

❄️ *Seasons Greetings to all our members* ❄️



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

December 2013

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North West Regional Conference Looking outward, getting active

This year, we hosted the North West conference which was attended by 80 delegates. The morning focus was on understanding the reality behind AI's 2014-16 global campaign of "Stop Torture" and on finding out how easy it can be to take this message onto the streets. The keynote speakers were from the "Survivors Speak Out" network, a group supported by "Freedom From Torture". Their words helped us understand the enormity of being forced to flee one's own country and then of arriving in a country where everyone and everything is alien, with the challenges of language and stigmatisation, compounded by the de-humanisation of the UK asylum system. This was followed by a brief description of AIUK's intended campaign due to commence in June 2014.



The delegates then took this stark and painful information into a creative session in which they worked in teams to arrive at a visual message and a press statement, displayed and enacted for all to see on the steps of St Peter's House. Powerful messages of "Stop Torture" delivered in less than 45 minutes. Over a tasty soup and sandwich lunch, delegates took the opportunity to sign actions and network, using the information that was available on human rights in Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, The Roma People and "Freedom From Torture". They also took the opportunity to sing "Happy Birthday" to one of the keynote speakers who was a very long way from home.

The afternoon session was opened by Kerry Moscojiuri, AIUK's Director of Supporter Campaigning and Communication. She led us visually and verbally through the International Council Meeting in August 2013 and the challenges of democracy in a multi national movement. Overall, the message was one of optimism, and planned improvement in the areas of governance and finance. The questions focused on the Global Transition Programme, the AI structure of hubs and sections and the impact on AIUK of the ongoing process of restructuring.

The remainder of the conference was devoted to small group facilitated workshops and how to get active in response to the speakers' messages. Trevor Trueman (Malvern Amnesty) spoke of his ongoing research amongst the persecuted Oromo people who have fled Ethiopia, whilst Maggie Towse, Country Coordinator for Zimbabwe, presented an up to date account of human rights issues in that country. Alex Jagger, AIUK Europe Coordinator, spoke passionately about the ongoing plight of human rights abuses experienced by Roma people in Europe today and in the fourth workshop, an Afghani member of Manchester Amnesty answered questions about her personal experience of working with women's human rights groups and the problems that women face in Afghanistan.



Thank you to all who helped make the conference a well organized success!



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Group news

Send a message of hope

Every year we take part in the Greetings Card Campaign – sending messages of hope and support to victims of human rights abuses and human rights defenders.



We have 3 stalls, at the Peoples' Museum, at Unicorn and on Saturday 14th December at the Birch Christmas Fair (2-4pm), Birch Community Centre, Fallowfield. The first two will have happened by the time that you read this newsletter – however you are welcome to go along to the Birch Centre to help write cards and we will be writing cards at our next group meeting – so come along and join in.

Alternatively, take part at home - you will find all the information you need at <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/write-rights-2013>

The Bolotnaya Three

December 2013 Local Group Monthly Action
Vladimir Georgievich Akimenkov, Artiom Victorovich Saviolov and Mikhail Aleksandrovich Kosenko were detained during the protest against Vladimir Putin's rule in Bolotnaya Square, Moscow, on 6 May 2012. Although they were briefly released, the trio were arrested again the following month and charged with participating in a 'mass riot'; Artiom and Mikhail are also accused of using force against police officers. Since then the men have been held in custody, which is taking a toll on their health. All three firmly deny the charges and video footage supports their claims. The police statements against Vladimir and

Artiom have changed substantially since the protests, and the officer allegedly beaten by Mikhail later said he had never seen him before.

We will be taking action on this case at our December meeting. If you can't make it, take action at home:

www.amnesty.org.uk/bolotnaya

Next Group Meeting

Held 2nd Wednesday each month - 7.30pm

12th December

For this DECEMBER only, the monthly meeting will be held just around the corner from our normal venue - still in the city centre, at:

Abbey College Manchester
5-7 Cheapside
Off King Street
Manchester
M2 4WG

Come and write some Greetings cards as part of the Write for Rights campaign

**Do the monthly action on the Bolotnaya Three
Take part in an action to mark Human Rights Day**

*Why not join a few of us for a pre meeting meal just after 6pm.
This month we will be in the bar at Jamie's (the top of King Street).
It would be good to see you there.*

Campaigns

Syria

Over 100,000 men, women and children have been killed since the crackdown on peaceful protests first began in Syria in March 2011. The current action on the AIUK website is to email both pro and anti-government representatives, calling on them to protect civilians.

Get online and send an email:

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/protect-civilians-syria>

Women's Rights in Afghanistan

Women human rights defenders are regularly targeted and attacked in Afghanistan. It's been named 'the worst place in the world to be a woman'.

There are groups in Afghanistan working to improve women's human rights. At our last meeting we make patches which were sent off to AIUK to form part of a patchwork quilt as a



message of support for these courageous people.

We are also asked to contact our MPs to urge them to ensure that women's rights are high on the agenda in their dealings with the Afghani authorities. Contact gibbs.mary@gmail.com or look on line at <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/stop-violence-against-women-activists-afghanistan>

Zimbabwe

At our November meeting we took part in the Solidarity Poster-making which was part of the launch of a new AI Report and AIUK will be sending these posters off to WOZA and to other HRDs in Zimbabwe in the new few days.

Maggie Towse, the AIUK Zimbabwe Country Coordinator, has sent the following report:

The new government in Zimbabwe has now been in office for just over 100 days and to mark this the IS team has published a Report, **Zimbabwe: Human Rights Agenda for the Government, 2013-2018** (Index:AFR46/017/2013), which has been sent to the authorities in Zimbabwe and to embassies around the world, including here in the UK.

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The report notes the poor human rights record of the country and urges this new government to put human rights at the heart of its agenda. The new constitution, if fully implemented, would do much to improve the human rights environment and it is crucial that repressive laws that are not compatible with this new constitution are quickly repealed or substantially amended. The report also calls for an end to the culture of impunity that has prevailed for so long and that previous violations are properly investigated. The report notes with concern that HRDs have continued to be harassed and beaten by police while going about their legitimate business since the elections and calls for this to be brought to an end.

Some good news!

Beatrice Mtetwa, Zimbabwe's most high profile Human Rights lawyer, was acquitted of all charges last week. She faced possible imprisonment if found guilty of 'obstructing the course of justice'. The case had dragged on since March when she was first arrested for requesting to see a police search warrant.



She was appalled by her experiences in prison where she was detained for 8 days and is now launching a constitutional case challenging the "inhuman" conditions that inmates have to endure.

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR46/019/2013/en/7782cc52-722d-4d65-b062-67ba2df1a62d/af460192013en.html>

In a further piece of good news from the Zimbabwe courts, a leading human rights defender, **Abel Chikomo the Executive Director of the Zim Human Rights Forum** has also just been acquitted of all charges. Charges of running an "unregistered" organisation were first brought against him on 8th February 2011 and the trial has been subject to repeated adjournments. In both of these cases the presiding magistrate castigated the prosecution for bringing cases for which there was no evidence.

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/zimbabwe-s-acquittal-activist-small-step-against-climate-intimidation-2013-11-22>

Less good is the news that WOZA members have again been beaten by police. On 29 November over 1000 WOZA members took to the streets in Bulawayo to mark African Women Human Rights Defenders Day. They marched in 11 separate groupings

to the County offices where they were to present a petition of their demands for local authority officials this was done successfully and after Jenni had announced to members that the petition had been delivered suggested that they began to disperse. As they started to do this they were met with riot and reaction police who obstructed their paths. The police used their batons to beat WOZA members and many were arrested. Jenni and Magadonga were held in a separate area from the others for 3 hours. Members who were not arrested were chased by police officers and prevented from going to the bus station which was their intention. Police dogs were also in use, although not unleashed. Eventually all members were released after the Police officer in charge announced that he didn't know why they had been arrested in the first place.

More good news!

You may recall that Magadonga was facing charges following an incident with an MDC who official who had accused her of harassment. This case went to trial in October and I am pleased to be able to tell you that she was acquitted.

And more!

At a recent rally organised by AI Zimbabwe the Justice Minister Emmerson Mnangagwa stated that he would do all in his power to completely abolish the death penalty in Zimbabwe. There are currently 89 people on death row in Zimbabwe (87 men and 2 women) although there have been no executions for several years. The new Constitution that came into force earlier this year abolished the death penalty for women and for men younger than 21 and older than 70.

This was better news that anyone had dared hope for at this point although it was thought that the Minister would be sympathetic to working towards abolition at some point in the future. He fought in the liberation war and faced charges of terrorism but escaped execution because of his age. He was 20 at the time. He has been Justice Minister in previous governments and not pressed this issue so we are all hoping that he can and does follow through on this now.

<http://livewire.amnesty.org/2013/11/13/a-big-step-closer-to-abolishing-the-death-penalty-in-zimbabwe/>

"It always seems impossible until it's done."

Nelson Mandela 1918 - 2013

Rest in peace Madiba.

Other Amnesty news

AIUK AGM 2014

Early announcement for 2014 AGM in Edinburgh - 12th -13th April 2014 at Herriott-Watt University www.amnesty.org.uk/agm.

The resolution deadline is 11th Feb and booking deadline is 3rd March.

AIUK are asking for working party chairs to facilitate debate on amendments to AGM motions - training will be provided - deadline for applications is 31st Jan. Same website address for applications or if you want to discuss it, ring the supporter care team on 02070331777.

Board Elections

Elections for the board are coming up: anyone wishing to apply for consideration must request a nomination form by 8th Jan and return the form by 15th Jan: info from amnesty.org.uk/boardelection or email nomcom@amnesty.org.uk