



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

April 2016

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

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Group meetings – another new venue!

The venue in the Northern Quarter has not been as successful as we hoped, mainly due to the loud music that seems to start just as our meeting gets going. For our April meeting we are going to try another place to meet (also free!).

MadLab Salford, 218 Chapel St, Salford M3 6BY, just off Bexley Square.

See <https://madlab.org.uk/madlab-salford/> for more details and a map

MadLab Salford is behind the Spinningfield area and, although technically in Salford, it is a relatively short walk from Manchester city centre. There is some on-street parking behind the venue and also a Salford City Council car park on Cleminson Street just 1 min away which costs £1.50 pay and display. It is well served by buses as 8,12,25,26,32,34,36,37,38,41,50,67,71,73, V1, V2 and X34 pass the door (alight at Salford Cathedral) and is just 5 minutes walk from Salford Central station. Tram stops are a bit further away; Google gives the following walking times: Victoria - 16 mins, Exchange Square - 16 mins, Market Street - 18 mins, Deansgate - 20 mins, Piccadilly Gardens - 21 mins.

There is also a café, the Deli Lama, on the corner of Bexley Square that is open until 10pm on Wednesdays and some of us will meet up there for a bite to eat before the meeting – you are welcome to join us (see https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Restaurant_Review-g503819-d5849065-Reviews-Deli_Lama-Salford_Greater_Manchester_England.html for reviews).

April Group Meeting

Normally held 2nd Wednesday each month - 7.30pm.

This month at MadLab Salford (218 Chapel St, Salford M3 6BY)

Wednesday 13th April – Mike Kavanagh from Campaign Against Arms Trade

Campaign Against Arms Trade's (CAAT) website has a map of and information on UK companies involved with the arms trade. Mike Kavanagh (previously Manchester CAAT local contact and a former CAAT Steering Committee member) has been undertaking research on arms companies in Greater Manchester to identify additional companies and to gather further information on those already known. His talk will consider issues relating to the UK arms trade and highlight the activities of some of these Greater Manchester companies.

Campaigning

Burma (Myanmar)

There are changes going on at AI International Secretariat The Burma country co-ordinator is in the process of moving on and a new co-ordinator taking his place.

However, Burma has been in a "waiting place" for the last few months. President Thein Sein steps down at the end of March, and Htin Kyaw will take office as the first democratically elected president of Burma for more than 50 years. Amnesty will be watching carefully to see if the new Government will tackle issues around Human Rights and unlawful imprisonment.

There are laws which make it possible for the government to imprison people legally, while denying them their human rights, especially those which pertain to the right of assembly, or protest, or laws which deny people their right to freedom of

expression. Amnesty expects to issue a research report which will focus on these laws and their misuse by the state.

Amnesty's advocacy will continue to focus on individuals at risk, and a strategy which will target new MPs.

Two items of Good News

- The Political activist Ko Wai Lu was released on Nov. 12th 2015 on the completion of his sentence.
- On December 10th 2015 Thein Aung Myint a member of the Movement for Democracy, and a peaceful protester had his sentenced reduced on appeal.

See Monthly Action on Burma

Monthly Action

Free Phyo Phyo Aung in Burma



Phyo Phyo Aung is a young activist and Secretary General of the All Burma Federation Student Union (ABFSU) – one of the largest students unions in Burma. She has been in prison along with 50 other students and protesters since 10 March 2015 after being arrested during a student protest against the newly adopted National Education Law, which students say curtails academic freedom. Phyo Phyo was arrested purely for expressing her opinion; she is a prisoner of conscience.

AIUK are picking this case up again because of the change of government in Burma. The National League for Democracy has publicly stated that they want to release all political prisoners as soon as possible.

April 1st and the following weeks is an important opportunity to put pressure on the new government to deliver real human rights change and ensure that any prisoner release includes Phyo Phyo Aung and the other peaceful students. Activists and human rights defenders have a vital role to play in shaping Burma's future at this critical juncture. They will be unable to do so if they are locked up, or at constant risk of arrest for expressing their views.

We will be taking action at our group meeting
Come along and take part.

Refugee Rights

Email your MP – Ask your MP to call urgently upon the Prime Minister to amend the immigration rules to help more refugees be safely reunited with relatives in the UK
<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/bring-refugee-families-back-together-asylum-uk-reunion?from=issue>

When 12-year-old Omar arrived in Stockholm after escaping from Syria, he had become separated from his family and was completely alone in a strange and unfamiliar city. It took months of tears, emails and phone calls before he saw his parents and big brother again. Had Omar arrived in London, he wouldn't have been allowed to sponsor his family to join him. Fleeing war and persecution, people like Omar's relatives are forced to take grave risks, often in the hands of people smugglers – all in the hope of finding a safe place to be a family again. It doesn't have to be this way.

Tell the UK government to help refugees travel safely to be reunited with their families

What Amnesty is calling for:

Everyone has the right to seek protection abroad, but getting to Europe safely and legally is impossible for most refugees.

Family reunion for refugees is not a new idea – but the UK's immigration rules are failing many like Omar's family. Currently a child refugee in the UK cannot sponsor any family members, even their parents, to join them.

Most adult refugees already in the UK are unable to sponsor their parents, children over 18 or adult siblings, because of severe restrictions in the rules. Many British citizens are similarly unable to sponsor their refugee family members because of these restrictions.

The UK government must not sit by as more people are forced into the hands of people smugglers and to undertake dangerous – and often fatal – journeys. By expanding these rules and allowing refugees to join family members in the UK, the government could make a huge difference to families torn apart by crisis in their home country.

If you would like to personalise your email, let them know if you have been involved in any local activities connected to the refugee crisis to give them a sense of the wider support for refugees in your constituency.

Urgent Action - Humanitarian crisis in Greece amid EU paralysis

Thousands of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants are trapped in Greece in dire conditions, with no access to protection due to arbitrary and discriminatory border closures on the Western Balkans route. As thousands are arriving, the humanitarian situation will deteriorate unless EU states urgently start accepting refugees from Greece.

Please write immediately in English or your own language (addresses and sample letter attached) calling on the President of the European Council and the members of the EU Council (heads of state or government of the EU Member States) to:

- Use all available means to urgently accept asylum-seekers from Greece - including relocating a large number of persons without applying restrictive selection criteria, easing family reunification and allowing asylum-seekers to obtain visas from member states' representations in Greece for onward legal travel;
- Support an effective relief programme to ease the pressure on Greece to respond to the humanitarian crisis;
- End discriminatory border practices and support countries along the Western Balkans route, to ensure refugees and asylum seekers can access asylum procedures and adequate reception conditions;
- Open up more safe and legal routes for people in need of international protection to ensure refugees do not need to embark on dangerous sea crossings to reach protection in Europe.

Southern Africa

ANGOLA: In March this year we wrote to the Angolan ambassador in London to urge the Angolan authorities to release 15 activists from house arrest. They were arrested for attending a meeting in June 2015 to discuss politics in the country. Amnesty International regards these activists as prisoners of conscience.

Regrettably, on 28th March an Angolan Court condemned these 15 activists and another two women to jail terms, ranging from

two to eight years. Furthermore, they have been required to pay for the legal costs of approximately 220 GBP each.

They have all been accused of "preparatory acts of rebellion" and "criminal conspiracy".

AI's Director for Southern Africa, Deprose Muchena, has stated that: *'[These activists] are the victims of a government determined to intimidate anyone who dares to question its repressive policies.'*

We wait for instructions from AI UK on further action.

North Africa, Middle East, Children's Human Rights

No updates this month.

Global Stop Torture and My Body My Rights campaigns are currently winding down. People on the Move and Protecting the Space for Human Rights Defenders are yet to start.

Group News

Group officers and campaign leads

Our AGM at the March group meeting allowed us to review who does what in the group. We were pleased that the people in the key officer roles were happy to remain. We agreed to drop our work on South America and Egypt but to take on North Africa and the Middle East country actions as well as retaining Southern Africa and our casework in Burma – thanks to Simona, Henrike and Jean for their continued input into these. In addition, Henrike is to take on Crisis and Tactical campaigns, Rosemary Collins has agreed to help Hazel with the IAR work and Steve Lindsay and Lianne Slavin will oversee our presence on Twitter and Facebook.

We are still looking for someone to keep a watching brief on children's rights (involves receiving the occasional short term action) and Anne would welcome someone taking over the Save the Human Rights Act campaigning lead as she is quite busy enough with being group secretary and putting the newsletter together, as well as her role as a trainer for groups in the North West. We have already done quite a bit as part of this campaign but it is likely to regain prominence if the government ever announce the promised consultation on replacing the Act.

Here is a list of our current officers/coordinators following the AGM. If you are interested in a specific area of work, do drop them an email. I'm sure that they would very much welcome your help.

Officers		
Chair	Laura Barsby	laura.barsby@yahoo.co.uk
Vice-chair	Hazel Errey	hazelerrey@gmail.com
Secretary	Anne Walker	Anne.walker9@ntlworld.com
Treasurer	Sean Dunne	Sean.a.dunne@btinternet.com
Members sec	Eleanor Kelly	eleanor_kelly@yahoo.co.uk
PR leads		
Press releases	David Keyworth	keyworthdavid@gmail.com
Twitter	Steve Lindsay	stevenjameslindsay@gmail.com
Facebook	Lianne Slavin	Lianne.slavin@googlemail.com
Newsletter	Anne Walker	Anne.walker9@ntlworld.com
Website	Anne Walker	Anne.walker9@ntlworld.com
Campaigns		
Individuals at Risk	Hazel Errey	hazelerrey@gmail.com
	Rosemary Collins	Rosemarycollins81@gmail.com
Save the Human Rights Act	Anne Walker	Anne.walker9@ntlworld.com
Burma (Unity 5 case)	Jean Mary	chnmanchester@gmail.com
Southern Africa	Simona Mattanza	simona.mattanza@hotmail.com
North Africa	Simona Mattanza	simona.mattanza@hotmail.com
Middle East	Henrike Greuel	henrikgreuel@gmx.de
Crisis and tactical	Henrike Greuel	henrikgreuel@gmx.de
Refugee rights	Laura Gibbons	laurahelengibbons@gmail.com
Women's rights	Mary Gibbs	Gibbs.mary@gmail.com
Children's Rights	Volunteer needed	

Subscriptions please!

Annual donations from members are vital to keep the Group going. The suggested sum is £20 if you have a wage, £5 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.

Dates for your diary

We will be needing volunteers to help out at a stall at the Didsbury Festival, help out at our next Acoustic Amnesty and to take part in the Manchester Pride parade. Make a note of the dates now!

Saturday 11th June – Didsbury Festival
Friday July 29th – Acoustic Amnesty
Saturday 27th August – Pride Parade

Next Letter Writing Session

Saturday May 21st 2-4pm
The Eighth Day Café, Oxford Road

Case sheets, pen and paper provided.

All Welcome.

Only 2 people turned up for the session on 19th March but they managed to write 11 letters – well done Hazel and Jo!
It would be good to get a few more to the next session.

Other News

Chamber Music Concert

Sunday 5th June, 8pm

£5 on the door - informal atmosphere - cash bar
The Wonder Inn, 29 Shudehill, M4 2AF

Save a date in your diary for the Eblana String Trio and friends in the snug and relaxed surroundings of the Wonder Inn, where a collection of the UK's most versatile and creative chamber musicians will gather to present jewels of the repertoire, all in aid of Amnesty International's Manchester Group.

Liverpool Amnesty Event

At The Unitarian Church Hall, Ullet Road Liverpool
21st May 2016, 7.30–1100

Bob Dylan's Music
in
Chimes of Freedom
An interactive journey of discovery and wonder.

See flyer for more details.