

Action

January/February 2016



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

4th February
Group Business Meeting and campaign update
All welcome

Monthly Collection 20th February 19th March 16th April

Contact Julian
julianwatmore@gmail.com
07469776295

Monthly Stalls

Sydney Street
Contact Jill 01273 621697
6th February 2016
11am to 1pm

Regional Conference

Saturday 20th February
10am to 4pm
Lewes Town Hall
Lewes
East Sussex

Keynote speaker
Stephen Bowen

Director of British Institute of Human rights

Short film and talk from pupils at Lewes Priory school about their part in the campaign to release Shaker Aamer

Workshops:
My Body My Rights
Media Relations
Death Penalty campaign

Please book by calling Philip Strudwick on 01483 503876

Write for Rights 2015

On Saturday 5th December we had a wonderful day of letter writing at the Friends Meeting House as our annual Write for Rights campaign. Between us we wrote 271 cards and 49 letters. We ate lots of cake, listened to some beautiful madrigals and enjoyed the company.

Thanks to all who helped to make the day such a success.

Here are just a few of the photos from the day. For more please look at <https://www.flickr.com/groups/amnestybrighton/>





MEXICO STILL FAILING TORTURE SURVIVORS

A year and a half after the global launch of Amnesty International's 'Stop Torture' campaign, Mexico's torture survivors are still waiting for concrete advances in the investigation and prosecution of torture cases.

Enrique Guerrero Aviña, philosophy student and activist was driving in Mexico City on 17th May 2013, when he was stopped by plain clothed federal police. They took him to a warehouse where he was subjected to over thirty hours of physical and psychological abuse. Enrique was then taken to the Federal Attorney General's Office on Organized Crime (SEIDO), where a public prosecutor tried to get him to confess to involvement in a kidnapping

which had occurred three months earlier in the state of Oaxaca (in the south of Mexico). Enrique was later charged with organised crime and kidnapping and transferred to a maximum security prison where he is still being held.

According to the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, who visited the country in spring 2014, Enrique's story is typical of victims of torture and ill-treatment in Mexico. The targets usually come from poor or marginalised groups and are accused of being involved in organised crime (which exempts them from many protections under Mexican law). They are often arrested without a warrant and not given reasons for the arrest until much later. The detainees are then blindfolded and taken to unknown locations where the torture takes place. This consists of a combination of: punches, kicks and beatings with sticks; electric shocks through the application of electrical devices such as cattle prods to their bodies; asphyxiation with plastic bags; waterboarding; forced nudity; suspension by their limbs; threats and insults. The Special Rapporteur is also concerned about the reports of sexual torture being perpetrated against

"I frankly and humbly ask for the support and solidarity of those who believe in justice to spread the story of my case and join forces to raise their voices against injustice in whatever way, place, or corner possible. We walk together towards a better country where injustice, torture and falsehood will not prevail." Enrique Guerrero Aviña, writing from prison.

women. On occasions family members are unaware of the detainee's whereabouts for several days. Often victims are subjected to the further degrading treatment of being paraded before the media as criminals without having been convicted.

Complaints of torture doubled between 2013 and 2014 (a figure which does not include those who fear reprisals if they report). The number of investigations has also increased. Yet this does not seem to have resulted in an increased number of charges or convictions. In fact, data regarding criminal proceedings against torture is hard to come by or simply incomplete. The Attorney General on Federal Crimes has even admitted to Amnesty International that they "don't have any hard data" on torture charges.

The attitude towards the state on stamping out torture is reflected in the complete failure to carry out proper investigations, including gathering forensic examinations, witness testimonies and crime scene inspections.

It should not be ignored, however, that there have been some positive policy developments. These include new standards from the fed-



eral judiciary and two new internal guidelines on torture from the Federal Attorney General's Office. A General Law on Torture, which would apply at federal and state level, is currently under discussion and due to be passed very soon. In addition, more and more torture survivors have been using Mexico's relatively new system of "spoken" trials to bravely tell their story and confront their abusers. The hope is that these developments will transform into significant change on the ground. The most significant barrier to reform seems to be the government's failure to publicly acknowledge the extent of the problem in Mexico. Until this happens, it is difficult to see how the country can really begin tackling its torture "epidemic". *By Freya Lyte*

A BEACON OF PEACE

Monthly Stall Update

Date Saturday 16th January

Time 11 - 1pm

Venue Outside Amnesty Bookshop, Sydney Street, Brighton

Weather Cold but dry (after being rained off twice before with this campaign!)

Volunteers Julian, Andrew, Celia and Jill

Campaign The Peace Community of San Jose de Apartado, Columbia

In 1997 a group of farmers displaced by Colombia's long - running armed conflict declared their neutrality between the warring sides. Over the years they braved threats, harassment and killings to maintain their Peace Community. They refused to be drawn into the armed conflict between the country's armed forces and paramilitaries and the guerrillas of FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia.)The community has 900 members in north western Columbia who have focused on agriculture, education, healthcare and a justice system. They have been exporting organic cacao to the British cosmetics company Lush.

We asked people in the street to sign a message of solidarity to send to the Peace Community. We collected 117 signatures altogether.

Next Stall Saturday 6th February

Campaign Sending letters for a recent urgent action

If you would like to help contact Jill on 01273 621697

NATIONAL CONFERENCE AND AGM 2016

Amnesty's National Conference & AGM takes place on 9-10 April 2016 at East Midlands Conference centre in Nottingham. All Amnesty International members can attend and vote. Please visit <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/agm> for more information and how to book your place.

The National Conference is about bringing people together to learn from one another and be inspired. There will be workshops you can attend on lots of different topics, as well as an action centre where you can learn more about the different things we do, inspirational speakers, one-to-one help in clinics, and a social where you can meet other activists and hang out with fellow human rights defenders.

This years conference is free of charge including food. Accommodation can be booked at either student halls or local hotel through the Amnesty website (link above) at either £40 or £60 per person.



Take Action

FREE ASHRAF, POET FACING EXECUTION IN SAUDI ARABIA

ASHRAF FAYADH a 35 year old poet and artist, is sentenced to be executed by Saudi Arabian authorities for his art. On 17th November 2015, the General Court in Abha, southwest Saudi Arabia, found Ashraf guilty of 'apostasy' – renouncing Islam – for his poetry and sentenced him to death.

Ashraf was initially arrested in 2013 following a complaint registered against him by another Saudi citizen, who said that the poet was promoting atheism and spreading blasphemous ideas among young people. He was released the following day but rearrested in January 2014, when he was charged with apostasy; he had supposedly questioned religion and spread atheist thought with his poetry. Later in the year he was sentenced to 4 years in prison and 800 lashes for the charges relating to images of women on his phone. The General Court accepted Ashraf's apology for the charges. However the Court of appeal sent his case back to the General Court, which in turn sentenced him to death for apostasy.

Throughout this process Ashraf was denied access to a lawyer, violating his human rights as well as Saudi Arabia's national laws. In addition the death penalty according to international law, may only be used for the most serious crimes. Apostasy is not a crime at all, let alone a serious one. The death penalty is a cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment; it violates our right to life and our right to be free from torture. We are asking the Saudi Arabian authorities to drop Ashraf's conviction and all charges against him.

TAKE ACTION – SIGN THE PETITION AT

www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/free-ashraf-favadh-saudi-arabia-palestinian-poet

Text PROTEST plus your full name to 70505

BRIGHTON & HOVE AMNESTY GROUP CONTACTS

Chair – Peter brightonandhoveai@googlemail.com Tel: 01273 607110

New Member Secretary: Sue Tel: 07790 755921

Group Secretary—Catherine brightonandhoveai@googlemail.com 07759 271399

Treasurer: Sue 07790 755921

Newsletter editor: - Emma: Tel: 01273 232397

Please email any contributions for the newsletter to brightonandhoveai@googlemail.com

Lanes collection organiser: - Julian julianwatmore@gmail.com 07469776295

Web Site co-ordinator: Michael - michaelowenfisher@hotmail.com

Amnesty Stalls co-ordinator—Jill —01273 621697

Campaign Co-ordinators:

Individuals at Risk – The Mansoura women (Egypt) Celia Stubbs—01273 593833

Security and Human Rights—Michael—michaelowenfisher@hotmail.com

Stop Torture—Michael - michaelowenfisher@hotmail.com

My Body My Rights—Jess 07740 344832

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

