



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

May 2013

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AIUK National Conference and AGM

The weekend of the 13th-14th of April was a busy one for nine of the Manchester Amnesty International group who went down to Warwick for the national conference. It promised to be a difficult and challenging weekend where we continued discussions of Amnesty's governance and of the restructuring process, but however challenging, it's an invaluable and inspiring opportunity to discuss ideas with others and hear from human rights activists from the UK and beyond. This year, international speakers came from Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, India, and Horia Mosadiq, an Afghani human rights activist and Amnesty researcher, presented the evening keynote.

There are three main areas to the formal parts of the AGM that we take part in: workshops, working parties and the voting session. Workshops provide the opportunity to discuss and learn about a particular theme whether it be activism in Syria or how to take action on Zimbabwe or get more involved in issues of AI's governance, while working parties focus on a group of resolutions that had been proposed by members or by the board and discussed them before they went to the vote in the plenary.

Although wrestling with the issues and debates is intense, being part of Amnesty's democracy is incredibly valuable to the integrity of the movement and inspires us all to stay active.

The breaks are always invigorating; gathering new information, talking with country coordinators, taking part in actions from groups and activists all over the country, meeting other activists, talking to international guests. This year, two key campaigns both had a huge presence within the Action Centre, a new feature for the AGM. We were able to talk with Nolwandle, a WOZA activist, and the director of AI Zimbabwe, and complete a number of actions for Zimbabwe to highlight violence around the upcoming elections. There was also an inspirational photo exhibition of Afghani women, and the final action of the weekend was the unveiling of a HUGE banner highlighting human rights struggles of women in Afghanistan.

One of the best things about going to an AGM is the feeling of being invigorated and spurred on to carry on campaigning on a range of issues. As ever, new plans were hatched in the bar following a very long day and an evening working session that didn't finish till 10 PM. It's amazing the ideas that can happen late at night when you've spent the day hearing real struggles from real people. Although we were expecting many more difficult conversations about Amnesty's governance and the change in structure I think most of us felt that we had made real progress and the weekend ended very positively.

Next stop: Edinburgh!



Campaign news

Urgent Action Scheme

The Urgent Action Scheme is based on a simple idea: when someone is in immediate danger of serious human rights abuse, the government responsible for committing the abuse or failing to

prevent it will receive thousands of letters, faxes, emails, telegrams creating pressure to stop to respect human rights. The scheme turned 40 in March as the first action was issued on behalf of Professor Luiz Rossi on



19th March 1973. Prof Rossi was a prisoner of conscience in Brazil under the military regime. This first Urgent Action helped prevent him from being tortured and later led to his release. The scheme is still very active, with 671 actions being issued in 2012. The group receive some of these actions via campaigns that we have opted into (e.g. death penalty) or our country work (e.g. Burma, Southern Africa).

We have been circulating all UAs that arrive but are very aware that this can lead to group members getting overwhelmed by the number of emails. It is also important for AI to know approximately how many people take action. Therefore, at the last group meeting we discussed this issue and decided to stop routinely circulating UAs to all. There are 2 ways that you can still receive and act on UAs:

1. If you are keen to take part in this scheme and can commit to taking action on a regular basis (e.g. once per month) then we suggest that you sign up to receive UAs directly. Visit www.amnesty.org.uk/ua to sign up.
2. If you are particularly keen to do UAs on our specific campaigns, opt in to be on the sub group email list. Contact the following if you want to receive UAs via our coordinators:

Death Penalty: devansjennifer@gmail.com
Burma: barsbylaura@gmail.com
Southern Africa: anne.walker9@ntlworld.com

Burma

We have received some very distressing news about our PoC Dr Tun Aung who it is understood has recently had his original sentence of 11 years extended by 6 years following an appeal by the prosecution. He will now not be eligible for release until 2029 when he will be 81 years old. This demonstrates how important it is that we continue to put pressure on the authorities in Burma to secure Dr Tun Aung's immediate and unconditional release.

At a time when the EU has agreed to lift sanctions on Burma, ethnic and religious tensions continue to be of grave concern, as highlighted by the recent Human Rights Watch report on the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya.

Given the above, we are keen to continue to raise awareness of the situation on Burma. We are lucky enough to have the opportunity to hear from a former political prisoner of the Burmese government, Min Min, who has agreed to come and talk at our July meeting (for more information please see his bio: <http://www.york.ac.uk/cahr/defenders/past/min-min/>). We are also hoping to hold a film night in the Buddhist Centre around the 19th of July, so SAVE THE DATE if you can!

Women's Rights in Afghanistan

Amnesty's Women's Human Rights programme focuses on women in conflict situations, in countries where the UK has some influence. For the next two years (up to the end of 2014) Amnesty members will be putting pressure on the Afghan government and its international partners, including the UK, to better support women's rights in Afghanistan. To help the group plan their contribution to this campaign, Anne Walker will lead a workshop at the next group meeting. This will provide an update on current concerns and prepare us to lobby MPs., deal with members of the public at stalls and come up with some creative ideas.

Zimbabwe elections

Thanks to those of you who signed the petition at the last meeting urging action to ensure peaceful elections. Maggie Towse tells me that she sent about 500 signatures to the Zimbabwe Embassy in London to arrive on 18th April - Zimbabwe Independence Day.

Group News

Letter Writing session

Sending appeals on behalf of Amnesty cases is a keystone of our work. Every two months we hold an informal get-together to write letters. This helps motivate long standing members and provides support to those new to Amnesty's work.

The next session will take place on Saturday 18th May at The Eighth Day Cafe on Oxford Road. Put it in your diary and come along to swell the number of

letters written over a cup of tea and a slice of delicious cake.

Didsbury Festival

The annual community festival held in Didsbury park is always busy and vibrant. This year our stall will concentrate on the Afghan women's rights campaign and will probably feature purple fingers!



We need volunteers to help on the stall (2 hour sessions between 12 to 4 pm). If you can help, please contact Sameena asap: sameenadk@yahoo.com

Event for Syria

British Syrians and Syria Relief are planning an event on 29th June which will be similar to the one they did in 2012 over in Wilmslow to raise awareness and funds for the work they do for the people of Syria. It is in the very early planning stages so all we have is the date at the moment but please "save the date" if you want to come along and help out. We had a stall last year with a photo action, letter writing to the Syrian and Russian regimes and information about AI's research in Syria. We even got on Al Jazeera TV!

Literature Festival

We can confirm a fantastic speaker for our Literature Festival event on 19th October - London-based writer, critic and broadcaster, Bidisha. - SAVE THE DATE!

Specialising in social justice and international affairs, Bidisha is a 2013 International Reporting Project Fellow working to raise awareness of global development issues. To see more of her writing, blogs, information about the many awards she has won see: <http://bidisha-online.blogspot.co.uk/p/biog.html>

Bidisha will be reading from her new book, Beyond the Wall: Writing a Path Through Palestine, described as 'an unflinching portrait of life in the West Bank'. The book draws on testimonies given by activists, ordinary citizens, international aid workers and foreign visitors. It also draws upon Bidisha's own personal experience of the West Bank's checkpoint culture. The event will bring to light the often hard-to-grasp reality of life in an occupied territory. It reveals

the diversity of experience and different aspects of the occupation, focusing on a variety of locations.

Group Meetings

2nd Wednesday each month
Cross Street Chapel - 7.30pm

8th May

Workshop on the Afghan Women Campaign – see above

12th June

Speaker - Ian Harvey, a social worker from the UK, who lives in Lubumbashi, DRC and works alongside a Congolese team as Project Manager for a charity supporting street children: see www.kimbiliocongo.org for more info.

If you are in town, why not join a few of us for a pre meeting meal at Grinch, immediately adjacent to Cross St Chapel. We normally gather before each meeting just after 6pm.

Regional Conference

The next North West Regional Conference will be in Manchester, provisional date is Saturday 16th November 2013. We hope to confirm the venue this week and then we will need to get down to planning the programme. The planning is led by the NW Regional rep, Jennifer Jaynes, with a small group from around the NW. However, the Manchester Group will need to provide local know-how and support. If you would like to be in a Manchester Group sub-group inputting into the planning and organisation of the conference, email anne.walker9@ntlworld.com.

Group Calendar

Month	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct
Group Meeting	Workshop on Afghan Women	Speaker on street children	Burmese Speaker			
Events	Letter writing(18 th)	Didsbury Festival (8 th) Syrian event (29 th)	Letter writing (20 th)	Pride Parade (24 th)	Street Collection (28 th) Letter writing (21 st)	Manchester Lit Festival (19 th)

Subscriptions please.

Annual donations from members are vital to keep the Group going. The suggested sum is £20pa if you have a wage, £3 otherwise, or whatever you can afford to give. If you haven't already donated this year, please bring your cash or cheque to the next meeting or contact the Treasurer (manchestergroup@amnesty.org.uk) if you aren't going to be at a meeting in the near future and he will tell you how to get the money to him.

Thanks!