

Manchester Group Quarterly Bulletin Number 8 March 2024

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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.

Press Freedom and Julian Assange

The lead article this quarter focuses on the case of Julian Assange. As readers will know, Assange has been in Belmarsh high-security prison for almost 5 years, under threat of extradition to the USA. As a result of publishing leaked information about the illegal activities of the USA in Iraq and Afghanistan, Assange faces charges under the USA's 2017 Espionage Act (the provisions of which were never intended to be used against journalists and publishers), and if convicted could be sentenced to 175 years in prison. Assange's extradition was approved back in June 2022, by the then home secretary, Priti Patel, and his first appeal against the extradition order was unsuccessful.

On 20th and 21st February (collectively called Day X), Assange's lawyers were at the Royal Courts of Justice in London arguing that he should be allowed a further opportunity to appeal against his extradition in the UK courts. We await the outcome of this hearing (possibly any day now). If Assange is denied a further appeal in the UK courts, he will have exhausted all legal avenues and extradition could take place imminently. However, it is expected that failure in the UK courts will result in his lawyers will taking his case to the European Court of Human Rights.

On the occasion of the 20th/21st February hearings Amnesty International's criminal justice researcher, Julia Hall, [said](#),

"It's not just Julian Assange in the dock. This is a test for the US and UK authorities on their commitment to the fundamental tenets of media freedom that underpin the rights to freedom of expression and the public's right to information."

Assange was unable to attend the hearing in person due to ill health. Amnesty International have argued that, if extradited, Assange is likely to be held in solitary confinement, and may be subject to cruel and inhumane treatment, breaching his human rights.

Amnesty International have supported Julian Assange's case for many years. Here in Manchester our Press Freedom/Assange subgroup, led by Lima Al-iskalachi, has been taking every opportunity to raise awareness of the issues surrounding Assange. In the past 3 months, the group distributed Free Assange tee-shirts to musicians to raise awareness and held a stall at a Rock 4 Gaza event.



Lima inspiring us to create our art

On 10th February, we had a very successful event in central Manchester, where members of our group and other Amnesty groups, plus members of the public, could make art works for display at an event to mark Day X on 20th February in St Peter's Square.



Art blocking at the Assange Art event



Showing our artwork

Then on 20th February, a good crowd turned out to hear speeches, listen to music and to decorate St Peter's Square in support of Julian Assange.



Special Article by our archivist, Anne Walker.

From the Archives

1975 - 1979

This was a time of significant growth and activity for the Manchester group, going from just a handful of people at meetings in 1975 to a regular cohort of 15 – 20 by the end of the decade. We continued to meet in members houses but I remember it being rather a squash at times.

1977 was the year that Amnesty was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. We have this copy of the certificate in our files and this award gave a real boost to all of us involved in Amnesty.

To quote from the Nobel Peace Prize website:

“Amnesty International was the obvious candidate for the Peace Prize in 1977 – the year the organization itself proclaimed Prisoners of Conscience Year. In its decision, the Norwegian Nobel Committee emphasized that the organization had fought to uphold human dignity, and had given practical, humanitarian and unpartisan support to people who had been imprisoned because of their race, religion or political convictions. The organization had also actively taken part in the campaign to ban torture and the death penalty. It sought to promote justice and thus a more peaceful world.”



Much of our work continued to revolve around case work for Prisoners of Conscience (PoC), but we also participated more actively in the Urgent Action Network and Amnesty-led campaigns. In this period, we were also quite imaginative on the fundraising side with a wide range of events organised.

Our minutes include several mentions of a certain Mike Reed who was the North West Regional Representative and organised events such as conferences and training session for groups across the region. Nice to see that he is still a very active Amnesty activist!

Case Work

We continued working for our original cases from the early 70s in Chile, Zanzibar and Spain until we heard of their release. Our next prisoner was a student in South Korea who was serving a two-year sentence for demonstrating against the government. He was released quite quickly, and we then went on to work on behalf of 18 year-old Zagary Kiriya, from Ukraine (then part of the USSR) who was arrested for “evasion of regular call-up to military service”. His family were Pentecostals and had applied to emigrate.

In 1978 we were also allocated an Iranian PoC who was arrested on his return to Iran from Bradford where he was a student and where he had taken part in protests against the regime. He was released on the Shah’s birthday in November and was eventually able to rejoin his wife and son in Bradford. The next year we started work on an Iraqi investigation case. He was accused of cooperating with Kurdish guerrillas so was not initially classed as a PoC but he came under the Amnesty mandate due to the inadequacy of trial procedures

– I was the lead for this case even though I had just had my first child and therefore mainly organised a letter writing rota.

Members of the group regularly took part in the Urgent Action scheme which had started in 1973, however we did not have the benefit of email and the internet so there was an inevitable delay as everything was done by circulating pieces of paper by post. Nevertheless, during this time we received several replies. Of particular note was the UA issued in May 1976. We received 3 telegrams from the Mexican authorities denying the detention – only for the prisoner to be released from police detention three months later!

Campaigning

Amnesty increased its more general campaign work during this period and the Manchester group took part in campaigns on USSR dissidents in psychiatric hospitals (100 letters were sent to the Manchester City Council on the visit by a Leningrad Civic Delegation in 1977), Chile when we organised a public meeting and film show at UMIST, religious prisoners of conscience in the USSR, Ethiopia, Tunisia, Guatemala, Torture and the Death Penalty (note that the UK still had the death penalty for treason at that time). Much of our campaigning work involved letter writing and holding stalls at which we asked people to sign petitions; we regularly achieved getting on for 1000 signatures on petitions.

Fundraising

Subscription to the group was around £1 but we had to send £200 to the British Section office, so extra fundraising was essential. (Incidentally, last year, we donated £1000 to AIUK). We started off booking the charity stall on Stockport market selling junk and this was so successful that it became an annual event. We also held jumble sales, a balloon race, a dance display and an art exhibition with works donated by leading local artists, all of which raised a magnificent £557. The most enjoyable event that I remember was a sold-out concert by 'The Occasional Players', all regular members of the Halle orchestra, with wine and cheese in the interval.

Unfortunately, I have no photographs from this period so if you have any old records, especially photos, I'd love to add them to our archive. Anne Walker
anne.walker9@ntlworld.com

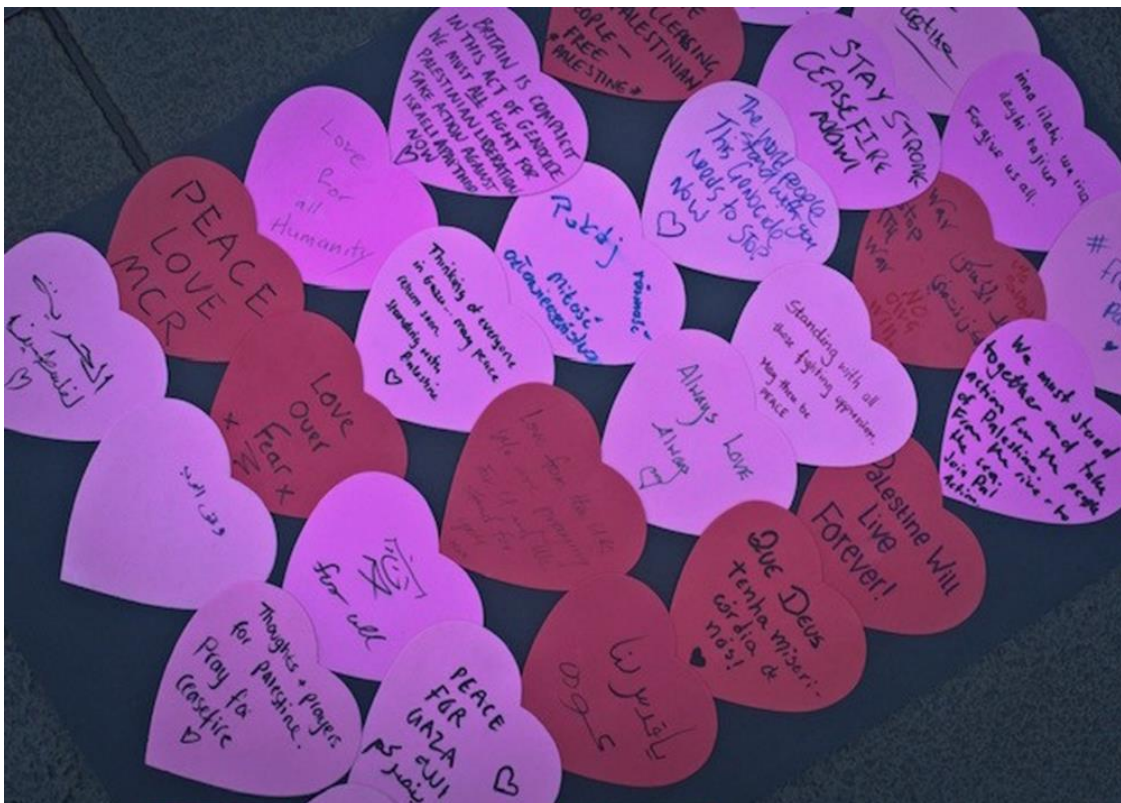
Israel-Palestine

Manchester amnesty's vigil for Gaza

Manchester Amnesty continues to hold a weekly vigil for the people of Israel and Palestine. This is held every Friday from 5 to 6pm in St Peter's Square. The vigil is held in silence and provides an opportunity to express empathy for the people who suffer injury, death and bereavement in the war in Gaza. Amnesty condemns the breaches of international law and the appalling abuse of human rights by both Hamas and the state of Israel. We also recognise that the October attacks by Hamas on Israeli civilians did not arise from nowhere, but followed 17 years of a brutal blockade of Gaza imposed by Israel and by 75 years of oppression of Palestinians since the creation of the state of Israel in 1948.



We welcome the many people who join us in the weekly vigil. There seems to be a shared feeling that the vigil allows us all to reflect and contemplate, and to feel great sadness about the unfolding tragedy in Gaza and Palestine. Many people passing by have expressed their sympathy and support. When one person placed a bouquet of flowers in front of our line, we realised that others want and need to express their feelings also. We devised a means for them to do so by writing a simple message for the people of Gaza on large felt hearts which are then placed on large display boards in this public place. The response has been warm and encouraging from a wide range of people.



Our weekly vigil began in October and we plan to hold then every Friday up to (but excluding) the Easter weekend (29 March). We will then review whether to continue. Do please join us.

Talk and presentations



Chorlton Central Church organised a talks event in January with Mike Reed speaking on behalf of Amnesty on Israel's Apartheid against the Palestinians. There were also talks by Monna El Farra and her son Mohammad Ghalaieny, who live in Gaza but are currently based in Manchester. They both spoke about events in Gaza and the suffering caused by Israel's war on the territory. Finally, there was a talk by David Vickers, founding member of Jewish Action for Palestine. The event was attended by over 90 people in person and more online. There was a lively question and answer

session with a keenly interested audience.

The Church had on display one of Manchester Amnesty's exhibitions featuring children in Palestine and the tragic circumstances of their lives. One of the audience took the exhibition to an event for Palestine the following day. A few weeks later she used it in a march for Palestine led by children in Media City.

Pete Weatherby KC gave an excellent talk to Manchester Amnesty's February meeting. Pete is a renowned barrister with an outstanding record in defending human rights, specialising in miscarriages of justice and freedom of expression. Pete has represented families in the cases for Hillsborough, Grenfell Tower, Manchester Arena bombing and the Covid bereaved Families for Justice. He has appeared before the European Court of Human Rights and presented at the United Nations Human Rights Committee.

He kindly gave his time to talk to us about Gaza under attack by Israel and Palestine under Israeli occupation. He related many of the horrendous facts and figures, referencing them to reliable sources and to international law. He explained the case of genocide by Israel brought by South Africa to the International Court of Justice, setting out the evidence against each of the criteria in the Genocide convention. He also described the role of the International Criminal Court and its failure to use its powers to bring Israel to account.

He concluded that we still live in a world "where might trumps right, where international law and binding court orders are ignored with impunity." He advised that we should not think progressive change can be achieved only or substantially through the law." And he reminded us that "what Amnesty and others are so good at – protests, campaigning, holding the feet of democratic representatives to the fire, petitions, winning the public debate – remain of central importance." While the evidence which Pete Weatherby presented to us was both distressing and depressing, we should respond to his final call to action and renew our efforts for justice in Palestine. A full transcript of Pete Weatherby's talk is available on request from alison.wearden@gmail.com.

Amnesty's campaign

Amnesty continues with its campaign on Israel's Apartheid Against the Palestinians, to raise awareness of the ongoing situation and to bring about lasting change with respect for human rights and international law. Amnesty has done good work with key audiences, but still needs progress with the wider public. The UK government and political parties do not



accept Amnesty’s finding of the crime of apartheid by Israel, but they have had to face up to the question and state their position. The responses from the Labour and Lib Dem parties were hopeful; they did not totally disagree, they acknowledged the “systematic discrimination” of Palestinians, and Keir Starmer expressed support for the investigation of Israel by the International Criminal Court.

Amnesty’s position is in line with views expressed by Palestinian civil society and trade unions. It has also made good relationships with the Jewish diaspora through Yachad and Na’amod and others. Amnesty feels there is potential for a broad anti-apartheid coalition. The subject of Israel’s apartheid is gaining recognition, with open talk about it at the United Nations, other international bodies and by commentators around the world. This is a big step forward from the previous situation where the topic was a no-go area.

Amnesty’s aims and objectives

Amnesty’s main objectives are to increase global public awareness of the impact of Israel’s apartheid system on Palestinians. It particularly aims to influence states with close relations to Israel to take action to recognize Israeli apartheid and to apply pressure on Israel to dismantle the apartheid system. Amnesty focuses on persuading Israel to end forced evictions and home demolitions. Amnesty calls for specific sanctions related directly to human rights abuses, such as a ban on imports of goods made in the illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, and the suspension of arms sales to Israel. It also calls for support of international justice and accountability initiatives, such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) investigations and the UN Commission of Inquiry.

To help achieve these objectives Amnesty will encourage more activism by Amnesty groups to achieve more local media coverage and to meet MPs and Parliamentary candidates. Amnesty also aims to gain support and action from influential people (MPs, FCO officials etc) and from high profile celebrities.

Amnesty’s demands

Amnesty calls on Israel to: lift the siege of Gaza, restore essential services, allow access for aid and support, minimise harm to civilians, and end indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks. Amnesty calls on Hamas to end attacks on civilians and release all the hostages. Amnesty calls on the international community to support the investigation by the ICC of serious violations of international humanitarian law and war crimes by Israel, and to hold perpetrators to account in court.

To help achieve these aims Amnesty calls on the international community to: impose a comprehensive arms embargo on all parties; recognise that serious violations and crimes under international law are being committed; take all necessary measures to open humanitarian corridors in coordination with the UN and relief organizations to ensure the safe passage of the sick and injured and to bring in humanitarian aid and food, water, fuel, medical aid and health supplies; confront attempts by Israel to close off the Rafah crossing; lend unconditional support to the work of the ICC.

UAE

Campaign for Ahmed Mansoor and Mohammed al-Roken in the UAE

During COP28, the UAE announced that 84 people currently in prison since their notoriously unfair trials in 2012-13 were to be retried for the same 'crimes' under new laws. This includes both Ahmed Mansoor and Mohammed al-Roken along with many other people whose sentences have already been served. Amnesty International [stated](#),

"It is ludicrous that UAE authorities are charging scores of defendants with the same acts they were already convicted of more than a decade ago. This is a flagrant violation of the fundamental legal principle barring repeated prosecution of the same person for the same crime."

The trials are currently underway without any oversight or transparency. The families are not allowed to attend most of the trial sessions and are not informed of what has happened.

It is a serious blow to all the human rights groups who campaigned in the buildup to COP28 in the hope that the spotlight shone on the UAE would make a difference.

We have had mixed success from our local work. We have written to all five local MPs asking them to join the UAE All-Party Parliamentary Group. One MP has agreed to raise Ahmed Mansoor's case in Parliament and will attend the meetings if he is free.

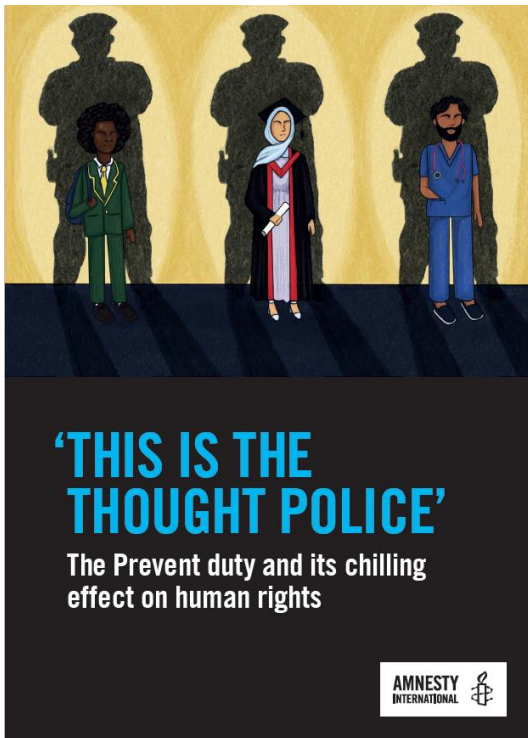
We have not heard back from the head of the Manchester Council, Bev Craig, after sending two letters asking her to publicly call for Ahmed Mansoor's release. She also did not reply to a joint letter from five human rights groups who made the same request.

We have had no response from the Manchester City Football Fan groups we approached asking them work with us.

Anti-racism

At our January group meeting, we were joined by three members of Joint Enterprise Not Guilty by Association (JENGBA) who talked about their organisation, focusing on the unjust and discriminatory use of Joint Enterprise laws against working class people and people of colour. It was inspiring to hear them speak about their tireless campaigning for their loved ones and those of other families who are serving prison sentences for crimes committed by others. We were joined by several Amnesty UK members from other local groups and hope to raise the profile of this work within Amnesty UK over the coming months.

After the meeting, some of us added our names to an open letter by JENGBA in support of Kim Johnson's private members bill to amend the 1861 Accessories and Abettors Act so that only people who have directly committed or made a significant contribution to the commission of an offence can be held criminally liable. This was debated in parliament on 4th February and then adjourned to 21st June.



We are currently involved in planning a launch event in Manchester for Amnesty UK's report about the Prevent programme, *This Is The Thought Police: The Prevent duty and its chilling effect on human rights*. <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/prevent>.

The event will take place on Saturday 6th April, 2-5pm at The Friends' Meeting House in the city centre. It will include a briefing on the new report and the human rights impacts of Prevent. There will also be an opportunity for campaign planning for the Greater Manchester area. We will be inviting organisations and individuals who may have been affected by Prevent as well as those working for services that are required to implement the programme. If you are interested in attending the event, tickets are available here:

[Join the guestlist – Prevent Campaign Launch - Manchester – Friends Meeting House, Sat 6 Apr 2024 2:00 PM - 4:30 PM \(tickettailor.com\)](#)

If you know of any individuals or organisations that may wish to attend the launch event, please contact hazelerrey@gmail.com so that we can send an invitation.

Individuals at risk



We continue with our appeal writing get togethers near the café in Central Library. These take place on the 4th Saturday of every second month, with the next one on March 23rd, 2-4 pm.

7 people came to our January Individuals at Risk drop in, including one member of the public who joined us. Between us we wrote 13 letters and sent 9 emails.

At our sessions we always have details of current cases and all the information you need to write an appeal letter. However, if you prefer

you can also send emails and tweets (wifi is available in the Library). Do drop by for as long as you can spare - all are welcome. It's a great way to get involved in Amnesty work.

Acoustic Amnesty



On 2nd February, we had an Acoustic Amnesty fundraiser in aid of Amnesty and Medical Aid for Palestinians at which we heard a complete cover of Marvin Gaye's 1971 Album "What's going on?"

The concert raised £626, most of which has gone to MAP. Thanks to Bill and Tim for their enchanting covers of both Marvin Gaye and other well-known songs, and as always, a big thanks to Steve Lindsay for organising the event.

Craftivism

The main work carried out by the craftivism group in recent months was the production of artwork in support of Julian Assange. See the Press Freedom/Julian Assange section (p2-3) for lots of photos of our fantastic artwork!

Art blocking for the climate crisis at the People's History Museum



On Feb 21st, along with members of Extinction Rebellion, we talked about human rights and the climate crisis with parents and children at the Peoples History Museum. The children printed t-shirts using our art blocks and coloured in postcards to send to Graham Stuart, the minister for energy and net zero, asking that the government honour the pledges made at COP28. (see pictures on next page)



Examples of the cards created by children attending our People's History Museum event

Human Rights in the UK

Here is a list of some major pieces of legislation enacted in the past 2 years which impact unfavourably on human rights in the UK:

Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022; Nationality and Borders Act 2022; Elections Act 2022; Strikes (Minimum Service) Act 2023; Illegal Migration Act 2023; Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023; Public Order Act 2023.

See these links for AIUK's views on some of these Acts:

[Protest is a Human Right | Amnesty International UK](#)

[Amnesty UK letter to Minister on commencement of Nationality and Borders Act 2022 | Amnesty International UK](#)

[Illegal Migration Act 2023 - analysis of the Act's structure, purpose and key working parts | Amnesty International UK](#)

Currently we have the Safety of Rwanda bill at the Report stage in the House of Lords, and the Economic Activities (Overseas Matters) Bill at the Committee stage. Both of these bills could become law and add to the list of rights-denying legislation.

Additionally, the government is increasingly using secondary or delegated legislation, which is not subject to full parliamentary scrutiny, to further reduce our rights when implementing laws. For example, [Liberty](#) have recently taken the previous home secretary, Suella Braverman, to court for judicial review, after she used secondary legislation to define

“serious disruption” as “anything more than minor”, despite the fact that Parliament had rejected that definition. Read more [here](#).

At the end of 2023, AIUK asked local groups to send a letter to local press drawing attention to the setbacks for human rights in the UK that had taken place in 2023. Our letter was published in the Manchester Evening News on 23rd December.



Our letter in the Manchester Evening News on 23rd December 2023



The AIUK Human Rights in the UK Special Interest Group (SIG) has plans for two actions over the summer.

The first is to raise awareness of Human Rights in the UK by using a version of Liverpool Amnesty’s Wheel of Fortune (pictured). Members of the public spin the wheel and are asked a question corresponding to the number that the pointer lands on. The wheel has proved to be very effective way of engaging the public and informing them about various human rights issues.

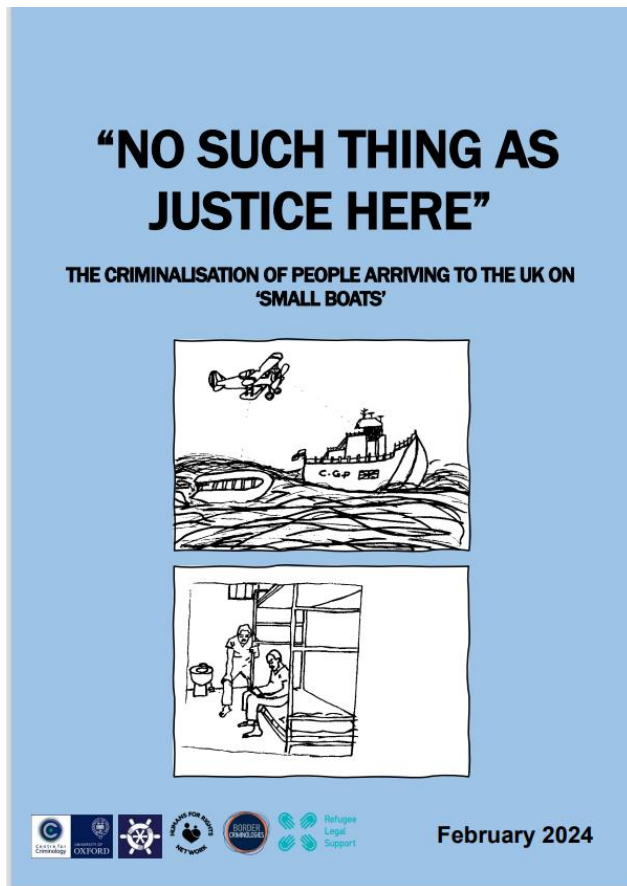
The second action is to prepare a list of questions relating to human rights to ask all candidates in the forthcoming general election. Discussion as to the contents of this list is underway. Anyone who wants to attend the SIG online meetings can do so. Please let alison.wearden@gmail.com know of you want more information.

AIUK is about to launch a campaign on Economic Social and Cultural rights violations here in the UK. You can attend a webinar to learn more about the campaign by registering [here](#).

The Manchester Amnesty Group has signed a [statement](#) produced by the GM Housing Justice Network standing in solidarity with all those in Greater Manchester who face homelessness and housing injustice.

Refugees

The nefarious effects of the government's Nationality and Borders Act 2022 and the Illegal Migration Act 2023 are devastating the lives of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK.



A report published last month by the [University of Oxford](#) in conjunction with three refugee organisations, entitled "*No such thing as justice here*," documents how the Government has been implementing recently enacted laws to criminalise people arriving in the UK on "small boats"

In February Ibrahima Bah, an asylum-seeker from Senegal, was sentenced to nine and a half years imprisonment for steering a small boat across the Channel in which four people drowned. Despite Bah's claim that he agreed to steer because he feared he would be killed if he refused, the sentencing judge considered he was not subject to duress. See this article in the [Guardian](#).

Since 2018 numbers of asylum-seekers arriving in small boats have increased because there are so few alternative accessible 'safe and legal' routes. In June 2022, the Nationality and Borders Act expanded the offence of 'facilitating arrival'

and increased the maximum penalty to life imprisonment. In 2022, 1 person in every 10 dinghies was arrested for their alleged role in steering; in a year this increased to 1 in every 7 dinghies. Those spotted with their 'hand on the tiller' may have sailing experience, be steering in return for a discounted passage or simply be under duress.

Those charged face immediate, short hearings in Magistrates Courts, often without appropriate interpretation or clear explanation of proceedings, followed by long periods on remand and custodial sentences starting at 3 years. [Campaign Support UK](#), which was present for Bah's trial, has shared concerning details about how it considers the verdict to have [been prejudiced](#). On Friday 23 February, campaigners held a [protest outside the Home Office](#) to show their anger over the injustice of Ibrahima's sentencing. SOAS Detainee Support has set up a ['write to' action](#) where you can write to parliamentarians, parliamentary groups and others demanding they do all in their power to secure his freedom.

At the same time as asylum seekers are dying at sea trying to reach the UK, the Home Office's own recently published figures show that there is an unprecedented backlog in asylum applications, with 128,786 people being deliberately held in an administrative limbo, many living in totally unsuitable accommodation. The backlog has built up as a direct result of government policy and refusal to deal with claims, as detailed in this [AIUK briefing](#).

On 19th February, without any notice or warning, the government closed the Ukraine Family Scheme with immediate effect, at the same time making unfavourable changes to other schemes for Ukrainians.



At our February group meeting, we took a screenshot of us holding up orange hearts and messages. We then posted these on twitter, on Facebook and on our website on Valentines Day, to support the launch of the Together with Refugees campaign “Fair Begins Here”

Dear refugees of Greater Manchester

This Valentine's Day we are writing to share love and solidarity with you, to make it clear to you and to political leaders that we welcome you into our community.

We, representing various parts of Greater Manchester society including faiths, arts and culture, women's rights, LGBTQ+ communities and education, have come together to sign this joint message. It serves as a testament to our unity in support of refugees and our call for a fair new plan.

We firmly believe that given the opportunity, communities like ours go out of their way to welcome and support refugees - opening our homes, volunteering our time, speaking up and donating. And, given the chance, refugees do so much to enrich our society as they strive to build new lives.

There is amazing work happening across Greater Manchester to uphold the rights and fulfil the needs of people seeking asylum and refugees. We champion the actions of the countless voluntary, community and faith organisations and the local authorities in Greater Manchester which work towards creating a place of sanctuary, here, for everyone.

We're grateful for your wonderful contributions to our communities, culture and economy.

We want you to know that there is overwhelming support across Greater Manchester for a fair new plan for refugees, one that's rooted in fairness, justice and compassion - a positive and viable alternative to the current refugee system. Now is the time for a fairer and more compassionate approach towards refugees in the UK.

With love from

- Aderonke Apata, Lawyer, Founder and CEO of African Rainbow Family
- Bishop John Arnold, Bishop of Salford
- Katy Ashton, Director, People's History Museum
- Jill Brennan, Co-Chair GM Faith and Belief Panel
- Hazel Errey, Chair, Manchester Amnesty International group
- Mark Fletcher, CEO, Manchester Pride
- Professor Jane Ginsborg PhD, Associate Director of Research, Royal Northern College of Music
- Professor Caroline Glendinning, Chair, The East Manchester Community Association/Rainbow Haven
- Neil MacInnes OBE, Head of Libraries, Galleries, Culture, and Youth Services, Manchester City Council
- Helen Pankhurst CBE, writer and women's rights campaigner
- Revd. Ian Rutherford, City Centre Minister, Methodist Central Hall Manchester
- Lemn Sissay OBE FRSL, author, broadcaster & former Chancellor of Manchester University
- Rabbi Warren Elf, Co-Chair GM Faith and Belief Panel

FAIR BEGINS HERE

Manchester Amnesty was a signatory to an open letter expressing support and solidarity to the refugees of Greater Manchester. This was also posted on social media. The letter was reported in an [article](#) about the experience of being a refugee in the Manchester Evening News

Over the summer, we plan to do some awareness raising and campaigning about refugee rights, potentially using the Wheel of Fortune (see page 13).

Women's rights



In the run-up to International Women's Day, we had a stall at an event

By Trailblazers! Women of Greater Manchester, to celebrate 100 years since Mancunian Ellen Wilkinson became the first woman to be elected to parliament as a Labour MP. As well as general information about Amnesty, our stall had details of actions relating to two women - Justyna Wydryska, the Polish abortion rights defender, and Rita Karasartova the human and climate rights defender from Kyrgyzstan.