



## The Crisis in Israel and Palestine



## Manchester Group Quarterly Bulletin Number 7 December 2023

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*This newsletter is compiled by the Group Communications Secretary, Alison Wearden ([alison.wearden@gmail.com](mailto: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 crisis in Israel and Palestine – report with personal reflections from our Israel/Palestine coordinator, Mike Reed.

## Reaching out in Empathy

In common with many Amnesty activists, I have always felt that Amnesty gave me the means to feel I could do something in response to the appalling evidence of human rights abuses around the world. I have never been overcome with that feeling of powerlessness, that sense of despair that many people experience. Until now.

The shocking events in Israel and Gaza over the last two months have left us all reeling. We can feel paralysed into inaction. Is anything we do going to make the slightest difference? It was in this feeling of helplessness that twelve Manchester Amnesty members and contacts gathered to discuss whether and how we could respond. We recognised that whatever we did would NOT make a difference to the lives of the people living in those lands. But we felt that we had to make a response.

And it was expressing our feelings that was at the core of how we wanted to respond. We wanted to show respect for those who had lost their lives, and empathy for those who had lost their loved ones. We decided to hold a silent vigil. For the victims and the suffering people on both sides of this dreadful chapter in the life of Israel-Palestine. We started on 20 October and we have continued since. Every Friday, 5 to 6 pm in St Peter's Square, Manchester, we stand in silence, dressed in black. We sing no chants, we display no flags. Our only banner is the Amnesty logo with its candle as the symbol of hope, amidst the barbed wire symbolising repression and cruelty. We display simple placards demanding justice for all: Protect all Civilians; Uphold International Law; Stop war crimes; Ceasefire Now; Humanitarian Aid Now; Protect Human Rights.



When we stand together in that line we feel touched by the pain and suffering of the people in Gaza and Israel. And it is clear from the reactions of many people in the city that we have touched a nerve with them also. We have received applause, praise and warm reactions. And we are reminded of the principle that where there is injustice we must speak out. It is our duty, regardless of how helpless we may feel. Our vigils will continue at least until the Friday before Christmas. We welcome you to join us for just one hour.

## Reaching out to the Muslim Community

While we acknowledge and condemn the human rights abuses by both sides in the recent conflict, we must and will continue with our campaign based on Amnesty's report: Israel's Apartheid Against the Palestinians. And we have been given opportunities to promote the message.



*Mike speaking at the BMHC event*

Just as we were trying to forge links with the Muslim community in Manchester, we received an invitation to meet with community leaders at the British Muslim Heritage Centre (BMHC) in Manchester. They wanted a speaker for a fundraising event for the people of Gaza. And what an event it was!

Organised with only a few days notice, they attracted an audience of 500 to a dinner with speeches and appeals. Our presentation of 50 minutes had to be compressed into 15 minutes. But perhaps it was more powerful for that sharp focus. It was very well received with many people expressing huge thanks, exchanging contact details and offering further opportunities to make a presentation. Four of our members attended. The fundraising on behalf of Islamic Relief, produced an amazing £144,000 on the night. And as a result we have been invited to speak at a similar event in Birmingham, and a smaller event in Altrincham.

## Reaching a wider audience

Early in the new year we will be preparing plans for further activity in Amnesty's campaign. We recognise that awareness raising is the critical early phase of this long campaign and we want to find effective ways to do this. One suggestion is to train and support other members in giving talks to audiences around Manchester. But we need to identify other imaginative approaches. We welcome your suggestions. Do please get in touch.

This report has said nothing about the shocking facts on the ground during the war on Gaza. The reporting is extensive and in so many news bulletins, what can we add? But we urge you to read Amnesty's latest briefing which expresses the critical urgency of our demands:

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/resources/briefing-crisis-israel-and-occupied-palestinian-territories-23112023>

## Reaching into our hearts

Oh rascal children of Gaza  
oh rascal children of Gaza,  
you who constantly disturbed me with your screams under my window,  
you who filled every morning with rush and chaos,  
you who broke my vase and stole the lonely flower on my balcony,  
come back –  
and scream as you want,  
and break all the vases,  
steal all the flowers,  
come back,  
just come back...

A poem by Khaled Juma

For further information please contact Mike Reed: [mikewreed101@gmail.com](mailto:mikewreed101@gmail.com)

## UAE and campaign for the release of Ahmed Mansoor and Mohammed Al-Roken. *Kathryn Fletcher*

It has been a busy three months.

### Focus on COP28: climate rights and human rights.



We have focused on the COP28 in Dubai in our campaign for Ahmed Mansoor and Mohammed al-Roken. In September and October we held two stalls at the Granby Street Market with the Liverpool Amnesty group and Greenpeace. We offered art blocks printing and as always, these were incredibly popular and drew people into conversations about climate and human rights. Over 200 people signed our petition to the UK government representatives attending COP28, asking them to raise

the issue of the many people detained in the UAE. This has now been sent to the UK government.

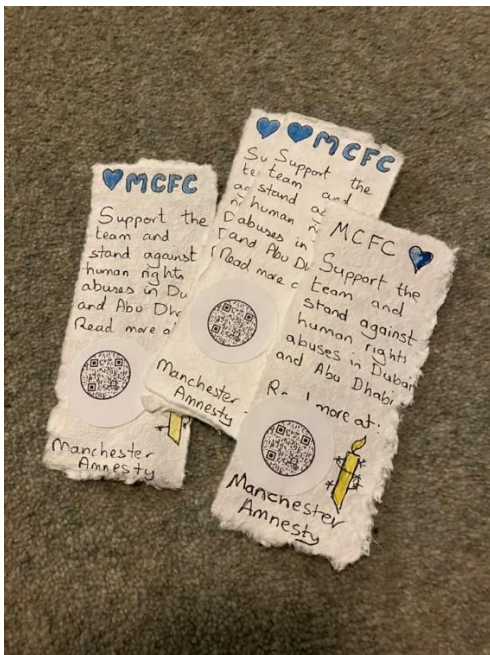
## Focus on football.

With support from AIUK, we commissioned a plane trailing the words **'UAE: Free Ahmed Mansoor'** to fly over Manchester City's Etihad stadium during their top-of-the table match with Liverpool on 25<sup>th</sup> November. It not only, reportedly, caused a stir among the fans, but the stunt was also featured in over one hundred news outlets around the world. You can read Amnesty's press release [here](#).



In the weeks leading up to the plane fly-over, members of our craftivism group had prepared about 120 little scrolls (see picture below) asking people to stand against human rights abuses in the UAE. The scrolls have a QR code leading to further information, and links to actions that can be taken for Ahmed Mansoor.

A week before the plane fly-over, three of us "went shopping" and dropped the little scrolls into the pockets of merchandise at the Manchester City shop in the Arndale Centre. They were still there a week later for fans to discover when they brought their purchase home.



## Focus on Write for Rights

Ahmed Mansoor is featured in the Write for Rights campaign this winter. A prominent human rights activist, Ahmed has been detained in solitary confinement with no access to books and not even a bed to sleep on, since his arrest in March 2017. He was subsequently sentenced to 10 years imprisonment in May 2018 for “*insulting the UAE and its symbols.*”



We will be promoting Ahmed’s case at letter writing events over the coming month. You can send Ahmed a message of support, write to the President of the UAE and/or the UAE ambassador demanding Ahmed’s immediate release, tweet, or [sign this petition](#) on Amnesty’s website. All the details and instructions are included in this year’s [Write for Rights booklet](#).

## Focus on the city council.

Fair Square and four other human rights organisations have [written a letter](#) to the leader of Manchester City Council, Bev Craig, who has close connections with the UAE government, through her role as a director of Manchester Life Development Company. The letter asks Cllr Craig to use her influence and to make a public call for the release of Ahmed Mansoor and others who are unjustly imprisoned for criticising the UAE government. We plan to continue to put pressure on Bev Craig to respond to this letter.

We will be meeting soon to work out how best to build on our recent campaigns and take our work forward. If you would like to get involved, please contact Kathryn Fletcher on [bussk@btinternet.com](mailto:bussk@btinternet.com)

## Anti-racism sub-group update. *Hazel Errey*

We have continued to support Kids of Colour in their work with the Manchester 10 and their families. There was a glimmer of hope at the start of November when three of the boys/young men had their sentencing appeal at the Royal Courts of Justice in London. The three boys concerned had all been convicted on the basis of private Telegram chat messages, which were used by the prosecution as evidence of a ‘gang’ conspiring to harm although no incident of harm occurred. Unfortunately their sentencing appeal was adjourned at the hearing in order to provide more time for the legal teams to prepare. Although it must have been devastating for the three boys and their families, Kids of Colour are hopeful that when the appeal takes place next spring, it may be more likely that the convictions can be appealed as well as the sentencing.

In the meantime, Kids of Colour continue to support the boys in prison and their siblings at home, including sending them books in prison and tokens for the siblings. If you would like to donate to the fund for these gifts, please **go to the Kids of Colour website where you can make your donation:** <https://donorbox.org/kidsofcolour>

If you feel happy to do so, please mention that you are a member of Manchester Amnesty group. The donation system allows you to specify that you would like your donation to be used for the support of the Manchester 10 boys.

Following the passing of our resolution on the racist use of Joint Enterprise & conspiracy laws at Amnesty UK's AGM 2023, we are looking forward to welcoming members of the organisation, Joint Enterprise Not Guilty by Association (JENGBA) to Manchester Amnesty's January online group meeting. <http://jointenterprise.co/> They will be talking about their organisation, which is a grassroots campaign run mainly by family members of individuals who are serving prison sentences for crimes committed by others. Their campaign highlights the unjust and discriminatory use of Joint Enterprise laws against working class people and people of colour.



Amnesty UK has recently released a report about the Prevent programme entitled, *This Is The Thought Police: The Prevent duty and its chilling effect on human rights*. The report illustrates and shows evidence that *Prevent* is a dangerously broken system that is seriously interfering with the lives and freedoms of thousands of innocent people. It highlights the way in which *Prevent* has a racist and discriminatory impact affecting some of society's most vulnerable and marginalised people.

You can download the report by following this link: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/prevent>. Manchester Amnesty's anti-racism sub-group is planning to read the report together in 2024 and discuss ways in which we can raise awareness of the serious human rights impact of *Prevent*.

## Individuals at Risk and Write for Rights. *Anne Walker.*

Every year, in the run up to the festive season, Amnesty International run an international campaign sending messages of support and appeals for a few emblematic cases from around the world. This year they have included a prisoner of conscience, Ahmed Mansoor, for whom we have been working since his arrest in 2017.

We are all encouraged to send solidarity messages to the 10 individuals enduring human rights abuses, usually in the form of a Christmas card, and to write appeals on their behalf to government authorities.

Background information on each case and instructions and tips for writing are included in the 2023 Write for Rights Booklet. You can all take part. [Download the booklet](#) at:

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/write-rights-2023-get-started>



### Write for Rights Stalls/events

We also want to involve non-Amnesty members and have been holding stalls to invite passersby to send a card. So far, we have held a stall in Manchester Cathedral and Central Library. Both have been very quiet and we have struggled with volunteers to help. We have one more stall at the People’s History Museum on both days over the weekend on 9/10<sup>th</sup> December. This coincides with the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – let’s hope for more interest! **We are still short of volunteers to help, so if you can spare a couple of hours between 11am to 4 pm on either day, please contact [anne.walker9@ntlworld.com](mailto:anne.walker9@ntlworld.com).**

The Whalley Range Justice and Peace group regularly hold a big Write for Rights event at St Margaret’s Church, this year on December 2nd. We had a stall there to promote our group, but the Peace and Justice group do all the work. As always, this was a very popular event with many cards and letters written (we will publish the figures for all our write for rights stalls when they have been collated), excellent music, food and stalls. This year, we also had a letter, which 63 people signed, asking Manchester City Council leader Bev Craig to use her influence to call for the release of Ahmed Mansoor from prison in the UAE, plus a stall on which visitors could do art block printing of Amnesty and climate rights logos.





## Press Freedom and Julian Assange. *Lima Al-Iskalachi*

As reported previously, Julian Assange is still waiting for his final appeal against extradition to the USA on espionage charges to be heard, and no court date has yet been set. It is likely that the case will be scheduled for a court hearing at the last minute, meaning that there will be very little time for Assange's supporters to react. If the appeal is unsuccessful, he could be extradited to the USA immediately.

In mid-September, 60 Australian MPs and senators called on the United States to drop the charges against Assange, saying that justice was not being served by his continued incarceration (currently for more than 10 years) and that the case was weakening respect for the US justice system. Last month, sixteen members of the US congress from across the whole political spectrum wrote to President Biden urging that the extradition proceedings against Mr Assange are dropped. Their letter referred to "...*unnecessary prosecution that risks criminalising common journalistic practices and thus chilling the work of the free press.*"



Lima Al-Iskalachi has been working very hard on an ongoing project to create an artwork (see photo) which will be used in a Vigil for Assange and Press Freedom in Manchester City Centre once the court date is announced. This work is being carried out in conjunction with an Amnesty group of Assange supporters in Adelaide, Australia, and thus showcases both local and global collaborations. The artwork features contributions reflecting freedom of speech, peace, and justice. Local artists Caroline Blackburn (ceramics) and Maggie Stick (print) have donated and there are photos and words from local photographers and poets. Globally, Kym Staton shared the poster of his documentary film about Assange and David Dormino granted permission to add an image of his 'Anything to Say' sculpture.

Additional expressions welcome as we await the UK court's verdict on Assange's extradition appeal. If you would like to contribute, please contact Lima - [limazakoor@gmail.com](mailto:limazakoor@gmail.com)

## **LGBTQ+ rights.** *Zoe Wong*

December 1<sup>st</sup> was World Aids Day. Vigils were held throughout the country to commemorate the lives of all those who have died from, or are living with HIV, still predominantly people from the LGBTQ+ community. Our LGBTQ+ coordinator, Zoe Wong, attended the Liverpool vigil.

Following the Conservative Party Conference in Manchester early October, a series of homophobic and transphobic comments was made by several party members and endorsed by the Prime Minister. The then Home Secretary Suella Braverman suggested, despite a complete lack of evidence to support her claim, that LGBTQ+ people and women are misusing their identities to claim asylum in the UK, demonstrating her lack of compassion and willingness to make political capital from the refugee crisis. [Amnesty](#) called her speech “a display of cynicism and xenophobia.”

The Prime Minister Rishi Sunak then made an anti-trans comment claiming that misgendering trans people is “common sense”. Both comments have provoked great grievance within the LGBTQ+ and wider community. Such comments are not only obvious discrimination against LGBTQ+ people, but also can potentially lead to more hatred from the general public towards LGBTQ+ people of the intersection, that is, LGBTQ+ people of colour, LGBTQ+ asylum seekers, LGBTQ+ immigrants, etc.

A trial of two young people for the murder of Brianna Ghey, a trans 16-year-old teenage girl, started in late November. Brianna was brutally murdered on February 11 in a park near Warrington. It's agreed that this was a hate crime committed against her trans identity. With the anti-trans comments made by the Prime Minister not long ago, it's clear that we need to stand together with trans people and fight for their rights.

On the international scene, [Amnesty has condemned as “shameful and absurd”](#) the recently announced decision by the Russian Supreme Court to label LGBTQ+ activists as “extremists”, with the possibility of long prison sentences for participation in LGBTQ+ groups. It is expected that the ruling will lead to an increase in persecution of members of the LGBTQ+ community and could have “catastrophic” consequences.

Please feel free to contact the coordinator of the LGBTQ+ subgroup @ [weiyi.zoe.song@gmail.com](mailto:weiyi.zoe.song@gmail.com) if you wish to discuss the current human rights situation for LGBTQ+ people or participate in any future events.

## **Refugees** *Alison Wearden*

At our December monthly meeting, we were pleased to welcome Liz Hibberd, formerly an active member of our group, who spoke to us about her work with [City of Sanctuary](#), a scheme which accredits community groups, schools, libraries and businesses (so not only cities!) when they have demonstrated that they provide a safe, enabling and welcoming environment for refugees and asylum seekers. Manchester has recently pledged to become a City of Sanctuary (Salford has already achieved this status) and Liz told us about the steps that will need to be taken before the award can be made. The slides which accompanied Liz's talk can be accessed [here](#).

The major news on refugees since our last bulletin was the decision by the Supreme Court on 15<sup>th</sup> November that the government's plan to send asylum seekers for processing in Rwanda is unlawful. The court found that Rwanda is not a safe country, does not have the wherewithal to process claims properly, and that asylum seekers would be at risk of being sent back to the country from which they are fleeing. In response to the ruling, [Amnesty called for the government to abandon and "draw a line"](#) under this cruel and unworkable policy.

Readers may be interested in [this informative article](#) by Colin Yeo of the organisation Free Movement, which discusses the huge backlog in the processing of asylum cases that exists in the UK at the moment, and outlines some of the appalling consequences. These include asylum seekers being housed in completely inappropriate accommodation for months and years; the recent decision to evict those whose claims are successful from Home Office sponsored accommodation at very short notice, creating a serious homelessness problem; and the use of money from the already inadequate international aid budget to finance the asylum chaos.

Members who are able to do so may wish to attend an all-day workshop on 11<sup>th</sup> December at the Methodist Central Hall, Oldham Street, M1 1JQ, focusing on campaigning for refugees and asylum seekers as part of the Together with Refugees coalition.

If there is a member who would be willing to take a lead on campaigning relating to refugees, please let Alison know.

## **Human Rights in the UK** *Alison Wearden*

Following on from the success of her online quiz about the many-pronged assaults on our human rights in the UK, Liverpool member and joint regional rep Elena Auer set up a special interest group to focus specifically on UK human rights issues. She also wanted to build a community of people with similar concerns, including members of other organisations such as Liberty. I have been attending group meetings and can report back briefly here.

The purpose of the group is to **"raise awareness of the erosion of Human Rights in the UK, to support initiatives to protect human rights in the UK, and to argue for the importance of remaining a signatory to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)."**

At the moment the group is involved in producing two letters for circulation asking members to send them to their MPs as we approach a general election. The first asks:

*Do you agree that all UK legislation should uphold the rights set out in the ECHR?  
and*

*Do you share our view that a newly elected UK government should take legislative action to review and rescind legislation that is not compliant with the ECHR and international law?*

The second letter is about this government's increasing use of statutory instruments (SIs), which do not require full parliamentary scrutiny, to fill out the details of bills after they have been through parliament. One example was using an SI to define "serious disruption" in the Public Order Act, and recently we have heard of the use of statutory instruments to allow

the use of MRI scans to attempt to determine the age of asylum seekers (note that most authorities agree that this is a very flawed method). The second letter asks MPs whether they would support a commitment to reviewing the procedure and practice for the use of SIs. When finalised these letters will be circulated to groups so that members can use them to take action.

Another piece of work being carried out by Liverpool Amnesty, and which will be shared with the group, is the development of a fun tool-kit for engaging people in discussions about human rights in the UK – e.g. a UK human rights wheel of fortune, and a festive unlucky dip where participants pick out information about rights that have been curtailed over recent years.

Anyone who is interested in joining the Human Rights in the UK Special Interest Group is welcome to do so. Let me know ([alison.wearden@gmail.com](mailto:alison.wearden@gmail.com)) and I'll ask Elena to add your name to the mailing list.

## Amnesty stall at Trailblazers event. Alison Wearden

On 14<sup>th</sup> September, we had an Amnesty stall a fabulous event at Station South in Levenshulme, put on by a group of women who engage in needlecraft and had made a quilt to illustrate the lives of 16 trailblazing Manchester women.



The event was really interesting, with short talks about each of the 16 women, given by the woman who stitched that part of the quilt. There was also a longer talk by historian Helen Antrobus and some photos on display.

On our stall, we highlighted the cases of three women (in Bangladesh, Burundi and Russia) whose rights were being threatened or denied, and provided links via QR codes to petitions to sign or letters that visitors could write. It was a successful evening which generated interest in our work and we got a few new members!

Fundraiser for Safe Passage  
refugee charity at Sacred  
Trinity, Chapel Street,  
Salford

# ACOUSTIC AMNESTY

**TOM BLACKWELL**  
**MARK GREER & CLIVE MELLOR**  
**LUCY HOPE**  
**IAN DANIEL/LESLIE (POET)**  
**ROBIN MUKHERJEE**  
**OPEN VOICE CHOIR**

**DEC  
8TH**

**7.30  
PM**

**TICKETS £10 AT WEGOTTICKETS.COM**  
**(EVENT 594143)**

## **Acoustic Amnesty December 8<sup>th</sup>, Sacred Trinity church, Salford** *Steve Lindsay*

The last Acoustic Amnesty of 2023 will take place  
this Friday, 8<sup>th</sup> December, 7:30pm.

Proceeds will be split between Amnesty and Safe  
Passage refugee charity

Do support it if you can as you are guaranteed to  
have a great time!