



Manchester Group Quarterly Bulletin
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Refugee month edition



WE STAND
#TOGETHERWITHREFUGEES

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This newsletter is compiled by the Group Communications Secretary, Alison Wearden (alison.wearden@gmail.com). If you have any ideas for short or more in-depth articles for the newsletter, please feel free to contact her. We would welcome pieces on any area of Amnesty's work, and also human interest stories. If you would prefer to stop receiving this newsletter, please let Alison know.

Refugees and Asylum seekers: raising awareness, nurturing empathy, standing up for the rights of refugees.



June is refugee month and the week of 20th-26th June is Refugee week. The ability to seek asylum is a fundamental human right, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Manchester Amnesty group has a long tradition of campaigning on issues around the rights of refugees and asylum seekers, and we have now set up a subgroup to focus on refugee rights. We would love to have more members, so if you would like to join us, do get in touch with alison.wearden@gmail.com.

Clearly, refugees have been in the news a lot recently, due to the invasion of Ukraine, which has led to an [estimated 6.5 million](#) people leaving the country, in addition to the 7 million people who are



internally displaced, and 2.5 million others in need of urgent assistance¹. The Ukraine crisis has significantly increased the total number of displaced people worldwide, which, according to the United Nations High Commission on Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), is currently standing at over 100 million². We have read many stories of kind and generous offers of help by the general public but, as [Amnesty](#) and others have pointed out, the response of the UK government has been slow, chaotic and obstructive to Ukrainian refugees wishing to enter the UK³. We have recently featured Amnesty's demand that the government supports Ukrainian refugees and protects Ukrainian citizens as a weekly action. If you have not yet had time to [take action](#), please do so now⁴.

The inadequate government response to refugees from Ukraine is only the latest in a series of inadequate responses. For example, following the crisis precipitated by the withdrawal of Western troops from Afghanistan, the UK government pledged to provide a warm welcome to people fleeing persecution and loss of rights under the new Taliban-led regime. However, it has been [estimated](#) that only 5% of the 75-150,000 people applying for evacuation to the UK were helped⁵. There are huge numbers of Afghan refugees (including an estimated 1.2 million in Pakistan and 800,000 in Iran), putting our government's pledge to resettle 20,000 Afghans over the next 5 years into some context.

A new scheme, the Afghan Citizen Resettlement Scheme, was announced in January 2022, and there was some publicity about the first family resettled, but it is not known how many people have been resettled since then. A widely quoted figure is that there are currently about 12,000 Afghans seeking asylum in the UK, and it seems that the great majority of these are still living in hotel accommodation. A recent article by [Human Rights Watch](#) highlighted the particular plight and consequences for their mental health of traumatised Afghan women refugees and their children living for months in one hotel room, or being moved from one temporary "dispersal" accommodation to another⁶. In December 2021, there were [5249 asylum seekers](#) (of all nationalities) living in "dispersed accommodation" in Greater Manchester⁷.

During the last week of the last parliamentary session (April 2022), several bills affecting human rights in the UK and on which Amnesty, including members of our group, had been campaigning, were finally passed in parliament. One of these was the Nationalities and Borders Bill which has now been enacted into law. While the government had difficulty getting this bill through parliament, as the Lords objected to and tried to amend many of its clauses, the Act that was finally passed represents a grave assault on the rights of refugees and asylum seekers. People seeking asylum who arrive in the UK by what are described as "illegal means" (for example, arriving in a boat) will have drastically fewer rights and, instead of being helped to escape persecution, will face detention and possible deportation. Given that there are virtually no "legal means" of arrival, this law

effectively closes the door to most asylum seekers in the UK, [placing the UK in breach of its duties](#) under the international Refugee Convention (1951)⁸.

However, the fight for the rights of refugees continues. Recently, on the eve of a court case brought by four organisations including Freedom from Torture and Care4Calais, the government [drew back from a stated intention](#) to “push back” into the sea boats containing people seeking asylum, conceding that it would be illegal⁹. While the government plans to start executing its much trumpeted but [underspecified](#)¹⁰ plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda on June 14th, there are ongoing [legal challenges](#).¹¹ On 29th May, [Care4Calais](#) reported the release of a refugee from Sudan who had previously been detained on arrival in the UK and informed that he would be sent to Rwanda¹². Some commentators have suggested that both the “pushback” and the Rwanda plans may best be characterised as an attempt to court support from that part of the electorate who feel antagonistic towards refugees and asylum seekers, but we will keep a close eye on developments.

Although the government’s parliamentary majority means that for now it is able to push its anti-human rights bills into law, the public’s response to people fleeing war and persecution in Ukraine, Afghanistan, Syria and more, suggests that many of us are indeed compassionate and concerned about the rights and welfare of refugees. Recent data published by [BritishFuture](#) in conjunction with Ipsos showed that 75% of the nationally representative sample polled (before the war in Ukraine) agreed that people should be able to take refuge in other countries, including Britain, when fleeing war and persecution¹³. The majority were also sympathetic rather than antagonistic to people arriving in the UK in boats. On the other hand, due to tendentious or inaccurate reporting in sections of the media, hostile posts on social media, and misleading statements by law-makers, many people remain poorly informed or misinformed about refugees and asylum seekers. For example, it is widely stated and believed that over recent years the UK has been generous in its resettlement of refugees, whereas figures provided by the UNHCR show that the [UK lags far behind other European countries](#), let alone the many poorer non-European countries which are home to the great majority of refugees from neighbouring states¹⁴.

The Manchester Amnesty refugee subgroup is planning a series of linked events (see below) which aim to build on existing public good will, to raise empathic awareness of the difficulties faced by people fleeing persecution, to address misperceptions about refugees, and to keep the issues raised by the recent changes to the UK law in the public eye. We want to get more people involved in speaking out and taking action against the hostile approach to refugees and asylum seekers adopted by the current government.

We also want to build collaborations with some of the many other organisations in Manchester which are fighting for the rights and welfare of refugees. We are pleased to welcome speakers from the Manchester based group Women Seeking Asylum Together (WAST) at our June group meeting.



The refugee rights subgroup is currently working together with the craftivism group to make 100 orange hearts, using felt and scraps of fabric. Orange hearts have been used by “Together with Refugees,” a coalition of organisations concerned with refugee rights and welfare, to symbolise kindness and welcome. We will attach this QR code to the hearts and display it on a banner. The QR code links to a flyer with information about refugees, which will also appear on our website. We are planning to display and distribute the hearts and banner at events in Didsbury (19th June), Chorlton (2nd July) and the City Centre (14th August). Anyone who wants to either make some hearts



or come along to any of these events, please contact alison.wearden@gmail.com.

Update on Ukraine

Content warning on all links – both Amnesty and external – information contained within is deeply distressing

Amnesty cannot vouch for the content of external sites – be aware of the extent of misinformation circulating about the Russian war on Ukraine, particularly on social media

Readers of this newsletter will, of course, know of the tragedy of the ongoing war following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which began on 24th February, 2022. It is clear from reporting that war crimes, as well as other violations of international humanitarian law, have been committed. Amnesty has been updating its country page on Ukraine, and you can access this [here](#). The page notes a range of concerns arising from the war, such as the use of cluster munitions, which are inherently indiscriminate. Cluster munitions spread a number of smaller explosive submunitions (also called 'bomblets') over a wide area. Their use is prohibited by the Convention on Cluster Munitions. Human Rights Watch has information on the use of cluster munitions in Mykolaiv [here](#), for example, and a longer report on cluster munitions in Ukraine [here](#).

As Amnesty notes, both Russian and Ukrainian forces are reported to have mistreated prisoners of war. For more information on the international humanitarian law that guides the treatment of prisoners of war, the third Geneva Convention, see the International Committee of the Red Cross's website for a short overview [here](#). In mid-May, Amnesty released a [call](#) for the rights of Ukrainian prisoners of war from the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol to be respected.

Amnesty also discusses longer-term issues, beyond the borders of Ukraine, not just the flows of refugees, as discussed elsewhere in this newsletter, but also the rise in food and fuel prices around the world. Amnesty cites the World Food Programme, which warns that "acute hunger could impact an additional up to 47 million people globally". Indeed, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food – not a right we regularly talk about at Amnesty Manchester – has warned of "imminent famine and starvation in more places around the world."

Repression of human rights is also present in Russia itself, with Amnesty recently raising concerns about the impact of the crackdown on [academia](#) (on students and educators at universities and schools), as well as on the [media](#).

Amnesty International has released a new briefing calling for Russian forces to face justice for war crimes committed in the Oblast region, northwest of Kyiv. In the briefing, available [here](#), Amnesty documented unlawful air strikes as well as extrajudicial executions. As you will be aware, the first trial related to war crimes committed by Russia in Ukraine recently concluded, with a 21-year old sergeant sentenced to life in prison by a court in Kyiv, more [here](#).

Some other sources of information:

- Amnesty Ukraine is on [twitter](#) at @Amnesty_UA
- Evidence from Amnesty's [Crisis Evidence Lab](#) verifying indiscriminate attacks during the early stages of this most recent invasion
- Amnesty UK [briefing](#) on the "Human Rights Catastrophe"
- The BBC runs the Ukrainecast [podcast](#)
- The Kyiv Independent provides updates [online](#) and via [twitter](#)
- The Ukraine Crisis Media [Center](#)
- The UK Disasters Emergency Committee Ukraine [Appeal](#) (involves 15 charities, including the British Red Cross)
- Suggestions from the [Guardian](#) of "ways you can help the people of Ukraine from the UK", including contributing to campaigns, supporting local journalism, and writing to your MP.

The Amnesty Brave Campaign draws to a close

In 2017 Amnesty International launched an international campaign to support Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), with the publication of the report 'Human Rights Defenders Under Threat – A shrinking Space for Civil Society'. The UK section took an active part in this campaign. The Manchester group contribution was mainly via our work for HRDs in the UAE but many of you will also remember campaigning on behalf of the featured cases at stalls and letter writing sessions.



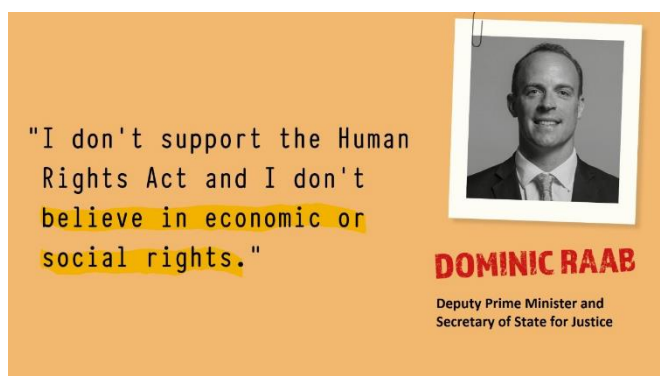
The official definition of an HRD is a person who, individually or in association with others, acts to defend, promote and protect human rights at the local, national, regional or international levels. They come from every walk of life: they may be journalists, health professionals, teachers, trade unionists, or others. They may be acting in their professional roles or voluntarily to protect their community or family. As the 2017 report outlined, there is great concern that HRDs are being targeted to silence them by governments, companies, armed groups and other powerful entities and that this harassment is increasing.

The campaign has now ended as a global priority campaign, although of course Amnesty continues its work in defence of HRDs. Amnesty International UK have commissioned an independent evaluation of this campaign.

This evaluation has highlighted some really significant achievements, as well as valuable insights into ways we can improve our work in future. It finds that the Brave campaign achieved its aim to enable more Human Rights Defenders to carry out their work more effectively and safely due to factors such as their level of connection, and the ways in which they are equipped to advance their human rights work. The campaign was also successful in increasing awareness of Human Rights Defenders across the UK public and government.

You can read the [full evaluation report](#), watch a short animation summarising its key findings, or listen to podcasts of the external evaluators talking about their conclusions and discussing the use of the term 'Human Rights Defender'. <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/BraveEvaluation>

What can we do about Government's plans to scale back human rights in the UK?



Amnesty International UK (AIUK) researcher Tom Southerden recently highlighted several concerns to our local group around Government's plans to scale back human rights in the UK, by scrapping the landmark Human Rights Act 1998 (HRA) and replacing it with a potentially watered down British "bill of rights". These plans were confirmed in the Queen's speech at the State Opening of Parliament on Tuesday 10th May, and we await more detail and draft legislation which is expected in the Autumn.

Tom highlighted the possibility that while Government is talking the language of better rights protection, it may actually be poised to reduce rights in practice. Tom and his colleagues at AIUK are worried that new barriers to bringing cases may be introduced, and remedies for injustices may be curtailed. There is also widespread suspicion that changes will be ideological rather than pragmatic: current Secretary of State for Justice Dominic Raab has been openly sceptical of human rights. So what can we do to support AIUK and its partners in the fightback against dilution of human rights protections in the UK? Amnesty International Manchester's Human rights in the UK subgroup met recently to discuss this subject, and discussed lots of potential ways to make a difference. One key task will be to keep abreast of developments in a subject which is notoriously complex even before obfuscation is considered.

Fortunately AIUK has a section of its website dedicated to summarising and simplifying this subject at <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/issues/human-rights-uk>. This includes examples of how claims under the HRA have avoided significant injustices, some of which are very high profile. You can also sign up for regular updates on this subject, as well as take part in actions such as petitions and email/letter writing as the fightback progresses.

If you would like to stay abreast at a local level, we would encourage all contacts to like and follow us on our social media channels. We have a local group [website](#) and use [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) (all @amnestymanc) to highlight events and initiatives, including on human rights protections in the UK. We also have a WhatsApp group specifically for updates on issues on this subject – to join simply contact us using the details at the foot of this article.

If you would like to be more proactively involved, you might like to join or try out our human rights in the UK subgroup. As well keeping up to date, we have come up with ideas to make an impact locally. Current initiatives and ideas include crafting, highlighting local human rights success stories and creating a podcast or documentary about the importance of human rights in our region. New members and ideas are welcome, but there is no pressure to give lots of your valuable time.

We're also always keen to hear from other organisations in our area and beyond. If you are a member of or have dealings with any group which also cares passionately about human rights in the UK, please let us know so we can share updates and potentially work together. Efforts to derail dilution of human rights in the domestic legal system will ultimately depend on human rights defenders organising and joining together to influence the outcome.

Please feel free to contact Matthew Sherwood with any enquiries using m.j.sherwood@outlook.com.

Israel: Palestinians are living under a system of apartheid - major new report



Amnesty International has published a major report which concludes that Israel is committing the crime of apartheid against the Palestinian people. Amnesty committed four years of intensive research and legal analysis, and its comprehensive report - [Israel's Apartheid against Palestinians: Cruel System of Domination and Crime against Humanity](#) - presents 280 pages of detailed evidence.

A system of apartheid is an institutionalised regime of oppression and domination by one racial group over another. Amnesty's investigation details how Israel enforces a system of oppression and domination against the Palestinian people wherever it has control over their rights. This includes Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), as well as displaced refugees in other countries.

The report finds that:

- * Palestinians in Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel are forced to live with 'cruel policies of segregation, dispossession and exclusion' amounting to crimes against humanity.
- * Palestinians are treated as 'inferior racial group and systematically deprived of their rights'
- * Dispossession and displacement of Palestinians from their homes is a crucial pillar of Israel's apartheid system

Amnesty's report documents evidence including massive seizures of Palestinian land and property, unlawful killings, the forcible transfer of Palestinian people from their land, drastic movement restrictions, and the denial of nationality and citizenship to Palestinians. These are all components of a system amounting to Apartheid under international law. The specific acts which constitute apartheid are set out in the Apartheid Convention and the Rome Statute.



Amnesty UK is calling on the UK government to ensure there is a "major re-assessment" of its foreign policy position and strategy on Israel so as to "confront and begin to tackle the scale and systematic nature of Israel's apartheid crimes".

Amnesty said: "Apartheid has no place in our world and states which choose to make allowances for Israel will find themselves on the wrong side of history. The international community must face up to the reality of Israel's apartheid, and pursue the many avenues to justice which remain shamefully unexplored."

"Israel must dismantle the apartheid system and start treating Palestinians as human beings with equal rights and dignity. Until it does, peace and security will remain a distant prospect for Israelis and Palestinians alike."

Round up of group activities

Anti-racism

The Anti-Racism sub-group was formed in Autumn 2021 in response to Amnesty UK's Strategic Plan 2022-2030, which includes Anti-Racism as one of 6 priorities. Prior to this, we had already started to discuss and take action on reported racial disparities in policing by Greater Manchester Police and several members were keen to continue this work. We were also inspired by a talk given by Tolu Ajayi from Rainbow Noir at our July 2021 group meeting.

We have met on a 6-weekly basis and have identified three areas for our work:

1. Self-education: we are using the book, *Me and White Supremacy* by Layla F. Saad as a guide to our discussions and self-education. We believe that it is our personal responsibility to educate ourselves about racism and how to be actively anti-racist in everyday life as well as understanding and campaigning for racial justice as Amnesty members.
2. Anti-racism campaigning: as this is a new area of work for Amnesty UK, we are still learning the best way to approach this type of campaigning. So far, we have focused on local issues mainly linked to racial disparities in policing by GMP and the cases of young black teenagers in Manchester being found guilty by association of conspiracy to murder or GBH. We have also signed petitions and open letters organised by the Northern Police Monitoring group

voicing concern at the number of fatalities resulting from police vehicle chases and the high numbers of People of Colour within those fatalities.

3. Building links with other local anti-racism campaigning groups: over the past few months we have been in touch with Manchester Stand Up to Racism, Joint Enterprise Not Guilty by Association (JENGbA) and Kids of Colour. Following discussion with Ilyas Nagdee, AIUK's Racial Justice lead, we have decided to focus our joint campaigning with JENGbA and Kids of Colour as our current campaigning issues are similar to the issues that these groups are working on locally.

Plans for the future include continued self-education work and a continuation of the campaigning areas outlined above. We hope to welcome Ilyas Nagdee (AIUK Racial Justice lead) to one of our monthly group meetings this year so that he can explain AIUK's plans for anti-racism campaigning to the wider group. Along with other local groups, we will also be attending the launch of AIUK's Anti-Racism network in the Autumn.

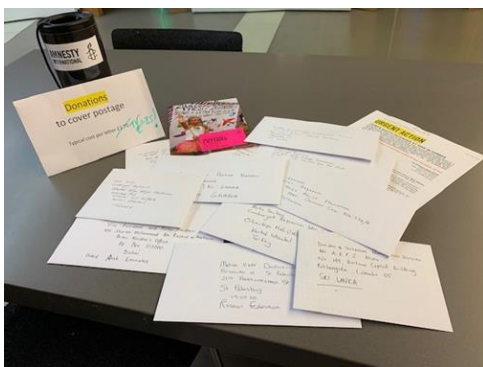
Human Rights in the UK

With the Government announcing its intent to scrap and replace the UK's Human Rights Act in the Queens speech, the Human Rights in the UK subgroup met recently to discuss the fightback. Top of the agenda were reviewing past initiatives such as successful engagement with local councillors and Members of Parliament (MPs), and ideas for future initiatives in order to make an impact.

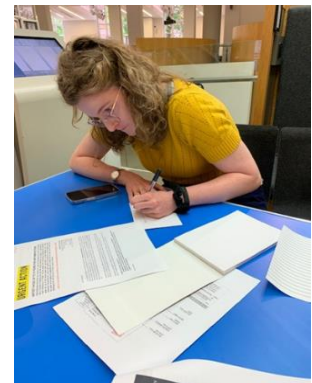
The subgroup is keen to support Amnesty International UK's (AIUK's) campaigns in this area going forward, but would also like to raise awareness of the importance of human rights in and around Manchester. Members will be compiling success stories where human rights protections have made a real impact on local people's lives, and will be aiming to share these with press and other stakeholders.

We anticipate that Government will introduce its draft bill aimed at weakening human rights standards in the Autumn, but we will monitor the progress of other draft legislation aimed at restricting hard-won freedoms in the UK. If you want to get involved, share and learn new skills, and help send parliamentarians a loud message, email Matthew Sherwood using m.j.sherwood@outlook.com

Individuals at Risk – Letter writing drop in sessions



We held our second post pandemic **Appeal Writing drop in** at Central Library on Saturday 28th May. In total 7 of us turned up and a couple of passers-by also joined in. We wrote 14 letters and 8 emails to Russia, The Gambia, Sri Lanka, UAE, and Turkey. It was lovely to see everyone in person rather than on Zoom.



Rebecca, our vice-chair, hard at work

We plan to hold these sessions every 2 months, on the 4th Saturday. So, our next session will be on: **Saturday 23rd July, 2-4pm, Central Library. Get it in your diary NOW!**

United Arab Emirates

1. Date for your diary: Sunday 17th July (release date for Mohammed al-Roken) join us in raising awareness at the Liverpool Arab Arts Festival

We are holding a shared stall with the Liverpool and Wirral Amnesty groups to promote awareness of the release date for Mohammed al-Roken. It is part of an Arab arts festival family day with Arab food, music and dance. <https://www.arabartsfestival.com/2022festival/> We will be planning the details of the event next week with the Liverpool group. There will be more information in the weekly actions emails.

It promises to be a good day out so please come along and support us.



2. Amnesty Issued a [statement](#) on Monday 30th May on the continued detention of many prisoners of conscience beyond the end of their sentence. In the last two months, 10 dissident Emirati nationals have completed prison sentences imposed on them in the mass trials of 2013 which were widely recognised as being unfair. All ten are still detained in prison without a right to appeal. We are extremely concerned that Mohammed al-Roken will also be detained beyond the 17th July. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/MDE2555212022ENGLISH.pdf>

Craftivism subgroup



We met at Manchester Art Gallery (which has a great café with good cakes!) on 8th May to start making over 100 orange hearts for our Refugee week actions. Please let Kathryn Fletcher know if you want to join our group. bussk@btinternet.com

Thanks to Anne Walker



We presented Anne Walker with a bouquet of flowers as a small token of our heartfelt thanks for all the years of work that she put in as Secretary of the group, finally stepping down in March 2022. Anne is still the group membership secretary, and continues to be a very active member and contributor to all of our campaigns. Thanks Anne!

Tribute to Marion Hunt (18 September 1948 – 18 March 2022)

It was with great sadness that we learnt of Marion's death in March this year. Marion was a long-standing and loyal member of Manchester Amnesty group for many years, along with her husband Sean who continues to be our group Treasurer.

Upholding human rights for all was very close to her heart and something that she campaigned for tirelessly. Many of us admired the way in which she always spoke up at meetings and events, never shying away from difficult conversations and discussions. At Amnesty stalls she was always one of the bravest among us – by that I mean she would always have a go at engaging members of the public in conversations about human rights even when they clearly disagreed with her and were saying so! This takes a lot of guts and determination and Marion had both of these in bucketloads!

Although she campaigned with us on many aspects of human rights, Marion was particularly keen to work for the rights of Palestinians and also refugees. Apart from believing strongly in the UK's duty to provide a safe home for those seeking asylum, she also recognised & valued the contribution that refugees can make to our communities and how all our lives are enriched by their presence. At the service that was held recently to commemorate and celebrate her life, it was moving to hear several refugees who had been taught English by Marion, speaking about the huge positive impact she had had on their lives when they arrived in the UK and settled in Salford.

Many Manchester Amnesty members will remember that Marion valiantly helped Sean with the annual Amnesty street collection over many years. As well as helping Sean with the money-counting, Marion always spent at least two 2-hour shifts standing on a street somewhere in the city centre (regardless of the weather!) with her own collection tin. She regularly won the much-coveted award of champion Amnesty street collector having the greatest amount of money in her tin at the end of the day! We always asked her how she did it but she shrugged off our admiration, saying it was just how it happened! But I think we grew to realise that Marion was highly skilled in communicating her strongly held belief that everyone is of equal value and is entitled to their human rights. She was prepared to convey that message to anyone anywhere in a way that made absolute sense to them and encouraged them to donate to Amnesty at the same time.

As well as being an inspiring campaigner, Marion was a wonderful friend to many of us. We have already missed her at our meetings and events and I know we will continue to do so, but her contribution to the group will not be forgotten. Among many other campaign actions this year, Manchester Amnesty will be working on behalf of refugees and Palestinian rights and I know we will all be inspired by the memory of Marion's dedication, energy and commitment as we go about our campaigning work and actions.

Hazel Errey (Chair, Manchester Amnesty)