



News from the Minehead Group



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Actions you can take this month:

- ✓ **Demand an urgent ceasefire in Israel and Gaza:** urge Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to call for an immediate ceasefire by all parties and help end the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. Follow this link to add your name to AIUK's letter. <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/ceasefirenow>
- ✓ **Send an email** that asks the Indian High Commissioner to the UK to put pressure on the **Indian** Government to release **Kashmiri** journalists and human rights defenders detained for exercising their right to freedom of expression and to drop all charges against them. You can take action by following this link. <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/activist-actions/ccsasjammukashmir1>
- ✓ **Take further action** for **Umar Khalid** who was jailed in **India** in September 2020 because he joined and spoke at peaceful protests against the discriminatory Citizenship Amendment Act in 2019. You can write a solidarity letter to him in prison: Dr Syed Umar Khalid, ID Number 626714, Jail No. 2, Tihar Central Jail, New Delhi 110058. Also demand Umar's immediate and unconditional release, by writing to the Union Home Minister of India, Mr Amit Shah, Ministry of Home Affairs, North Block, New Delhi 110001, India. Salutation: Dear Union Home Minister; email address: jscpq-mha@nic.in

News from our group

Write for Rights: the 2023 global campaign began on 1 November and some of us met on the start date, in the Beach Hotel, and wrote letters on behalf of a range of the 12 cases selected for this year's campaign. On 1 December, we were delighted to be invited by the Minehead Quakers to join their monthly 'quiet half hour' and



soup lunch. After everything was cleared away, we sat around the table to sign letters and cards on behalf of four Write for Rights cases: Ahmed Mansoor, United Arab Emirates: locked up for 10 years in solitary confinement for speaking out against injustice; Rita Karasartova, Kyrgyzstan: a human rights campaigner and expert in civic law

charged with attempting to overthrow the government; Thapelo Mohave, South Africa: in hiding because of death threats resulting from his work to improve the lives of the poor; Chaima Issa, Tunisia: facing prison for her peaceful activism.

Minehead Christmas Tree Festival: once again Amnesty was represented by a tree at the festival. Our tree was decorated with pictures from the Write for Rights booklet, and information was left under the tree for the public to pick up. Thanks to everyone who helped with our tree and volunteered to steward.

Minehead Community Orchestra kindly voted to give the donations collected at their Christmas concert to Amnesty and the very



welcome sum of £135 was raised. It was a very enjoyable evening, with a friendly, informal atmosphere, and we hope that the occasion helped others to understand and support what we do! Here is a picture of the conductor, Emily Feldberg, talking about Amnesty at the start of the concert, with the lit candle prominent at the front.



Diary Dates

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

Thursday 22 Feb
Minehead Group's AGM & talk on Kashmir at 1400. Venue to be confirmed.

Tuesday 5 March
Group meeting with a speaker at 1730. (We had booked a speaker on Gaza but this is likely to change in view of recent events.) Tbc.

Friday 8 March
International Women's Day Action Details to be confirmed.

Saturday 20 April
SW Regional Conference in Exeter. Details to follow.

Campaign News

JAMMU AND KASHMIR: It is now more than four years since the Indian government enacted the abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution in August 2019, which changed the status of Jammu & Kashmir from that of a State with its own Chief Minister and Parliament, to two Union Territories ruled directly by the national government from India's Capital, New Delhi. During this time there has been significant intensification in the repression of rights in the region, particularly with the arrest and detention of journalists and human rights defenders. These individuals' right to freedom of opinion and expression is being violated, along with their right to movement, right to privacy, and right to remedy and access to justice. The authorities have committed these violations with absolute impunity, misusing legislation such as the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and the Foreign Contributions Regulation Act (FCRA) to detain journalists and activists without trial for indefinite periods. Multiple news media outlets and human rights organisations constantly face raids and investigations from the National Investigation Agency and the Income Tax Department over unsubstantiated charges of financial irregularities. A number of journalists including Aasif Sultan and Sajad Gul have been subjected to 'revolving door' arrests, whereby they are arrested under one law, granted bail by the court, and then re-arrested almost immediately under the UAPA.

Amnesty believes that anyone facing charges for internationally recognised criminal offences should be tried promptly and fairly in a regular court with legal representation of their choice. Unjust barriers placed on the people of Jammu and Kashmir that prevent them from expressing themselves freely should be removed, including the ban imposed on protests by government workers. Steps should also be taken to improve representation and participation of the people of Jammu and Kashmir in decision-making processes. Please take the action listed overleaf, if you can.

ISRAEL AND GAZA: Well done to our member Philippa Gerry for organising three peace vigils in Minehead town centre. Here she is with the Quakers' peace banner. Philippa also worked hard trying to raise awareness in local churches. We heard that local members, David and Julie, had managed to join a Palestinian Solidarity march in London, and Susan witnessed similar marches when travelling recently in New Zealand. It's encouraging to feel that we are not on our own when campaigning about these issues.



Other News

As you'll have read in our last newsletter, our group sent off £800 to AIUK in October. Our group's treasurer, Cherry, received this encouraging note from AIUK's community **fundraising** organiser:

Local groups donated £50,000 to AIUK this year (with still a few weeks to go!) This figure only represents a fraction of the total raised by local groups with much of the money generated being spent on human rights campaigns locally. Thank you for all you've done to support this work. Thanks to the hard work and commitment of volunteers like you, Amnesty International has a presence in communities across the UK putting human rights on the map.

And members will also have received an encouraging 'thank you' from Sacha Deshmukh, AIUK Chief Executive Officer. Sacha says: *Although 2023 has felt, at times, to be a bleak year for human rights, there have been lots of **human rights wins** over the last 12 months. Many of these have been possible thanks to your support, so thank you for being a member of Amnesty International UK.... During 2023, our **crisis work** has included exposing human rights violations in Ukraine, Iran, Afghanistan, and Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. In 2024, we will continue to investigate and expose human rights abuses, call for the release of those wrongfully imprisoned, and defend the rights of those whose rights have been taken away.*

How to contact the Minehead Amnesty International Local Group:

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