



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

2nd June 2016

Group Business Meeting

7th July 2016

Guest speaker

Talking about the plight of the Oromo people of Ethiopia

Monthly Collection

18th June

Contact Julian

julianwatmore@gmail.com

07469776295

Monthly Stall

21st May

Sydney Street

Contact Jill 01273 621697

11am to 1pm

6th August 2016 Pride

Group will take part in the parade and have a campaigning stall

September 2016 Date to be confirmed Annual Street Collection

17th December 2016 Write for Rights

10am to 4pm

Friends Meeting House
Ship Street

Campaign to Free Political Prisoners in Iran



On Saturday 21st May we competed against the FA Cup Final, Brighton Festival and the Great Escape to host Shiva Mahbobi talking to a group of 30 people about the plight of Political Prisoners in Iran. Shiva spent 3 and a half years in prison in Iran from the age of 16. Having left Iran after release in 1992 Shiva has devoted herself to publicising what is going on there.

During the Shah's reign prior to the revolution in 1979 and since then under the theocratic administration executions, detention and torture have consistently been used to suppress dissent. Shiva talked lucidly and comprehensively about the mass executions (5000 in one particularly horrific week), the use of rape, female and male, and torture within prisons.

She particularly highlighted the cases of British Citizens, Roya Saberinejad Nobakht and **Ghonche Ghavami** currently imprisoned in Iran for, amongst other things, attempting to watch a male volleyball match and putting anti-regime comment on Facebook. We hope to get more information about these cases so that we can, by focussing on the specific, make some effort to affect the general abuses of Human Rights in a country which is beginning to engage again in regional and wider politics.

There followed a series of questions and answers which expanded our knowledge. The development of Social Media and the continuing dissent of university students offer a difficult challenge for the regime to keep control of their interests.

Unfortunately, enjoyable is never an adjective which can be applied to such meetings but it was informative, thought-provoking and a spur to action. I thank Shiva for this.

If you want to find out more visit www.iranpoliticalprisoners.com.

Peter

EAST SUSSEX FREEDOM FROM TORTURE SUPPORTERS GROUP



Freedom from Torture (FfT) is the only human rights organisation solely dedicated to the treatment of torture survivors. For over 30 years it has provided professional clinical care, helping 55,000 clients to recover – physically and psychologically – from their experiences. Over 350 staff and volunteers – doctors, caseworkers, counsellors, legal advisors, physiotherapists, psychotherapists, psychologists, interpreters, child and family therapists, art and music therapists – work to help torture survivors rebuild their lives.

It was in 1985 that members of Amnesty International's Medical Group set up the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture. Working from a hut in the yard of the AI office, the six founding members, under director Helen Bamber, offered medical treatment, counselling and therapeutic care to survivors of torture. The following year the Foundation moved to the National Temperance Hospital, and during that year saw 45 clients. It now has centres in London, Birmingham, Newcastle, Manchester and Glasgow. These centres serve as safe spaces in which clients can attempt to rebuild their lives. In 2011 the name of the organisation was changed to the more manageable "Freedom from Torture".

Through its policy and advocacy work, it has produced compelling groundbreaking reports, based on factual evidence, on Sri Lanka, Iran and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Last year, over 71% of the 1,300 clients supported by FfT came from 10 countries: Sri Lanka, Iran, Afghanistan, DRC, Pakistan, Turkey, Cameroon, Nigeria, Iraq, and South Sudan. This is a clear indication of how widespread the practice of torture is and reminds us how relevant and important FfT's work is.

Around the country, supporters of Freedom from Torture are setting up local groups to increase awareness of its work. An East Sussex group is being formed, and the inaugural event, with entertainment, will be held on the evening of 1st October at Lewes Town Hall. You will be very welcome: contact Marisa Tighe (marisa.marisatighe@gmail.com) for details. If you are interested in joining the group, please contact Pal Luthra (pal.luthra@btinternet.com).

David Willingham, Acting Chair, Freedom from Torture East Sussex Group

BAE Systems AGM infiltrated by peace activists

On 4th May I had the dubious honour of being a BAE Systems shareholder for the day and attended the company's AGM at its factory in Farnborough. This strange situation was part of a "plot" hatched by Campaign Against Arms Trade to challenge the Board of Directors about it's immoral, unethical, arguably illegal, but hugely lucrative, arms deal with Saudi Arabia* (see below) - arms currently being used, to great destructive effect, in the conflict in Yemen against civilian as well as military targets. My proxy share entitled me to a vote and a chance to ask a question.

A group of about 15 of us, all with proxy votes, met briefly beforehand to discuss tactics and compose questions before boarding the courtesy bus to take us to the AGM. I was very glad of the companionship and solidarity as it's a very imposing site - all gates and razor wire, security guards filming us and airport-style security checks at the entrance. (The AGM moved from London to Farnborough a few years ago to avoid the "sabotage" - ha!)

About 300 attendees listened to a slick speech by the slick Chairman Sir Roger Carr, in which he waxed lyrical about the amazing profits made, the impressive sales, abundance of government contracts, strict ethical guidelines ...bla...bla...bla. Not much about the resulting misery in Yemen: thousands of civilian deaths and casualties, 2.4 million displaced people, 14 million people facing food insecurity, 1.4 million acutely malnourished children, several hospitals destroyed. "The scale of human suffering is almost incomprehensible" to quote the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator. Placards held up by one or two of our group during the speech tried to inform the audience, but they were swiftly frog-marched out of the room by security. Our numerous questions challenging the Chair to respond to accusations of breaching international humanitarian laws, as underlined by the UN and the brutality of the Saudi regime, were, needless to say, quickly rebuffed with answers such as "We are not here to judge the way that other Governments work, we are here to do a job under the rules and regulations set out by the UK government...what we are doing is in the interests of peace for the world...the principle of speaking softly but carrying a big stick...we want to provide our people...our allies with the very best sticks they can have, *to encourage peace*..(my emphasis) and continually referred to Saudi Arabia as a "crucial ally", with a Government making progress in the field of human rights!

When asked whether the Board might consider using the undoubted talents of its engineers and scientists to diversify to the manufacture of products which could alleviate climate change instead, he replied unimaginatively: "We're an arms company - it's what we do." Eventually, after about a dozen questions on the topic, the microphones were switched off and we were left to protest with our placards (*see Guardian online*).

I felt it was a really worthwhile protest, as the attendees could be left in no doubt about the effect of the company's deals, even if they somehow managed to justify it to themselves. CAAT will be organising some more actions during the Farnborough Air Show (11th - 17th July) - billed as a family-friendly day out, it is actually an arms fair, with most of the world's major arms companies exhibiting their wares. For more info: www.caat.org.uk

2.8 billion of weapon sales to Saudi Arabia were licensed by the Government in the six months after the bombing started (CAAT)

*Overheard comment by an attendee "I didn't even know where Yemen was".
When asked about the gender imbalance in the BAE workforce, the Chairman said they hoped to recruit more women as "You can be feminine and be an engineer".....!*

Sue Williams



URGENT ACTION ;

YOUTH ACTIVISTS BAYRAM MAMMADOV AND GIYAS IBRAHIMOV DETAINED AND ILL TREATED – AZERBAIJAN

Youth activists Bayram Mammadov and Giyas Ibrahimov were arrested on 10th May 2016 in Baku the capital of Azerbaijan, for alleged drug possession after they painted political graffiti on the former President's statue, Heydar Aliyev, the father of the present president Ilham Aliyev. . According to their lawyer they have been beaten and otherwise ill -treated in detention. The Judge has approved their pre-trial detention for 4 months and if convicted they could face up to 12 years in prison.

Both the activists are 22 and Bayram is a member of the pro-democracy youth movement NIDA. They have told their lawyer that the drugs were planted on them and then "discovered" in the presence of "witnesses" who work for the police. They have refused to publicly apologise and have been severely beaten; their lawyer has seen the bruising. They have been refused an examination by an independent doctor and have not been allowed to contact their families to date. Their lawyer has filed a complaint about their ill-treatment with the Office of the Prosecutor General.

Please sign the enclosed letter or write one of your own.

Thank you. Celia

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