



News from the Minehead Group

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Actions you can take this month:

- ✓ Come and support us on **Thursday 26 June** – at **1230** outside the Minehead Methodist Church on The Avenue, for a half hour **vigil** to mark the UN International Day in support of victims of torture.
- ✓ Come and **write letters or sign action cards**, and join us for refreshments, on **Thursday 26 June**, from **1400-1530** in the Quaker Meeting House.
- ✓ Visit the AIUK website www.amnesty.org.uk and take the action on behalf of **Meryam Yehya Ibrahim**, the Sudanese woman who has been sentenced to death for refusing to renounce her Christian faith. Send an email asking for Meryam and her children to be released immediately from prison and help AIUK reach its target of 250,000 actions taken.
- ✓ Volunteer to manage our group's **Facebook** and **Twitter** pages. This could be done remotely – you don't need to attend meetings!
- ✓ Think about whether you could undertake any of these jobs coming up over the next few months:
 - Assisting our campaign coordinators with the new global campaigns on 'stop torture' and 'my body, my rights'.
 - Helping with our stall at the Roadwater fete on 26 July
 - Helping with the fund-raising AmnesTEA on 26 August.

Round up of May news from the group and from AIUK

May group meeting: the meeting started with a workshop, led by Susan, introducing the new global campaign 'Stop Torture'. See over for more information. The other main item concerned our response to AI's consultation on strategic goals, the key themes and direction of the global movement from 2016 to 2019. We had an interesting discussion which confirmed our wish to see AI continuing to focus on Individuals at Risk, and using individual cases to highlight wider concerns and contexts.

Contact with MEPs: in November 2013, Alison wrote on behalf of the group to Giles Chichester, MEP. She raised the issue of companies that fail to report transparently on the impact of their activities on human rights and on the environment, and of their national governments that fail to hold companies to account. Giles Chichester replied in May, reporting the good news that the EU Directive on non-financial reporting by companies had been adopted by the European Parliament with an overwhelming majority. To become law, the Directive now needs to be adopted jointly by the European Parliament and the EU Member States. This positive communication prompted us to write to the two new South West MEPs – Clare Moody and Molly Scott-Cato – introducing our group and seeking their future support.

Monthly action: we all signed action cards on behalf of Mahdi Abu Dheeb, former president of the Bahrain Teachers' Association who has been held in solitary confinement, tortured, beaten, forced to sign false 'confessions' and sentenced to five years' imprisonment. AI believes he has been imprisoned solely for the exercise of his legitimate rights to freedom of association and because of his trade union activism.

Diary Dates

Monthly meetings:

We meet on the fourth Tuesday of the month (except August and December) at 1930, usually at the Quaker Meeting House on Bancks Street, Minehead. The first part of the meeting is open to all and features a speaker, film or workshop. After a tea break, AI members are invited to stay for a short business meeting which will end by 2130.

Monday 23 June (NB

change of date to avoid clash with Film Society) Showing of the film 'Me, my Gipsy Family and Woody Allen' which gives an insight into the life and culture of Roma people, whose human rights are under threat across Europe.

Tuesday 24 June

Showing of '12 Years a Slave' at the Regal & handing out leaflets afterwards.

Thursday 26 June

Stop Torture day of action (see details opposite)
1230: vigil
1400-1530 letter writing

Tuesday 22 July

Group meeting – focus on South Asia

Saturday 26 July

Stall at Roadwater fete

Tuesday 26 August

AmnesTEA 3-5pm in Carhampton, followed by a supper for helpers and group members.

Campaign news

Stop Torture: This campaign is being coordinated by Jill Walmsley, with support from Chris Lawson. Here are Alison's notes from the workshop.

Our May meeting began with a workshop on the recently launched Stop Torture campaign. First, our trainer gave an overview of the campaign. Although torture is illegal in 155 countries, torture by the state is on the rise. This campaign is therefore necessary and timely. Although torture is illegal in most countries, governments continue to torture their citizens and to inflict cruel, inhuman and degrading punishments on them. A recent global poll commissioned by AI showed that 44% fear torture in their own country. Torture is hidden away and victims feel isolated and forgotten. How can one expose this inhumane and illegal practice? AI will intervene where it can in five countries (Mexico, Morocco, Nigeria, Philippines and Uzbekistan) to show the victims they are not alone. AI will call for practical safeguards such as lawyers to be present during interrogation, and doctors to visit detention centres. AI will insist that torturers are held to account. We were shocked to learn that a recent survey by AIUK showed that almost one in three people in the UK think that torture could be justified. We divided up into small groups to consider the justifications for torture that people might give, and the arguments we could use to counter them. Some of the comments we might hear from people who favour torture could be: 'torture saves lives'; 'it gets information'; 'it is a deterrent'; 'other states do it'; 'terrorists deserve it'; 'the end justifies the means'.

However, as members of Amnesty International, we have to be clear in our response:

- Torture is uncivilised, immoral, and inhumane.
- Information gained through torture is unreliable.
- Torture is illegal.
- We should lead by example and treat terrorists humanely.
- No! Torture is wrong!

My body, my rights: this second global campaign will be launched later in the year. Sue Hazelwood will be the campaign coordinator with support from Cherry Bird.

Action file: we have requested a new action file and hope to have more news about this by the June and July meetings.

LGBTI network: From March this year, marriage ceremonies in England and Wales were legally extended to same-sex couples. This is a historic moment for LGBTI rights. In the Guardian, Sandi Toksvig described how prejudice, which included death threats, had wrecked a previous relationship, and how happy she is to be able to be open about her choice of partner nowadays without fear of a backlash. She and her partner Debbie renewed their vows at the Royal Festival Hall to celebrate the legalisation of gay marriage. However, in many countries, homophobia is on the rise. In February, the Ugandan anti-homosexuality bill that had been in the wings for five years was passed by President Museveni. After international condemnation, this repugnant and discriminatory law was amended so that death sentences for 'the most serious offences' were commuted to life behind bars. The World Bank stopped a \$90 billion loan set to fund healthcare in Uganda. Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands have cut aid for legal services in Uganda. Thus all Ugandans will suffer as a result of this bill becoming law.

How to contact the Minehead Amnesty International Local Group:

Website: www.amnesty.org.uk/minehead

Facebook: www.facebook.com/amnestyminehead

Twitter: www.twitter.com/amnestyminehead

Group contact and agenda secretary:

John Melbourne Tel 01643 821109 Email: louise@bourne2007.entadsl.com

Chair: Alison Dietz: Tel. 01984 641603 Email: dietz@btinternet.com

Vice Chair: Jenny Lennon Wood Tel. 01643 706900 Email: rodent.major@btopenworld.com

Treasurer: Cherry Bird Tel. 01984641052 Email: cherryebird@gmail.com

Press officer: Jill Walmsley Tel. 01643 705061 Email: jillwalmsley09@btinternet.com

Meeting notes, newsletter & website: Susan Mew Tel. 01643 821209 Email: brightmanmew@btinternet.com