



Minutes of [Amnesty International Reading Group](#) Meeting

Thursday 10th July 2025 - *This meeting was held on Zoom*

Chair: Anne

Welcome and introduction

13 people joined the meeting tonight: Tom, Helen, Michael, Angus, Vicky, Paula, Iona, Liz, Ian, Blanca, Gueth, Ruth

Apologies – Sue, Hilary, Ilaria, Durga

Speaker - Tom Southerden, AIUK's Programme director for Law & Human Rights, talking about Freedom of Speech and the Right To Protest in the UK

Tom's area of responsibility - UK HR framework which includes the European convention, access to justice, judicial review, legal aid, Human Rights Act, protest rights

One of Amnesty International's overall focus is the **PROTECT THE PROTEST** campaign - freedom of expression - this continues up to 20230. International work and country specific work happening for this campaign.

In the UK, there has been significant legislative crackdown on peaceful protest, framed around the context of disruptive protests. Last government passed bills and now the current government is too. New criminal offences, increased sentences to existing bills, police discretionary powers have increased, arrests and prosecutions, invented new-non criminal and civil powers that restrict protests.

A large bill "**Police Crimes Sentencing and Courts Act**" 2022 - protest restrictions included in it.

Public Order Act 2023 - A very troubling bill. This was used during the Coronation, people carrying things to lock onto something. Equipped to lock on - luggage straps

Offense of **interfering with major public infrastructure**. A and B roads included, as well as places such as power stations. Now marches down an A road, Police have discretionary

power to arrest - "slow walking" obstructing traffic. The courts are upholding these arrests.

Police are being criticised for political inconsistency - farmer slow driving was not considered a crime.

Protest banning order - civil order for people with previous conviction. Court can compel them - you can't attend that protest. Hand over phone and laptop over to the police to check, can't communicate with people attending the protest. Not had enough time to be used yet, as Amnesty managed to get it put to 2 offences.

Public nuisance - always existed but had been beefed up. Lengthy sentences - maximum sentence is 10 years - as it covers a wide range of crimes, including causing death.

Disruptive but peaceful!

It's been used heavily - 5 year sentences

Conspiracy to cause a public nuisance - police and prosecutors are interpreting public nuisance as a pre-crime

Arrests can be made in advance of a crime.

Liberty had a success earlier this year. Police already have powers to restrict - the timing, the location, etc

Serious disruption - anything less than minor - day to day activities hindered - lawyers were arguing about the wording

The high court found that the Government had gone beyond its power and they upheld Liberty's case - arrest and criminal prosecution can follow, so it was high stakes.

Now this has been overturned, lots of cases can now be challenged.

Courts have been very keen to uphold, enthusiastic enforcers of the new laws.

Now - **Crime and Policing Bill** - gone through Parliament - heading for the Lords in Autumn

Police can ban **facial covering** - not just a mask, placard in front of your face.

Some protections if health or medical reasons - up to you to defend yourself after a charge by the police

Police power to **issue caution - attach conditions**. Attach immigration - limited leave to remain. Short of permanent settlement - include victims of trafficking, refugees, no due process attached to this. This was done due to the number of students protesting.

Questions & comments

- Hong Kongers are at risk, due to their immigration status (most are here on BNO visas) and lots prefer to cover at protests or vigils, due to transnational repression. They must be more at risk now? Absolutely - the Hong Kong Protest Movement gave compelling evidence to the parliamentary committee when it went through. They said the British Government are concerned about transnational repression but these laws hinder HKers safety. Government 's position is that the laws are only available when criminality is happening at a protest, so they shouldn't be worried. It's going to the Lords, and this is exactly the kind of issue the Lords are interested in, so there is hope.
- A possibly flippant question - could we be arrested for meeting to talk about a protest? It's the discretionary nature that is troubling. A march down Whitehall could be interpreted as a breach. Unknown what will or won't be allowed.
- Are we in a police state? No, because you have to read legislation in conjunction with the Human Rights Act. Police have an obligation to facilitate protest, not behave in a way that breached the convention rights. Police will answer that if challenged on why they allow a protest to happen. However, it does nothing good for clarity which is a major problem.

Anti protest injunctions - created by the courts themselves, nothing to do with government. Companies or organisations can use it to prevent protests near their land. Increasing a prison sentence beyond typical sentencing. Costs - protestor liable for legal costs for implementing the costs of applying the injunction - ie Shell. People went bankrupt or lost their homes. Heathrow has an injunction on all their sites, in connection with an environmental cause. Shell held an AGM in the conference centre on Heathrow site, so we were unable to protest.

The main concern is the inconsistency with which the police are applying and ambiguity of the law. This can deter anyone from protesting - however we still have the HRA so we can and must continue to protest.

Anne thanked Tom - how good that we have people at Amnesty keeping on top of all these things! We had a general chat about wider issues, trials without juries, street protests (keep going!), working with other organisations. Civil rights movements, (ie Liberty) will work on this and issue organisations such as PLO, environmental groups and BLM who are largely impacted by these laws.

Group AGM

- Anne gave an overview of the year - when listed, we had done a lot!!!!
- Anne also noted that we have a good number of regular attendees.
- Anne thanked Helen for her work as secretary over the past year. Anne thanked Ruth for keeping a hand on the group's money. Helen thanked Anne for bringing us all together for the meetings.

	Who was put forward?	Nominated by	Seconded by	Voted by the group
Chair	Anne	Helen	Blanca	unanimous
Treasurer	Ruth	Anne	Iona	unanimous
Secretary	Helen	Anne	Iona	unanimous

Accounts for 2024

- Ruth presented the accounts for 2024 - see attached for regular group members.
- Notable costs - the new gazebo, rent for stalls and room hire, refreshments for Chantry House
- Notable income - the quiz night, chance2dance
 - Profits from the Chantry House will fall into accounts for 2025.
- The group sent £1,500 to AIUK, in addition to the £72 we sent that gives us group membership.
- Richard, Ruth's finance contact at AIUK, has commented that the Reading group is doing very well. There followed a discussion about the past, when the National Conference used to announce the groups which raised the most money. However, with significantly less active groups now, this focus seems to have changed.
- Ruth mentioned she would add another group member to the bank access.

Group Business:

- **Afghan Women Campaign**
 - **feedback from Waterfest.** A very good event, about 400 signatures for our petitions, lots of photos for our socials. Good level of engagement from the public. We had new members sign up - they haven't shown up yet, but they will now get the information about our local group.

- **Webinar** - has become more complicated as one of our speakers has been rejected following the due diligence checks
- **Mini group** to meet to review next steps
- **Feedback from the Amnesty AGM & conference** - see report from Hilary who attended this year
- **Upcoming events - Basingstoke and Reading Pride** - Helen asked for volunteers for the rota - confirm this on WhatsApp
- **August meeting** - discussion about a social event. Decided on a meal out on our usual slot, so Thursday 14th August, but a little earlier 7.30pm - chat about arrangements on WhatsApp
- **Anti-death penalty, South East Asia, Türkiye, UAE - our prisoners of conscience, Ahmed Mansoor & Dr Mohammed al-Roken** - no updates this month. See social media for actions through the month.

Our Group's confirmed Upcoming Events:

Event	Dates	Venue
Basingstoke Pride	Saturday 16th August 11am-4pm	Festival Place's Amphitheatre
Reading Pride	Saturday 30th August, 12noon-5pm	Kings Meadow
Chance to Dance	Friday 12th September 7.30-9.30pm	Peppard Memorial Hall Peppard Common
Barn Dance with the Scamping Rogues	Saturday 15th November 7.30pm	St Michael's church - booking details to follow
Write for Rights	Thursday 11th December, 7.30-9.00pm	Reading Biscuit Factory

Other events likely to be planned in

- International Festival - October/November

Other Amnesty or local upcoming events:

Event	Dates	Venue
Regional Conference	11th October	TBC

Next meetings:

August meeting - TBC

Thursday 11th September 2025

Zoom at 8pm

Speaker meeting – Milena Marlin, head of Amnesty’s Evidence Lab - Protecting Against Fake News

[ZOOM Link](#)

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