



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

July 2013

<http://manchester.amnesty.org.uk/>

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Campaign news

Burma



On Saturday the 22nd June, we staged a 'mock arrest' to raise awareness of Dr Tun Aung's continued imprisonment at the hands of the Burmese authorities. Whilst the weather was not ideal, mercifully the rain held off and we managed to get a fair amount of signatures for our cards to send to AI UK to forward on to Dr Aung's family to show our support.

Other Burma news

Former political prisoner of the Burmese government, Min Min, has agreed to talk at our July meeting . For more information please see his bio: <http://www.york.ac.uk/cahr/defenders/past/min-min/>.

A reminder of 'They call it Myanmar' at the Buddhist Centre on the 19th of July at 6.30pm. If tweeters & facebookers could share, that would be great, and everybody else, please tell your friends! (<http://www.theycallitmyanmar.com/trailer/>)

And a coup! Laura received a letter from the Burmese High Commissioner for Human Rights acknowledging our letter on behalf of Dr Tun Aung. A rarity, and let's hope it bodes well for future appeals.

Zimbabwe elections [See Anne's detailed report at the end of this newsletter]

There will be a big campaigning push on this in the next few weeks. At present, the date for the election is set for 31st July, but there are major concerns, expressed by the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC, the main party of opposition to President Mugabe's Zanu-PF, though they are currently in coalition) and the South African Development Community (SADC, a regional inter-governmental structure).

A new Constitution adopted in March requires that widespread reforms of the security sector, media,

and electoral processes before elections can be held, and clearly these reforms will not be in place by the end of this month. The MDC asked SADC to intervene, and a summit held on 15th June agreed more time was needed, and the earliest date should be 14th August, which still allows little time for reforms to be formulated and implemented.

The political parties continue to wrangle about a date. Meanwhile, we need to maintain our pressure on the authorities in Zimbabwe and on SADC to try to ensure that the elections, when they do occur, are violence-free. We are asked to keep sending letters to the SADC leaders and Anne will have postcards for us to send at the July Group meeting.

Petition: [http://action.amnesty.org.uk/ea-](http://action.amnesty.org.uk/ea-action/action?ea.campaign.id=21019&ea.client.id=1194&utm_source=aiuk&utm_medium=Homepage&utm_campaign=HRD&utm_content=Zim_electionaction_nib)

[action/action?ea.campaign.id=21019&ea.client.id=1194&utm_source=aiuk&utm_medium=Homepage&utm_campaign=HRD&utm_content=Zim_electionaction_nib](http://action.amnesty.org.uk/ea-action/action?ea.campaign.id=21019&ea.client.id=1194&utm_source=aiuk&utm_medium=Homepage&utm_campaign=HRD&utm_content=Zim_electionaction_nib)

Blog: <http://www2.amnesty.org.uk/blogs/lydiaparker>

Coming up...

Friday 19th July, 6.30pm

Manchester Buddhist Centre, 16-20 Turner St, M4 1DZ.
Details of the film in Burma section, above
Free admission, tea and cakes.
Voluntary donations which will go to AI.

Sunday 21st July, 3-5pm



24, Gladstone Grove, Heaton Moor, Stockport SK4 4DA
Tea, cakes and musical entertainment for a minimum donation of £3. Anne will be asking for offers of help and cakes at Wednesday's meeting.

Writing for Rights

Our bi-monthly session will be combined with AmnesTea.
As always, all information, paper and envelopes provided.

Saturday 24th August, afternoon

Pride Parade, city centre

Thursday 5th September, 7.30 for 8pm

Venue 2022NQ, Basement, 20 Dale Street, M1 1EZ

Acoustic Amnesty

Music and poetry from a great range of generous artists – see facebook for full line-up

£7.50 <http://www.wegotickets.com/event/224209>

Saturday 28th September, all day

Our annual street collection and main fundraiser in the city centre. Please keep the date free and spare an hour or two. To state the obvious, the more of us there are, the more money we get, as well as making Manchester Amnesty visible.

NB the Conservatives will be coming to town for their party Conference the next day, so who knows whose pocket you might empty?

Saturday 19th October, 2-3pm

Cross Street Chapel,

As part of Manchester Literature Festival, we have Bidisha, reading from her book *Beyond the Wall: Writing a Path Through Palestine*

Tickets £7/£5

Saturday 16th November 2013.

North West Regional Conference, Manchester

Can you help?

Afghan Women's Rights

Becky has been leading on this campaign but is moving away in September. We are committed to working on this campaign and a subgroup will be taking things forward.

Twitter

We now have six tweeters and our followers have increased from 770 to 828 in six weeks – thanks to all who have contributed. Volunteers take a day each to tweet and re-tweet Amnesty and human rights related information. One more person to cover Thursday would complete the week.

If you can help with anything above, contact Helen at amnestymanc@yahoo.co.uk

Group Meetings

2nd Wednesday each month
Cross Street Chapel - 7.30pm

Group meetings

10th July – speaker Min Min, Burmese

former political prisoner

14th August

If you are in town, why not join a few of us for a pre meeting meal at Grinch, immediately adjacent to Cross St Chapel.

We normally gather before each meeting just after 6

Group Calendar

Month	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct
Group Meeting	Workshop on Afghan Women	Speaker on street children	Burmese Speaker			
Events	Letter writing(18 th)	Didsbury Festival (8 th) Syrian event (29 th)	AmnesTea/letter writing (22 nd)	Pride Parade (24 th)	Acoustic Amnesty (5 th) Street Collection (28 th) Letter writing (21 st)	Manchester Lit Festival (19 th)

Subscriptions please.

Annual donations from members are vital to keep the Group going. The suggested sum is £20pa if you have a wage, £3 otherwise, or whatever you can afford to give. If you haven't already donated this year, please bring your cash or cheque to the next meeting or contact the Treasurer (manchestergroup@amnesty.org.uk) if you aren't going to be at a meeting in the near future and he will tell you how to get the money to him.

Thanks!

Zimbabwe elections – a detailed update from Anne

There have been some important things happening in Zimbabwe over the last few weeks.

On 31 May the Constitutional Court in Zimbabwe, in response to a private petition from an individual requesting that an early date be fixed for the elections, ruled that they should be held by the end of July 2013. This decision was made in the light of the Government of National Unity's period in office which comes to an end at the end of this month. On the face of it this seems to be a reasonable decision but there are several important factors that need to be addressed. ZANU-PF has been pushing for an early date and the MDC parties have wanted a later date.

The new Constitution that was adopted following the referendum in March of this year clearly requires that widespread reforms need to take place before elections can be held. These reforms include those which Amnesty has long called for. Notably, the new constitution demands reform of the security sector which has been implicated in much of the violence and human rights abuses over many years and particularly during election periods. Secondly the constitution requires media reforms to take place thus ensuring that all political parties will have a level playing field during the campaign period. This would also mean that the general population would have broader access to news through a wider range of papers and broadcasting agencies, another of Amnesty's key concerns. A further requirement that needs to be met is that the electoral processes are reviewed and reformed to ensure that the Register and its administration are free from political bias. Electoral reforms were actively under discussion and were due to go before the House of Assembly within the next few days.

There seemed to have been a general view that additional time would be required to meet all of the requirements prior to the election and that the Constitutional Court could be asked to review its decision.

Notwithstanding all of this President Robert Mugabe on Thursday used The Presidential Powers Act to unilaterally set the date for elections for 31 July.

Should you wish to read his letter you can find it here:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/zimbabwe/10118141/Robert-Mugabe-fast-tracks-Zimbabwe-election-laws.html>

The MDC parties in the coalition government have contested this decision as 'unlawful' and have appealed to SADC to intervene. A SADC Summit was scheduled, but President Mugabe asked for it to be postponed as he needed more time to prepare: Zimbabwe was the main item on the agenda. The Summit met in Maputo on 15th June and has made a significant ruling. Member states whilst acknowledging the Court ruling agreed on the need for Zimbabwe to approach the Constitutional Court to seek more time beyond July 31. A formal request was made to President Mugabe to make such an approach to the Court.

SADC leaders also endorsed a report presented by South Africa President Jacob Zuma, the chief regional mediator on Zimbabwe, on the need for media reform and the "upholding of the rule of law and the validity of electoral regulations" along with the adequate deployment of regional poll monitors and consensus on an election date ahead of voting (from the summit's closing communique.)

Over the last few days, the political parties have continued with their wrangling, and South African Development Community continues to state that elections should not be earlier than 14 August. ZANU-PF seems to be split on this as some messages seem to indicate that they would prefer 31 July. The MDC would like the elections as late as possible this year.

Both of the suggested dates are very early, and it seems unlikely that the necessary reforms discussed above will be in place prior to polling, particularly as the Zimbabwe parliament has now been dissolved. Even if reforms had been passed in statute, it is doubtful that there could be any cultural shift at all in the time available.

So we need to maintain our pressure on the authorities in Zimbabwe and on SADC to try to ensure that the elections, when they do occur, are violence-free. We are asked to keep sending letters to the SADC leaders and Anne will have postcards for us to send at the July Group meeting.

There is an online petition on the AIUK website as well as a staff blog. Do take a look at them and add your signature to the petition and spread the word!

Petition: http://action.amnesty.org.uk/ea-action/action?ea.campaign.id=21019&ea.client.id=1194&utm_source=aiuk&utm_medium=Homepage&utm_campaign=HRD&utm_content=Zim_electionaction_nib

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