



Actions you can take this month:

- ✓ **Come along** to hear a talk on **Afghanistan** and write some letters on cases featured in AIUK's **Real Lives** spring supplement. Join us at the Quaker Meeting House on Thursday 21 April at 1400. Refreshments will be provided. All welcome.
- ✓ **Watch** a short two-minute video produced by Amnesty about why it's important to name Israel's treatment of Palestinians as apartheid. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8aD4p3Z1XQ>
- ✓ **Sign the petition** to end Israel's apartheid. Call on Israel's Prime Minister to immediately cancel all orders for forced evictions and home demolitions against Palestinians in Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territories, and end the forced displacement of Palestinians. Find the petition at <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/EndIsraelsApartheid>
- ✓ **Watch** a message of thanks from British/Iranian retired engineer, **Anoosheh Ashoori**, to all Amnesty supporters who campaigned for his release from an Iranian gaol. It is an inspiring reminder of why we campaign for Amnesty! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDXsyk_OF10
[Note: you may need to open YouTube first and then cut & paste these video links.]



News from our group

We were all very sad to hear of the death on 1 March of our member and friend,



Judith Ward. The following message, from Chris and Christina Lawson, sums up the feelings of many of us: *'Judith was such a positive person, influence and personal support. We are so glad that we knew her. She was a founder member of AIM at the inaugural meetings in 2002 and she was always well engaged with whatever we were doing. She will leave a big hole in the lives of many in Minehead with all the various interests and connections that she had.'*

Unfortunately, our planned **International Women's Day street stall**, planned for 11 March, had to be cancelled because of the awful wind and rain. But, we took the petition about women and girls in **Afghanistan** to the SW regional conference and we will also be following it up at our meeting on 21 April.



We were relieved that our **Annual Quiz** could go ahead on 25 March. Despite numbers being down, owing to Covid and other reasons, those who came along were entertained with a range of interesting questions kindly set for us by

Jean Humber. The total amount raised, including the raffle, was £248. These comments from our regular quiz supporter, Anne, who travels up from Exeter, sum it up: *'I very much enjoyed the quiz. The questions were very imaginative and wide-reaching, and Cherry was an excellent question-asker.'* Anne was also very pleased with her raffle prize and her prize for being in the winning team!

March was a busy month as three of us also attended the **SW regional conference** – see reports overleaf.



Diary Dates

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

Thursday 21 April

Talk on Afghanistan followed by letter writing 1400-1600 at the Quaker Meeting House, Bancks St, Minehead. All welcome!

Monday 30 May

Short films on Palestine, with bring & share supper at Alison's. Time tbc.

20-26 June

Refugee Week

Saturday 25 June.

AIUK AGM On-line.

Thursday 21 July

Letter writing session – 1400-1600. Venue tbc.

Saturday 23 July

Stall at Roadwater Fete From 1400. Set up in the morning. Info, letters, petitions and games. Help needed!

Regional Conference

We were glad to be able to attend the much-postponed Regional Conference on 12 March. Our very own Cherry Bird delivered a very interesting talk on **Kashmir, Afghanistan and activist-led campaigning**. And then Exeter University lecturer Nick Gill gave a most informative talk on our **Immigration and Asylum system**. The photo-action showed our support for all refugees, regardless of how they arrive or where they come from.



Alison summarises some of the main points from Nick Gill's talk: He began by comparing Britain's immediate response to the challenge of Ukraine with that of Germany: we admit 300 refugees, Germany to admit 3000. Our government's reluctance to help Afghan refugees recently is a shameful betrayal of their trust in us. The tabloid press demonises refugees by using dehumanising language, describing them in terms of floods, herds, a stampede, swarms and cockroaches. In an Ipsos Mori poll people guessed that the UK has 28% of the world's refugees. The actual number is 2.7%.

Dr Gill summed up government policy in six Ds:

Delay: refugees are put in camps, stopped at borders.

Delegation: they are met with hostility, and are required to provide information from many sources.

Deportation: In 2012, 15,134 refugees were forcibly deported. In 2020, the number was down to 3,327. But this reduction may be due to the expense.

Destitution: £5.66 benefit per day. This meagre support is stopped when they get asylum status.

Dispersal: Refugees are sent to areas with the cheapest housing, 43% of which is not fit for purpose. These are deprived areas with a high incidence of racism.

Detention: there are around 2,000 facilities in 100 countries. These resemble prisons and instil fear. Some are used as removal centres. In the UK, 62% of detainees are released into the community each year; so detention served no purpose.

Action we can take: show compassionate solidarity; challenge our political and legal structures; show outrage; create Cities of Sanctuary.

I Welcome Refugees

Jenny Gateau sent this update: **Minehead and District Refugee Support Group** have just sent out Easter cards plus small gift to our 17 families in Taunton, Wellington and Bridgwater. We have booked five summer holiday breaks at the Baptist Holiday Apartments running from 23 July to 18 August, one week for each family. As some families have not been to Minehead before, we shall need extra help with showing them around, best places to shop, playing on the beach, and invitations out to tea, lunch, picnic etc. Please let me know if you can help!! (01643 708471). Other good news is the resettlement of three more refugee families from desperate situations. **Refugee Aid from Taunton (RAFT)** has found new premises after having to leave the old. They are now at Unit 4, Enterprise Park, Priorswood Rd, Taunton, TA2 8DU. Please see their Facebook page for latest urgent needs, and their opening times. They too are now sending to Ukraine as well as their other places of need.

Other Campaign News

UKRAINE: AI has formally declared a Crisis Response and established an Urgent Crisis Coordination Team. It is working directly with refugees who have crossed borders and is gathering evidence of war crimes. It has stated that Russia's invasion is a clear violation of the UN Charter and, as an act of aggression, is a crime under international law. All those responsible have to be held accountable.

ISRAEL: earlier in March, UN human rights expert, Michael Lynk, concluded that the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories amounts to the crime of apartheid against the Palestinian people. Lynk called on the international community to accept and adopt the findings in his report, which echo recent findings by Palestinian, Israeli and international human rights organisations, including Amnesty. The UN report follows on from Amnesty's report published in February: *Israel's Apartheid against Palestinians: Cruel System of Domination and Crime against Humanity* and is a welcome boost to AI's campaign.

SOUTH ASIA: more news from Cherry in the next newsletter!

How to contact the Minehead Amnesty International Local Group:

Website: www.amnesty.org.uk/minehead

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