



# News from the Minehead Group



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## Actions you can take this month:

- ✓ **Join us** at our **letter writing** and **planning** session on Wednesday 19 July 1430-1600 at the Beach Hotel. We will write letters about the cases detailed in AIUK's Summer **Real Lives** supplement and plan our autumn programme of activities.
- ✓ **Send a letter** to the UK Prime Minister asking him to stop the cruel **Immigration Bill** that is currently going through Parliament. A model letter is attached for you to adapt and send.
- ✓ **Send a letter** to the Indian High Commission in London about the **BK16**. This is the same letter that many signed at the Amnesty Concert in June. The letter is attached for you to adapt and send.
- ✓ **Call on our MP** to press for **Israeli settlement goods** to be banned from entering UK markets and help end the human rights violations endured by Palestinians living under the Israeli authorities' racist system of **apartheid**. Write your own letter or follow this link to sign on line: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/ban-israeli-settlement-goods-uk>

## News from our group

Much of May and June was taken up with preparing for our **Concert and Tea** on Saturday 24 June. The occasion was a performance of the **Amnesty Cantata** composed by Emily Feldberg, and first performed in 2011 to mark the 50th anniversary of the founding of Amnesty International. Emily offered to revive the Cantata to mark the **21st birthday** of our Minehead Group and the performance was timed to coincide with **Refugee Week**.

[The photo on the top right shows the choir and orchestra in rehearsal.]



We were delighted to welcome Chris and Christina Lawson, who now live in Sussex, who had started the group in 2002. They opened the event for us by lighting the Amnesty candle. [See photo on the left.] In our opening remarks we reminded the audience that the candle is an important symbol for Amnesty members as it reminds us of an ancient Chinese proverb 'better light a candle than curse the darkness'. The Cantata was performed by singers and orchestral players brought together by Emily from across West Somerset and even included one of her friends who had travelled here from Watford, especially to take part. The music was interspersed with readings by Amnesty members. These readings linked with the words of the Cantata and quoted prisoners of conscience who had thanked those writing

letters on their behalf. Their words highlighted how letters and solidarity messages give hope to those who are in prison without trial, who are tortured or face the death penalty. As the Cantata says: *'sent by a stranger, letters are noted, letters are seen, they show the world is watching, they show concern is real'*. Chris Lawson described the Cantata as *'a powerful piece - powerful in both words and music'*.





After the concert everyone enjoyed socialising over tea and cake. Chris and Christina cut the birthday cake made by Alison, after which Chris said a few words and was given an impromptu round of applause. Alison said: *'There was a lovely community atmosphere during the tea part of the event, with people seeing friends they knew well, others they hadn't seen for ages.'* As well as welcoming the Lawsons, we were very pleased to see Jenny Lennon Wood, another long term member of our group, who had travelled up from Weymouth to be with us.

Around the church we had put up displays about Amnesty, our current campaigns, refugees and the work of the Minehead & District Refugee Support Group. Everyone was encouraged to sign letters to the UK and Indian Governments, and solidarity cards to political prisoners in India. More than 40 signatures were collected on each, with Philippa doing a sterling job encouraging people to sign.

I think we'd all agree with the sentiment of one audience member who described it as *'A very special afternoon'*. We are very grateful to Emily, the choir and orchestra for the music, to members of St Andrew's church for helping with the venue arrangements, to the cake makers for their delicious contributions, and to the audience for their generous donations amounting to over £400. As lots of people don't carry cash these days, we experimented for the first time with using a card reader provided by AIUK. We took £42 in card payments, so it was worth the effort!

## Campaign News

**HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE UK:** recently, AIUK shared the good news that the UK Government had announced officially that it was to scrap the Rights Removal Bill (aka 'Bill of Rights'). This proposed legislation threatened to strip us of our Human Rights Act - our invisible safety net that protects all our human rights. Among many other things, the Human Rights Act has helped get a proper effective inquiry into the Government's handling of the Covid pandemic, pushed reform of how police respond to violence against women, and played a crucial part in securing the peace settlement in Northern Ireland. However, the journey towards safeguarding our rights is far from over, and challenges lie ahead. Various bills making their way through Parliament currently, including the **Immigration Bill** and the **Northern Ireland Troubles Bill**, pose serious risks to our fundamental human rights. We can all help by writing a letter to the Government or to our MP (see actions overleaf). If you want to find out more about the NI Troubles Bill, you can read a helpful overview by following this link: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/ni-troubles>

**ISRAEL AND THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES:** For decades, Israel has been forcing thousands of Palestinians off their land, occupying it and using it to create illegal settlements for Israeli settlers. Entire Palestinian communities have lost their homes due to these settlements, which continue to grow. Palestinians frequently face violent attacks by Israeli settlers and their homes, cars and orchards are regularly torched. Israeli authorities have long enabled and incited settler attacks against Palestinians, and in some cases, soldiers have participated directly. The UK is letting goods produced in settlements into our markets and allowing British companies to operate there. This legitimises the illegal settlements, which are all war crimes, and helps them expand and occupy more Palestinian land. Please help by taking the action listed overleaf. With political parties in the UK currently drafting their manifestos for the next general election, now is a good time to make our voices heard.

## Diary Dates

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

### Wednesday 19 July

Letter writing and planning session  
1430-1600 at the Beach Hotel. Come and share your ideas for our autumn programme.

## How to contact the Minehead Amnesty International Local Group:

**Website:** [www.amnesty.org.uk/minehead](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/minehead)  
**Email:** [amnestyminehead@gmail.com](mailto:amnestyminehead@gmail.com)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/amnestyminehead](https://www.facebook.com/amnestyminehead)  
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