



Amnesty International UK

November/December 2024

News from the Minehead Group



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Actions you can take this month:

- ✓ **Join us** on Friday 6 December between 1345 and 1515 at the Quaker Meeting House in Minehead to sign letters and solidarity messages for the 2024 **Write for Rights Campaign**.
- ✓ **Complete and send to your MP** the template **letter** attached to this newsletter, concerning **UK/India trade talks** and the need to take account of international human rights law. UK trade policies should be compliant with our obligations under international human rights law to protect and promote human rights, labour standards and equalities, both at home and abroad.
- ✓ **Donate** to Amnesty International's **urgent appeal** for our support to expose human rights abuses of civilians in Gaza, Lebanon, Israel and Syria where the humanitarian catastrophe is worsening. Amnesty acts swiftly to address urgent human rights crises, often deploying teams on the ground or working with local contacts to expose human rights abuses in areas like Gaza. To donate, you can follow this link: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/giving/donate/lebanon-emergency-appeal-oct-24-paid-social>
- ✓ **Make a date** to come along to our Minehead Group's **AGM** on Thursday 13 February at 1430 in the Minehead Quaker Meeting House. As well as reporting on the past year, we will also be discussing the future of the group. We'd value your input!

News from our group

On 5 November, we marked the launch of the **2024 Write for Rights Campaign** with a letter writing session at the Beach Hotel in Minehead. In an hour and a half, eight of us wrote 37 letters to the authorities and solidarity messages to the nine people featured in the campaign. The countries covered this year are: Angola, Argentina, Belarus, Canada, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Turkiye and Viet Nam and we managed to write letters to all of them. Many thanks as usual to Peter for providing the stamps. Here is a photo of us hard at work.

If you would like to take part in the campaign, please come along to the Quaker Meeting House on 6 December at 1345 to sign some letters and cards. You can also learn more about the campaign on the AIUK website or contact Alison to see if we have any more booklets available.



Diary Dates

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

Friday 6 December

Write for Rights

Signing of solidarity cards and letters at the Quaker Meeting House at 1345. (This follows the Quakers' monthly quiet half hour & soup lunch to which all are welcome.)

Thurs 13 Feb 2025

Group AGM at the QMH at 1430, and planning of the group's activities in the future.

Saturday 22 March

South-West Regional Conference in Exeter.

Refugees Welcome

Jenny Gateau reports that the West Somerset Refugee Support Group is considering what the group might do in the future, given that the Baptist Holiday Apartments closed in November. It was at these apartments that refugee families from Taunton, Wellington and Bridgwater have stayed for holidays in this and in previous summers. Jenny says *'The most likely way forward will be to do Days Out, as we started with in 2018, or perhaps do some Fund Raising amongst ourselves for one of the many Refugee Charities.'* Jenny added *'The other really splendid news is that the first of 'our' families to apply for and get British Nationality is Omer and Saffa's family. I went to see them recently and they proudly showed me their four new passports. Theirs is a story of huge faith and hope and resilience, as those of you who have met them will know.'*

The West Somerset Group is in touch with Taunton Welcomes Refugees (TWR), which has passed on information about the Displaced People Service at Somerset Council. This service is seeking to expand the Homes for Refugees scheme, which offers temporary accommodation to newly granted refugees in Somerset. More information is available from <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/health-safety-and-wellbeing/refugee-resettlement-in-somerset/> while the TWR website is at <https://www.tauntonwelcomesrefugees.co.uk/>

Campaign News: India and Kashmir

Cherry writes: It's not often we have good news to report, but the ruling of the Supreme Court in India that the Indian government's arbitrary punitive destruction of properties is 'unacceptable under the rule of law' is an important step in protecting the rights of people, especially as arbitrary destruction of housing has been seen to target Muslims and other minority groups and dissenting voices. The Court said that 'Citizens' voices cannot be throttled by a threat of destroying their properties'. This so called 'bulldozer justice' is something Amnesty has been campaigning against for some time.



And there is more good news. The

seven male BK16 prisoners remaining in prison were successful forcing the Indian authorities to take them to the Court where their hearing was held. Previously this had not been allowed, although it is a legal right. They began a hunger strike and also managed to get to the main gate of the prison to stage a protest, something very hard to achieve as security is very tight. After more than six years, these brave people have not lost their spirit and are an inspiration to use all.



I was invited to speak to the new All Party Parliamentary Group on Kashmir last week, at Portcullis House, which was an interesting new experience. It was good to see that the new Chair of the group, Imran Hussain, is very keen to work actively on a campaign for the rights of people in Kashmir, so I hope we can do more for them. Meanwhile, you can take action for Kashmir by writing to our MP using **the attached template letter**.

Season's Greetings!

Alison, Cherry and Susan send all our Amnesty friends and supporters their best wishes for a happy festive period and good news in the New Year.

Here is a photo of our tree in last year's Christmas Tree Festival.



How to contact the Minehead Amnesty International Local Group:

Website: www.amnesty.org.uk/minehead

Facebook: www.facebook.com/amnestyminehead

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Chair & group contact: Alison Dietz: Tel. 07981 866905 Email: aledietz7474@gmail.com

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Newsletter, website, press: Susan Mew 01643 821209 Email: brightmanmew@btinternet.com

Template letter for you to top and tail, edit if you wish and send to your MP

Dear _____,

Since the Prime Minister has announced that UK-India trade talks will relaunch in the new year, as a member of Amnesty International, I feel it is important that issues related to human rights within India are raised during negotiation discussions. While I understand that boosting trade abroad is essential to delivering a strong UK economy, and India is one of the fastest growing economies in the world and therefore an important market, this should not be at the expense of our commitment to international standards on human rights.

Amnesty International does not advocate human rights conditionality of trade and aid, but it should be recognised that such negotiations carry risk to human rights, which must be accounted for. Important points to consider are:

1. UK trade policies should be compliant with our obligations under international human rights law to protect and promote human rights, labour standards and equalities, both at home and abroad.
2. Human rights expertise should be included in UK trade delegations, in line with UK law, and training should be provided to the staff in the Department of Business and Trade on the linkages between business and human rights.
3. Impact assessments should be conducted to assess whether provisions in agreements are likely to undermine human rights, for example through adverse impacts on marginalised and disadvantaged groups and individuals. Action must be taken to avoid or address any possible adverse impacts identified.
4. Parliamentarians should have regular access to trade policy documents, including negotiation texts and impact assessments, to enable Parliament to fulfil its oversight role.
5. UK registered companies must prevent and be held more accountable for their human rights and environmental impacts.

In the longer term, a new Business Human Rights and Environment Act should be introduced requiring UK companies to conduct human rights due diligence and make them liable when they fail to prevent harm, in order to improve the protections offered to human rights defenders and victims of corporate abuses. Such legislation would also ensure the UK is at the forefront of setting standards for sustainable trade and investment worldwide, helping to level the playing field for British businesses in line with rapid advances being made in other countries. More than 50 businesses and trade associations, including the British Retail Consortium, the John Lewis Partnership, Tesco and Sainsbury's, and nine investors holding £1.4 trillion in assets have joined the call for mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence legislation. The Corporate Justice Coalition (CJC) has encouraged some MPs to sign pledges in support. See main elements of the proposed legislation, endorsed by Amnesty International: <https://corporatejusticecoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/CJC-BHREA-Principles-2023-1.pdf>

I also draw your attention to human rights concerns expressed by Amnesty International and the UN about the situation in Jammu & Kashmir, where there is complete repression of freedom of speech and association, arbitrary arrest and detention of activists without trial and cancellation of passports. See <https://www.amnesty.org/en/search/kashmir/>

More broadly, in many parts of the sub-continent, minority groups have been displaced without compensation in areas where mining and other natural resource exploitation or industrial development are taking place.