition/afghan-women-they-are-the-revolution-stand-with-them/?fbclid=IwAR34d-1ZiHLs99M3bbhn_y9WoamntVSvDAuVGh13xE5twrSwqBeK9qi7sng

Anti-Racism

The Anti-Racism sub-group continues to meet every 6 weeks. We are currently working our way through the book 'Me & White Supremacy' by Layla F. Saad, which provides a structure for our discussions & self-education. Anyone is welcome to join us and we have an agreement that although the topics may be personally challenging for us, we will ensure that our discussions are supportive with an overall aim of increasing our understanding of racism and our ability to be proactively anti-racist. Our next meeting takes place on Zoom on Monday 21st February, 6.30-7.30pm. Please contact hazelerrey@gmail.com if you would like to join us.

The sub-group has also been represented at recent meetings organised by Stand Up to Racism Manchester. During these meetings we have heard from trade unionists and refugee groups about plans

for UN Antiracism Day, which takes place on Saturday 19th March. There is a demonstration planned in London with subsidised train tickets

available for people travelling from Manchester. We are also hoping that there may be a demonstration on that day in Manchester that we can support so please keep the day free if you can.



Manchester goes to London by train for the UN Antiracism Day demonstration on Saturday 19 March. Book a seat through Eventbrite [HERE](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/manchester-transport-to-un-anti-racist-demo-in-london-19-march-tickets-249630671057)

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/manchester-transport-to-un-anti-racist-demo-in-london-19-march-tickets-249630671057>

Book your individual seat now. We will travel by train from Manchester Piccadilly, with pickup at Stockport train station.

TICKET PRICES - variable prices so that everyone can afford it

Free - for refugees, people seeking asylum, and people without status

Group News

Subscriptions and Annual General Meeting

Subscriptions to the Manchester Amnesty group for 2022 are now due. We suggest £20 for those who are in receipt of a wage or pension, and £5 or whatever you can afford otherwise. Please note that some of your subscription may be used to pay speakers' expenses or may be used towards small donations to speakers' organisations. Please contact Sean Dunne (sean.a.dunne@btinternet.com) who will provide you with the Amnesty account details.

As in past years, our March meeting will be the Annual General Meeting, where we will be discussing any resolutions, electing officers and appointing campaign leads, planning campaigns for

the year ahead, and considering a proposal to slightly modify how we communicate with the group via the Weekly Action email and the newsletter.

If you have any issues that you would like to have considered at the AGM, please contact the Chair, Hazelerrey@gmail.com.

We are always looking for people who would like to get more involved in the running of the group, or who wish to take a lead on some of our campaigning work. You can participate to the extent that suits you, all contributions are welcome. So if you want to get more involved, please do feel free to speak up.

Individuals at risk

Letter-writing drop in session -

Central Library Saturday March 26th 2-4pm

Before the pandemic we used to hold regular informal get-togethers to write appeals on behalf of Amnesty cases. We are going to restart these on the 4th Saturday every two months starting March 26th. We are delighted that Central Library in the city centre have offered us the use of a table near the café on the ground floor.

We used to find that this was an excellent way of getting engaged with core Amnesty casework whilst providing a nice social occasion. It is also guaranteed to produce lots of letters!

Get the date in your diary and feel free to drop by any time between 2-4pm.

Get involved!!

If you would like to get involved in any area of our work, email Anne.Walker9@ntlworld.com, who will put you in touch with the relevant group lead.

Craftivism Group

Members of the craftivism sub-group have been working very hard in recent months to create an Amnesty-related welcome gift for Councillor Bev Craig, the newly appointed leader of Manchester City Council.

The gift (an individually designed mobile -see adjacent photo) represents the many different aspects of human rights that are reflected in our work including Individuals at Risk, Anti-racism, LGBT+ rights and Environmental rights along with the Climate Emergency.

We will be presenting our gift to Cllr Craig at the end of this month when we will congratulate her on her election as Leader on behalf of our group. We hope that this meeting and the gift will mark the start of a positive dialogue with the City Council which will lead to the continuing promotion of human rights within Manchester and throughout the world.

We are now thinking about what to do for our next project. Please let me know any ideas you have at kathrynbuss@gmail.com. We will let everyone know when our next meeting is.



Our mobile for Cllr Craig

Other News

Concert in aid of Stockport Amnesty Group



On **Saturday 26 February, at 7.30pm**, Amaretti Chamber Orchestra is performing at St Andrew's Church, Cheadle Hulme. Proceeds from the concert are to be donated to Amnesty. Tickets are £10, and can be obtained in advance from anne.walker9@ntlworld.com, or in the event that Anne sells out, from Brigid Hemingway (07773 496210). It is recommended to buy tickets in advance as the church can fill up.

Amaretti Chamber Orchestra is of a very high standard and popular in the local community. The orchestra has guaranteed that Amnesty may retain 100% of monies raised from donations on the night, and also 100% of 'advance' tickets sold by members of Stockport Amnesty Group, and friends of the Group. In addition to this, the Orchestra will donate any profit it makes from selling tickets to its regular concert.

Refugee Week Conference 7th and 11th February

This conference is for anyone who wants to take part in Refugee Week 2022 which will take

place 20-26 June this year. You can join the conference on one or both days. It is a chance to meet with others from across the UK and the world to share inspiration, learning and ideas ahead of Refugee Week.

https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/refugee-week-conference-2022-tickets-249192099277?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=booking_now_open_for_refugee_week_conference_2022&utm_term=2022-02-05

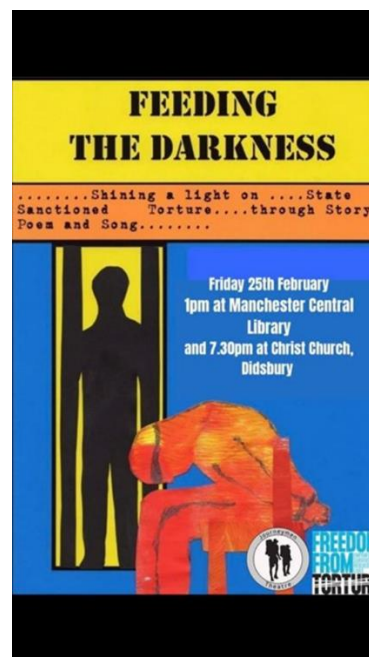
Freedom from Torture

Freedom from Torture have recently published a new Strategy Document which can be accessed here:

[https://www.freedomfromtorture.org/sites/default/files/2019-](https://www.freedomfromtorture.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/Freedom%20from%20Torture%20strategy%20report.pdf)

[04/Freedom from Torture strategy report.pdf](https://www.freedomfromtorture.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/Freedom%20from%20Torture%20strategy%20report.pdf)

You may also be interested in an event on 25th February featuring stories, poems and songs to shine a light on state sanctioned torture. This will take place twice on the same day at two locations – Manchester Central Library at lunchtime (1pm) and at Christchurch, Didsbury (7.30pm).



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