



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

May 2016

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Campaigning

Burma (Myanmar)

Nearly all the news that has come out of Burma/Myanmar is good, and leads to rejoicing and a sense of hard work worth doing.

At the beginning of last month we heard that **Phyoe Phyoe Aung** a student leader who had been arrested, convicted and imprisoned in 2015 had been released. She featured in April's Monthly Action but was released before most of us could take action! Her name was included in one of the first wave of presidential amnesties announced soon after the new Government took over on April 1st. She was one of a number of students who were released at the same time. Her husband, who was arrested soon after she was, was also released. Phyoe Phyoe Aung wrote to Amnesty supporters thanking all who had campaigned for her, and for others.



Towards the end of April, we heard that the **Unity 5** have been released in the most recent wave of amnesties. They are a group of journalists who were arrested because they had written an article for their Magazine - Unity – revealing the existence of a weapons factory which up to that point was known only to Government defence workers. Their sentence was long, and their release is a cause for joy. The hope now is that the new government will see its way to repealing the laws which up to now have made it possible to arrest, charge, try and convict any who protest peacefully against government laws and decisions, thus being deprived of their freedom of expression.

There is still in Burma/Myanmar an area where human rights are violated, and this concerns the situation of the Rohingya people - a group from Bengal (as it was then) who migrated to Burma several generations ago, and have never been granted full citizenship. The fact that they are predominantly Muslims adds to their risk of being persecuted. At this moment many of them are in displaced persons camps on the Thai border. Jean Mary plans to ask the Burma co-ordinator if there are any intentions to campaign on this issue.



In a recent statement Aung San Suu Kyi said it is acceptable for people to use either Burma or Myanmar when referring to the country. Both are equally acceptable.

Middle East

At the National conference, we discovered that AI, in conjunction with Human Rights Watch, had recently sent a letter to the leader of Manchester City Council outlining human rights abuses in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and urging the council to use its links with the UAE to raise these issues. The concerns cover a wide range of human rights abuses, including the exploitation of migrant workers, intolerance of peaceful dissent, the use of torture and arbitrary detention and discrimination against women.

As the local group, we are now pursuing this approach with members of the council. We recently opted into work on the Middle East and are discussing taking on long term casework.

North Africa

The two year international 'My Body My Rights' campaign will be ending this month and here is a summary of the current situation in some Northern African countries concerning the rights of women.

ALGERIA: In Dec 2015 Algeria's Council of the Nation (Upper House) approved amendments to the Penal Code criminalising violence against women. However, there are still provisions that allow the offender to escape prosecution if the victim forgives them, unless death or permanent disability is caused. This can expose victims to higher risks of pressure or violence aimed at forcing them to withdraw their complaint. Amnesty International has called on the Algerian authorities to approve the amendments minus the problematic provisions. The Algerian Minister of National Solidarity, Family and Women recently announced the launch of a 2016 project designed to survey the prevalence of violence against women in Algeria.

MOROCCO: In Oct 2015 Morocco's National Human Rights Council released a report on gender equality calling on the Moroccan authorities to amend the Family Code in order to give women equal rights in marriage, divorce, relationships with children and inheritance. This proposal was met with criticism from the conservative members of Parliament and the Moroccan media. In Jan 2016 Morocco's Minister of Women, Family and Social Development announced that a long-awaited draft law on violence against women had now been submitted to the General Secretariat of the government.

TUNISIA: In Nov 2015 Amnesty International released a report stating that loopholes in Tunisia's laws are granting perpetrators of rape, sexual assault and physical violence a way out while their victims are frequently punished and blamed when they report the crimes against them. Deputy Director of AI's Middle

East and North Africa Programme, Said Boumedouha, stated that 'a combination of archaic laws, ineffective policing and ingrained gender stereotypes make it difficult for women to seek justice for crimes committed against them and sometimes they are even prosecuted as criminals'. He added that 'despite positive reforms over the years, in Tunisia today, rapists and kidnapers of teenage women can still get off scot-free if they marry their victim. Women who report marital rape or family violence are shamed into withdrawing their complaints. Gay men or lesbians who report abuse are more likely to be prosecuted than their attackers. In some cases police officers are even the perpetrators of abuse.'

We have received two actions on Egypt this month. Simona will bring letters to the Egyptian authorities for signing at the group meeting but feel free to send your own appeal. Casesheets attached with this newsletter.

Next Letter Writing Session

Saturday May 21st 2-4pm
The Eighth Day Café, Oxford Road
Case sheets, pen and paper provided.

All Welcome.

Mark the end of the two year Stop Torture campaign by writing letters on behalf of cases involving the use of torture.

Monthly Action

Azerbaijan: Journalist, Khadija Ismayilova



This month's Individual at Risk case is Khadija Ismayilova, an award-winning Azerbaijani journalist and prisoner of conscience. Khadija Ismayilova is an award-winning Azerbaijani investigative journalist and an outspoken government critic who has published numerous articles exposing human rights violations and corruption at the highest levels in the country. The authorities punished her first by running a prolonged and retaliatory smear

campaign in the state-controlled media and later by bringing trumped-up criminal charges against her, including tax evasion, embezzlement and illegal business. Khadija was detained on 5 December 2014 and was sentenced to seven-and-a-half years of imprisonment on 1 September 2015. She is a prisoner of conscience and must be released immediately.

Refugee Rights

True or False quiz based on facts and figures about refugees:

- In Jordan and Lebanon, approximately one third of the population are refugees. T/F?
- The highest proportion are children under 12 years old. T/F?
- A single refugee camp in Kenya is home to 350,000 Somali refugees. T/F?

The overall aim of the forthcoming "People on the Move" campaign is to increase global responsibility sharing and international cooperation in order to ensure that refugees are able to access their rights. A crucial aspect of the campaign will be challenging and changing attitudes towards refugees at every level. The campaign is still under development, but a rough timeline of events over the next few months:

- July: focus of the AIUK campaign to be chosen and objectives developed
- August: materials produced
- September: Campaign launch
- October: AIUK activists skills share event

In the meantime, AIUK's current work on refugee and asylum issues continues and the Manchester AI subgroup on refugees and asylum seekers met recently to discuss plans for our involvement in Refugee Week. We are currently exploring the possibility of teaming up with another local group such as City of Sanctuary. More details to come.

Quiz results: True-True-True

Children's Human Rights

We are still looking for someone to take on leading our involvement in this network due to Becky having moved to London, at least on a temporary basis. This would involve receiving emails from the network and distributing the actions to the group, either via the newsletter or at group meetings. Most of the actions involve sending appeals on behalf of individuals or groups.

Group News

Group Meeting

Normally held 2nd Wednesday each month - 7.30pm.

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

Wednesday 11th May – Kieran Aldred, AIUK Advocacy Officer

Kieran is a member of the AIUK staff and will be in Manchester for the meeting with Manchester City councillors (see UAE article). He has agreed to come up early so that he can meet us all and plans to talk about AIUK's advocacy work, the role that local groups can play in this and help us explore how we can do this.

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

Highlights from the National Conference

Six of us made the trip to Nottingham for the annual National Conference, with Jean Mary joining us for the Saturday (sorry Jean, you missed the group photo).



We heard inspirational speakers, took part in debate on resolutions, learnt a lot from the workshops and met lots of committed Amnesty people.



The main business of the weekend is to debate and vote on the resolutions which set policy for AIUK. This year we had a large number of resolutions concerning AIUK governance, as the work of the Governance Working Party draws to a close. Thank goodness for the introduction of electronic voting which speeded things up considerably.

Most of these resolutions were carried comfortably although conference decided to not to have the Board chair as future conference chair but to continue with the tradition of electing a separate conference chair (the marvellous Alex Pool will chair again next year!) Conference also decided to require the chair of the AIUK board to be from the elected board members and to keep the current requirements for calling an Extraordinary General Meeting.

Most other resolutions passed comfortably although there was lively debate on the one instructing AIUK to take forward for discussion with the international movement the AIUK position on wider access to legal and safe abortion services based on a women's right to choose. Mary took part in this debate – see picture on the right. Full details on the resolutions can be found at <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/national-conference-agm-2016>.



Laura and Mary attended the workshop 'Syria - How to End the Suffering' led by Kristyan Benedict, Campaign Manager - Crisis and Tactical at AIUK (@KreaseChan). Kristyan discussed human rights benchmarks which must be met to ensure civilian protection and what else AIUK is doing to increase long term protection for Syrians, including working to empower local human rights defenders to strengthen civil society. We also had the opportunity to try out the Syria 360 VR headsets during this year's AGM, and we are hoping to bring them along to Didsbury Festival in a few weeks time!

As always, Kate Allen gave an inspiring review of the year, describing 2015 as 'a year of borders' and looked forward to the international 'People on the Move' campaign which Amnesty will be launching in September. We also heard from a keynote panel on the refugee crisis with all agreeing that it was sad to see the Europe that had led on drafting the International Refugee Convention in 1951 after the experience of the second world war, only seems to view refugees as a security threat in 2016. On Sunday afternoon we were treated to a moving talk by Sue Lukes, Director of Migration Work CIC, chair of Music in Detention and Director the Strategic Legal Fund for Refugee Children. Sue talked about her family history in relation to the Holocaust and highlighted some alarming similarities between the punitive laws enacted by the Nazis against Jews, and the government's Immigration Bill. For more information about Sue and her work, please see her website: www.suelukes.com. We ended the conference with an action to express our stance on the refugee issue.



↑
Heather as part of an art installation illustrating what people will do to cross borders.

Volunteers needed!

Anne is opening her garden again this year as part of the Heaton's Open Gardens event on Sunday May 15th. Last year we ran the 'Egg Game' at the entrance to the garden and made a good profit from the 400 or so people who visited the garden. Weather permitting, we hope to do the same this year but we need volunteers to run the stall, you need to be able to get up to Heaton Moor and the garden is open between 12pm and 5pm. If we have a few volunteers, we can spread the load.

Email Anne anne.walker9@ntlworld.com NOW.

We will also be needing volunteers to help out at a stall at the Didsbury Festival, help out at our next Acoustic Amnesty and to take part in the Manchester Pride parade. Make a note of the dates now and get your name down!

Didsbury Festival

Sunday Saturday 11th June
Names to Henrike henrikegreuel@gmx.de

Acoustic Amnesty

Friday July 29th

Pride Parade

Saturday 27th August
Names to Laura laura.barsby@yahoo.co.uk
Planning meeting 5th June, 5.30pm
Tampopo, Corn Exchange

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.

Other News

Chamber Music Concert

Sunday 5th June, 8pm

£5 on the door - informal atmosphere - cash bar
The Wonder Inn, 29 Shudehill, M4 2AF

Save a date in your diary for the Eblana String Trio and friends in the snug and relaxed surroundings of the Wonder Inn, where a collection of the UK's most versatile and creative chamber musicians will gather to present jewels of the repertoire, all in aid of Amnesty International's Manchester Group.



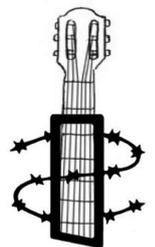
Acoustic Amnesty for Manchester & Salford Women 's Aid

Just released - a new Acoustic Amnesty album raising money for Manchester and Salford Women's Aid.

This is a live recording of the full concert at Sacred Trinity Church, Salford on July 16th 2015. Featuring solo and collaborative performances from Little Sparrow (aka Katie Ware), Becca Williams, Leonie Kate Higgins, Raevannan Husbandes and Tracey Browne. Selected performance poetry by Rose Condo and Louise Fazackerley is also featured, as performed on the night.

This is an ambient recording using six microphones positioned in different parts of the venue, as such you will hear human sounds like the occasional crying baby or person seated close to a microphone humming along. We like to think that this adds to the experience of being there at the time and hope that you enjoy listening.

<http://traceybrowne.bandcamp.com/album/acoustic-amnesty-for-manchester-salford-womens-aid>



Liverpool Amnesty Event

At The Unitarian Church Hall, Ullet Road Liverpool
Saturday 21st May 2016, 7.30-11.00

Bob Dylan's Music
in
Chimes of Freedom
An interactive journey of discovery and wonder.
See flyer for more details.

Join the revolution against FGM and Child Marriage

Amnesty works with communities in Sierra Leone and Burkina on these issues. Donations for this work received between 18th April and 18th July will be matched under the Department for International Development (DfID) Aid Match scheme.

See www.amnesty.org.uk/grouprevolution