



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

February 2014

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February Group Meeting

Wednesday 12th February

Cross Street Chapel - 7.30pm

This month, **Kate Allen, Director of AIUK**, will be joining us for a question and answer session and discussion. While there will be time for questions on the night, we will prioritise the questions that have been sent in advance. We look forward to an insightful and engaging discussion - full report next month.



We also plan to hold a candlelit vigil for Syrian journalist Ali Mahmoud Othman – see below

Why not join a few of us for a pre-meeting meal just after 6. This month we will at The Grinch on Chapel Walks next to Cross St Chapel.
N.B. Our monthly meetings are held every 2nd Wednesday each month – all welcome

Recent Events

Writing for Rights

We held our busiest letter writing session yet this month, with 12 of us turning up to write 43 letters whilst enjoying the excellent fare at the Eighth Day café.



We hold these informal sessions throughout the year, usually on a Saturday every other month at the Eighth Day café on Oxford Road. Our next one will take place on Saturday 22nd March, 2-4pm. Make a date in your diary and come along to get stuck in to some core Amnesty work.

Don't forget that you can always send emails, sign petitions and write letters at home as well. Make a habit of regularly checking the AIUK website for new cases to move you to put pen to paper. Go to <http://www2.amnesty.org.uk/actions> for cases to work on.

Guantánamo Bay

Guantánamo Bay was established in January 2002 as a place for the US authorities to hold people perceived to be 'enemy combatants' in this war on terror. The first detainees were transferred to the prison camp on 11 January 2002. Those of us on our group Twitter account

held a day of Guantánamo tweets to mark this shameful anniversary.

Abbas Khan Memorial

Dr Khan was the doctor from the UK who the Syrian authorities claim 'committed suicide' just one day before his release from detention. Several of us attended a memorial event for Dr Abbas Khan last month, organised by the local Syrian community.



At that meeting we were asked, 'what will you do?' and we as individuals and members of Manchester Amnesty agreed that we want increase our focus on supporting the people of Syria.

At our February meeting we plan to have a candlelit vigil for Syrian citizen journalist Ali Mahmoud Othman. Ali Othman was part of a network of activists who ran the Homs media centre providing footage and information to satellite TV channels and news outlets. He was arrested by the Syrian authorities in March 2012 in Aleppo province and has not been seen since the end of May last year. A relative of Ali Mahmoud Othman who lives outside Syria told Amnesty International that in November 2012, the family had received word from an unofficial source that he had been transferred to the infamous Saydnaya Military Prison near Damascus, although Amnesty International has been unable to confirm this..



Group AGM

We held our Annual General Meeting last month. We have a few changes to the group's officers and campaign coordinators – see list opposite. In particular Helen is standing down as chair to concentrate on her PhD and Michelle is also handing over the secretary's job, however they still plan to be involved in the group leading our Middle East and North Africa (MENA) work with a particular interest in Egypt and Syria. Thanks to both of them for all their efforts so far.

Financially we had a good year in 2013 with some good fundraisers. The Acoustic Amnesty event brought in £324, the street collection £325, the Amnestea £216 and the Literature Festival £120.50. This means that we were able to send £1013.37 to AIUK and reserve £261 to invest in group facilities and events in this coming year.

However, we do also rely on donations from group members (£455 in 2013) to help keep the group afloat. It costs us about £600 just to hire the rooms for our monthly meetings. It is that time of year again when subscriptions are due – so please help us out.

Subscriptions please!

Annual donations from members are vital to keep the Group going. The suggested sum is £20 if you have a wage, £3 otherwise, or whatever you can afford to give. Please bring your cash or cheque to the next meeting or contact Treasurer Sean Dunne (Sean.a.dunne@btinternet.com) and he will tell you how to get the money to him.

Thanks!

Other Amnesty news

AIUK AGM 2014

Don't forget to book for the 2 day 2014 AGM in Edinburgh - 12th -13th April 2014 at Herriott-Watt University. See www.amnesty.org.uk/agm for full details. N.B. The resolution deadline is 11th Feb and booking deadline is 3rd March.

Sex Worker Policy Consultation

Some of you might have picked up some response in the media and on Facebook and Twitter to Amnesty's launch of a consultation on a future policy on sex worker's human rights. At the moment AI has no policy.

Here are some extracts from a recent email received by the group from Kerry Moscogiuri, AIUK Director of Supporter Campaigning and Communications (newsletter editor's emphasis):

'As you will be aware, Amnesty International is conducting a consultation in order to inform the development of a policy on sex workers. While this is a sensitive area, it is entirely appropriate that Amnesty International focuses on this issue. Sex workers are a very vulnerable group of people who face constant abuse of their human rights. That is why Amnesty is currently canvassing opinion and encouraging discussion with our members around the world.

We are due to send you a full set of consultation documents next week and we will discuss the issue in depth at the AGM this year. The issue is of course controversial. We have already had some media coverage on the issue in the UK and over the past few days some significant comment on social media. That is the reason for my getting in touch today; to equip with you with responses should you need them.The crucial point is that we are consulting about a future policy position. We currently do not have one and the consultation we are undertaking is a genuine one in order to establish our position. I do hope this is helpful.

Find out more about the consultation on the AIUK website at <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/global-policy-consultation-sex-work>

Group Officers		
Chair	Laura Barsby	barsbylaura@gmail.com
Vice-chair	Hazel Errey	hazelerrey@gmail.com
Secretary	Anne Walker	Anne.walker9@ntlworld.com
Treasurer	Sean Dunne	Sean.a.dunne@btinternet.com
New Members	Mary McBride	Mary.mcbride@blueyonder.co.uk
PR leads		
Press releases	David Keyworth	keyworthdavid@gmail.com
Twitter	Michelle Eddisford	sheddie@live.co.uk
Facebook	Laura Barsby	barsbylaura@gmail.com
Newsletter	Anne Walker	Anne.walker9@ntlworld.com
Website	Anne Walker	Anne.walker9@ntlworld.com
Campaign leads		
Stop Torture	Lianne Slavin	Lianne.slavin@googlemail.com
Women's rights	Mary Gibbs	Gibbs.mary@gmail.com
	Marie-Louise O'Hanrahan	mlohanrahan@outlook.com
Individuals at Risk and HRDs	Hazel Errey	hazelerrey@gmail.com
Burma	Jean Mary	chnmanchester@gmail.com
Southern Africa	Anne Walker	Anne.walker9@ntlworld.com
MENA (includes Syria & Egypt)	Michelle Eddisford	sheddie@live.co.uk
	Helen Underhill	helsunderhill@yahoo.co.uk

Torture Sub-group and Literature Festival planning

Lianne and Sue have organised the first meeting for the Torture subgroup which will also lead on the Literature Festival in October (we have to start early!)

Meeting: 18th February, 6pm. Cornerhouse, by Oxford Road station, Manchester. All welcome.