



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

Thursday 13th November 2025 - *This meeting was held on Zoom*

Chair: Anne

Welcome and introduction

13 people joined the meeting tonight: Reading group - Helen, Vicky, Iona, Mus, Hilary, Liz, Ilaria

Visitors

- Faissal - Amnesty's new Afghan country coordinator
- Cherry - Minehead group, country coordinator for India and the regional coordinator for the South Asia region
- Chris - Banbury group & coordinator of Oppressed Minorities group of CEN
- Clare - Bournille group
- Liz - Dundee group

Apologies – Ruth, Sue, Ian, Michael, Blanca, Paula

Introductions made as we had a number of visitors tonight.

Speaker - Faissal Sharif, AIUK's new country coordinator for Afghanistan

If you would like to watch a recording of this session, and this is **strongly recommended** - [please click here](#).

The password is - @1=%Vk5s

The main part of Faissal's presentation starts at 8m45s, after the introductions and house-keeping.

Faissal introduced himself to the group - he is currently a PhD student at Oxford, researching mental health and how the brain is affected by trauma, particularly for displaced people. He is also a consultant for the UN development programme, looking at humanitarian issues and peace keeping in conflict.

Faissal spoke about the lived experience for himself and his family, why they needed to leave their homes and how they became refugees, trying to escape Afghanistan and build

a life for themselves abroad. He talked about the difficulties involved in leaving Afghanistan, what impacted his family's decision to choose to go to Germany and the subsequent impact that had on them all.

He talked eloquently about the issues of belonging & identity, how many families become dispersed around the world, settling in a new country, how different countries' approach to refugees has a massive impact on how they can feel. How do you sustain your culture in a country that wants you simply to integrate, when everyone around you is local to that region, where you can't buy any food, where your children are bullied for being different, where schools see your inability to speak the local language as a sign of lack of intelligence?

He spoke about how losing your career, your home, your community strips you of so much - you become a "refugee" which frequently sounds like an insult. You are mourning your identity and home country, you are starting from zero, but you have to be strong for your children. An insane level of emotional strain.

He discussed possible reasons for choosing a destination - maybe you have family there already, maybe you can speak the language. For example, his family decided to head for Germany.

Whilst Faissal spoke about the many challenges his family faced, he also completely acknowledged the huge privilege they had in being able to make the choice to leave in the first place.

Questions & comments - *lots of additional conversation following each question*

- How much support is available for refugees at different levels?

Things are moving in the right direction - there is more and more awareness of the immediate and also the long-term impact. However this is massively underfunded. Afghan have the highest rates of mental health issues globally, after so many years of trauma. Faissal also recommended not asking refugees to talk about their experiences or their journeys - it can be re-traumatizing to recount this over and over. Faissal spoke about the positive impact of local support groups.

- How can women try to get asylum now, with travel restrictions and access to embassies to get visa application

No - it's virtually impossible - they need money, means, patience and a man to travel with them

Group Business:

- **Finances** - we have £2,108.77 in the account currently. We discussed remaining costs/possible gains that would occur up until the end of December, which is the end of our financial year.
 - Anoosheh's visit to RBF
 - Room hire - £175
 - Travel costs - AIUK will pay
 - Barn Dance
 - £702.37 profit

Future anticipated costs for 2026 so far

- New Gazebo - up to £220 - new ones have bags with wheels, definitely worth getting!
- Cost of WOMAD - this is split amongst those in the group who choose to get a traders' ticket

Ideally, we agreed that we should keep approx £1,000 in the group float, so we could well send money to AIUK this year.

- Review at December meeting

● Review previous/current/upcoming events

- **Exhibition and upcoming talk from Anoosheh** - all sorted
- **Barn Dance** - quick discussion about arrangements - all areas covered
- **Letter writing sessions and Write for Rights**
 - November 22nd at Woodley Library
 - RBF 11th December for our December group meeting. It was agreed Helen would take all copies of letters and cards and do a group post to save on costs - people are free to post themselves, of course.

Our Group's confirmed Upcoming Events:

Event	Dates	Venue
"Surviving Evin" Prison exhibition	On throughout November	Reading Biscuit Factory
Annosheh Ashoori in Reading	Sunday 23rd November at 5pm	Reading Biscuit Factory
Write for Rights	Thursday 11th December, 7.30-9.00pm	Reading Biscuit Factory

Next meetings:

Thursday 11th December 2025
Reading Biscuit Factory at 7.30pm

[Write for Rights](#)

Thursday 8th January 2026

On Zoom - details on next newsletter

8pm

Planning for 2026

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