



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

February 2016

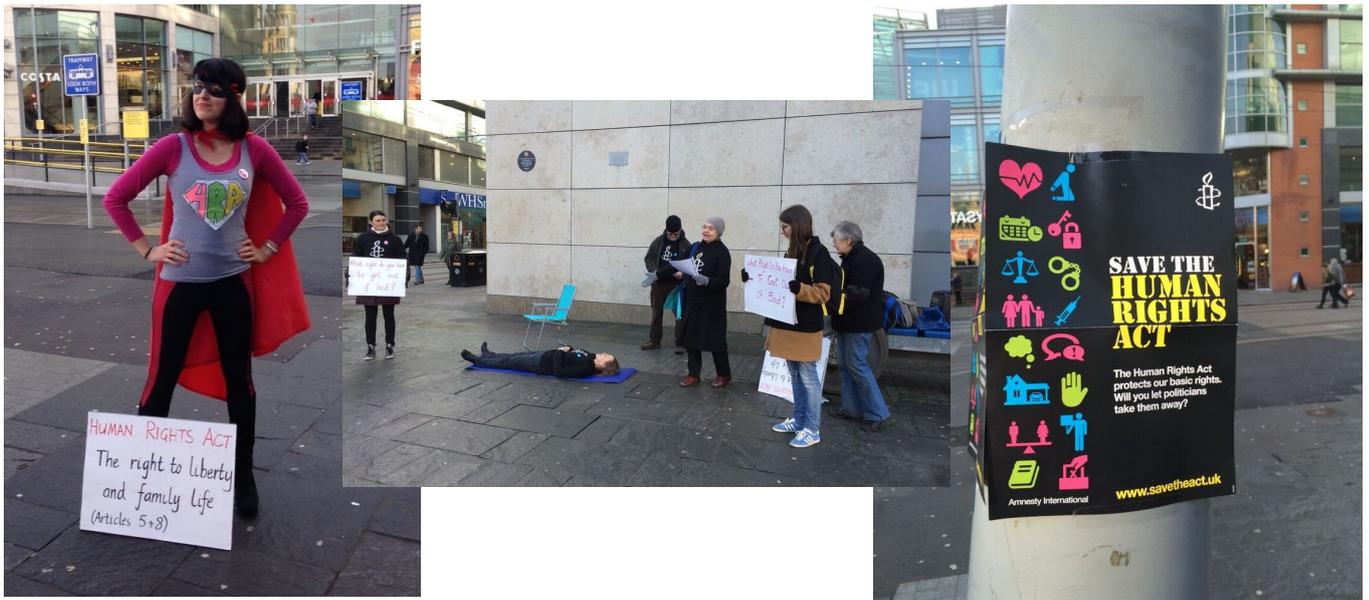
<http://manchester.amnesty.org.uk/>

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Campaigning

The Human Rights Act challenge

AIUK challenged us to come up with a creative way to visually represent the Human Rights Act. At our January meeting we improvised a bit of street theatre and took it onto the city centre streets on 23rd January. Thanks to all who took part!



Monthly Action



A devastating conflict has been ongoing in Yemen since 2014, with a coalition led by Saudi Arabia carrying out airstrikes against an armed rebel group, the Huthis, who took over the capital of Yemen, Sanaa, in September 2014. Hundreds of ordinary people have been killed or injured as a result.

During this time the UK Government has been supplying arms to the Saudi Government. Amnesty have been very concerned about this and have found that the UK Government have been breaking international and national laws. This month we are asked to sign a petition to the UK Government to halt exports to Saudi Arabia and its coalition of all weapons that risk being used in the Yemen conflict to commit violations of international law. If you want to sign individually, visit the AIUK website. If you are able to gather signatures from friends and colleagues, a paper copy of the petition can be found at:

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/resources/local-group-activity-pack-february-2016-uk-stop-selling-arms-saudi-arabia>

Stop Torture

The need for an independent judge-led inquiry into UK complicity in torture



The UN Convention Against Torture states that 'no exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture'. It also states there should be a prompt and impartial investigation wherever there is reasonable ground to believe an act of torture has been committed.

Amnesty International believes that there is credible evidence that the UK has been involved in grave human rights violations perpetrated against people held overseas since the attacks in the USA on 11 September 2001 to warrant the establishment of an independent, impartial and thorough judge-led inquiry. Credible allegations implicate the UK in torture or other ill-treatment, unlawful detentions and renditions. Over the years, Amnesty International and others have documented cases of the UK's involvement in these abuses, including:

- UK personnel were present at and participated in interrogations of detainees held unlawfully overseas in circumstances in which the UK knew or ought to have

known that the detainees concerned had been or were at risk of being tortured and/or whose detention was unlawful;

- UK personnel provided information (e.g. telegrams sent by UK intelligence personnel to intelligence services of other countries) that led the USA and other countries to apprehend and detain individuals when the UK knew or ought to have known that these people would be at risk of torture and/or unlawful detention
- The UK was involved in the US-led programme of renditions and secret detentions through, for example, the use of UK territory (e.g. Diego Garcia) and/or airspace
- UK personnel forwarded questions to be put to individuals detained by other countries in circumstances in which the UK knew or ought to have known that the detainees concerned had been or were at risk of being tortured and/or whose detention was unlawful
- The UK systematically received information extracted from people detained overseas in circumstances in which it knew or ought to have known that the detainees concerned were victims of torture

A number of individuals, including former Guantánamo Bay detainees have spoken publicly about UK involvement in their mistreatment. Shaker Aamer, who was released from Guantánamo in October 2015, after nearly 14 years without charge or trial, has said that a UK official was in the room when his head was beaten against a wall.

In 2008 the High Court confirmed that the UK, through its security service (MI5), had facilitated the interrogation of Binyam Mohamed in the knowledge that his initial detention in Pakistan was unlawful. Then, during a two-year period, the UK continued to facilitate interviews conducted on behalf of the US authorities when it must have realised that Binyam Mohamed was being held unlawfully by a third country and that the UK knew or ought to have known that there was a real risk that Binyam Mohamed was being tortured.

The Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) has the task of investigating allegations of UK complicity in torture, but Amnesty International, along with many other anti-torture organisations including the UN, believes that the ISC is wholly unsuited to the task in hand. The structural limitations of the ISC, particularly its lack of power and independence from government, means that any investigation the ISC conducts is unlikely to get to the truth.

The Prime Minister ultimately decides what evidence the Committee can see, what it can publish and who can be a member. Crucially, the government retains the right to withhold information considered to be “sensitive” or on grounds of national security. The definition of what constitutes sensitive information is extremely broad and notably includes information provided by a foreign intelligence agency which can object to further disclosure of that information. Any Secretary of State can determine material is sensitive and in the interests of national security should not be disclosed to the ISC.

TAKE ACTION ONLINE:

www.amnesty.org.uk/tortureinquiry

Individuals at Risk

As Write for Rights draws to a close for another year AIUK want to extend a huge thank you to all of us for taking part. Hundreds of events have taken place throughout the UK, thousands of letters have been sent, and thousands of tweets posted to stand up for human rights across the world. Over 74,000 actions have been taken across the UK (and many more worldwide) – Please see attached Write for Rights summary for 2015.

We are so sorry that the planned letter writing session in January was advertised as an incorrect date and also failed to take place. Many apologies if you turned up and found no one there.

We will be holding our next session in March (a little earlier than usual to avoid the Easter weekend) and will mainly be featuring cases from the new Real Lives leaflet received with this month’s mailing.

Next Letter Writing Session

Saturday March 19th 2-4pm

The Eighth Day Café, Oxford Road
Case sheets, pen and paper provided.

All Welcome.

Burma (Myanmar)

There have been reports that claim the trial of the two Burmese migrants convicted of the murder of two British tourists in Thailand was deeply flawed and unfair. The Prosecution put great weight on their confession. It is claimed that this was obtained under torture. One forensic scientist testified that police mishandled DNA evidence. Amnesty has called for an independent investigation into the allegations of torture, and for a re-trial which conforms to international standards. Amnesty have not yet asked for membership action.

Burma groups are all waiting for the cards to be used in action on behalf of the Unity 5 to be produced. Watch this space.

There is an Urgent Action on behalf of Chaw Sandi Tun a woman who was arrested in October 2015, tried and convicted in December, of “mocking the Army “by a post on Facebook, referring to the similarity of the colour of Aung Suu Sun Kyi’s sarong and the uniform of one of the Army Generals. She was found guilty under Article 66(d) of Myanmar’s Telecommunications Act. She was sentenced to 6 months in prison. Amnesty regards her as a prisoner of conscience and asks us to write asking for her immediate and unconditional release. Jean will bring letters for signatures to the next meeting.

Women’s Rights

As some of you will remember, Mary brought a letter to Stormont to be signed at our December meeting. It was about the abortion law in Northern Ireland, following the judgement by the Belfast High Court that current law breaches the human rights of women who are pregnant with fatal fetal abnormalities, or as a result of sexual crime, as the incredibly restrictive law on abortion in Northern Ireland prevents abortion in nearly all cases (with a possible penalty of life imprisonment, and poorly defined

permitted circumstances, the reluctance of medical personnel to agree to abortion is often understandable.) It is clear that the time is ripe for change – a poll commissioned by Amnesty in 2014 found that 60-70% of Northern Ireland residents support abortion in cases of rape, incest or a fatal fetal abnormality.

It seems from news reports that the current First Minister, Arlene Foster, who officially replaced Peter Robinson in January (Mary copied our letter to both of them), has no mind to change the law, and on 25th January the Northern Ireland Minister of Justice, David Ford, launched an appeal against the High Court decision. Amnesty International has spoken out against this decision, and continues to support the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, who brought the original case, in their efforts to obtain a change in the law.

Protests have been taking place both in Eire and Northern Ireland demanding a change in the restrictive law throughout Ireland. Amnesty currently has an on-line petition to decriminalise abortion in the Republic of Ireland.

Please sign this if you have not already done so.

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/abortion-ireland-crime>

South America

The South America subgroup has worked on the case of the Yakye Axa community since May 2015. The Yakye Axa community has been waiting for proper access to the land that they can occupy. Although last year there was some progress in identifying a viable access route to the land, they still wait for the land title to be confirmed.

The International Secretariat of Amnesty International has decided to make the case dormant, as action is no longer needed at this time. The case will be reviewed again with the communities, partners and sections involved in a few months time to determine whether or not it will be reactivated or closed.

Asylum Justice Project, Southern Africa, Children's Human Rights

No updates this month

Group News

Group meetings

We have an interesting programme of meetings coming up. For this month's meeting we are delighted to welcome Jyhun Park, originally from North Korea, who will give us an insight into life under this most secretive regime. See her video on

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DMn2_2TxiSw

We have received the 2016 planning pack detailing ways we can get involved with Amnesty Campaigning this year. Campaign leaders will have a pre meeting at the end of February and we will discuss the possibilities and make decisions at our March meeting. We will also hold our annual general meeting to formally appoint our group officers for the coming year.

In April, Mike Kavanagh, a long time member of the group but also an active member of Campaign Against the Arms Trade, will be coming to talk about research he has carried out on arms companies in Greater Manchester.

Group Meetings

Normally held 2nd Wednesday each month - 7.30pm upstairs at Terrace NQ, Thomas Street, M4 1NA.

Wednesday 10th February – Life in North Korea, a talk by Jihyun Park based on her personal experiences

Wednesday 9th March – Planning our campaigning and Group's AGM

Wednesday 13th April – speaker from Campaign Against the Arms Trade

Some of us will meet beforehand (at about 6pm) in the bar at Terrace for a bite to eat – all welcome

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.

Thanks!

Other News

NATIONAL CONFERENCE AND AGM 2016



AIUK's National Conference & AGM takes place on 9-10 April 2016 at East Midlands Conference centre in Nottingham. This is your chance to influence AIUK policy by joining in the discussions on the resolutions. The National Conference is also a time to hear from inspirational speakers, attend workshops, meet other activists and AIUK's staff, and hear from the Board of Trustees.

All national Amnesty International members can attend and vote. Group members who aren't individual members of AIUK can attend but do not get an individual vote.

Please visit <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/agm> for more information and how to book your place.

Darwin Day Celebration

An annual event organised by Greater Manchester Humanists

Friday 12th February; 6 - 10pm
Manchester Conference Centre,
78 Sackville Street, Manchester M1 3NJ



Stalls, exhibitions from Campaign Groups and the Arts and Sciences + local schools - admission FREE to exhibition

Manchester Amnesty have a stall and will be featuring the Stop Torture Campaign with the petition calling for an inquiry into the UK complicity with torture (see above). Volunteers needed to help set up and run the stall – contact anne.walker9@ntlworld.com asap.



7.30pm: Dr Susanne Shultz - Life Sciences Dept., University of Manchester, will give the Darwin Day Lecture: "Religion, Cooperation and pro-Sociality - Are Religious People More Cooperative ?" Tickets for her talk can be purchased at Eventbrite:

<http://www.eventbrite.com/e/darwin-day-celebration-2016-tickets-20739906619>

Protect Local Democracy

Mike Kavanagh from CAAT has contacted us with the following message:

I wondered if Amnesty supporters would send a prepared response to a current government consultation. The response has been prepared by War on Want and has the support of Campaign Against Arms Trade; Community Reinvest; Conscience; Global Justice Now; Palestine Solidarity Campaign; Platform, and 350.org. The only details required are a person's name and their email address.

These groups are concerned that the government is now consulting on changes to the way local authorities in England and Wales invest their members' pension funds. These changes would allow central government to block ethical investment decisions made by democratically elected local authorities. This is an attack on local democracy and the ability of groups to encourage such funds to become ethical investors on a range of issues.

For example as a member of Greater Manchester Pension Fund, I have tried to persuade it to end its investment in arms companies, take positive action to tackle climate change and end its holding of Israel government bonds. This may no longer be possible if the changes are implemented.

*The Conservative Party press release announcing the changes explicitly said it was to prevent campaigns **against UK defence companies**, but the legislation could have far wider implications, for example blocking ethical investment decisions related to other human rights issues or climate change.*

The response is at:

<http://waronwant.org/protect-local-democracy>.

The government consultation ends on 19 February.

A Look at Some of Amnesty's Global Success in 2015 50 Ways You Changed Lives In 2015

In 2015, millions of Amnesty supporters like you pushed decision-makers to make change happen worldwide. You helped to release journalists and activists. Change discriminatory laws. Compensate victims of corporate crime. Pardon survivors of torture. And so much more. As governments continued to crack down on dissent and free speech, your pressure was critical to protect people's human rights. Please visit the link below for a snapshot of some of the many success stories we made happen in 2015.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2015/12/50-ways-you-changed-lives-in-2015/>