

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL Hammersmith and Fulham Group

JULY, 2012 NEWSLETTER

JULY MEETING

We signed letters and discussed usefully a number of subjects. These included:

STALLS

Questions have been raised in the past about whether our monthly stall is worth the time and effort we put into it and if it is how we can make it more effective. Several views were expressed at the meeting. We decided to continue the stalls in the same location for the time being, but also:

Make the letters shorter and more readable.

Keep some literature about the local group on the stall so that we can suggest to anyone interested that they might join.

Partly as an experiment, the next stall will be for four hours instead of six and will consist of two two-hour shifts instead of four one-and-a-half hour shifts.

The stall will be on 21st July, and its subject will be corporate responsibility.

PEACE FAIR

We decided to have a stall at the West London Peace Fair on Sunday, 8th September, on Turnham Green. This will substitute for the September stall.

CLOSE TO THE GROUND

This is the term International Headquarters gives to a proposal to establish ten Amnesty offices around the world, to be closer to the areas of human rights abuses. Groups were asked for their opinions.

We discussed the proposal and several points were raised. Bruno said this is unnecessary: information comes to London more than anywhere else, and this is the best place to keep informed. Others said the offices must be staffed by locals, otherwise they would enhance the impression that Amnesty is a Western organization preaching to the Third



World. Others raised the question of expense: if those staffing the offices were to travel in their regions, and there would not be much point to their being there if they did not, this would be costly.

The consensus was this should be tried, if at all, initially with a smaller number of overseas offices.

ARMS CONTROL TREATY

Amnesty, along with other organizations, has been campaigning for years for an international treaty to control the sale of weapons, ensuring that they do not go to government that will use them to oppress and persecute. This has now reached its culmination in a meeting of governments at the UN headquarters in New York to finalise the treaty.

In our group Nick has been working on this and keeping us informed.

The British Government has been pressing for a treaty. David Cameron said in Parliament on the occasion of the start of the New York meeting:

"Britain wants an ATT that includes small arms, light weapons and ammunition. We want to see a treaty that contains strong provisions on human rights, international humanitarian law and sustainable development, and covers activities like brokering."

Amnesty UK Director Kate Allen welcomed the Prime Minister's support and said, "We hope he sends a clear message to the UK team at the United Nations that there must be no compromise on key principles....Thousands of people die every day as a result of poorly regulated arms controls."

Nick told us that at present the United States is holding back from committing itself totally; it wants ammunition to be excluded.

PETITIONS

At the meeting we signed petitions on two subjects.

We sent one to the **Nigerian** Government over the eviction of thousands of people from their homes, a situation that Bruno is monitoring.

In a riverside area of Port Harcourt where gangsters flourished, the Government sent in bulldozers to demolish the entire area, making more than 10,000 people homeless. This is the rainy season but many people are sleeping in the street or in churches.

We asked the Government to provide temporary housing for those evicted and relief health services, to compensate them for their loss and halt further evictions until safeguards against abuse are in place.

We sent a petition to **Burma** as part of an Amnesty International campaign for the release of prisoners of conscience. Although the Burmese Government has dropped some of its repressive behaviour, many people Amnesty considers prisoners of conscience are still behind bars.

This is part of an Amnesty International campaign, timed to coincide with the visit to Europe of Aung San Suu Kyi, who was recently released from house imprisonment and allowed to take her seat in Parliament.



MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

AI has produced a campaign update on the Middle East and North Africa, an area which is a period of transition. Among the points:

- Positive developments: the release of thousands of political prisoners in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya; the establishment of mechanisms to look into past crimes in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya; greater freedom of expression particularly in Egypt and Tunisia.

- However, Amnesty has many reports of the sexual harassment of women in Egypt, and in Libya the fragmentation of authority with human rights abuses often. In a climate of impunity.

- In Syria Amnesty wants the UN mission to be given a new mandate that will include monitoring human rights abuses. It is also developing contacts with the Syrian Non-Violence Movement.

CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

Amnesty continues to campaign to make corporations responsible for human rights abuses as a result of their activities. It has campaigned recently on two issues in particular: **Dow Chemicals and the Olympic Games**. Dow is one of the sponsors of the games, but Amnesty and others insist that it has not compensated the thousands of victims of the Bhopal

We also campaigning over Shell and Nigeria, asking Shell to accept responsibility for the environmental damage caused by its activities in the Niger Delta.

AI has collected 300,000 signatures on a petition to Shell. And Amnesty representatives went to Shell's annual general meeting at its headquarters in the Hague.

Shell's CEO, Peter Voser, has refused repeatedly to say whether or when Shell will pay the billion dollars needed to start the clean-up. He insists that Shell abides by the law, although it has been found guilty in Nigerian and American courts.

The Hammersmith and Fulham branch of Amnesty meets on the second Monday of the month at the Amnesty bookshop, 139B King Street, Hammersmith, telephone 020 8746 3172. Meetings start at 7:45pm. Next meeting is the 13th of August.