



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

April 2015

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

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General Election Campaign

The aim of this campaign is to ensure that all newly elected MPs in parliament after the General Election are aware that human rights issues matter to their constituents.

Take the Pledge

AIUK has launched activists' pledge cards



which we are asking **all** our group members to sign. The pledge is to stand up for the Human Rights Act, to stop torture worldwide and also leaves a space for you to insert your own human rights issue.

We will be taking these to our newly elected MPs after the election to show the level of support for human rights in their constituencies.

We will have pledge cards at the April group meeting. However, if you won't be there, can you print out and sign the attached pledge and send it to 24 Gladstone Grove, Stockport, SK4 4DA. Do it now before you forget!

Take the Pledge Now!

Get your family, friends, colleagues
to take the pledge as well.

Writing to PPCs

You will have already received an email asking you to write/email your constituency PPCs to make them aware of your views and to ask theirs, especially about the UK Human Rights Act and the Stop Torture campaign. Please find an updated list and sample letters attached again. If you haven't got time to do separate emails, do the 'click and send' action on the AIUK website

Email your PPCs!

Hustings

We will hold our own mini hustings at the next group meeting with prospective parliamentary candidates (PPCs) from the main parliamentary parties from constituencies across Greater Manchester. At the moment we have PPCs promised from the Conservative, Lib Dems and Greens and hope that Labour and UKIP will also send representatives. We have already thought of a few questions to ask, but if you have a burning question let Laura have it (either in advance – laura.barsby@yahoo.co.uk) or at the beginning of the meeting. A question form is attached with this newsletter.

We also hope that group members will attend local hustings to ask human rights linked questions. We will have a list of hustings and questions to ask and will be asking for volunteers at the April meeting.

Next Group Meeting

Normally held 2nd Wednesday each month - Cross Street Chapel 7.30pm

8th April

Meet some greater Manchester Prospective Parliamentary Candidates

We have invited PPCs from the main parliamentary parties from constituencies across Greater Manchester. Come along and hear their views on a range of human rights linked questions.

Why not join a few of us for a pre-meeting drink/meal just after 6pm, we will be at The Pizza Express on the top end of King Street.

Other Key Campaigns

Stop Torture

City Centre Walk

To mark the one year anniversary of the launch of the Stop Torture campaign, we are holding a walk around Manchester City centre during the afternoon on Sunday June 7th. We will be following the Manchester Peace and Social Justice Trail (see <http://www.discoverpeace.eu>) and will be lead by Steve Roman who helped put the Trail together. The walk will take about 3 hours to complete and passes by many important landmarks in Manchester with human rights links. Tickets will be £7 (£5 concessions, all proceeds going to Amnesty, and will be on sale in the near future.



EU Torture Tools Petition.

The EU are currently reviewing the arms control legislation. AI feels that this is the ideal opportunity to close some loopholes in EU laws, which allow trade in an array of gruesome torture equipment right here in Europe. If you haven't signed it, the petition is still available at <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/eu-torture-tools-trade-uk>.

Individuals at Risk

We held another of our regular letter writing sessions at the Eighth Day Café on 28th March writing 30 letters on behalf of Amnesty cases. We hold these regular sessions roughly every two months, the next one is planned for May.

Next Letter Writing Session

Saturday 30th May 2-4pm

The Eighth Day Café, Oxford Road
Case sheets, pen and paper provided.
Buy your own cakes!
All Welcome.

Women's Rights

My Body My Rights - Tree of Change

We attended the 'Being Watched' conference on 14th March to raise awareness of the My Body My Rights campaign. The conference was aimed at young women aged 13-19 to discuss surveillance and control in their lives, so seemed an appropriate setting to talk about the relevance of the campaign issues closer to home, and how these personal concerns are linked to the global issues of attempts to limit women's rights over their own bodies and autonomy. We set up our 'Tree of Change' and asked delegates to add a personal message to a leaf for the tree, sharing a change they wanted to see, or a challenge or issue to be overcome in the fight for rights in this area. The event was an amazing opportunity to network with other women's groups in



Manchester, and to hear from inspirational speakers, including Julie Ward, the Labour MEP for the North West, and an ardent campaigner for women's rights.

We plan to set up the tree at future events in Manchester to generate interest in Amnesty's work, and highlight the relevance of this campaign to issues experienced by women everywhere. We will also be sharing the messages via Twitter with the hashtag #MBMR. If you're not already following the group, we're @amnestymanc - please re-tweet!

Acoustic Amnesty for Women's Rights - 16th July

We are planning an Acoustic Amnesty with a full programme of female artists to celebrate our campaigning for women's rights. The event will hopefully include a reading of 'Even if we lose our lives', the script written for Amnesty recording stories of Afghan women defending human rights in their everyday lives. The Women's Rights Sub-Group is looking for volunteers who would be interested in helping with the planning and staging of this production.

South America

The deadline has been extended on the UA featured in our last newsletter concerning the case of 12 young black residents of Salvador, north-eastern Brazil. All 12 adolescents were killed by the Military Police in a special operation; according to residents, they were deliberately assassinated. If you haven't already sent an appeal, please find the updated UA casesheet attached with this newsletter. Appeals must be sent before **April 15th**.

Southern Africa

Amnesty has issued an Urgent Action for Itai Dzamara, a Zimbabwean journalist and democracy activist who was abducted in Harare on 9 March. Towards the end of last year he was brutally beaten by police when he led a peaceful demonstration in Africa Square in the capitol and there are fears that he may be being tortured or otherwise mistreated by his captors. Simona will bring a letter for us all to sign at the monthly meeting but if you have time to send an appeal, the UA is attached with this newsletter.

Send Urgent Action appeals now!

Burma (Myanmar)

Jean Mary receives regular updates and has provided the following summary of current concerns:

Since a democratically elected government replaced the Military government in the last few years, all who have concerns for the people of Burma have hoped to see a society where human rights are protected for all citizens. A promise made by President Thein Sein in 2013 at Chatham House has been often repeated: 'There will be no political prisoners in our prisons by the end of this year' Sadly this was not the case, and it is not the case now. There are several areas where people's human rights are not respected.

The first is the question of political prisoners. There is a law, "The Peaceful Procession and Assembly Law" which states that those who protest against any legislation must obtain permission of the local council before they organize a protest. Frequently this permission is refused, but the protesters hold their protest meeting anyway, and are then detained, and charged and may receive a cumulative sentence of 2 or 3 years.

In addition, journalists and others who write articles which are critical of the government or local authorities have been detained, and charged under the Peaceful Procession and Assembly Law. Many are now in prison, serving sentences ranging from 1 to as many as 10 years for breaking this law.

'There are still political prisoners in Burma'.

A second area where human rights are frequently violated is the area of land, and the conflict between the rights of those who have lived off the land for generations, and mining companies who want to make profits from the resources which Burma has, including the copper in the Michaunglan Community in the NE of the country. The government supports the mining companies from Canada, and China as their profits also benefit the government. Those who were evicted have been protesting and claiming the return of their land and compensation for the loss of their livelihood. There are 12 women and 3 men detained for protesting who have been sentenced to six months in prison.

However, the main source of conflict in that N.E. area is religious. Buddhism is the main religion in Burma, and there is a drive (not ostensibly initiated by the government,) to make Buddhism the national religion, which means other religions are only just tolerated. This region is where a number of Muslims, who were originally refugees from Bangladesh, have settled. They have not been warmly welcomed, but are resented by the Buddhist majority who have made life difficult for them. At times, Muslims have been attacked by Buddhists and many have fled to refugee camps on the Burmese–Thai border. Where there is any kind of dissatisfaction in the area, such as the conflict over land rights, Muslims are often the victims.

In the area of protests, the Burmese police force has recently been known to have dispersed protesters by particularly violent means. The most recent event was a student protest against a new education law. Eye witness accounts of this reported images of police beating fleeing demonstrators with batons, and using unnecessary and dangerously violent tactics to disperse the protestors.

In all of these areas there are indications that the present government has a long way to go before they can claim to be truly democratic, and acting as if they intend to govern in line with international standards as expected of those who have signed the International Declaration of Human Rights.

This statement is evidenced by four recent laws which are at the moment being debated by Parliament. All four laws would fuel discrimination on grounds of race or religion. Amnesty's judgment on two of those laws, The Religious Conversion Bill, which would demand government permission for anyone wishing to convert to another religion and the Buddhist Women's Bill which would also demand government permission for any non-Buddhist man wishing to marry a Buddhist woman is that they should be scrapped as they are seriously flawed with regard to the human rights of the people.

The remaining two Bills are the Monogamy Bill and the Population Control Health Care Bill which Amnesty feels need drastic revision to bring them into line with international Human Rights law and standards.

Jean will have an Urgent Action for us to sign at the group meeting.

Children's Human Rights

No actions this month

Group News

AIUK General Meeting

The National Conference and AGM will be held over the weekend of 18/19 April at Warwick University and we have 5 people representing the group this year.

The AGM resolutions are now available (attached with this newsletter). We won't have time at the April meeting to discuss this so can you have a look and let Laura (our chair who will hold the group vote) know if you have any strong opinions on how the group should vote and any individual resolution.

Pride Parade

We will be taking part in the Manchester Pride Parade this again year. This year we will have the superb Manchester Samba Band walking with us to add to our visibility. This is a marvellous way to get our message seen by thousands of people and is real fun as well – so make sure that you are around on Saturday 29th August (the bank holiday weekend).

Subscriptions please!

Annual donations from members are vital to keep the Group going. The suggested sum is £20 if you have a wage, £3 otherwise, or whatever you can afford to give. Please bring your cash or cheque to the next meeting or contact Treasurer Sean Dunne (Sean.a.dunne@btinternet.com) and he will tell you how to get the money to him.

Thanks!

Other news

Amnesty Human Rights Happy

As part of their campaigning in the general election, the York group has produced a Youtube video to promote the Human Rights Act. It is called "Amnesty Human Rights Happy" and set to the Happy track of Pharrell Williams (yes, it is cheesy....). The idea is to introduce human rights in a fun way to people who would not normally be interested and to encourage them to discuss them with their election candidates.

See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lejsMIIDs8&feature=youtu.be>

Amaretti Chamber Orchestra Concert

The Stockport Group have organised a concert by the Amaretti Chamber Orchestra (see www.amaretti.org.uk) as a major fundraiser this spring. They would welcome our support.

Tickets (£8.50 includes tea/coffee/biscuits) can be ordered directly from the Stockport Group (Amnesty will then receive the whole amount - Tickets bought on the door will not all go to AI.) Contact Liz Nott on ejnott@gmail.com 0161-486-1690.

N.B. There is parking behind the church and on certain roads nearby.

Walk for Life - Whitehaven to St. Bees round trip

This year's Walk for Life will take place on May 9th 2015, starting as usual from Whitehaven Market Place at 10.00 am. You can support by joining in the walk, being at the send-off, sponsoring a walker or making a donation.

Contact Alan Alexander, West Cumbria Amnesty, 01946 810444, sandoak@aol.com for more details.

Spring Reign – A story from the Syrian Conflict

DEvised BY THE COMPANY AND SCRIPTED BY AWARD-WINNING WRITER ROB JOHNSTON
PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY BENEDICT POWER



Syria has descended into civil war and Aleppo is besieged. Salah and Aisha have lost control of their lives and are plunging headlong into an uncertain future. The Syria they hoped to change is gone, in its place, violence and destruction - the arbitrary brutality of war. With the unexpected arrival of two Westerners, who have stayed too long in Syria and must now be given refuge, the fragile existence of the Syrian couple comes under even greater threat. How will they survive as they fall further away from hope, from what they know and from what they used to be?

Based on real-life accounts collected from Syrian refugees, aid workers, activists, journalists and photographers, Spring Reign features live performance, video, original music performed by Chris Davies, and frontline photography by Musa Chowdhury.

Reviews for previous work War Stories - written by Rob Johnston and Emma Gibson, directed and co-produced by Benedict Power:

'The most emotionally engaging piece... performance and production standards are high throughout... beautifully balances direct narrative delivery to the audience and story-telling skills, with emotional expressiveness and impressive restraint.' The Observer

'Exceptional... As quietly moving as anything else I've seen on World War One.' Manchester Confidential

'A haunting experience.' Weekend Notes

'Benedict Power finds some lovely moments of lightness and ease... A solid and powerful piece of theatre.' The Public Reviews

Warning: Some material may be unsuitable for children under 15.

THEATRE IN THE MILL, BRADFORD
WED 13TH MAY - 7.30PM
BOX OFFICE: 01274 233200
BOOK ONLINE: BRAD.AC.UK/THEATRE

THE LOWRY, SALFORD QUAYS
TUE 19TH & WED 20TH MAY - 8PM
(AFTER-SHOW DISCUSSION: TUES 19TH)
BOX OFFICE: 0843 208 6010 - GROUP BOOKINGS: 0843 208 6003
BOOK ONLINE: THELOWRY.COM/THESTUDIO

BENEDICTPOWER.CO.UK/SPRING-REIGN

[FACEBOOK.COM/SPRINGREIGNPLAY](https://www.facebook.com/springreignplay) - [#SPRINGREIGNPLAY](https://twitter.com/benedictpower)



Tickets now available