



THE BRIGHTON AND HOVE AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL GROUP NEWSLETTER

Forthcoming Brighton and Hove Amnesty Group Meetings/Events

Group meetings take place on the first Thursday of each month from 8-10pm at Community Base, Queens Road, Brighton

4th April
Guest speaker
Medicin Sans Frontier

2nd May
Business meeting and Group AGM

6th June
Speaker from Syrian Non Violence
Movement

4th July
Group business meeting

Letter writing evenings

An evening once a month to sit and write letters with fellow Amnesty members. These evenings are hosted at member's houses. All welcome, simply contact the host/hostess for details:

17th April
Host Emma 01273 232397

—please contact Emma on 01273 232397 if you would like to host a letter writing evening

Monthly Collection

30th March
27th April
25th May
Contact Catherine : 07828
584430 to volunteer

Monthly Stall

13th April
Contact Jill 01273 621697

Afghanistan Don't trade away women's human rights



Women and men in Afghanistan show they have voted by dipping their finger in purple ink. This is to avoid double voting. It can be used as a symbol of women's engagement in the political process. In 2009 there were reports that Taliban Militants cut off the ink-stained-fingers of two voters. We will be using the purple finger as a symbol in our new campaign to protect the rights of women in Afghanistan.

After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, women in Afghanistan have been able to gradually claim their basic human rights - including accessing work, school, and voting in local and national elections. Some have entered politics at great personal risk.

But since the reemergence of insurgency in 2005 by armed groups, including the Taliban, the basic human rights of women and girls are under attack once again. We are seriously concerned that as the Afghan government enter into discussions with the Taliban, women in the country are at real risk of losing the basic rights they have been able to claim in the last decade.

This is a crucial time to protect Afghan women's rights, as international forces - including those from the UK - prepare to leave the country next year. Instability and conflict could increase. If the current systematic problem of violent abuse faced by Afghan women and girls is not addressed now, the situation will only get worse.

The aims of the campaign are:

- 1. To promote women's full participation in the peace process.**
- 2. Protecting Women's Rights during the transition.**
- 3. Tackling violence against women and girls.**
- 4. Supporting women human rights defenders.**

Please see page 2 for Gwyneth's report back from the training day on this campaign

Campaign for Women's Rights in Afghanistan **Report on an Information and Skillshare Day (9th March, Human Rights Action** **Centre New Inn Yard, London.**

We were greeted with the news that Justine Greening, Secretary of State for International Development has announced (March 5th) that DIFID (Department for International Development) will make combating violence against women in Afghanistan (one out of a hundred projects competing for DIFID's attention; only two were chosen), a strategic priority. Effectively, one of Amnesty's Campaign Goals is already realised. Now we need to know how this "prioritising" will be translated from rhetoric into work.

The first item was a Panel session chaired by Bethan Cansfield, AIUK's Campaign Coordinator (Women's Human Rights).

Horia Mosadiq (AI's Afghanistan researcher) gave us an overview and a history; dispelling some myths. Afghan women first had the vote in 1919. Before the Taliban they'd had access to education, and to the professions, for decades. A talented girl, whatever her background, knew that she could make her way in the public world if that was her choice. Horia and Samira Hamidi reminisced about life in the sixties, when women (Horia herself and Samira's mother) would wear miniskirts in town, and "cover up" when they visited family in the country. But forced child marriage was and remains culturally acceptable. Paying over a child or a girl in forced marriage to solve a dispute, is culturally acceptable. Educated women who go unveiled are the product of hated foreign influence. In 2001 Women's Rights were used as a mask by the Allies, in their pursuit of Osama Bin Laden, justifying their invasion to the world. Afghan people remained ambivalent. The peace negotiations with the Taliban raise women's fears again: "There's a huge lack of transparency at government and international level". Afghan women are not properly involved in the process (and to a great extent nor is any of Afghan civil society). Afghan women don't want to lose what they have gained since 2001.

Under the Taliban girls were banned from education. There were secret schools, but the risk of being

found out was terrifying. Horia said to us: "When I realised that if I stayed, I would have to bring up an illiterate daughter, that was the worst moment of my life."

She also spoke of Bibi Aisha, the young woman who made the cover of Time magazine in 2010, for the horrible reason that her nose and ears had been cut off, to punish her for trying to escape from an abusive forced marriage. Aisha's message, despite her mutilation, is: "Stand up and fight for your rights. Don't remain a victim!" Afghan women are feisty. It's scary to listen to.

Samira Hamidi was the Country Director of the Afghan Women's Network (AWN) and leader of the AWN delegation to the Bonn conference on the Afghanistan peace process in 2011. She's currently doing an MA, but she has worked with women's organisations all over Afghanistan. Samira spoke of the practicalities. "Violence against women is really severe in Afghanistan right now. There's media coverage of the problem, which is good, in terms of visibility, bad in that it shows this violence as a growing trend." Shelters for abused women are a very difficult issue, and corruption in the whole Justice sector is rife. Huge amounts of money can be put into Human Rights projects and then vanish without a trace. "Equal rights" legislation looks like a great leap forward, but fails to deliver. Girls are supposed to have returned to education, but vicious threats are posted outside schools, to discourage pupils and female teachers from attending. There's a serious lack of government and police support for women victims. "Women's organisations; women defending women's human rights, face huge, enormously stressful challenges". Funding is welcome, but transient funding is useless. "If a woman flees to a Shelter, and then the funding dries up, she's on the street." "Advocacy really helps morale, but advocacy alone doesn't achieve much". Ask your MPs, she

said, to insist on accountability and sustainability with aid money.

Lunchtime gave us the chance to look at posters from the Afghan Women's Society's Exhibition, on display in the basement. Blown-up colour photos from the sixties, seventies, eighties, make the point that Afghan Women were very much free people, until war and the Taliban tore their lives apart. The stories of individual exiles, their achievements and the losses they have suffered, were very moving. I don't know if this is a travelling exhibition, but it would definitely be an asset to any Creative Action (if held in a suitable venue).

In the afternoon **Heidi Alexander**, Labour MP for Lewisham East, gave us an MP's perspective on the lobbying process. Many of the points she made can be found in the AI general Lobbying Tips hand-out, but the practical details about what happens after you've succeeded —when you've convinced your MP to table a question, or put an oral question to the Minister—were very interesting. Apparently about six weeks ago (I mean to look this up in Hansard) a question was asked that resulted in about half a session of supplementary questions, all on the topic of Women's Rights.

Then came the workshops, a relief after a lot of listening and note-taking. I chose the Media workshop (the alternative was Lobbying). I didn't have much luck researching the circulation contact details and deadline for stories, for the local paper for Frome in Somerset, but it was fun devising a photo-opportunity for your MP, based on the Purple Finger Campaign. I'm sure Caroline Lucas would be a good bet for a Creative Action in Brighton. Whether we could get the Argus on board, I don't know. We were advised that a good way to get a photograph in the paper is to provide a professional-standard digital photograph yourselves, and send it in along with your catchy press release.

Gwyneth

Take Action**Fray Tomas Gonzalez**

Catholic Priest Fray Tomas Gonzalez runs the 'La 72' migrants shelter in Tenosique, Mexico, providing food, water, advice and support to migrants from Central America heading for the USA. Fray Tomas and other staff at the centre face threats and harassment for their work.

Members of criminal gangs have threatened staff and migrants at the shelter, and migrants passing through Tenosique are routinely assaulted.

No one has been held to account for these abuses and the shelter remains vulnerable to attack. The limited protection previously provided by the authorities was withdrawn in October 2012.

Migrants' rights defenders are targets of attack because of their work highlighting abuses against migrants by public officials and criminal gangs.

Please send the enclosed letter in support of Fray Tomas Gonzalez and his co-workers.

March Stall - The Displaced People of Tawargha.

Saturday 23rd March was freezing with a March wind blowing. Nevertheless we set up our stall outside the Amnesty Bookshop to get signatures from the general public for the Tawargha people in Libya. They are the Prisoners of Conscience for our Amnesty Group. We will be doing 'Actions' on their behalf throughout the year.

In 2011, fighters from Misratah attacked the neighbouring town of Tawargha. They wanted revenge because they believed the Tawarghas supported Gaddafi's government forces during the uprising. They drove out Tawargha's 30,000 inhabitants, burned down the town and destroyed its infrastructure. Tawargha is now a ghost town with its people scattered across Libya. Hundreds have been de-

tained and tortured. We are asking the interim government to stop this persecution and help these people return to their home town once again.

The bookshop's volunteers supplied us with mugs of hot coffee to keep up our spirits. We managed to collect an amazing 111 signatures, thanks to Julian and Lucien who were on the stall for the first time. We collected 132 signatures altogether including those from our last meeting. I will send these to the Minister of the Interior c/o The Libyan Embassy in London.

Hopefully it will be somewhat warmer next month when we will be holding the stall on Saturday 13th April outside the bookshop again. We will be doing an action for Hakamada

Iwao, the Japanese prisoner who has been on Death Row for 44 years. Please contact me if you wish to help with the stall. Jill (01273 - 621697)

N.B. I have received an update on the Tawargha's situation. There has been some recognition by the Libyan authorities on their plight. In February 2013, the Deputy Prime Minister held a meeting with the Ministry of Justice and Interior to discuss this issue. They have recommended improvements for the conditions for internally displaced people and established a Displaced Persons' Affairs Office. However the Tawargha community say they have yet to see any action taken on their behalf and continue to face harassment from the militias.

Jill

Would you like to bring human rights to life in the classroom?

Amnesty International has a dedicated team of volunteer speakers, trained to come into schools (from primary to university level) and introduce students to human rights ideas and Amnesty's work.

Amnesty has designed a diverse range of resources to help make learning human rights accessible and fun, as well as ensuring it is relevant to the national curriculum.

If you would like to invite a speaker to come into your school or suggest a school which may be interested, please email or call Freya at freya_lyte@hotmail.co.uk or 01435 872559.

For more information about Amnesty's education work visit <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=10679>



Local events noticeboard

Brighton and Hove Palestine Solidarity Campaign

Public meeting: Thursday 11th April 7.30 p.m.
Friends Meeting House, Ship Street, Brighton

Is International Law Relevant to Palestine?

Michael Kearney
Lecturer in International Law, University of Sussex

How is international law relevant in theory, and why has enforcement proved unattainable? What are the key strands of relevant international law, and how have the various players - PLO, Israel, EU, UN, and civil society - sought to rely on, or to reject, international law and institutions? The idea will be to have a discussion on how and whether international law may provide tools for either *resolving* or *perpetuating* the occupation.

Michael Kearney has worked for the Palestinian human rights organisation Al-Haq. He has published on matters relating to international law and Palestine including on apartheid & colonialism, the question of statehood, the International Criminal Court, and the politicisation of international law (lawfare). Several of these papers are freely available for download at http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/cf_dev/AbsByAuth.cfm?per_id=1505305.

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