



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

July 2016

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Campaigning

Refugee Week 2016 and Simple Acts of Welcome

The theme for this year's Refugee Week, which ran from 20-26 June, was Welcome! The North West region saw a huge range of events celebrating the contribution of refugees to the UK and promoting a better understanding of the reasons why people seek sanctuary and of the challenges that they face. The Manchester Amnesty group joined with the local Syrian community organisation, Rethink Rebuild Society, to screen the French film, Samba.

The screening took place on the same day as vigils were held in memory of the MP Jo Cox. The discussion following the film was heartfelt and passionate, reflecting a strong desire to fight against attitudes of hatred and intolerance and to develop instead the culture of welcome celebrated and promoted in the Refugee Week theme. You can visit the Simple Acts website for ideas on simple acts of welcome that could make a difference in your community, workplace, social circle or family.

With the fallout from the recent referendum result, it is more important than ever to be active in standing up and challenging ignorance, prejudice and intolerance. Amnesty International has announced a new emergency campaign to combat racism and xenophobia in the UK, prompted by reports of a rise in racial abuse in the wake of the EU referendum.



Find out more on the AIUK website and take action!
<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/tell-your-local-council-stand-against-hate-crimes-racism-xenophobia?from=issue>
We will also feature this during our July meeting.

Campaign Launch: Let Refugees Learn!

New research from Refugee Action has revealed that new refugees are struggling to access English classes after ESOL provision was cut by over 50% between 2009 and 2015. As a result, new refugees are finding it difficult to access employment and training, as well as settling in to life in the UK.

Refugee Action have launched a new campaign – Let Refugees Learn – asking the Government to create a fund to support refugees learning English, publish an ESOL strategy for England, ensure equal access to ESOL for women, open up access to

courses for asylum-seekers and facilitate a national framework for community-based language support.

How can you get involved in the campaign?

- Read the report from Refugee Action: <http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/assets/0001/3854/letrefugeeslearnfullreport.pdf>
- Sign the petition to let refugees learn <http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/actnow> (It is addressed to Prime Minister David Cameron, so you'll have to be quick!)
- Contact your local MP and ask them to support the campaign. Check out the resources on the Regional Asylum Activism website for some useful tips: <https://regionalasylumactivism.org/resources/>

The Immigration Act 2016: where are we now?

The Immigration Bill has now finished its passage through Parliament. Here is a summary of the outcome on some of the issues we were working on:

Relocation of Refugee Children: After an amazing outpouring of public support, Lord Dub's amendment - calling for the relocation of refugee children stranded in Europe - received cross-party support in the final Commons debate on the Bill. The government committed to relocating an unspecified number of unaccompanied child refugees stranded in Europe, and have been in conversation with local authorities to determine exactly how many child refugees can be relocated.

Safeguards on Detention: introduction of judicial oversight for immigration detention, as well as a 72 hour time limit on the detention of pregnant women (extendable to a maximum of one week with ministerial approval).

Transition Period for New Refugees: The government agreed to conduct a review into whether the 28 day transition period given to new refugees is sufficient.

Asylum Support: Refused asylum-seeking families will have 90 days before their asylum support is withdrawn, and two extra paragraphs have been introduced in Schedule 3 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 to clarify the rights and responsibilities of local authorities towards destitute refused asylum seekers.

Thank you to everyone who stood together and said 'Refugees Welcome Here!' In the light of the current political turmoil, we must remain vigilant to ensure that people seeking sanctuary in the UK receive the welcome and the protection that they need.

Jo Cox Vigil

On Wednesday 22nd of June several members of Manchester Amnesty attended a very moving memorial event in Piccadilly Gardens held in memory of the late Jo Cox MP. Tributes were made by Jo's friends and family, and there were also poetry readings and a rousing chorus of 'If I had a hammer', one of Jo's children's favourites. The organisers of the event wanted us to believe like Jo did, that we have more in common than that which divides us, and that going forward, in times of political and social uncertainty, we need to remember this, and LoveLikeJo.



Middle East

The group sent urgent actions on behalf of Moza 'Abdouli and the Jordanian journalist and poet Tayseer al-Najjar. Both were arrested in the UAE for publishing posts on twitter/ facebook and are at risk to be charged for insulting the UAE and its leaders.

Furthermore, urgent actions have been sent to Israel to request that farmers have access to their land, which they lost due to the Separation Barrier/Wall and secondly on behalf of Mohamad Faisal Abu Sakha, who has been arrested near Nabulus. His right to challenge his detention has been denied by withholding "the evidence".

We also featured Syria on a stall at the Didsbury Festival using the 360° headsets to engage with members of the public. The rain poured down but we still had lots of people visit the stall and we got 65 signatures on a petition to Didsbury MP, Jeff Smith, asking him to contact the Foreign Office with Amnesty's concerns. Here is a picture, taken in between downpours of Jeff Smith MP with Cllr Kelly Simcock and Cllr James Wilson and Haytham of the Rethink Rebuild Society, members of which came along to support the stall.



North Africa

EGYPT -Human Rights Defenders targeted: Throughout May and June 2016, North Cairo Criminal Court has ruled to freeze the assets of several NGOs and Human Rights organisations. Travel bans have also been imposed onto the directors and founders of these organisations.

Some of the organisations involved have found out about the freeze on their assets through newspapers. Some of the people involved have found out about their travel bans once stopped at the airport, with no explanation provided.

The organisations affected include Al-Andalus Institute for Tolerance and anti-Violence Studies, Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights and the Arab Network for Human Rights Information.

At the July's meeting we will sign a letter for the Egyptian Minister of Social Solidarity and the Egyptian embassy in the UK.

Southern Africa

MALAWI-Malawian authorities promise to tackle attacks on people with Albinism :On 7 June 2016, an Amnesty International delegation presented the organization's latest report on Malawi to the President, Arthur Peter Mutharika, and other officials including Inspector General of the Police, Minister of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare and Minister of Justice. At the meeting, a series of commitments were made including reviewing government policies and establishing the root causes of the crimes against people with albinism.

The government of Malawi also welcomed Amnesty International's recommendations to ensure safety for the vulnerable group in the country. These include the call for visible policing in rural districts as well as monitoring and recording attacks. On 13th June, International Albinism awareness Day, Amnesty International encouraged the Malawian Government to live up to its promises.

ZAMBIA -The Post newspaper owner and staff arrested :On 21st June 2016 the Zambian Revenue Authority ordered the closure of the publishing company Post Newspapers Limited, demanding US\$6.1 million tax in arrears. In response, the newspaper accused the authorities of selectively applying the law to target the critical news organization and on 28th June a Zambian court ruled against this closure.

However, on the same day, the newspaper's owner Fred M'membe, his wife Mutinta M'membe and the Deputy Managing Editor, Joseph Mwenda, were arrested. They are still being held at the Lusaka Central Police Station without any charges. Zambia Reports has reported that Police engaged in a "physical confrontation" with Fred M'membe before they were taken away.

Amnesty International's Director for Southern Africa, Deprose Muchena, stated: "*Fred M'membe and his newspaper are victims of an attempt by the state to silence critical media and those who speak truth to power. It is unacceptable and must be brought to an end.*"

Burma update

The NLD government have released a large number of Prisoners of Conscience, including the Unity 5 – journalists who had reportedly given away state secrets in one of their magazine articles and who the Manchester group had asked to adopt and campaign on their behalf. We are now negotiating for another prisoner or group to adopt.

In spite of this swathe of releases there are still prisoners of conscience behind bars These include 5 men, of whom 3 are Muslims, 1 Buddhist and 1 ethnic Chinese, a 6th member of the

group – Rohingya is in hiding, All 5 were arrested in November 2015, - their crime – to publish a calendar which asserts that the Rohingya are a religious minority from Myanmar. It then gives information on their history, including statements that they have lived in Myanmar for centuries, implying they should now be given full citizenship.

U Gambira's case has been highlighted in an Urgent Action see attached. He was a monk, who was arrested and beaten during the Saffron Revolution of 2007 He has mental health issues, and is now living in Thailand, and seeing a psychiatrist regularly. He needed to visit Burma to apply for a passport and was arrested and sentenced to 6 months in prison on immigration charges. He should be released immediately Messages of support and solidarity can expressed on the Facebook group run by his wife his wife who visits him regularly www.facebook.com/groups/FreeGambira.

Amnesty is recommending the (re) formation of the Prisoner of Conscience Affairs Committee in Burma to ensure independent monitoring of whether ALL prisoners of conscience are being released. AI is also calling for the reform of many laws which make the conviction and imprisonment of people on charges which in fact are simply the lawful expression of their human rights. These include the Peaceful Assembly Act and the Unlawful Association Act. Some of these are relics of British Colonial rule, which points to the fact that an overhaul of the penal code is long overdue. The NLD Government is already committed to the review of 142 laws, and they have started with the Peaceful Assembly Act The previous government had done some redrafting but changes have not gone far enough.

Amnesty is now prioritising the needs of the Rohingya, who are said to be the most persecuted minority group in the world. Although they have been in Burma for centuries, they are still not recognised as Burmese, but are referred to as Bengali. They cannot get passports, have difficulty in getting employment, or education. Are last in the queue for health care, and first to be evicted from houses if the land or buildings are needed for anything else.

An AI researcher visited Rakhine state, where many displaced Rohingya are living in camps, in appalling conditions. A Report is expected soon, and hopefully will lead to some campaign

strategy, as part of the "People on the Move " Campaign supporting displaced peoples. Watch this space !

Individuals at Risk

We are beginning to think about the Write for Rights campaign which will start in November in the run up to Christmas. We are hoping to work with the Challenge Project and Whalley Range Peace and Justice Group again but will probably do a stall or two ourselves. If you know a good venues – do let Hazel know (hazelerrey@gmail.com).

In the meantime, we have our regular letter writing session at the end of the month, come along and get inspired. Help and advice will be provided for anyone new to this. It is an excellent way of getting going sending AI appeals.

Next Letter Writing Session

Saturday 23rd July 2-4pm

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

All Welcome.

Children's Human Rights

We have a volunteer to take on this subgroup, Kieran Roberts. He is a relatively new member of the group and is a teacher by profession. He is signed up to receive updates – more to follow! If you are interested in this work, do drop him a line at kieranroberts@googlemail.com.

Women's Rights

Thanks to Lucy and Peggy Nolan for getting together a brilliant classical music concert at the Wander Inn in aid of the AI appeal to support women's refuges and sexual and reproductive rights education in Burkina Faso and Sierra Leone. We raised £157 which will be doubled by the Department for International Development.

Forthcoming Events

Acoustic Amnesty

Friday July 29th

Sacred Trinity Church

The next Acoustic Amnesty fundraiser is coming up and we will be fundraising for the Manchester City of Sanctuary refugee support group (<https://manchester.cityofsanctuary.org/about>) as well as Manchester Amnesty.



The excellent performers so far are: Tracey Brown, James Carson, Chris Flynn, James Holt, Scott Lloyd, Iain Till and Leonie Kate Higgins. The gig will be seated and totally silent for performances with the (well stocked!) bar in a separate room.

We are remaining with our approach of no sound system whatsoever - totally acoustic using the natural acoustics of the venue.

Doors will open at 7pm and the show starts at 7.30pm prompt. Free on-street car parking is available and the venue is a stone's throw from Deansgate/Market Street in Manchester city centre.

Tickets are only £8 in advance for all of this entertainment – available here <https://www.wegotickets.com/event/362474>

As if that's not enough, Steve is taking this to the acoustic stage at the wonderful Butefest festival on Sunday 31 July - <http://www.butefest.co.uk/>. This is on the Isle of Bute in the Clyde estuary in Scotland.

We need volunteers to help set up and man the Amnesty stall at the Manchester event – email heathercard12@gmail.com

Pride Parade Saturday 27th August

We will again be taking part in the hugely popular Manchester Pride Parade – as a walking entry. The theme is ‘Once upon a time . . .’ and we will be dressing up as Amnesty candles freeing prisoners of conscience with a banner: *Amnesty International fights so you can live happily ever after* (or something like that!)



It is a great event to be part of and means that our message will be seen by many thousands of people. We need at least 12 volunteers to make an impact – preferably a lot more. Please let Laura know if you can make it – laura.barsby@yahoo.co.uk

We will have a craft session at our August meeting to make some extra banners etc – come along and help us be creative. If you have specific arts and crafts skills and would like to help mastermind the costumes and banners, WE NEED YOU. Please get in touch with Laura

Group Meeting

Normally held 2nd Wednesday each month - 7.30pm.

Wednesday 13th July

Our campaign work

at MadLab Salford (218 Chapel St, Salford M3 6BY – <https://madlab.org.uk/madlab-salford/>)

We will be concentrating on the campaign work that we have opted into, with a particular emphasis on our involvement in the United Arab Emirates and our new adopted prisoner, Mohamad Al-Roken, a human rights lawyer. There will be plenty of actions to take, including the new emergency campaign #againststhat.

Some of us will meet beforehand (at about 6pm) in the Deli Lama café next door to MadLab for a bite to eat.

All welcome