



Photograph: Michael Regan/Getty Images

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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.

The protest against the Qatar bid to own Manchester United



Photograph: Peter Powell/Reuters

The issue of human rights in Qatar was at the forefront of our minds during the recent World Cup, with Amnesty speaking out about the rights and welfare of migrant workers, the denial of rights to LGBTQ+ people in Qatar, and other human rights issues. You can read Amnesty's full report [here](#). Now the current owners of Manchester United want to sell it, and there has been a bid by the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, to take over the ownership of the club. While this initial bid appears to have been rejected due to disagreements among the current owners, it is likely that a further bid will be made.

Our member Kathryn Fletcher made the [news](#) with an impromptu protest against the potential ownership of Manchester United by Qatar, holding up a banner saying "Human Rights Matter." She is just visible under the banner, looking unhappy about the human rights issues, even though the football was good that day.

After this picture appeared in the Guardian online on 8th February, this was followed up by a [letter](#) pointing out the human rights issues and asking both United and City supporters (City is owned by Abu Dhabi) who are concerned about "sportwashing" to get in touch with us. Then on 19th February, Kathryn was interviewed for an article in the [Observer](#) which mentioned the views of Manchester Amnesty and other human rights groups. We have also been in touch with the Rainbow Devils, and Newcastle United fans who have spoken out about Newcastle's Saudi takeover, and we have been tweeting @AmnestyManc. Anyone who wants to get involved in this campaign, please contact Kathryn at bussk@btinternet.com

Human Rights in the UK

We have been following the progress of the Government's **Public Order Bill** (also known as the Protest Bill) over the past few months. As you will recall from our September and December '22 bulletins, the Public Order bill as originally published by the Government sought to place further draconian restrictions on the right to protest, as well as extending stop and search powers. It is Amnesty's view that the police already have sufficient powers with respect to protests. Only recently, Amnesty spoke out about the [arrest of 4 people](#) for peacefully protesting against the proposed felling of 61 historically important trees, underlining that even without the provisions of the Public Order Bill, our rights to protest are severely curtailed.

The bill has now passed through all its parliamentary stages in the Commons and the Lords, where it was heavily amended. The Commons may accept or reject the Lords amendments, or make further amendments of its own. It is likely that the bill will enter "parliamentary ping-pong" where the Commons and the Lords pass the bill back and forth, attempting to come to a compromise. In the end, it is the Commons which has the final say on the bill which is voted on and, if passed, becomes law.

The amendments passed in the Lords during February were welcomed by human rights groups including Amnesty and Liberty. Liberty have published a useful summary of the Lords amendments [here](#). Anti-protest measures that are unlikely to return are the provision for the police to pre-emptively stop protests which they think may become disruptive later on, and government attempts to limit when someone can use "reasonable excuse" in their defence.

However, MPs will vote again on the following Lords amendments:

- Removing powers to stop and search protestors without suspicion
- Removing powers to impose Serious Disruption Prevention Orders (SDPOs, effectively protest banning orders) on people who have not been convicted of a crime
- Adding a definition of serious disruption in the Bill
- Narrowing who can be given a protest banning order on conviction
- Adding protections for journalists and other observers of protests.

A further provision of the bill that was thrown out by the Lords was the proposed use of electronic monitoring (ankle tags) to enforce SDPOs – see report on the Craftivism subgroup activities for our response to this. We are unsure whether the government will try to revive electronic monitoring.

Another piece of proposed legislation which could seriously affect the rights of workers in the UK is the **Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill**, also known as the Anti-Strike bill, which is currently at the Committee stage (between 2nd and 3rd readings) in the Lords. [Amnesty strongly condemns the bill](#), as it poses a risk to the fundamental right to strike.

"The legislation ignores key safeguards that protect workers' rights under international law. It gives ministers sweeping powers to impose minimum service levels after whatever consultations they see fit, rather than requiring them to negotiate alongside unions and employers, subject to third-party arbitration, where agreement cannot be reached."



On February 4th, several of our group members attended a coffee-morning with a focus on Human Rights in the UK and globally, hosted by the Manchester Gorton MP Afzal Khan. There were talks by Pete Weatherby KC and our own Mike Reed who spoke about the work that we do.

News on Israel and Palestine

Violence

The first two months of 2023 were the deadliest since 2000. Israeli forces have killed 65 Palestinians, including 13 children, and injured hundreds of others so far this year. Palestinians have killed eleven Israeli civilians, including three children, and a police officer.

Anti-Arab Government

In December Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition with the ultra-nationalist Religious Zionism party, headed by Bezalel Smotrich, formed the new government reported to be the most right wing and anti-Arab government in Israel's history. Smotrich was appointed Finance Minister with responsibility for settlements in the West Bank, which are illegal under international law.

In February Israel issued a statement that it was committed to stop "discussing setting up any new settlement units for four months and stop approving any new settlements for six months". Minister Smotrich quickly said he would not abide by any agreement on freezing settlement construction. "One thing I do know: there will not be a freeze on the building and development in settlements, not even for one day (it is under my authority)."

Political power over the Judiciary

The coalition plans "judicial reform" to weaken the powers of the supreme court and impose greater political control over the judiciary. The proposals led to rare protests by Israeli citizens, worried about the risks to democracy and a slide towards an authoritarian state. 100,000 people took part in weekly protests across the country and outside Israel's parliament.



© Jack Guez, AFP

Punishment for breach of loyalty

Israel's parliament passed a bill in February allowing the state to revoke citizenship and residency from Palestinians for alleged "terrorist acts." Further legislation will apply the same treatment to family members. The new laws will make collective punishment legal and will expand Israel's powers to render Palestinians stateless for alleged "breach of loyalty" to the state. International law [prohibits an occupying power](#) from requiring the civilian population to show allegiance to it.

In December, Israel [expelled](#) Salah Hammouri, a Jerusalem-born Palestinian human rights lawyer, to France on the pretext of "breach of loyalty". He was detained without charge or trial in the months leading up to his forcible removal from his homeland. In August last year Israel shut down six human rights NGOs in the West Bank, including the internationally respected human rights organisation Al-Haq. The move was widely condemned across the world.

Amnesty's approach

Amnesty continues with its straightforward message: Israel is breaking international law and imposes a regime of Apartheid on the Palestinian people. The road to solving the problems must be based on respect for international law and for human rights. The killings of civilians by both sides must be condemned. To quote Gary Eitle, Amnesty UK Coordinator for Israel: "For activists the mission remains the same. An unswerving bearing of the truth to ensure the facts are known and understood and repeated again and again, so that there can be no claim of ignorance, from any quarter, when inaction leads to more bloodshed."

Events and campaigning activities

Acoustic Amnesty with Women Asylum Seekers Together (WAST)



On 17th Feb we had a very successful and enjoyable fundraising and awareness-raising Acoustic Amnesty event put on jointly with our friends from the Manchester group Women Asylum Seekers Together (WAST). There were 4 choirs, 3 poets, a singer and a band. The WAST choir's song "Far away from Home" was absolutely heartrending.

We were delighted to raise over £850 and were able to make a substantial donation to WAST, as well as to other charitable causes, the Turkish/Syrian earthquake appeal and Amnesty. Enormous thanks to our member Steve Lindsay for organising it, to Eunice Manu and WAST for their participation, to all the other acts who took part, and to Sacred Trinity Church, Salford for the venue.



Busking for Assange and press freedom



Our indefatigable member Lima Al-Iskalachi has been out on the streets of Manchester busking to raise awareness about the continued detention of Julian Assange while he waits to find out if he will be extradited to the USA. There were two events recently – one on 10th December, Human Rights Day, and the other in January.

The case of Julian Assange was highlighted as one of the reasons for the “demotion” of the UK to the third tier in the global index of free expression published by Index on Censorship, but shockingly the UK was listed as only “partially open” on every key metric that goes to make up the Index. See this [Guardian article](#) for more information, and this [website](#) for detail of how the index is constructed.

Lima is keen to get a subgroup going to help her with her work on press freedom and Julian Assange. If you are interested in joining her, please email her limazakoor@gmail.com



Our contribution to Write for Rights 2022 & Individuals at Risk

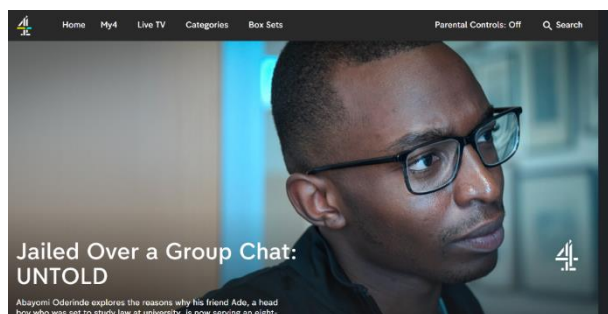
As reported in the last bulletin, we had a very successful **Write for Rights** campaign 2022, and now have the numbers to prove it! As a group, for the 2022 WfR campaign, we wrote 95 solidarity letters or cards and 26 appeal letters. The Whalley Range Peace and Justice Group event produced a fantastic total of 515 solidarity letters or cards and 263 appeal letters for the 2022 campaign. All of this is in addition to the letters we have been writing throughout the year at our drop in sessions.

Our next Individuals at Risk letter writing drop in will be on **Saturday 25th March** 2-4pm at Manchester Central Library behind the café area. More details will appear in the Weekly Action and Newsletters. Do come along!

Reports from the Subgroups

Anti Racism update and sub-group news

We continue to meet every 6 weeks online and split the meetings between self-education and campaigning ideas and actions. We continue to use Layla F. Saad's book *'Me and White Supremacy'* as a starting point for our learning & discussions.



At our January Manchester Amnesty group meeting, we showed the Channel 4 documentary *Jailed over a group chat*.

During the follow-up discussion, it was decided to draft a resolution for the Amnesty UK AGM, which will take place in June 2023. We have just heard that our resolution has been accepted for discussion at the conference.

Here is the resolution:

'This AGM requests that the Amnesty International UK Section Board investigates ways in which the Joint Enterprise and conspiracy laws are being used against communities in the UK, including the use of racist gang narratives in prosecutions, particularly of young people of colour. In addition, this AGM requests that the Board make representations and/or campaigns on any human rights issues identified.'

We feel that it would be timely for Amnesty UK to add its voice to the growing concern about the use of Joint Enterprise laws. We were pleased to see that our friends at Joint Enterprise Not Guilty by Association (JENGbA), represented by Liberty, recently had [success with their legal challenge](#) regarding the Joint Enterprise law. As a result, the Crown Prosecution Service has agreed to a pilot scheme to monitor data on the age, race, sex and disability of those prosecuted under the joint enterprise doctrine.

The anti-racism sub-group is always pleased to welcome new members so please get in touch if you would like to join us: hazelerrey@gmail.com

Refugee rights update and subgroup news.

The fight against the governments cruel plan to deport asylum seekers to **Rwanda** has been ongoing, with some small victories but also some setbacks. The long awaited ruling from the UK High Court on the legality of the government's plan to deport to Rwanda finally arrived on 19th December, and disappointingly, the government's plans were declared to be lawful. However, while the plan itself was considered lawful, the judges found that the 8 asylum seekers whose cases had been brought by Asylum Aid, Care4Calais, Detention Action and the PCS union, had not themselves been correctly dealt with. They identified flaws in the reasoning of the officials who had dealt with the cases, failure to consider all available evidence, failure to communicate essential information, and a case in which one asylum seeker had been confused with another. The judges therefore quashed all 8 cases.

The judges did agree that there could be a partial appeal against their decision that the Rwanda plan was lawful. However, the court ruled that only individual claimants and not organisations such as Care4Calais, would be allowed to appeal. Whereas the aid organisations are able to represent the interests of many refugees who will be impacted by the government's plans, individual asylum seekers, who usually have no recourse to resources, can only argue for themselves. This [Guardian](#) article explains some of the complexities of the decision. We await further news.

In January, some of us took part in an action initiated by Manchester based refugee research organisation RAPAR, writing letters, emails and tweets about the case of Kouame K whose claim for asylum had been denied and who was facing imminent deportation to the Ivory Coast where his life would be in danger. Thankfully, at the last minute, the deportation did not go ahead, although it is not clear if he is out of danger yet.

The refugee rights subgroup meets approximately monthly, mainly over zoom, and has been planning its campaigns for Refugee month, which is in June. After the success of last year's orange hearts campaign, we plan to do something similar this year during refugee month (June) and particularly refugee week (June 19th-25th this year). The 120 orange hearts in felt and fabric took a long time to make, so we thought that this year we would make them from card, and hope to display them at several open garden events in South Manchester, which happen to take place in June. The refugee rights sub-group meets approximately monthly usually over zoom and is always pleased to have new members. If you want to join us email alison.wearden@gmail.com

United Arab Emirates Update and sub-group news

There is no news on either of our human rights defenders in prison in the UAE. Mohammed Al Roken remains in prison eight months after his release date. March 20th is the 6th anniversary of Ahmed Mansoor's arrest and all the UK groups campaigning for his release have agreed to take photos of themselves with signs demanding his release to put on social media. We will take the photo of our group at the next group meeting on March 13th.

COP28 Nov 2023 will be in the UAE. What on earth can we do to effect change?



There was outcry from environmental groups when the UAE appointed Sultan Al Jaber as the president of the COP 28 talks. He heads the state-owned Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (Adnoc), the twelfth largest oil company in the world. The climate emergency badly needs world leaders to agree to significantly reduce the use of oil and gas over the coming decade and Sultan Al Jaber has not shown himself to be a leader with any interest to affect this shift.

There are concerns too that the closed nature of Emirati society will block any form of protest during the event. Human rights campaigners within Egypt successfully used COP27 to bring publicity for the detained democracy activist Alaa Abd el-Fattah. This will not be

possible in the UAE. Human rights groups across the globe are working together to plan actions to shine a light on the situation in the UAE leading up to COP28.

Our group is working with Liverpool Amnesty to prepare activities leading up to COP28 in the UAE. We plan to hold stalls alongside environmental groups such as Greenpeace to draw attention to the link between climate justice and human rights.

Please join us! This is a deeply important moment for our planet.

The next subgroup meeting is Weds 22nd March 6pm on zoom. Contact Kathryn bussk@btinternet.com

Craftivism



After our successful orange hearts project for refugee week last year, we have been using craft again to promote human rights. On 1st February, we attended the rally in Central Manchester in support of striking workers from various unions, and distributed some tags. Each tag had a QR code linking to information about some of the worst aspects of the Public Order bill, including the proposal to use ankle tags to monitor activists who had been banned from protesting. The tags were well received and people were interested in the message.

As noted in the piece on Human Rights in the UK, the Lords removed the use of electronic monitoring from the Public Order bill. If tags make a comeback in the Commons, we will resume our campaign!