



THE BRIGHTON AND HOVE AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL GROUP NEWSLETTER

Forthcoming Brighton & 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

2nd April

Group business meeting

7th May

Group AGM
And planning 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:

Thursday 16th April
Hosted by Mike and Luke
michaelowen-fisher@hotmail.com

Monthly Collection

18th April
16th May
Contact Julian
julianwatmore@gmail.com
07583334740

Monthly Stalls

18th April
Election Campaign
Pledge Cards
Sydney Street
Contact Jill 01273 621697

Shaker Aamer Amnesty petition delivered to Downing Street on day of parliamentary debate



Amnesty petition calling for Shaker Aamer to be charged or released was delivered by David Nicholl to Downing Street on Tuesday 17 March with 41,688 signatures. David Nicholl is an Amnesty activist who will be running the London marathon for Shaker in April.

Also on Tuesday was a parliamentary debate on Shaker's case. This saw a resolution passed calling on the US Government to "release Shaker Aamer from his imprisonment in Guantánamo Bay and to allow him to return to his family in the UK". This resolution should help to build pressure on the US.

Here is a brief report from Maude who was one of the local Amnesty members who attended the parliamentary debate:

On Thursday, thanks to dogged and tireless work by Caroline Lucas, John McDonnell & Jeremy Corbyn we finally got the backbench debate in the main chamber of the House of Commons which was triggered by the 117,000+ petition two years ago. There was a rally beforehand in one of the committee rooms, at which Sara Birch spoke as Amnesty's representative, before we proceeded to the public gallery of the main chamber. Shaker's three sons were bravely in attendance, as were his wife's dad and brother.

A range of cross party MPs spoke passionately & eloquently, including a number of Tory grandees. After these gripping displays of eloquence, Tobias Ellwood's response arrived like a damp squib. Shaker's family left the public gallery before he got to the end.

Shaker Aamer report continued from page 1

Anyway, I thought you might like to read the Hansard record, which gives a great insight into how democracy works. It's column 707 4.25 pm

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmhansrd/cm150317/debtext/150317-0003.htm>

Maude

Other useful links on Shaker Aamer :

For Amnesty's background and information on Shaker Aamer please see

<http://www.amnesty.org.uk/shaker-aamer-13-years-guantanamo-bay-torture-uk#.VRHLi3ysX84>

PJ Harvey's song for Shaker:

<http://www.uncut.co.uk/news/hear-new-pj-harvey-song-shaker-aamer-19997>

Roger Waters' response to a letter from Shaker:

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=747127365331071=>

Obama speaking the day after our debate in the House of Commons last week:

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/mar/18/obama-thinks-he-shouldve-closed-gitmo-first-day/>

CAMPAIGN AGAINST ARMS TRADE "Arms to Renewables"

On 21st March I attended the national gathering of *Campaign Against Arms Trade* – an issue I feel passionately about, as it links so clearly to AI's concerns. Also, CAAT's latest campaign "*Arms to Renewables*" i.e. transferring the finances and skills of the arms industry to the renewable energy sector, seems a "no brainer".

It was a really inspiring day with excellent workshops and speakers and a final rousing speech by Owen Jones (journalist and author of "*The Establishment - And how they get away with it*").

Bahrain

One of highlights was an opening speech by Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei, a Bahraini activist arrested and imprisoned during the 2011 protests, who now lives in the UK, having been granted asylum, and campaigns vigorously against the UK's arms exports to Bahrain (ironic or what?) The UK's export of armoured vehicles to Saudi Arabia, which were used for repression in Bahrain, is well known, but Sayed told another chilling story of a Bahraini Prince (the King's son) who is known to have been personally and directly involved in torturing activists, and whose immunity from prosecution, because of the very serious nature of the crimes, was quashed by the High Court when he recently visited the UK. However the UK Government overturned this decision and the Prince secured meetings with the Ministry of Defence and a deal with the UK to build a military base in Bahrain.

Some 2014 anti-arms trade campaign achievements:

- The Natural History Museum refused to host a dinner for the arms trade
- The Edinburgh Science Festival refused sponsorship from Senex (a subsidiary of Finmeccanica)
- Comic Relief has divested from BAe Systems
- The BBC's Nick Robinson stepped down as a keynote speaker at an arms trade dinner at the last minute
- Activists occupied the Israeli owned Elbit Systems factory in Birmingham and shut it for a day
- The AGM of a tear gas manufacturing company was delayed

A shipment of 1.6 million (yes, that figure is correct!) canisters of tear gas from South Korea to Bahrain was stopped by activists

Things everyone should know about the UK's arms trade:

- Out of the 28 "countries of concern" listed by the UK in relation to human rights and democracy, we have licensed weapons to 18
- Saudi Arabia is the UK's largest buyer (£1.6bn worth of licences in 2013) and ranks at number 5 in terms of authoritarianism in the world, below North Korea, Guinea Bissau, Chad and Syria
- The UK has been arming both Russia and Ukraine

- In the initial "embargo" on sales to Russia, only 34 of the 285 licences were cancelled
 - Tear gas used on the pro-democracy demonstrators in Hong Kong was manufactured in the UK
 - Bribes worth £116m were paid to officials in South Africa for a deal to build fighter jets worth £8bn which have never been used
- With no named threat the UK is building aircraft carriers at a cost of £6.5bn and fighter jets costing £2.5bn

Just how essential is the arms trade to the UK economy?

- Arms exports make up only 1.5% of total UK exports
- Arms export jobs account for only 0.2% of total employment
and yet
- Every worker in the arms trade is subsidised to the tune of £10,000 per year
 - 27% of UK Government research expenditure is on arms
- 54% of the total of export promotion staff is committed to "defence and security"

Arms to Renewables

A panel of speakers including an off-shore wind engineer and members of the Trade Union *Campaign Against Climate Change* group all made a powerful case for investing the arms industry finance (£37,000,000,000 a year) in renewable energy, arguing that the biggest threat to security is climate change.

- There is a very close skills match
 - Many more jobs could be created
- Off shore wind projects would ideally be located in exactly the places where jobs are scarce i.e the North-East

The Arms Trade Treaty

Unfortunately there is a great deal of controversy over this treaty, which Amnesty campaigned so hard for. CAAT believes that not only will be *ineffective*, but might also do more harm than good. To summarise:

- The treaty's threshold for refusing arms exports is far too high: words like "overriding risk", "right to self-defence" and "likely" and "substantial risk" are open to interpretation
- The treaty has no effective requirements for record-keeping and reporting: states are only required to submit minimal lists of arms exports and any information deemed "commercially sensitive" or threatening "national security" can be omitted
- The treaty excludes certain types of weapons including surface-to-air missiles, armoured troop-carrying vehicles, tear gas and drones

The treaty doesn't cover all types of arms transfers: military forces of two or more countries working together are exempt, as are licence production agreements: e.g. the UK granting a licence to another country to produce a weapon we have designed.....and so much more!!

Report from Sue

Amnesty Stall Monthly Report - FEBRUARY

Date Saturday 21st February
 Time 11 - 12.30 pm
 Venue Outside Amnesty Bookshop, Sydney Street, Brighton
 Weather Cloudy with sunny intervals
 Volunteers Julian, Peter, Gwyneth, Celia and Jill
 Campaign STOP TORTURE CAMPAIGN

In 2010 Ali Aarrass was forcibly returned to Morocco and has been detained since then. He was taken to a secret detention centre where he was beaten on the soles of his feet, given electric shocks to his testicles, suspended from his wrists and burnt with cigarettes. He was convicted solely on the basis of a confession extracted under torture. The Moroccan authorities have failed to investigate Ali, claims of torture and ill treatment.

Target We had all 94 cards signed by the general public, to be sent off to the Minister of Justice in Morocco.

Jill

Live reading of Even if we lose our lives on 7 March

After several rehearsals we were delighted to put on this event at New Venture Theatre in Bedford Place. Three of us read the words of three Afghan women, with contributions from two colleagues. We were in the downstairs, bar area, and participants and members of the audience benefited from an informal atmosphere and access to refreshments before the reading and during the interval.

After the reading, and interval, Christine Usher, AI UK's Middle East Country Coordinator, lead a discussion mostly about the prospects for women in Afghanistan. She told us that out of a population of about 30 million people, 15 million are under eighteen years of age, and about one third of those receive schooling. This made me even more in awe of the efforts of the three women whose words we had read.

I hope the listeners were as moved by the stories we read as we ourselves were. Several members of the audience contributed to the discussion which followed the reading.

We are grateful to Gwyneth, who organised the readers and prompted us, very patiently and courteously, to improve our efforts, and to New Venture Theatre who generously lent us the use of their premises free of charge.

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Amnesty Websites: international - www.amnesty.org AI UK - www.amnesty.org.uk local group - www.amnesty.org.uk/brighton

Follow us on twitter @AmnestyBrighton

See our photos on Flickr—

<http://www.flickr.com/groups/amnestybrighton/pool>

Amnesty UK Human Rights Centre - Tel: 0207 0331500

