



# MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

November 2015

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

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## October Events

### BIHR Human Rights Tour

At the beginning of October, we were delighted to host a meeting of the British Institute of Human rights as part of their 15 day Human Rights tour 2015 in celebration of 15 years of the UK Human Rights Act (HRA).

We heard from Sanchita Hosali (Deputy Director BIHR) and Stephanie Davies (Human Rights Officer at BIHR) who explained what the HRA covers, how it works and how it is used to protect the vulnerable in the UK.

We had a lively discussion and those that attended are now better informed to take part in the forthcoming government consultation on the future of the Human Right Act.



### Amnesty International event at the Manchester Literature Festival.

The following weekend we held a sell out event, Asylum and Exile, at Cross Street Chapel in association with Manchester Literature Festival making £192.50 for Amnesty funds.

We heard journalist, critic and broadcaster, Bidisha, talk about her book Asylum and Exile: The Hidden Voices of London, based on her work with refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented people. The discussion, followed by a lively question and answer session, brought up many disturbing and moving accounts of those forced to seek sanctuary. Bidisha spoke powerfully about her visits to UK detention centres and the stories she heard from asylum seekers, illuminating the human stories which often get lost behind the headlines and statistics.



### North West Regional Conference

The weekend after that, 5 of us attended the North West conference in Blackburn. We listened to the harrowing stories of Dr Charles Dotou and Eman Mashhour, refugees and human rights defenders from Senegal and Yemen, ate fantastic food prepared and served by refugees and asylum seekers from the area and followed the drum playing of a refugee from the Ivory Coast, while chanting "Refugees are Welcome Here" on our street action through the town. We also heard speakers from the Amnesty Board and from the Asylum Justice Project and attended workshops (actually! Laura and Anne both lead workshops on 'My Body My Rights' and 'Increasing our impact')



### Meeting with members of Manchester City Council.

The day before the President Xi Jinping of China arrived in Manchester we were invited to a meeting in the Town Hall, with members the city council, the MEP Theresa Griffin, representatives of the Falun Gong (a sect that suffers appalling persecution in China) and the University Amnesty group to discuss human rights in China. The councillors present stated that they will be investigating how information of human rights can inform the council's interaction with other countries.

# Campaigning

## SAVE THE HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

The Human Rights Act protects the fundamental rights we all have as human beings, and allows us to challenge authorities if they violate them. You might not have used it, but it's there if you need it. It is now under threat

### Petition

If you haven't already signed the AI petition to Michael Gove  
DO IT NOW:

<http://savetheact.uk/#signup-form>

### Skill Share Day

There will be a skill share day at AIUK in London on November 28th with a chance for activists to come together for an informative day on the Human Rights Act, and AIUK's next plans for the campaign to save it. It would be good to have a Manchester representative. If you are interested in going, email [anne.walker9@ntlworld.com](mailto:anne.walker9@ntlworld.com).



### The Human Rights Act challenge

AIUK are challenging us to come up with the most creative way to visually represent the Human Rights Act. **Prizes will be given to the best ones.** Winning entries will be used to help promote the campaign.

We will need to send us a photo or video of our action to AIUK by 31st January 2016



Inspiration required!

We can create any type of content we want but will be judged on these

criteria:

- Most creative
- Reached out to the most people/engaged new audiences
- Best representation of a HRA right/the act itself!

We will brainstorm ideas at the November meeting – get thinking!

## Asylum Justice Project

### Urgent Immigration Bill Action

Now is a key time to contact your MP about raising two important issues that **must be included in the Immigration Bill**.

- **Ending Indefinite Detention**
- **Extending Refugee Family Reunification**

Please write or email your MP, or request a meeting with them to discuss these further. See full Action sent out with this newsletter for more details.

### Take Action:

Contact your MP to End Indefinite Detention and Extend Refugee Family Reunion

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION BEFORE 23 NOVEMBER.**

## Individuals at Risk

### Write For Rights 2015

This year we are involved with The Challenge (a young people's citizenship project) who plan to take the Write for Rights campaign onto the streets in the northern quarter on Saturday 21st November. The event will be based at MadLab on Edge Street and if you are free it would be great to have as much support for the young people as possible (look out for more details nearer the time!)

We have two events on Saturday 28th November:

- We will be holding our usual bimonthly letter-writing session at Eighth Day Café on Oxford Road using the cases featured in this year's Write for Rights Campaign. Please come along if you have time between 2-4pm - all materials & help with composing letters will be provided! It's a chance to meet other members as well over a cuppa and delicious cake!
- We have also been invited to have a stall at the marvellous annual Amnesty event organised by the Whalley Range Peace and Justice group on the same day – volunteers needed! – email [anne.walker9@ntlworld.com](mailto:anne.walker9@ntlworld.com).

We may also run stalls at other venues in December so please watch this space! If you would be interested in using Write for Rights materials in your local church/book group/work place/neighbourhood event please feel free to get in touch with Hazel ([hazellerrey@gmail.com](mailto:hazellerrey@gmail.com)) for any information or ideas.'

### Good News

It is sometimes difficult to gauge the impact our letters have on cases. So AIUK have compiled some good news stories from recent Urgent Actions!

**UA192/15 – INDEFINITE EXECUTION STAYS IN OKLAHOMA CASES** On 30 September the Governor of Oklahoma issued a 37-day stay of execution for Richard Glossip minutes before he was due to be killed, after the prison department revealed it did not have one of the drugs required for the lethal injection. The state Attorney General has now obtained indefinite stays of execution in this and two other cases.

**UA196/15 – GOVERNMENT ABANDONS PROCESS TO CLOSE NGO IN ECUADOR** Ecuadorian Authorities have abandoned their plans to shut down freedom of expression organization Fundamedios. This is a welcome move which will allow Fundamedios to continue carrying out their legitimate human rights work.

**UA207/15 - MISSOURI GOVERNOR COMMUTES DEATH SENTENCE** The Governor of Missouri commuted the death sentence of Kimber Edwards to life imprisonment without the

possibility of parole four days before he was due to be put to death. He had been sentenced to death following his conviction of murder, which he has maintained he did not do.

**UA128/15 – VIETNAMESE PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE TA PHONG TAN RELEASED** Vietnamese blogger and prisoner of conscience Ta Phong Tan (f) was released on 19 September after serving four years of a 10-year prison sentence. She was immediately put on a plane to Los Angeles, in the USA, where she is now effectively in exile. She has thanked everyone for their “continuous and tireless advocacy on my case” which resulted in her release.

**UA186/15 – DALIT FAMILY TO BE PROVIDED WITH PROTECTION** The Supreme Court in India has ordered the Delhi police to provide protection to two sisters and their family after they fled their village in Baghpat, Uttar Pradesh, fearing for their safety. The sisters had been ordered to be raped by the unelected all-male village council, after their brother eloped with a married woman from a Jat (dominant caste) family. This led to an international outcry and a huge number of appeals from Amnesty International activists.

**UA176/15: COURT BLOCKS EXECUTION OF NICARAGUAN MAN** A Texas appeals court issued a stay of execution in the case of Bernardo Abán Tercero (m) a day before he was due to be put to death for the murder in March 1997 of Robert Berger during a robbery of a Houston dry-cleaning business. The stay has been granted so that the courts can consider the claim that the prosecution presented false testimony at the 2000 trial.

## Next Letter Writing Session

**Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> November 2-4pm**  
The Eighth Day Café, Oxford Road  
Case sheets, pen and paper provided.

Come and take part in this year's  
Write for Rights Campaign

*All Welcome.*

## Southern Africa

At the November meeting Simona will bring along a letter and a solidarity card for us all to sign.

The letter is a follow up on 2 activists in Angola, calling for the release of one of them (Jose Marcos Mavungo) and for the

second (Arao Bula Tempo) to receive medical care where needed.

The card is for WOZA in ZIMBABWE to show our support for their struggle for human rights in Zimbabwe

## Stop Torture

### GOOD NEWS – Shaker Aamer released

After more than 13 years, Shaker Aamer, the last remaining British resident in Guantanamo Bay has been released.

For more info please visit:

<http://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/shaker-aamer-reports-hes-being-returned-uk-welcomed>

<http://www.amnesty.org.uk/blogs/campaigns/shaker-aamer-released-guantanamo-bay>

### EU Tools of Torture vote passed

On 27 October the European Parliament voted overwhelmingly to support our position on closing the loopholes, in the EU regulation which prohibits the trade in torture equipment. The vote was in the region of 630 – 30 in favour of our calls.

Activists across the country have been lobbying their Members of the European parliament (MEPs) for the past year to secure this fantastic outcome. The EU member states, European Commission and MEPs will now come together to agree the final text, before it becomes law.

<http://www.amnesty.org.uk/ending-europes-trade-torture-equipment#.VijiWdLhDct>

### Mexico Stop Torture briefing launched

The briefing highlights how Mexico's torture epidemic has reached new catastrophic levels with reports of asphyxiation, rape and other sexual abuse, electric shocks and beatings at the federal level more than doubling in the last year.

[http://www.amnesty.org.uk/webfm\\_send/1771](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/webfm_send/1771)

### Morocco – Ali Aarrass

Ali Aarrass is currently on hunger strike in protest at his ongoing detention. There are concerns that his health is failing and he is in need of medical treatment. Amnesty has launched an Urgent Action in response

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde29/2702/2015/en>

## Women's Rights, Burma (Myanmar), South America, Children's Human Rights

No updates this month

## Group News

### Acoustic Amnesty

**Friday December 11<sup>th</sup> Sacred Trinity Church**

Acoustic Amnesty returns building on the most beautiful night last time out. On the bill this time are Tracey Browne, Little Sparrow, Leonie Kate Higgins, Jacob H James and Becca Williams. The musicians will all be on stage together and will perform solo, duets and as an acoustic supergroup. The gig will be seated and totally unamplified, utilising the venue's natural acoustics. There will be a well-stocked bar in a separate room. Tickets are now on sale from <http://www.wegotickets.com/event/334698> or will be available at our November meeting.

**Flyer attached – please distribute!**



## Christmas Cards

Send Amnesty Christmas cards this year!

We have already sold £200 pounds worth at a Christmas Card fair in Stockport – they were very popular. We will have them available for sale at our November meeting and at our events in the run up to Christmas.

All packs £3.95 – please bring the right change if possible.

## Change of Venue from January

We have been looking for an alternative location for our regular meetings for some time as we end up paying a significant portion of our fundraising for the use of our current venue. Café bar Terrace, in the Northern Quarter, have offered us the use of their upstairs room free of charge. It is slightly smaller than our present location and does not have a kitchen area. However they promise us a kettle so that we can make our drinks, although some of you might like to use the downstairs bar.

From our January meeting we will move to our new home – more details next month!

## Next Group Meeting

Normally held 2nd Wednesday each month - Cross Street Chapel\* 7.30pm

**11<sup>th</sup> November**

Laura will lead a workshop on 'Increasing our Impact' and we will apply lessons learnt to the Human Rights Act Challenge

*Why not join a few of us for a pre-meeting drink/meal just after 6pm, this month we will be back at the Grinch on Chapel Walks – right next to Cross St Chapel*

\* Note change of venue from January 2016 – see article above.

## Other News

### Human Rights Course On Freedom Of Expression

Amnesty International will be running their first free massive open online course (MOOC) on human rights. This will be taking place from 17 November to 8 December 2015. Relevant cases from Write for Rights will be used to bring alive the right to Freedom of Expression through this short online course running for three weeks. You can take part & register here <https://www.edx.org/course/human-rights-right-freedom-expression-amnesty-internationalx-rights1x>

### Thematic Networks Conference

AIUK would like to invite you to their very first Amnesty UK Thematic Networks Conference on Sat 5 Dec. This conference is open to all members of Amnesty UK's LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex), Women's Action and Children's Human Rights Network

Whatever your experience of Amnesty and human rights - whether you're a seasoned campaigner or completely new to it - this day is for you and you will have the chance to understand more about Amnesty and its network, campaign to save Human Rights Act and meet like-minded people.

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/amnesty-uk-thematic-networks-conference-tickets-18907212983>.

### AIUK's Consultation on Abortion

At the AGM 2015, members voted that the Board of AIUK to conduct a review of member's view on Amnesty International's current stance on abortion. This online consultation can be completed by individuals and groups.

You can find the consultation questions at [www.amnesty.org.uk/consultation](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/consultation) - The link will be live on 3 November & the results will be shared in advance of the 2016 AGM.

Please note that the survey is on the member section of the website which is only available to AIUK members and supporters. To access this area, you'll need to sign in to the website by clicking on 'Sign in' in the top right hand corner. If you do not have an account, you'll need to register online first but please be aware that it may take up to a week for you to be able to access this area as our database is updated weekly.

### Write for Rights Craft Fair

The Glossop Group are holding a craft fair/ card writing session:

**Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> November,**  
10am – 2 pm  
Central Methodist Church  
Chapel St, Glossop

Refreshments available, including home made soup.