



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

September 2015

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

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Pride Parade!

*Thanks to all who marched with us at the fantastic Manchester Pride Parade
– especially the superb Bloco Mundo Samba Band!*



**Pride
2015**



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.

BIHR meeting

We have joined up with the British Institute of Human Rights to be part of their "15 Days of Action" roadshow in October. We have been allocated October 11th, a Sunday evening, to host a meeting. At the moment we are trying to find a venue – any ideas to Anne please (anne.walker9@ntlworld.com).

Petition

If you haven't already signed the AI petition – DO IT NOW:

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

Write to your MP

AIUK have produced a briefing for MPs and last month we asked you all to send it to your MP. If you haven't done it yet – do it now. If you've lost the briefing and sample letter Anne will happily email you another. She also wants to hear of any responses received. Email her at anne.walker9@ntlworld.com.

Twitter Q&A

Thanks to Becky for hosting a Human Rights Act Q&A on Twitter – she did lots of postings and got some interaction going. Definitely worth trying again as the campaign heats up once the government's consultation starts.

Women's Rights

Subgroup

Marie-Louise, who has jointly led our active Women's Rights for some time, has recently moved to Newcastle. We are sad to see her go and to lose her vitality and creativity from the group – we are sure that the Newcastle group will feel the benefit. We wish her all the best for the future.

This leaves us needing a new subgroup lead. Mary Gibbs has jointly carried out this role with Marie-Louise but, as she is away sailing a good part of the year, is not able to take it on by herself. Is there anyone out there who would like to get a bit more involved in this area of work and help her out? Email: laura.barsby@yahoo.co.uk to find out more.

El Salvador

The monthly action for September asks us to make keys with ribbons attached as part of the international My Body, My Rights campaign on sexual and reproductive rights. These keys will form part of a solidarity sculpture that Amnesty El Salvador is creating in November when they will host a week of action with a concert in San Salvador to highlight to Salvadorians and especially to young people the effect the total ban on abortion

has on women and girls in the country. The entire art piece which is in a shape of a tree growing in a cage will then be delivered to the Minister of Justice and Public Security.

The total ban on abortion is having a devastating effect on women and girls in El Salvador. In 2011, the World Health Organisation found that 11% of women and girls that sought an illegal abortion in El Salvador die as a result.

The restrictive laws in the country have meant that women are frequently charged with aggravated homicide when suffering complications following their pregnancies. When this happens, women who live in poverty are often less able to access a suitable legal defence and most likely to see their right to a fair trial violated. In these instances verdicts of the trials are often inevitable even if there is a lack of evidence or despite medical evidence indicating the women suffered a miscarriage. As a result women have been sentenced to up to 40 years in prison, in clear violation of their human rights.

Some women that Amnesty have spoken to have witnessed that they have not had time to recover from medical procedures and some women have reported waking up handcuffed to a hospital bed with police not medical staff at their bedside. They've had no time to see or speak to their families or children, as many of the women affected are young mothers.

Ilopango women's prison in a suburb of San Salvador is one of the prisons where women serve their sentences. Designed to hold 220 inmates, Ilopango now is home to nearly 2,000. The living conditions here are hard and women have to sit, lie and sleep in every available square inch of space, sometimes being 40 women sharing a cell. Most of the women who find themselves in Ilopango are young, single, poorly educated and living in poverty.

Additional reading: El Salvador Report – On the Brink of Death – violence against women and the abortion ban in El Salvador
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr29/003/2014/en/>

Individuals at Risk

We hold regular informal letter writing sessions at the Eighth Day Café on Oxford Road every two months, usually the last Saturday in the month. Come and be inspired to put pen to paper at our September session.

Next Letter Writing Session

Saturday 19th September 2-4pm

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

All Welcome.

Stop Torture.

As a result of concerns raised by Amnesty International and others, the EU introduced specific laws to restrict the trade in torture equipment in 2005. But there are loopholes that mean

certain types of trade or certain categories of torture equipment continue to be traded. The EU is currently reviewing the regulation banning the trade in equipment used for torture and the death penalty and we have a unique opportunity to close these loopholes.

From the 15-18 September the biennial DSEI Arms Fair returns to London. At past DSEI Fairs, Amnesty has uncovered torture equipment being illegally traded. At the last DSEI Fair in 2013 for example, Amnesty uncovered two companies advertising a variety of torture equipment, including electric shock batons and leg irons. Previous fairs have all seen a variety of illegal weapons including cluster bombs, leg irons and electric shock weapons advertised for sale.

A key loophole we wish to see closed in these EU torture trade laws relates to the ease by which companies can continue to promote market and advertise tools of torture at arms fairs within the EU.

The DSEI Arms Fair therefore gives us a great opportunity to pressure the UK Government to support our calls to close the loopholes in these EU tools of torture laws and to stop torture equipment being traded in the UK at DSEI and other UK defence and security exhibitions. At our September meeting we will be signing a letter from the group to the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills.

Online action - in September AIUK will launch a new online action targeting the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills. You will find this action at www.amnesty.org.uk/armsfair

'For those who want to learn more, the report, *Europe: Grasping the nettle: Ending Europe's trade in execution and torture technology* is available at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur01/1632/2015/en/>

Asylum Justice Project.

The AJP subgroup has been focusing on lobbying MPs on the UK's response to the Mediterranean crisis and on the recent and proposed cuts to asylum support.

From 10th August 2015, the Government introduced a new statutory instrument that reduced asylum support for all people seeking asylum to a single flat rate. This has substantially reduced the amount given to children seeking refugee protection. This is a devastating blow for families. Research by Refugee Action in 2012 demonstrated families were already struggling to eat properly, buy non-prescription medicine, or baby products such as nappies, formula milk or bottles. This decision means a couple with a child will soon be forced to live on just under £111 per week, 40% less than a comparative family living on income support.

On top of this, the government is now consulting on plans to cut off support entirely for refused asylum seeking families, a measure that will leave vulnerable families totally without any means of support, with no money for food and no accommodation.

Refugee organisations have expressed concern that these new measures will force children and vulnerable adults who have sought safety in the UK further into poverty and utter destitution,

breaking the spirit of the UK's history of welcoming refugees and safeguarding vulnerable children.

Please do write to your MP on this issue if you have not already done so.

On 18th August Heather and Lianne attended a meeting jointly organised by Refugee Action and Regional Asylum Activism NW, aimed at supporting volunteers to develop their skills of campaigning on asylum issues. The meetings take place on a monthly basis and we hope to have at least one member of the subgroup attend each time. Heather and Laura G are also hoping to set up a meeting with their local Conservative MP to discuss the Government's approach to asylum support.

Maryam is setting off for the Greek island of Kos to volunteer with a Dutch organisation providing help and support to the refugees who arrive there on their journey to safety. We look forward to hearing about her experience there.

At Manchester Pride there was a very enthusiastic response to our refugee theme, especially from this group of Ugandan refugees who attended the parade with the Leicester City of Sanctuary group.



Southern Africa

At our September meeting we will be signing a letter to the Angolan Minister of Justice and Human Rights and the General Prosecutor in Angola asking for the release of 15 activists, who are being detained without charge in Luanda, Angola. During a peaceful protest to request their release, some relatives and supporters have been attacked by police.

Burma (Myanmar)

We have been offered the Unity 5 as our new case for long term work. They are 5 journalists from the Unity paper, arrested, tried and convicted because they wrote critically about the government.

More details at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2015/04/journalists-silenced-in-myanmar-free-the-unity-five/>

Jean will be bringing actions to our next meeting.

South America

The South American subgroup had a first meeting last month, ideas were exchanged and activities are now being planned for

October. Everyone who would like to participate is warmly welcomed to join – email henrikegreuel@gmx.de.

This month we have an important petition to sign online. The Chilean Congress's Health Commission is currently debating a bill to decriminalise abortion. The Commission will vote on it on 8 September. During this crucial period, it is important to demonstrate to Chilean parliamentarians that there is widespread international support for the bill, so please sign the Petition:

<http://amnistia.cl/web/acciononline/call-on-chile-to-end-the-criminalization-of-abortion-in-all-circumstances/>

For those of you using Twitter, the hashtag of the campaign is #Desprotegidas, but AI Chile also recommends using #Aborto3causales, which is what other organizations are using.

Children's Human Rights

No update this month

Group News

Street Collection Saturday 26th September

We hold our annual Street Collection on Saturday 26th September in Manchester City Centre. This is an important fundraiser for us so we can continue to campaign for human rights worldwide. Campaigns cost money to organise, so every pound we collect really helps.



We are short of collectors this year – PLEASE spare an hour or two to shake a tin in the City Centre.

Either sign up at the September meeting, or contact, Sean Dunne, by email to sean.a.dunne@btinternet.com. Please let

Sean know what times you can be available - we will be starting at 10 a.m. and finishing at 4 p.m.

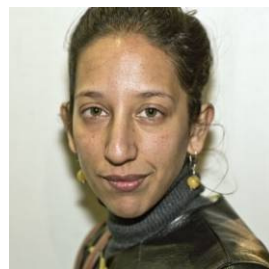
The more people we have on the streets, the more money we will collect!

**Volunteer
NOW!**

Acoustic Amnesty

Steve is planning another all female Acoustic Amnesty gig in aid of Manchester Women's aid and Manchester Amnesty later this year. Look out for further details coming soon!

Manchester Literature Festival



This year at the Manchester Literature Festival we are hosting to an afternoon with two inspiring writers on the theme of asylum and exile. We are pleased to welcome back journalist, critic and broadcaster Bidisha, who will introduce her 5th book, *Asylum and Exile: The Hidden Voices of London*, based on her outreach work with refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented people.

She will be joined by Gulwali Passarlay, whose first book, *The Lightless Sky: An Afghan Refugee Boy's Journey*, documents his passage from his homeland via Iran and the Mediterranean to Lancashire. Gulwali is about to graduate with a degree in Philosophy and Politics from The University of Manchester. Their talk will be followed by a Q&A and book signing.

Proceeds from this event will go to Manchester Amnesty International Group.

Asylum and Exile

Saturday 17th October, 2pm

Cross Street Chapel

Tickets £7/£5 concessions

Booking (*now open*) on 0843 208 0500 or

Manchesterliteraturefestival.co.uk

Next Group Meeting

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

9th September – let's catch up with all our campaigns now that summer is over and have fun creating the keys for the El Salvador action

*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*

Other News

North West Conference

Amnesty International UK North West Conference 2015

Bank Top Neighbourhood Learning Centre,
Arthur Way, Blackburn, BB2 1QP
Saturday 24th October 2015, 10am - 4pm

ASYLUM JUSTICE

Eman Mashehor (Yemen)
hosts "Work with Women
and Their Human Rights"

Dr Charles Raymond
Dotou (Senegal) on the
experience of asylum

Speaker from Asylum
Justice Project

Workshops include
"Working Effectively" and
"My Body, My Rights"

Updates from the AIUK
Board

Action stalls for
Guatemala, Morocco,
and East Africa

Street Action through
Blackburn

Lunch included

Register online at <http://aiuknw2015.eventbrite.com>
Or, e-mail sameenadk@yahoo.com to reserve your place and mail this form
to: Sameena Mattheissen, 22 Leaf Street, Manchester, M15 5LE. Tel: 07904 899569
Please send ____ tickets @ £8 each / unwaged £5 each.
I enclose a cheque for £____ payable to "Manchester Amnesty International"
Tickets in the name(s) of: _____
Address: _____
Phone: _____ E-mail: _____ Age if under 18: _____
Do you belong to an AI group or network? If so, which? _____
Do you have any dietary or access requirements? _____

Campaign Against the Arms Trade

Join the protests in London

Join the Stop the Arms Fair coalition from 7 September for a week of action outside the ExCel centre in London Docklands, to make it as difficult as possible for it to go ahead. More information on the week of action is available on the Stop the Arms Fair website at www.stopthearmsfair.org.uk.

Week of Action: 7 - 12 September

- Monday 7 September: [Stop Arming Israel](#)
- Tuesday 8 September: [No Faith in War](#)
- Wednesday 9 September: [Stop the Arms Fair: Arms to Renewables](#)
- Thursday 10 September: [Study War no More](#)
- Friday 11 September: [Freedom of Movement for People not Weapons](#)

Saturday 12 September: Big day of action! If you can only make it to one event, this is the one to join! There are plans to travel together from Manchester to London for the Big Day of Action- please contact nadkc@live.co.uk if you would like to book a coach space.

See <http://www.stopthearmsfair.org.uk/events/> for full details.

Can't make it to London? Join the action in Manchester!

Saturday 12th September, 11am - 1pm, Piccadilly Gardens, Manchester

Join Manchester PSC, CAAT and Manchester CND for a fantastic creative action in Picadilly Gardens, with costumes, banners and lots of energy! The group will be setting up a spoof arms sales unit where 'arms dealers' will be selling their weapons

to anyone passing by and sharing information about DSEI, and the Israeli and International arms companies doing business there. Meanwhile, NHS staff will be begging for the taxpayers money that gets invested in the arms trade to be reinvested in our health service and other welfare needs.

Come along on the day and help out, or contact Sandy at Manchester PSC if you'd like to help organise the action: sandybroadhurst@btinternet.com.

Meeting on Cuba



CUBA
What now for the revolution?

A new chapter has opened in the defence of Cuba's sovereignty and its socialist revolution, with the opening of negotiations with the USA and the freeing of the Cuban Five.

What threats and challenges lie ahead?
What difference will it make to daily life?
Has the blockade been lifted?
Is this the end of US hostility?
What now for the solidarity movement?

Speakers
Steve Ludlam, Senior politics lecturer, Sheffield University and Cuba Solidarity Campaign Executive
Caroline Bellamy, GMB member and guest of the CTC (Cuban trades union federation) at May Day 2015 march in Havana

Followed by discussion

Thursday 24th September 6.30pm
Room G3, Friends' Meeting House,
6 Mount Street, Manchester M2 5NS

Organised by Manchester Cuba Solidarity Campaign,
csc.mcr@poptel.org

Sex Worker Policy

You may have picked up that Amnesty International's International council meeting in Dublin last month adopted a resolution which authorised the International Board to develop and adopt a policy that supports the full decriminalisation of all aspects of consensual sex work. The policy will also call on states to ensure that sex workers enjoy full and equal legal protection from exploitation, trafficking and violence.

More info at:

<http://www.amnesty.org.uk/global-movement-votes-adopt-policy-protect-human-rights-sex-workers#.VeQpdM-FPIW>

AIUK's Constitution

At the 2015 AGM members voted that the Board should complete a comprehensive review of **AIUK Section's Constitution** with a view to proposing a revised, updated Constitution to the 2016 AGM. AIUK are running a consultation on the proposed changes to get comments and feedback to inform resolutions which will recommend revisions to the Constitution. This online consultation can be completed by individuals and groups and will be open until **Monday 2 November 2015**. You can find the consultation questions at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/AIUK2015>. The detailed consultation proposals will be in the September edition of the Amnesty Magazine and on the members page of the website at <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/2015Review>