



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

March 2016

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Campaigning

New Campaigns

The 2016 planning pack has arrived with details of forthcoming campaigning work that we can get involved in. There will be two new major global campaigns:

- **People on the Move** (launch Sept 2016)
The campaign goal will be to ensure people on the move are afforded the protections that they need during transit, and that just and durable solutions to the refugee crisis are put in place.
- **Protecting the space for Human Rights Defenders** (launch January 2017)
Across the world human rights defenders (HRDs) are being targeted and face growing restrictions on funding, status and freedom to operate. The focus will be on asking for robust political and legal mechanisms to ensure comprehensive protection for HRDs.

There will also be opportunities to get involved in campaigning to keep the Human Rights Act, crisis campaigning (e.g. in response to unforeseen outbreaks of massive human rights violations) and short term tactical campaigns involving such topics as economic affairs, arms control and women's rights as well as the usual individuals at risk and country/world region work.

Stop Torture

This major international campaign will end in May, although of course, working to end the use of torture remains a key Amnesty goal.

We held a Stop Torture stall at the recent Darwin Day event at Manchester conference Centre, with a display and the petition calling for an enquiry into possible UK involvement in the use of torture post 9/11 (see last month's newsletter or

www.amnesty.org.uk/tortureinquiry for more details)



You can still take action online:

www.amnesty.org.uk/tortureinquiry

My Body My Rights

This international campaign on sexual and reproductive rights is also due to wind down in May although ongoing work will continue through country and individuals at risk work. This

campaign has mainly featured women's rights issues such as access to contraception, forced marriage and abortion. We intend to maintain a coordinator for women's rights issues to keep a watching brief on these issues.

Monthly Actions

We have two monthly actions this month.

Burkina Faso – Early and Forced Marriage

Early marriage is common and most girls are married by the age of 19 (some as young as 10). The age difference between a girl and her future spouse can be enormous. In some cases the bride is 30 to 50 years younger than her partner.

Physical and sexual violence against women and girls in forced and early marriages is common. Of particular concern is the large number of pregnancy complications among young girls whose bodies are not yet ready to bear children. Some young girls may die during childbirth as a result of obstructed labour, or suffer life-threatening injuries, including obstetric fistula which can leave them incontinent.

In late December the Burkina Faso authorities adopted a national strategy and three-year action plan to prevent and eliminate child marriage in Burkina Faso. This is fantastic news, but there is still much work to be done to ensure girls don't end up forced into marriage in the future.

Amnesty International is calling for an amendment to the penal code to prohibit Early Forced Marriage conducted under traditional customary law or religious law within Burkina Faso. Working with communities and campaigners in Amnesty Burkina Faso we aim to increase pressure on the government to act.

In Burkina Faso Amnesty International is working directly with 5 of the shelters that house girls that have been subjected to Early Forced Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation but managed to seek help. Shelters like these are crucial to support young women and girls when they have no one else to turn to. You will remember that we sent messages of support to women and girls staying in these shelters as part of last year's Write for Rights campaign.

At the end of the group meeting we will make bunting which will be compiled and displayed in the five shelters that Amnesty Burkina Faso is working with, to show the women working there and the girls seeking shelter that they are not forgotten.

Syria: marking the 5th anniversary of the uprising March 15th
UN-facilitated talks between the Syrian authorities and opposition groups are due to re-start in late February/early March and last for several months. The lead-up to the talks has seen international attention on sieges in Syria, due in part to increased campaigning on this issue and the media focus on the situation in

Madaya. There is now an opportunity to urge the UK government, who are a key participant of the Geneva talks, to prioritise key human rights benchmarks for progress, as per UN Security Council resolution 2254, which specifies humanitarian access and ending attacks against civilians as well as for parties to "immediately comply with their obligations under international law."

We are asked to contact our MPs and ask them to write to the Foreign Secretary, Phillip Hammond, to ensure the UK champions human rights benchmarks at the Syria talks. See the Action sheet sent out with this newsletter.

At the March meeting we will also do a social media solidarity action using the dove symbol.



Individuals at Risk (IAR)

Campaigning for individuals whose rights are being abused remains at the core of Amnesty's work. As a group, we do this via our work to support the Unity 5 in Burma and through responding to actions received from the World Region teams (we are currently opted into southern Africa and South America) and the major campaigns which often feature work IAR work.

We also hold regular letter writing sessions and our next session will be in March, featuring cases from the new Real Lives leaflet and recent Urgent Actions.

All are welcome to this informal get together - come along and get inspired.

Next Letter Writing Session

Saturday March 19th 2-4pm

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

All Welcome.

Receiving Urgent actions are a great way of regularly taking action on behalf of individuals. You can sign up at <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/join-urgent-action-network> and you can tell them what frequency you are happy to receive actions. You can also access recent urgent actions via the link at the very bottom of the main AIUK page <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/>.

Henrike also recommends the Swiss website of AI: <http://ua.amnesty.ch/urgent-actions>. Unfortunately, the website is "only" available in German, French or Italian. However, it is really straight forward: "Laender" means: "countries" and "Themen" means "topics". If you click on countries, it always gives you regions as well as specific countries you can tick. If you click onto

the UA itself, you have the English word document on the right hand side of your screen, which you can download. The first date above the UAs shows when the UA became active and the second number "Noch 30 Tage Laufzeit" means it will be active for "30 more days". This is really helpful, as you can ensure that you send it on time! If you need more translations for the website and UAs, contact: Henrikegreuel@gmx.de who is happy to help.

South America

The case on Daniel Quintero that the group have been given to work on is now dormant, as is the case on the Yakyxa Axa community as mentioned in last month's newsletter. This means that we have no long term casework on this world region at the moment.

It is possible that a new case on Leopoldo López will be assigned to the group. Leopoldo López is leader of the Venezuelan opposition party Popular Will (Voluntad Popular) and has been in detention since February 2014, accused of inciting violence during the anti-government protests. He has now been sentenced to 13 years and nine months in prison, without any evidence provided by the prosecution that he had committed a crime. We will discuss whether to continue with this work at our March meeting.

Southern Africa

ANGOLA: 15 activists who were arrested in June 2015 for participating in a reading group and discussing about politics have been freed from prison and transferred into house arrest. Amnesty International played a crucial part in their release and we have received a letter of thank you from one of the people who have been freed. *The Manchester group supported this action.*

ZIMBABWE: Robert Mugabe will be celebrating his 92nd birthday during the week-end 25-26th Feb. The planned budget for his party was 800,000 US\$. Only recently Robert Mugabe has declared a national emergency due to a drought. Amnesty International estimates that 2.4 millions Zimbabweans are in need of food aid to avoid starvation. Meanwhile, Itai Dzamara, a Zimbabwean journalist and activist is still missing after his abduction in March 2015. Despite an order from a court requesting the Zimbabwean government to investigate into his disappearance nothing is being done. Simona is trying to find out who we can write to on this case.

Burma (Myanmar)

There are changes going on at AI IS dept. and the Burma researcher is in the process of moving on, and a new researcher taking his place

However, information tells us that Burma at the moment is in a "waiting" place. President Thein Sein is due to step down at the end of March, and AungSun Suu Kyi will lead the next government with her party the National League for Democracy, due to take over in April. Consequently, firm decisions are not being taken, and there are hopes and expectations that either President Thein Sein will issue a presidential amnesty for political prisoners just before he leaves, or AungSun Suu Kyi will issue a similar amnesty as she takes over - so watch this space.

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 Burmese 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.

We can expect more activity on the Burma/Myanmar front in March.

Asylum Justice Project, Children's Human Rights

No updates this month

Group News

Group planning and annual general meeting – Wednesday 9th March

We have recently received the 2016 planning pack from AIUK and our group's annual general meeting (AGM) is due during our March meeting. Our campaign coordinators and group officers held a meeting last week in preparation for our monthly meeting.

This is an opportunity to think about whether you would like a more involved role in the group.

We are pleased that the people in the key officer roles and some of the campaigning coordinators are happy to continue, although don't let that put you off volunteering; it is always good to have a change. **We need volunteers** for Children's Rights and the new Crisis and Tactical campaigning, We will also review how we coordinate the People on the Move campaign and we need to decide which world region work to undertake and who will coordinate it. If you have a particular interest in a country or region please come along and put it forward. We also need someone to oversee our FaceBook page.



Much of our work is done outside the group meetings, either by individuals or small subgroups. The role of coordinators is to keep a watching brief and take action when appropriate e.g. bring an action to a group meeting, call a subgroup meeting to plan an action. Campaign work ebbs and flows depending on the AIUK priorities of the moment and the country/world situation. No one campaign is busy all of the time and things can often be planned to suit the coordinator and group. No coordinator is ever left totally by themselves, there is always the support of the group's officers and usually a subgroup of group members interested in a particular campaign. We also realise that sometimes people have to take time out due to work/family commitments; you just need to let us know that you can't commit time for a period. We have a group guide to the coordinator role – if you want to receive a copy email laura.barsby@yahoo.co.uk

Here is a list of our current officers/coordinators that we need to review at the AGM.

Role	Current	Comment
Chair	Laura Barsby	
Secretary	Anne Walker	
Membership secretary	Eleanor Kelly	
Treasurer	Sean Dunne	
Newsletter editor	Anne Walker	
Facebook coordinator	Laura Barsby	Would like to step down from this role
Twitter coordinator	Stephen Lindsay	
Press coordinator	David Keyworth	
Stop torture coordinator	Lianne Slavin	Campaign coming to an end
Women's Rights coordinator	Mary Gibbs	This included MBMR campaigning which is coming to an end, however want to retain watching brief on these issues.
Individuals at risk coordinator	Hazel Errey	This includes regular letter writing sessions and our involvement in the annual Write for Rights campaign in the run up to Christmas. Hazel would appreciate someone to job share this with her.
Burma coordinator	Jean Mary	
Southern Africa coordinator	Simona Mattanza	
South America coordinator	Henrike Greuel	Our continued involvement to be reviewed
Refugee Rights coordinator	Laura Gibbons/Heather Card	Need to review in light of forthcoming People on the Move campaign.
Children's rights coordinator	Becky Carr	Need a replacement as Becky is working away.
Crisis and Tactical campaigns		New area of work. Need someone to keep a watching brief and take action as required.

Group Meetings

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

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.

Attendance is free this year, although you will need to pay for overnight accommodation and a donation is requested to defray the overall costs of the conference. 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.

Several of us are planning to go. If you intend to, please let Anne Walker know so that we can coordinate activities e.g. car share, making sure we cover all workshops etc.

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

The Co-operative Bank

Do you bank with the Co-operative Bank and use online or mobile banking? If so, and if you sign up for the bank's Everyday Rewards scheme, the bank will donate a minimum of £4 each month to Amnesty International, as long as you meet certain conditions in that month.

For full details and how to sign up, see <http://www.co-operativebank.co.uk/currentaccounts/everyday-rewards>

Annual Report

Amnesty International Annual Report, which sets out the state of the world's human rights in 2015 makes for grim reading. Sixty-one countries locked up prisoners of conscience. At least 30 states illegally forced refugees to return to countries where they would be in danger. At least 156 human rights defenders died in detention or were killed.

For more information and inspiration, do visit <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2016/02/annual-report-201516/>.