Amnesty Milton Keynes AGM

6 February 2013

**Chair's report**

21 January 2012 was our first meeting to discuss if we had enough support to warrant putting an active local group together. At our next meeting on 21 February 2012, we formally constituted the group, and chose chair, treasurer and secretary: 6 attendees, plus Bob Corn, South Midlands regional coordinator. Shortly after establishing this group, we were in touch with people who had been active in the previous MK group which meant that we had a fantastic source of knowledge and inspiration to draw on.

We have had monthly meetings since this point, usually at the Wetherspoons pub on Midsummer Blvd. This has been a pragmatic - i.e. free! - option, but hasn't been ideal for those of us who sometimes find it hard to hear. It is a dilemma we will continue to struggle with. The ideal would be to have enough supporters at each meeting to be able to cover room costs via donations.

We set up an AIMK web page as part of Amnesty UK's site in March and have been adding to this most months. We also set up a dedicated email address - amnestymiltonkeynes@gmail.com - which we can use rather than other own personal email addresses for group communications.

We were allocated our Individual at Risk case - Ferhat Gercek, in Turkey - in March and have taken it in turns to send letters on his behalf to the Turkish Ministry of Justice in most months since then. In September Barbara Lodge, Amnesty's Turkey country coordinator, came to give us a session to explain the national human rights context in which Ferhat's case is taking place.

In April we held our first campaign action in Newport Pagnell. This publicised the horrendous human rights problems occurring in the Niger Delta due to multinational companies' oil extraction and asked people to send their protests to the companies so that they provide remedy and clean-up.

In May we commemorated the end of Amnesty's 50th birthday year at the Peace Pagoda at Willen Lake with Bob Corn reminding us about Amnesty's amazing history, and moving testimonials about the current human rights situations in Sri Lanka, provided by Visvendran, and in Syria, provided by Subhi.

Adrian Henderson, from the Oxford local group, ran a session for us on the Arms Trade Treaty, which was being negotiated in July, and its potential to address human rights and humanitarian issues. We had been trying to get a meeting with local MP Mark Lancaster to talk about the Arms Trade Treaty talks, at the UK Section's request since his role in the Dept for International Development was influential in this regard, but alas we couldn't find a date early enough to make our discussion with him effective enough. Instead we talked to him about women's rights in Afghanistan: sadly we have not heard any follow-up news from him.

In August we held a stall at Northampton's Umbrella Fair, publicising Amnesty's campaigning work in an area where there is no local group currently but some membership interest.

In September Pat organized a hugely successful fundraising quiz night in Simpson, MK (see treasurer's report!). Our fundraising efforts in our first year have been rather sporadic apart from this, consisting of collecting tins located at various points and one-off donations as part of other activities. It is an area where we might want to concentrate more in 2013.

December saw more local activity, with a stall at Simpson church fair to highlight the Write for Rights campaign. We also set up various contacts to follow up an exhibition for the Forced Evictions campaign in the area this coming year.

We held our first joint meeting, with the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, in January for an excellent talk by Richard Barnes who worked at the Israeli Committee against Housing Demolitions. The numbers from Amnesty were small and this is something else we might want to focus on in 2013.

We have also managed in this first year to send a rep to (both! 2012 and 2103) South Midlands regional conference, the national 2012 AGM, and the EGM in London in January 2013. Not a bad sum total for our first 12 months of this new group! Let's hope we go from strength to strength in 2013, and consolidate our experience of campaigning, fundraising and taking part in the life of Amnesty in the UK.

Clare Mumford

Chair, Feb 2012 - Feb 2013