

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Hammersmith and Fulham Group

June 2012 Newsletter¹

JUNE MEETING

A productive meeting, which was gratifying considering that it coincided with rain and England playing in the European Cup Final.

Justice in the Balkans

We had a presentation on the search for justice in former Yugoslavia given by Alan Peake, the Balkans co-ordinator at AIUK, a talk illustrated by slides and statistics. Amnesty wants the perpetrators of atrocities in the wars in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s brought before the International Court set up to the Hague to try these war crimes. The presentation made it clear that except in a few cases, this is not happening. However, since Serbia and Croatia, where many of these crimes occurred, want to join the European Union, pressure can be brought to bear.

The figures make grim reading: some 15,000 people disappeared, their relatives still in the dark about their fate, 10,000 people massacred in Bosnia, 20,000 women raped, War crimes were committed by every side in the conflicts.

Serbia handed over the military commander Ratko Mladic but many others took part in or ordered war crimes. In Croatia Amnesty believes 540 cases should be investigated. Some of them involve senior figures in the army and in Parliament, but the Croatian authorities are reluctant to pursue these. In Bosnia, we were told, the central Government is weak and is unable to prosecute war criminals.

A striking injustice is the fate of Milan Lerner in Croatia. As a soldier he refused to take part in the mass execution of Serbs. He subsequently helped gather evidence of war crimes for the International Tribunal. He was murdered and the police



show no enthusiasm in hunting his killers. A journalist who tried to investigate the case was intimidated.

What can we do?

Alan Peake said we can lobby EU officials and the Balkan desk at the Foreign Office. These have leverage because Serbia and Croatia want to be accepted in the EU as democratic nations.

We sent a petition to the Croatian Parliament asking for justice to be pursued vigorously, and to the Mayor of Tuzla in Bosnia where some of the worst crimes took place.

New Member

A new member at the meeting was Florence Kamayo from Uganda. *She told the meeting how Amnesty helped her in Uganda when members of her family were murdered, and later in Kenya, when she fled there.*

Letters

We signed a letter prepared by Becky to **Lord Coe** and the Olympics Committee regretting the participation in the Olympics of Dow Chemicals. Dow took over the Union Carbide company, responsible for the disaster in Bhopal, India in which some 25,000 people died, but refuses to accept responsibility or pay compensation. We asked Lord Coe to ensure that ethical considerations play a larger part in Olympics arrangements in the future.

We signed a letter prepared by Bruno to the Government of **Peru** about the Mayor of a small town arrested after he opposed local mining contracts. We asked that he either be released or charged with a crime and tried before an open court.

We sent a letter prepared by Michael to the Government of **Bahrein** protesting at the arrest of a prominent human rights activist, Nabeel Rajab earlier this month. He has been arrested before, part of a wave of repression following protests inspired by the "Arab Spring" in other countries.

NO ARMS FOR ATROCITIES

That is one of Amnesty's slogans in its long campaign for an International Arms Trade Treaty which will regulate the flow of weapons around the world. It is a campaign in which our branch has played its part. We have written to our members of parliament and received promises of support, and it was the subject of our stall last month..

We are within reach of success: after years of negotiation, representatives of the nations of the world will meet at the United Nations in New York next month to draw up a treaty.

Jo Adams, Britain's Permanent Representative at the UN Disarmament Conference in Geneva, will be heading the British team, and she talked to Amnesty about her hopes for the meeting and some of the problems.

She is encouraged by the turn-around of the United States, which at first opposed the treaty but now supports it and is fully engaged.

She reminds us that she must look after the interests of the UK arms industry because of its contribution to the economy, but believes this is not incompatible with the aims of the treaty.

The important thing is to ensure compliance: "There is no point in having some-thing that looks good on paper but is unworkable." This means a system of reporting and regular review.

She says NGOs have been involved since the beginning, and tells us: "Amnesty should be proud of the work it has done and what has been achieved so far."

So we do make a difference!

STALL

The next monthly stall will be on Saturday 23rd June, at the usual place outside Mc Donald's in King Street near the Broadway. It will be devoted to refugees, as this will be Amnesty's refugee week.

The July stall will be on Saturday 21st July and will feature individuals at risk. As always volunteers for a 1^{1/2} hour shift will be welcomed. Victoria Brignell is stalls Coordinator, and can be reached on 8746 7750.

AMNESTY BLOGGERS

Do you have something to say about human rights issues that you want to share? Or do you want to see the views of others who do?

Take a look at the Amnesty UK blog site, blogs.amnesty.org.uk.

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 7.45. Next meeting is the 9th July.