



News from the Minehead Group

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Actions you can take this month:

- ✓ **Sign the petition** on behalf of the thousands of people with albinism – particularly children – who are at huge risk of abduction and killings in **Malawi**, where their body parts are sold for witchcraft. Attacks are on the rise. Call on Malawi's government to step in and stop this brutality. Go to www.amnesty.org.uk to find the action.
- ✓ **Offer to help** with the **AmnesTEA** on Saturday 9 July at the home of Karen Mills in Porlock. Even if you can't help on the day, offers in advance of cakes or raffle prizes would be very welcome. (Tel 01643 863409).
- ✓ **Make a date to visit our stall** at the Roadwater Fete on Saturday 23 July and take part in our actions on refugees. Offers of help with the stall are also welcome. (Contact Chris Lawson on 01643 704779).
- ✓ If you're going to be in **Taunton** on Saturday 16 July between 1000 and 1430, make a note to go along to Castle Green and **support** the Taunton Group's action against forced marriage in Burkino Faso.

Round up of April and May group news

At our **April group meeting**, Cherry reported back on the **AIUK AGM and conference**, which she, Alison and Susan had attended at the beginning of April. As usual we all found it a very busy, informative and inspiring two days. Highlights included: the impressive story of the Nigerian human rights defender, Justine Ijeomah, who lit the Amnesty candle in the opening session; the workshops we went to on Amnesty's work in relation to refugees, Syria, My Body My Rights and the Human Rights Act; a panel discussion on front-line work with refugees, and the awards ceremony where fellow activists were recognised for the outstanding work they do for human rights. On 10 May, Alison and Susan went along to the **Taunton Group's** meeting to report back to them on the AIUK AGM and conference. Our enthusiasm was such that several of their members said they might apply to go to the AGM next year!



At our **May group meeting**, Lisa Incledon kindly came from London to speak to our group about the **Children's Human Rights Network**. We split into small groups and tried to select the five most important Rights of the Child from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). It is the most complete statement of children's

rights ever produced, and is the most widely-ratified international human rights treaty in history. (The USA has not ratified the Convention). It was difficult to prioritise one right over another, but the attempt was thought-provoking and gave rise to a good discussion. Lisa informed us that in 2014, 40,000 children in Democratic Republic of the Congo were working in mines. In many countries, forced evictions have a huge impact on children's lives. And children who allegedly committed a crime while under 18 are imprisoned and served with the death penalty in a number of countries whose leaders have signed the Convention, making such a sentence illegal.

Diary Dates

Monthly meetings:

We meet on the fourth Tuesday of the month (except August and December) at 1930, at the Quaker Meeting House on Bancks Street, Minehead. The first part of the meeting is open to all and features a speaker, film or workshop. After a tea break, AI members are invited to stay for a short business meeting which will end by 2130.

Tuesday 28 June

Group meeting: this will be a business meeting including campaign updates. No special topic this month as several members are away.

Saturday 2 July

AmnesTEA at Karen's home - Westbrook, Furzeland Road, Porlock TA24 8NF.

Saturday 23 July

Stall at Roadwater Fete focusing on refugees. Set up from 1300.

Tuesday 26 July

Group meeting: special item will be a film: 'This is Exile' (portrait of child refugees forced to flee from Syria to Lebanon).

Tuesday 23 August

Summer Social: likely to be at Susan's home in Carhampton.

Tuesday 27 Sept

Group meeting: Holocaust Memorial Day planning for 2017.

Lisa focused particularly on **Malawi**, where children with albinism are frequently abducted and killed because their bones are thought to have special powers. The President of Malawi, Arthur Peter Mutharika, has condemned attacks on people with albinism, but concern remains regarding the inadequacy of police investigations and the leniency of any sentences imposed. We all signed letters to the President, concerning David Fletcher, a 15 year old boy with albinism, who went missing on 24 April on his way home from a football match. His remains were found in Mozambique with his hands and feet cut off. It is reported that he was sold to a traditional healer. There will be an opportunity at our June meeting to take action on behalf of children who work in hazardous conditions in cobalt mines for a dollar a day so that we can enjoy using mobile phones. In answer to a question Lisa explained that the network links up with Save the Children and Unicef when it is practical and beneficial to do so. We were very grateful to her for coming to speak to us.

Letter writing afternoon on 26 May 2016: On arriving at the Reading Room we were all struck by the change. All the books were gone, and everything else was in piles on the floor or on tables by the entrance. Just five days before closing. Lesley put on a cheerful face, but we all felt the sadness. We were grateful that we could still hold the letter writing session at the Reading Room and 11 of us spent a fruitful hour and a half writing to people featured in the summer edition of the Real Lives Supplement. We wrote 35 letters in all, with many going to Iran.

Campaign News

Ethiopia: To mark World Press Freedom Day (5 May) group members and friends signed postcards highlighting the case of Eskinder Nega, the Ethiopian journalist imprisoned for 18 years, and emphasising the importance of freedom of expression to ensure journalists can do their job without fear of persecution. These were delivered to the Ethiopian Embassy in London with cards signed by other groups working on this case. Our group also signed a letter to the new British Ambassador to Ethiopia informing her of our concern for Eskinder and for Andy Tsege, the British citizen arrested for his political activities. Some of our members also responded to a request from Reprieve to contact our MP about Andy Tsege, as the UK Foreign Secretary was recently visiting the area.

My Body My Rights and Women's Action Network: Although the MBMR campaign ended in May, work will continue on women's HR. Key areas will be: access to abortion (Ireland, N. Ireland, El Salvador); improving reproductive health education and services and eliminating child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) (Burkina Faso and other West African countries); addressing discriminatory laws and gender based violence (Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria). DFID (UK Government) has agreed to match any funds Amnesty raises between April and July 2016 for the West Africa work and our group will donate money we raise at our AmnestEA on 9 July to this cause, which will double its value. **MBMR successes:** The government of Burkina Faso has committed to making child marriage illegal and reducing cost of contraception; in Ireland public support for decriminalisation of abortion has increased (poll showed 70% of people want change); in Morocco the use of forced marriage to the victim to enable rapists to avoid prosecution has ended.

Refugees: People on the Move: This new campaign will be launched in September, with the main aim of enabling refugees to access protection and their HR through global sharing of responsibilities. It will cover three areas: responsibility for taking in refugees; establishment of a global fund for refugees; changing public attitudes to be positive towards refugees. Details and materials will be available through the summer, but meanwhile you can get involved by responding to online actions and email updates. Meanwhile we are making contact and arranging to meet with any groups or individuals interested in helping to raise public awareness and encourage more positive attitudes towards refugees. Contact Cherry if you would like more information or know someone who is interested.

How to contact the Minehead Amnesty International Local Group:

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Facebook: www.facebook.com/amnestyminehead

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