

Newsletter: March 2023

Bognor Regis, Chichester & District Group



Dates for your diary	Thursday 25/04/2023, 19:30 Group Annual General Meeting (in-person, Chichester) Saturday 24/06/2023 Amnesty UK AGM: London and online (hybrid meeting) TBC
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Dear writers

Local events

Thu 25/04/2023, 19:30 Group Annual General Meeting (in-person) Our Group Constitution orders an AGM every year. We would like to provide you with our annual reports as a committee, which are included with this Newsletter and hope that you will be able to attend the Group AGM in Chichester.

AGENDA FOR BOGNOR/CHICHESTER GROUP AGM, 7.30 PM FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE, PRIORY ROAD, CHICHESTER

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of last AGM (24/03/2022; rescheduled to 27/04/2022) - I can send e-copies (bobandmarg@bdewickderby48.com)
3. Matter Arising
4. Reports
5. Election of officers
6. Future programme
 - a. Ideas for attracting new members
 - b. Attendance at events
7. Any other business

Other events

- **Thursday 16/03/2023, 21:00, Channel 4; : Nazanin**
 - [Documentary](#): the behind-the-scenes account - part love story, part thriller - of how Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe was thrown into a Tehran jail, and how her family battled to get her home.
- **Saturday 24/06/2023, 10:00 - 17:00: Amnesty UK Annual General Meeting.**
 - This year's Annual General Meeting (AGM) will be held as a hybrid meeting at the Human Rights Action Centre (HRAC) in London at 17-25 New Inn Yard, London EC2A 3EA. You will also be able to participate remotely.
 - Amnesty's AGM offers all members - groups, individuals and networks – their say in Amnesty International UK.
- **Taking a stance against the death penalty** (online course) One of Amnesty's longest running campaigns, take this course to brush up on your knowledge about some common misconceptions about the death penalty and why it violates human rights. <https://academy.amnesty.org/learn/course/external/view/elearning/102/taking-a-stance-against-the-death-penalty>

Carry on writing!

Bob Dewick, Amnesty

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Annual Reports for 2022

Treasurer's Report

Bognor Regis Chichester and District Amnesty International Group Report for 2022 to the Group AGM 2023

Income	Expenditure	Total (£)
Subscriptions		516.00
Donations		30.00
Arias for Amnesty		401.12
Greetings Card Cathedral		45.28
	Secretary	51.55
	Membership Secretary	5.44
	Rent	181.50
	Greetings Card Postage	8.08
	AIUK Affiliation Fee	72
	AIUK Donation	400
	Brought Forward	502.51
	Balance	776.34

We had one fund raising event this year, a lovely evening of music, given to us by committee member Rebecca and her fellow musicians Stephanie, Charlie and Peter. The evening was a charming display of musical talent, set against a backdrop of covid restrictions and bad weather which made it all the more special for those in attendance. Many many thanks to Rebecca, Stephanie, Charlie and Peter, and to those who provided refreshments on the night. Thanks also to Kath for providing the information to make sure that all systems were in place to ensure as far as possible a safe covid free environment and compliance with all the rules. We have recently sent another £400 to AIUK, thanks to this event and to subscriptions we received throughout the year. Thank you to everyone who continues to support the group through these undoubtedly challenging times. We hope we can count on your support this year too.

Breege Gallagher, Treasurer.

Review of the Year: Campaigns March 2022 - February 2023

Action for individuals.

The group continues to focus on the terrible human rights situation in Egypt. Margaret Robertson's dedicated work in co-ordinating the Group's actions in 2022 have focussed on the following cases:

- On-going support for **Azza Soliman**. Following her release in September 2021, Azza returned to court appealing the implementation of a travel ban and asset freeze in February 2022. The travel ban was not immediately lifted but we heard some very good news in **March that she had been allowed to leave Egypt** on a long-awaited visit to family abroad.
- We continued to work on the case of housing rights researcher **Ibrahim Ezz El-Din**. Ibrahim was especially vulnerable as he suffered from extreme depression as a result of the torture which he had suffered and the



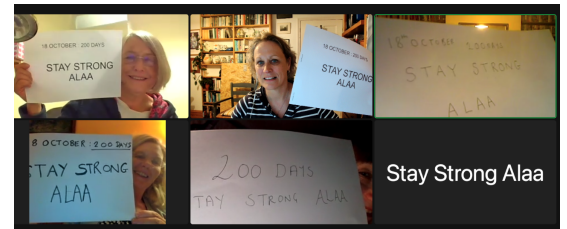
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insanitary conditions in which he was held. We were therefore relieved to hear that he was **released in April** as one of 41 detainees under a Ramadan presidential pardon. We were delighted to hear from Ibrahim in May, thanking all those who campaigned for his release.

- The release of Ibrahim Ezz El-Din meant the Group was able to take up a new case, campaigning on behalf of **Alaa Abdel Fattah**, a leading Egyptian/British intellectual and political thinker. In April, when we took on his case, he was on hunger strike in protest against the conditions in which he was being kept. We were introduced to his case at a Zoom meeting attended by his sister and cousin in May and immediately plunged into urgent appeals for action as a result of his desperate situation. This included postcard actions and gatherings/demonstrations in London at the Foreign Office (particularly focussed on the visit to London by the Egyptian Foreign Minister in July). Alaa's family were very active in campaigning to keep his case very high profile in the UK, with multiple newspaper articles and interviews on news channels and radio, and a campaign focussing on Egypt hosting COP27 in November. We were also able to act as liaison between Alaa's family and Chichester MP Gillian Keegan (when she was Foreign Minister with responsibility for Africa) and took action on the 200th day of his hunger strike. Our campaigning for Alaa continues, as he remains in prison and unable to get a consular visit.



Other Egyptian human rights defenders for we have taken action:

- At **Aria and Song for Amnesty** in February 2022, for seven prisoners of conscience: **Ahmed Samir Santawy**, a researcher and anthropology student; **Alaa Abdel Fattah**, writer and activist (whose case we later adopted); **Hisham Fouad**, trade unionist and politician; **Hossam Moanes**, journalist; **Mohamed Baker**, human rights lawyer; **Mohamed Ibrahim 'Oxygen'**; **Zyad el-Elaimy**, human rights lawyer.
- Journalist **Mohamed Salah**, who remained in pre-trial detention for longer than the period permitted by Egyptian law (a situation also suffered by Ibrahim Ezz El-Din, above)
- Former presidential candidate **Abdelmoniem Aboufotouh**, whose health condition was deteriorating in prison.

Other campaigning actions

- We continued to offer online events with other Sussex Amnesty Groups. Sussex Group members attended an online talk on the Country Co-ordinator role in March, which explored the work of the North Africa country co-ordinators; and met with the new Amnesty UK Chief Executive Sacha Deshmukh in October.
- Amnesty UK continued to offer plenty of online opportunities including the courses *Introduction to Equity and Inclusion*, looking at the core principles of equity, diversity, inclusion and anti-racism and *People, Power, Politics*, looking at decision-making in the UK; a suite of Activist Education courses; the launch of Amnesty's report and panel discussion on homelessness *No place like home*; the launch of Amnesty's *Anti-Racism Network*.
- We attended an activist planning meeting for British Nationals arbitrarily detained in Iran. Following the release of **Nazanin and Anoosheh**, Amnesty's campaign for the release of **Morad Tahbaz** and **Mehran Raouf** continues.
- Actions highlighted in the Group Newsletters were as follows:
 - We wrote to our MPs in Action on the third anniversary of the Hirk protest movement in Algeria, for those still detained for supporting or even covering these peaceful protests.
 - Crisis response actions for Ukraine, following reports of mass human rights violations by Amnesty researchers.
 - On behalf of Iranian prisoners facing execution and in support of protesters calling for *Woman, Life, Freedom*.
 - Actions for International Women's day in March included a petition to the UK government to support Afghan women and children; to call for the release of human rights lawyer **Nasrin Sotoudeh**, facing 38 years in prison and 148 lashes

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for her human rights work; and to urge the dropping of the case of artist **Yulia Tsvetkova**, for exercising her right to freedom of expression.

- Moroccan activist **Sultana Khaya**, subject to house arrest who reported rape and sexual assault at the hands of the security forces. We heard the good news in October that she had been able to leave her house arrest and travel to Spain for medical care.
- Algerian journalist **Merzoug Touati**, who had been on hunger strike to protest his appalling prison conditions.
- Tunisian lawyer **Abderazzak Kilani**, prosecuted by military court.
- Whistleblower **Mohamed Benhlima**, sentenced to death in absentia by Algeria.
- **Idris Hasan**, a Uyghur Muslim Chinese national threatened with deportation from Morocco.
- Saudi activist **Salma al-Shehab**, a mother of two sentenced to 34 years in prison.
- Blogger and activist **Fatima Karin**, on hunger strike in Morocco.
- Write for Rights actions on behalf of **Aleksandra Skochilenko**, artist and musician in jail for opposing the invasion of Ukraine, and **Shahnewaz Chowdhury**, environmental activist in Bangladesh facing jail for a Facebook post.
- **Mohamed Ziane**, human rights lawyer in Morocco, arrested on trumped up charges.

Chair's report, March 2022 - February 2023

- 2022 marked the 40th anniversary of **Bob Dewick** holding the post of Group Secretary. We were delighted to present him with a card and gift token at the Group AGM in April, as he entered his 41st year in post.
- We said goodbye to **Jilli Webber**, our long-standing Membership Secretary, who moved to South Yorkshire to be closer to family, and welcomed **Cheryll Pitt** as our new Membership Secretary. A very fond farewell to Jilli, and a big hello to Cheryll!
- Our **Pumble** this year was around Chidham and the 'Old House at Home'. Attendees are pictured on the sea wall overlooking Bosham Harbour, as we'd just about walked off the lunch...
- A return to an in-person **Write for Rights** action at Chichester Cathedral: collecting cards to highlight two of the cases in the 2022 Write for Rights campaign.



My grateful thanks to the members of the Committee for their hard work, support and friendship over the last year, both in person and online; and to the group members, their friends and families who have been able to support us when they can. If you would like to join the Committee, please do think about coming along to one of our Zoom meetings or to an event to find out what we do: we have several members 'without portfolio' and it is a friendly, relaxed meeting. If you are interested in steering a campaign on a topic that particularly interests you, or helping with our social media, or just supporting the planning of future events: you would be very welcome!

Kath Shakespeare, Chair

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Amnesty action: campaigns & letter-writing

Egypt update from Margaret, our Campaign Co-ordinator

2 March online meeting about Alaa Abd El Fattah, organised by Brighton Group

At this meeting Sara Alsheri, a friend of Alaa's family, spoke eloquently about the specific case of Alaa who continues to be held in prison because of his peaceful activism. Souleimene Benghazi, Egypt Co-ordinator at AI International Secretariat, spoke generally about the human rights situation in Egypt. He estimated that there are currently 60,000 political prisoners in Egypt. He emphasised that the Egyptian government is very sensitive to international criticism of their human rights violations and stressed that, since Alaa has British citizenship, this country has a particular responsibility for ensuring his welfare.

- If you would like to **hear a recording of this meeting**, please let Kath know (shakespeare.kath@gmail.com) so we can share the meeting recording.

Action for Alaa

It is now 4 months since Rishi Sunak met with the Egyptian President Al-Sisi at Cop 27 in November 2022 to discuss human rights issues, specifically the case of British/Egyptian prisoner of conscience, Alaa Abd el-Fattah. Yet there seems to be no change in Alaa's situation. Alaa's sisters and son are now in the UK and it is essential that we continue to exert pressure on the UK Government to effect Alaa's release and reunion with his family.

We have been asked to mark the date of the Sunak/al-Sisi meeting by sending messages on **the 7th day of each month** (or at closest opportunity) to remind the British authorities of their failure to act effectively on Alaa's behalf.

Please send this image (below) to:

- Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State (Middle East, North Africa, South Asia and The UN), Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office, King Charles Street, London, SW1A 2AH
- Email: fcdo.correspondence@fcdo.gov.uk

politely reminding him that, in spite of promises to call for Alaa's release there has been no sign of action from the UK Government.

- It is hoped that, on the 7th day of every month, we will continue to send reminders that another month has gone by while Alaa awaits release.



Rishi Sunak and President Al-Sisi
It is 4 months since COP27

SHARM EL SHEIKH | EGYPT | 2022
شرم الشيخ | مصر | ٢٠٢٢

Simon Walker / No 10 Downing Street

When will you #FreeAlaa?

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Actions for International Women's Day, 8 March

The world comes together for International Women's Day (IWD) on 8 March to celebrate women's achievements and reinforce a commitment to women's equality. Women and girls experience violence and discrimination based on their sex. Here are some actions to support women's human rights this month.



Act with women and girls in Afghanistan

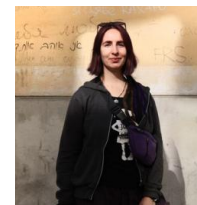
The rights of many women and girls in Afghanistan disappeared almost overnight when the Taliban seized power. Stand with them by urging the UK government to act

- Sign the online petition: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/AfghanistanWomen>

Human rights defender at risk

After having served almost 75 days in detention for purported petty hooliganism, Belarusian human rights defender and education Nasta (Anastasia) Loika faces unfounded criminal charges and remains in detention. She is being targeted in retaliation for her human rights work

Take action online: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions/human-rights-defender-faces-criminal-charges>



Andorra: activist defending abortion rights faces trial

Human rights defender Vanessa Mendoza Cortés could face trial for speaking out for women's rights in Andorra, including abortion rights, before a UN expert body in 2019. She faces a heavy fine and a criminal record if convicted.

Take action online: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions/activist-defending-abortion-rights-faces-trial>



Burundi: Journalist's conviction must be overturned

On 2 January, journalist Floriane Irangabiye was sentenced to 10 years in prison and a fine of one million Burundian francs. She was convicted on trumped-up charges of "undermining the integrity of the national territory": Amnesty believes she is being prosecuted solely for peacefully exercising her human rights and for her work as a journalist.

Take action online: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions/journalists-conviction-must-be-overturned>



State of Palestine: protect two Gaza women in grave danger

Two Palestinian women have not been heard from since 6 January, after the Palestinian security services in the Gaza Strip forced them back into the custody of their abusive father. Wissam al-Tawil, 24, and her sister Fatimah al-Tawil, 20, have faced multiple forms of violence at the hands of their father.

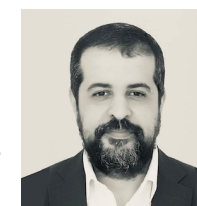
Take action online:

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions/state-palestine-protect-two-gaza-women-grave-danger>



Action: Morocco - human rights defender jailed for online posts

On 9 September 2022, the Casablanca judicial police questioned human rights defender **Rida Benotmane** about social media posts and YouTube videos he released in 2021, in which he denounced the Moroccan authorities for ignoring demands for social justice and warned against the potential use of Covid-19 vaccine passes as a tool for repression. He has since been held in arbitrary detention on bogus charges that violate his right to freedom of expression.



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On 20 February 2023, the Rabat Court of Appeal upheld the conviction against him, imposed by a lower court on 7 November 2022, on charges relating to his social media posts and YouTube videos dating from 2021, in which he criticised the Moroccan government. On appeal, his sentence was reduced from three years to 18 months in prison. He remains held in solitary confinement in Arjate 1 prison in the city of Salé.

What you can do:

Please use this template to write to:

Email: ambalondres@maec.gov.ma

To: Head Of Government, Mr Azizi Akhanouch

Your Excellency,

I am writing to express grave concern about the ongoing arbitrary detention of journalist and human rights defender **Rida Benotmane**. On 20 February, his conviction on charges stemming solely from the exercise of his right to freedom of expression was upheld on appeal. The judge also reduced his sentence from three years to 18 months in prison after upholding a lower court's conviction issued in November 2022. The charges against him relate to his Facebook and YouTube comments in 2021 calling for an end to political repression, including IT surveillance of human rights activists, and the release of political detainees.

Rida Benotmane is held in conditions violating the absolute prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment. He has been kept in prolonged solitary confinement in a cell of around 2.5 by 1.8m in Arjate 1 prison in the city of Salé since his detention in September 2022. His right to family visits, access to books, newspapers is severely restricted and photos of his wife banned.

Rida Benotmane's lawyers asked for his provisional release, but the judges in the Rabat Court of Appeal rejected this request without providing any explanation. His verdict will next be reviewed by the Court of Cassation, Morocco's highest court.

I urge you to release Rida Benotmane immediately and unconditionally and quash his conviction and sentence as they stem solely from the exercise of his right to freedom of expression. Pending his release, he should be held in conditions meeting international standards for the treatment of prisoners and removed from solitary confinement. I further urge you to end the prosecution of and criminal investigations against journalists, bloggers, and human rights defenders for exercising their right to freedom of expression.

Yours sincerely

Want to do more?

Real Lives supplement, February 2023

This *Amnesty Magazine* supplement is produced for readers and local groups wishing to write more letters in support of individuals at risk. **A copy is shared with those of you who receive the email newsletter**; please let us know if you need a print copy posting to you.

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