



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

January 2017

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

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Group News

Group meetings

As explained in the last newsletter, we have to change our regular venue as MadLab have shut their Salford outpost. They have offered us a permanent base in a new ground floor room that they are having built in their Northern Quarter building, but this won't be ready until February. Unfortunately we will have to change the day of the month that we meet in order to take up this offer.

Please note:

- **Starting in January, we will be meeting on the fourth Monday every month.**
- **The January meeting will be at Cross Street Chapel, after that our meetings will be at MadLab in the Northern Quarter.**

We are sorry that we have to make these changes. We do hope that you will be able to make Mondays and come along to the meetings - a great way to brighten up your Mondays and start the week.

Human Rights Day vigil

The group was involved in helping to organise a vigil to mark Human Rights Day on December 10th, jointly with Salford Council. It was held at Eccles Cross and featured readings and poems by local refugees.

Some 30 to 40 people attended the event, including MP Rebecca Long Bailey and Salford (Eccles) Councillor Lisa Stone



Help needed

We plan to hold a stall publicizing the case of Mohammed al-Roken at the Darwin Day event at Manchester Conference Centre on Sunday February 12th. If you could spare an hour or two to help man the stall, please contact Anne Walker (manchestergroup@amnesty.org.uk)

January Group Meeting

7.30pm.

Monday 23rd January Talk on the development of Amnesty International + Update on our campaigning

Anne Walker, an Amnesty member since 1970, will give a talk on the development of Amnesty's work over the years and what we stand for now.

We will also update on our campaigning work and look forward to the coming year.

! Cross Street Chapel !

Cross Street, Manchester M2 1NL

See <http://cross-street-chapel.org.uk/directions/> for how to find it.

Note change of venue!

Some of us will meet beforehand (at about 6pm) in La Sandinista, a tapas bar on Old Bank Street just round the corner from Cross Street Chapel, for a bite to eat.

All welcome

Group Officers

Our March meeting will be our Annual General Meeting when we review our campaigning work, finance and group officer roles.

Unfortunately, mainly due to work and study commitments, several of our officers / campaign coordinators feel that they need to take a step back. This gives us a chance to involve other members of the group and bring in some new ideas.

We will be looking for a new group chair, membership secretary (meeting and greeting new members and doing the admin on our Yahoo group), media lead (maintaining our press contacts list and drafting press releases and letters) and UAE campaign lead. If you fancy having a go at any of these jobs, do have a chat to find out more. All jobs could be done as job shares to provide support to each other.

Campaigning

Individuals at Risk

Chelsea Manning

In his final week in office, Barack Obama has pardoned Chelsea Manning. Instead of serving a 35-year sentence, she will walk free in May. Chelsea was sentenced after blowing the whistle on potential crimes under international law and human rights violations by the U. S. military. Amnesty International considers her a prisoner of conscience and the Manchester Amnesty group took part in writing letters calling for her release last year. She was held in pre-trial detention in conditions that the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture deemed to be cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. She is transgender but was denied appropriate medical treatment relating to her identity. She attempted suicide while in prison and was placed in solitary confinement in response. It is fantastic news that Obama has listened to calls to set her free - a huge thank you to everyone who campaigned for her.



Write for Rights

We took an active part in the 2016/17 Write for Rights campaign with 3 sessions (Unicorn in Chorlton, Birchfields Community Centre and St Andrew's, Dearnley) involving members of the public writing solidarity cards. In addition, our November letter writing session was dedicated to writing appeal letters on behalf of the Write for Rights cases and our December group meeting to sending solidarity cards.

Overall some 160 solidarity cards and 35 appeal letters were sent.

Many thanks to all who took part and especially to Hazel, Rosemary, Jo and Mary who organised our efforts.



Jo with The Rt Revd Mark Davies, Bishop of Middleton during the card signing at St Andrews in Dearnley

Letter Writing

Don't forget that we hold a regular bi-monthly letter writing session at the Eighth Day Café on Oxford Road. Our next session will be in March – it would be good to see you there.

March Letter Writing Session

Saturday 11th March 2-4pm
The Eighth Day Café, Oxford Road

Our regular session writing letters on behalf of those suffering injustice.
Case sheets, pen and paper provided.

All Welcome

United Arab Emirates

What has happened in 2016?

In May the group adopted the case of Dr. Mohammed Al-Roken, a human rights lawyer who is imprisoned because he called for democratic reforms.



We participated on his behalf in several events, such as three Acoustic Amnesty events, the Manchester half-marathon, and several Amnesty Write for Rights event. We also organised a "party" on his birthday in the Manchester city centre, where we shared cakes and informed Manchester citizens about Mohammed's situation.

Overall we send 310 signatures to Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahayan, 37 to Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahayan, 38 to Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum to call for his release. We also collected 24 signatures on behalf of Mohammed al-Roken that were sent to MP Rebecca Long-Bailey. She has been in contact with our Amnesty group and supported our work fantastically, in particular by raising several questions to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The group also collected 297 signatures on the letter to Sir Richard Leese, with whom the group also held a meeting last year to discuss the situation of Dr. Al-Roken and how Manchester could influence it.

So in total 706 signatures have been sent on behalf of Dr. Al-Roken, as well as an open letter signed by 3 councillors, 3 MPs and several solicitors has been sent to the Deputy Prime Minister of the UAE Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahayan and we should not forget that more than 50 people added their photo to our photo-collage.

If you want to get involved with our UAE work, drop Henrike an email (henrikegreuel@gmx.de).



Refugee Campaign

We have received the attached urgent action about refugees and migrants freezing in Serbia. **Please email and write to the Serbian authorities. Sample letters are attached**

- An estimated 1,200 refugees and migrants are sleeping rough in abandoned warehouses in central Belgrade.
- They are being exposed to disease and inhuman living conditions and, with winter temperatures reaching -20 degrees Celsius, they are at serious risk of illness and even death from frostbite and hypothermia.
- The Serbian authorities are failing to provide them with adequate food, water and sanitation, healthcare, appropriate clothing and basic accommodation.
- No attempt has been made by the Serbian authorities to identify particularly vulnerable people, including children and people requiring immediate medical treatment.
- Unaccompanied children as young as 11 represent a quarter of the population in the warehouses, according to UNHCR. They are at risk of further abuses and are particularly vulnerable to the harsh living conditions and exploitation.
- In November 2016, the government informed NGOs providing assistance that their support outside formal centres was “no longer acceptable”, while signalling that their capacity would not be increased.

Burma



As you might have seen on the news, Amnesty International has published a new report warning the treatment of the Rohingya in Northern Rakhine State may amount to crimes against humanity.

The report is attached with this newsletter. It is called 'We Are at Breaking Point' and outlines evidence documented from 35 interviews with Rohingya from Northern Rakhine State, as well as satellite imaging of villages burnt down by the Burmese army and Border Guard Police. You can also find the report here: <http://amn.st/60148Me08>

This evidence confirms reports of unlawful killings, arbitrary arrests, possible enforced disappearances, rape and sexual violence, destruction of homes, property and documents. Furthermore Amnesty International is very concerned that the continued denial of humanitarian access, including food and medical care, is putting lives of the over 150,000 people reliant on aid at risk. The way Rohingya are indiscriminately targeted is a collective punishment, which may amount to crimes against humanity.

The report and campaigns target both the Burmese and Bangladeshi authorities. There are serious concerns Bangladesh

is pushing back Rohingya refugees into Myanmar, contrary to the international principle of non-refoulement. The Rohingya that do reach Bangladesh have to stay in hiding, not having adequate access to food, clothing, shelter and medical care.

- A blog by Amnesty International summarizing the report can be found here: <http://amn.st/60148Me08>. It also contains an additional link to the report.
- A blog by Amnesty International on the satellite imagery: <https://medium.com/lemming-cliff/rakhine-navigating-the-information-black-hole-a4d69420604b#7u3xb5vap>
- You can find news section with an interview with Amnesty International's Burma researcher here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHYonSTeuNs>

Northern Africa

The tide of dissent and the quest for justice continues in Northern Africa. So do the Governments' attempts to stop this. Currently there are many activists convicted for expressing their opinion and for asking for a fairer society. Here is an update:

Algeria

Hassan Bouras is a journalist, a human rights defender and a leading member of the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights (LADDH) in El Bayadh, Western Algeria. In 2016 he produced video interviews of local residents stating that high-ranking judicial and security officials in El Bayadh took bribes and imprisoned innocent people on trumped up charges. The video was broadcast on a private satellite television channel with substantial audience in the country. On 28th November 16 Hassan was convicted for complicity in offending a judicial officer, law enforcement officers and a public body. The interviewees were also arrested. Letters will be sent to Algerian Authorities on Hassan's behalf.

Egypt

Mahmoud Abu Zeid [Shawkan] has featured in a number of newsletters. His trial has now been adjourned until the 17th January 2017. As a group we have written a number of letters to officials [including the president] asking for his release. The fact that he has been charged with murder makes the case very urgent. He could face the death penalty if convicted.

Libya

Jabir Zain is an activist, who advocates for women's rights and posts opinion on Facebook on issues that are deemed controversial in Libyan society. On 25th September 2016 as he was leaving a seminar on women's rights held by an NGO, he was abducted by Tripoli-based militia, which operates under the Ministry of Interior. Jabir has been accused of atheism, moral indecency and collaborating with foreign NGOs. His family has received information that Jabir was beaten and tortured by the militia. His whereabouts and well-being are unknown. We will send letters to Libyan's authorities on Jabir's behalf.

Tunisia

On 24th November 2016 Walid Zarrouk, a NGO founder, was sentenced to 26 months in prison in two separate cases. The first case relates to Facebook posts, through which Walid criticised the judiciary and the security forces' handling of investigations on the Bardo Museum attack in 2015 and the killing of politician Chokri Belaid in 2013. The second case relates to criticism

posted through Facebook of a former Minister of Justice and the Public Prosecutor. Walid is protesting against his conviction through a hunger strike and he is refusing to drink water and take medicine for a heart condition. His health is deteriorating and there are also fears for his safety. Walid is a former prison officer, outspoken on terrorism-related issues, and is currently sharing a cell with 13 individuals accused of terrorism offences. We will send letters to Tunisian authorities on behalf of Walid.

Southern Africa, Women's Rights and Children's Human Rights,

No updates this month

Review of 2016

We have just completed a survey for Amnesty about the group and our activities – this made us realise how many events we had taken part in this year and we thought we should share the list with you.

- Human Rights Act street theatre in the centre of Manchester
- Stop Torture stall at the Darwin Day event.
- Syria stall at Didsbury Festival
- 2 x Acoustic Amnesty nights
- Walking entry in the Pride Parade
- Eblana String Trio concert
- Samba film night for Refugee week
- Peterloo Tapestry entry for Mohammed al-Roken
- Stall featuring the '@Egg Game' at Heaton's Open Garden event
- Session by North Korean writer and activist, Sungju Lee, at the Manchester Literature Festival
- Street collection in Manchester City centre
- Street party for Mohammed al-Roken
- Mohammed al-Roken stalls at the Acoustic Amnesty stage at the Manchester Food and Drink Festival, both Acoustic amnesty concerts and and the Whalley Range Peace and Justice Write for Rights event.
- Manchester half marathon entry publicising the plight of Mohammed al-Roken
- Write for Rights stalls at Unicorn, Birchfield and Stalybrige.

My apologies if I've missed anything out!

We hope that we will be able to be as active this coming year. It is all down to you, the lovely Manchester Amnesty members!

In particular, we are currently looking for one or two people to take on masterminding our Manchester Literature festival entry for 2017. The festival organisers are very supportive and provide lots of help and do all the publicity. If you want to find out more, contact Mary McBride (mary.mcbride@blueyonder.co.uk) who has taken the lead for the last couple of years. Alternatively, let our secretary, Anne Walker (manchestergroup@amnesty.org.uk), know that you are interested.



Events of interest

Dedicated to all Defenders of Human Freedoms

An exhibition of the art of Paul Peter Piech is currently at the Peoples History Museum until **12th February**.

Paul Peter Piech was an artist, humanitarian and campaigner. Born in New York in 1920, Piech's influences were many, not least politics and equality, through to jazz and poetry. His print making was infused with both a desire to reflect the world's

wrong back on itself, and to demonstrate the power of compassion and art.

Dedicated to all Defenders of Human Freedoms. The Art of Paul Peter Piech at the People's History Museum, is a major retrospective of his career. Visitors will see Piech's powerful political work against racism and for peace, set against his more melodic prints illuminating his passion for jazz and the poet Walt Whitman.

Well worth a visit!

Women in the Media

This year's Women in Media event is at the people's History Museum, Manchester on 4-5 March (Saturday and Sunday).

It is run by The Manchester Media Group, the student media wing of the University of Manchester Students' Union. It is the second year of the event, but the first in which Amnesty International UK and NUS have joined as partners.

The event will showcase the very best of women in media and aims to inspire the next generation of female journalists. It will involve several practical workshops with leading figures in the media and a couple of keynote speeches.

The event will bring together hundreds of students involved in the media from across the north of England.

You can read a review of last year's event here

<http://mancunion.com/2016/03/08/women-media-conference-2016/>

And you can get tickets for the event here

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/women-in-media-conference-2017-tickets-30856953980>



AIUK would appreciate our help during the event, including manning a stall. If you can help, email manchestergroup@amnesty.org.uk to volunteer.

Stand Up to Racism Rally

When on 20th January, Donald Trump is inaugurated as President of the USA, there will be protests across America, and in 370 cities world wide.

Standing in solidarity with American activists, here in Britain Stand Up To Racism has organised protests across the country.

STOP TRUMP!

No to Racism! No to Fracking! No to War!
Yes to women's rights! Yes to unions!

