



SPRING 2014 Amnesty International -Welwyn Hatfield and East Herts NEWSLETTER

IT'S BEEN A WHILE since our last Newsletter but your group has still been pretty active.

The Quiz Night in October was the usual runaway success with 133 people in the Civic Centre and an amazing profit of £1,048. Thanks to Alison's excellent co-ordination, Phil Friend's firm but light-hearted control and a host of other helpers, it was a most enjoyable evening.

The Book and Bake event in November was very popular and raised £452 - many thanks to Vernonne and Rob Allan.

The Street Collection on December 14th raised £606 in spite of numerous difficulties such as our oldest collector being ousted from the M & S/ Car Park bridge and several other - unlicensed? - groups collecting on the same day. Thanks to Michael for his meticulous organisation and to all our collectors.

AND FINALLY...

Our Greetings Card Action Evening on December 18th resulted in 52 letters and 60 Greetings cards to prisoners. NB At a postage cost of £86 Amnesty work is not cheap!

QUIZ NIGHT 2013



View of part of the hall. Winning team front left.

THIS YEAR'S PLANS SO FAR...

**Thursday April 24th, 8pm,
Friends Meeting House, 109 Handside Lane, WGC.
PUBLIC MEETING.**

**Wai Hnin, the young Burmese woman who spoke to us a few years back, now working for the Burma Campaign, will bring us up to date on the real situation in that country.
Unmissable!**

- **Sat. May 17th, Plant Sale at 4 High Oaks Road, WGC AL8 7BH. Home of Brenda and Robert Weeden. 11am - 3pm.**

There will also be a sale of books, cds and dvds
Plus coffee and delicious, home made cakes.

Please help by dividing plants from your garden and leaving them inside the white metal gate to the left of the house during the preceding week or phone 01707 321668 to arrange for collection. Books etc can be delivered beforehand or brought on the day.

- **Sat June 7th - all day - Street Collection in WGC.**
If you can help - or if you will not be available that day - contact organiser Michael Hahn - hahn2@btinternet.com or 01707 395964. This will help him a lot.

ACTION EVENINGS.

- Wed April 9th, May 14th, June 11th, July 9th (ie 2nd Wed of every month)
Action Evenings at the Backhouse Room, 116 Handside Lane, WGC AL8 6SY. From 8pm.

Everyone is welcome to these evenings. Just bring a pen and your brain. Everything else, including refreshments, provided! Details from Sue Friend 01707 273894 or susan.friend@sky-mail.net

- The meeting on April 9th will begin with a brief **AGM**.

For a flavour of our work on these evenings, read on...

Middle East Notes

**by Dinny Hawes,
who co-ordinates our work
on this region.**

Unsurprisingly, the Middle East continues to be a key focus for the activities of our local group. The initial signs of hope for a positive change from the "Middle East Spring" in 2011 were short lived and have since receded into deep winter gloom. There were hopes for greater democracy throughout North Africa and the Middle East, from Tunisia, Libya and Egypt to Bahrain and Syria. With the possible exception of Tunisia the human rights situation in all the countries has deteriorated. Now, not a letter-writing evening happens without a series of Urgent Actions for victims of abuse and torture or defenders of human rights in the region.

In Egypt, the ending of Hosni Mubarak's oppressive 30-year-rule has now resulted in a return of military rule and a vicious crackdown on freedom of expression, association and assembly. Similar oppressive tactics occur in Bahrain, as all calls for democratic rights are ruthlessly dealt with.

Protests against government abuses in Syria have led to all-out war which threatens to engulf the whole region. It is estimated by UNHCR that in the three years of the conflict an estimated 130,000 have died, and that there are 2.4 million refugees in surrounding countries, mainly Jordan and Lebanon, as well as a further 3 million internally displaced. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimated that 1,900 people were killed while the first round of Geneva talks was happening. Both government and opposition are accused of abusing human rights and using widespread torture. Amnesty International UK has had a major campaign to pressure UK politicians to agree for the government to work with UNHCR to resettle some of the most vulnerable refugees, and it has now been agreed that a small number of survivors of torture and sexual violence will be allowed to enter the country.

Another constant for local Amnesty is the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict, and failure to secure a lasting solution is causing a deepening of poverty for the Palestinians, and allowing violence and despair to persist. In Gaza, where the Israeli blockade is tightening, 80% of the population is reliant on humanitarian aid for survival. In recent months Gaza's only power station has closed down, and winter storms and floods have led to the displacement of 10,000 people. Severe fuel shortages and the closure of supply lines from Egypt have had a huge impact on the embattled population. The siege of Gaza is now entering its 7th year and is a protracted disaster for the civilians confined under the control of Israel and the new military regime in Egypt. In the West Bank illegal Israeli settlements, in contravention of UN resolutions, take up Palestinian land and water resources and restrict movement of the Palestinian population, impeding their access to education, healthcare and employment.

There is so much to campaign on, so many changes that need to be made, and wrongs that need to be righted.

KEEP IN TOUCH

Group Website - <http://welwyn.amnesty.org.uk/>

Follow us on Facebook -

Amnesty Welwyn Hatfield and East Herts.

