



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

September 2016

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

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Get involved now!

Street Collection

Saturday 17th September

This is a major fund raiser for us when we go out onto the city centre streets with our collecting tins and sashes. We are short of collectors this year – **Please volunteer** as the more collectors that we get out – the more visible we are and the more money we will collect.



Either sign up at the group 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. Our headquarters will be in the vestry of St Ann's Church.

UAE street action and subgroup

We are currently working on the case of prisoner of conscience Mohammed al-Roken, a human rights lawyer sentenced to ten years in prison in the United Arab Emirates. See below for more details. Given Manchester's links with the UAE, this is a priority campaign for the group.

On **Sunday 25th September** the Manchester Amnesty group will hold a celebration of Mohammed's birthday, which will also provide an opportunity for local Manchester citizens to show their solidarity with the campaign for Mohammed's release.

Date: Sunday 25th September 2016 **Time:** 1.00pm – 4.00pm **Place:** St Ann's Square

At the moment the UAE subgroup consists of Henrike and Heather. As this campaign is going to be a main focus for the Manchester group over an extended period of time, it is vital that as many members as possible offer their support with the actions that we will be taking. If you are able to help with the event on 25th September, or if you would like to join the subgroup and be actively involved in the future planning of the campaign, please contact Henrike or Heather: henrikegreuel@gmx.de / heathercard12@gmail.com

Volunteers
needed for
subgroup

Come and join
the birthday
party

Get involved in this important campaign!

Lobbying sub group

Kieran Aldred, AIUK Advocacy Officer, came along to our May meeting and inspired us to be more effective in our lobbying of MPs and councillors etc. He recommended that we work out which MPs our membership covers, who is willing to contact which MP and what their interests are so that can more effectively target our lobbying. As we have some 233 members on the email list and Greater Manchester covers 27 constituencies, we need a couple of volunteers to get this background research sorted.

Can you help? – contact manchestergroup@amnesty.org.uk.

Group Meeting

Normally held 2nd Wednesday each month - 7.30pm.

Wednesday 14th September: Jane Graystone from City of Sanctuary

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

MadLab is just a short walk from Deansgate, very close to Salford Central train station and on many bus routes. There is also plenty of on street parking in the streets behind.

This month we have a speaker from City of Sanctuary who we raised money for at our last Acoustic Amnesty. Their aim is to make Manchester a welcoming city, open and fair for all.

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

Campaigning

United Arab Emirates

Mohammed al-Roken

In June the Manchester Amnesty group took on the case of Mohammed al-Roken, a human rights lawyer sentenced to ten years in prison in July 2013 in the United Arab Emirates for his human rights work and political activism. He paid with his own freedom for standing up for the rights and freedoms of others. Amnesty International believes that Mohammed is a prisoner of conscience, arrested for his human rights work, and that he should be immediately and unconditionally released.



The Background

Since 2011, with the rise of the Arab Spring, there has been a particularly strong crackdown on human rights activists in the UAE. In March 2011, Mohammed al-Roken was one of 133 individuals who signed a petition calling for democratic reform in the UAE. In July 2012, 94 individuals, including Mohammed, were arrested. The "UAE 94" were put on trial in July 2013, charged with forming a secret organisation aimed at overthrowing the government. In the run up to the trial, Mohammed and his co-defendants were denied access to a lawyer and kept in solitary confinement. Some told the judges they had been tortured, and confessions obtained through torture were used as evidence in court. 68 of the defendants, including Mohammed, were found guilty and sentenced to between 7 and 15 years in prison. They were all denied the right to appeal, in contravention of international law.

Mohammed al-Roken is a long-standing member of Amnesty International, and before his arrest he was a key contact for external human rights organisations such as Amnesty and Human Rights Watch. In recent years it has become increasingly difficult for such organisations to obtain information on human rights abuses taking place in the country and to gain any influence with the authorities. Since the beginning of 2014, the UAE authorities have prevented senior representatives from Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch from entering the country and have blacklisted Human Rights Watch's UAE researcher from the country.

The Manchester Connection

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch identified Manchester as a city well-placed to campaign on human rights abuses in the UAE, for two key reasons:

- Manchester has a proud history of supporting movements campaigning for equality, democracy and human rights, including the anti-slavery movement, the Suffragettes and pro-democracy demonstrations, as commemorated recently at the Peterloo memorial event. Mohammed al-Roken has been imprisoned for standing up for the very same values that citizens of Manchester have fought so hard to uphold.
- Manchester City Council is engaged in a close commercial relationship with senior figures in the UAE government, in particular through its stake in the Manchester Life Development Company (MLDC). This is a joint venture, ultimately controlled by the Abu Dhabi United Group for Investment and Development (ADUG), which also owns

Manchester City Football Club. The city of Manchester has gained significant financial benefits from these strong commercial links, especially through investment in regeneration and house-building.

In March, a joint letter from Human Rights Watch and the International Secretariat of Amnesty International was sent to the leader of Manchester City Council, Sir Richard Leese. The letter outlined deep concerns over the serious and systematic abuse of human rights in the UAE, and called upon the Council, in the context of their commercial relationships with senior figures in the UAE government, to urge the UAE authorities to take steps to end the serious human rights abuses taking place in that country. This was followed in April by a letter to Khaldoon al-Mubarak, Chairman of Manchester City Football Club.

As a local group, we were made aware of the approaches by the I.S. of Amnesty to Manchester City Council when we attended the AIUK National Conference and AGM in April. Since then we have been proactive in offering our involvement and support for this campaign. As citizens of Manchester, we are much better placed than international representatives for generating local support and lobbying the council and local MPs to demonstrate publicly their concern regarding human rights in the UAE.

Our actions so far

April/May: contacted known councillors, with whom we already had links, drawing their attention to the letter from AI and HRW. Initial meeting with: Cllr Mandie Shilton Godwin; Drewery Dyke, AI International Secretariat Researcher for the Middle East; Kieran Aldred, AIUK Advocacy Officer; local group members, Anne, Henrike and Heather.

Mandie agreed to raise the issue with other sympathetic councillors and to approach Sir Richard.

June: Al Manchester assigned the case of Mohammed al-Roken

July 13th: Meeting with Bishop of Manchester; James Lynch, Deputy Director, AI Middle East and North Africa Programme; Nick McGeehan, HRW Middle East Researcher; local group members, Henrike and Heather

Bishop David responded that focusing on the personal case of Mohammed al-Roken would be more effective than attacking the links of MCFC and MCC with UAE. He agreed to offer his support by raising the issue with other key individuals.

July 13th: Local group meeting: Henrike and Hayley introduced the case of Mohammed al-Roken. Signatures collected on letters to UAE Authorities. "Freedom for Mohammed" photographs taken for collage to be used in campaigning.

July 15th: Meeting with Sir Richard Leese; Drewery Dyke; Nick McGeehan; local group members Hayley and Heather

After a detailed discussion of the issues, Sir Richard asked for more details of the Mohammed al-Roken case to be sent to him. He said he would think about the matter.

July 29th: Acoustic Amnesty concert: signatures collected on petitions to UAE Authorities, Sir Richard Leese and local Salford MP. More "Freedom for Mohammed" photographs taken.

August 14th: Peterloo tapestry creation: Henrike, Heather and Laura B attended, together with Nick McGeehan. Information about Mohammed attached to the tapestry, together with Amnesty candle. Signatures collected on petition to UAE Authorities. More "Freedom for Mohammed" photographs taken.

August 24th: Sub-group meeting (Henrike and Heather) to plan September event for Mohammed's birthday. Monday 26th

September is Mohammed's 54th birthday. It will be the fifth consecutive birthday that he has spent in prison and he is not due to be released until he is at least 60 years old.

Sunday 25th September: street action to celebrate Mohammed's birthday – see above for details. Come along and join the party on the streets of Manchester!

Letter-writing action:

Please write to your MP about Mohammed's case. A template letter is attached with the newsletter.

If you live within the area of Manchester City Council, please also write to your local councillors, using the councillor letter template.

You can find a list of Manchester council wards at this website. By clicking on your ward you can find contact details for your local councillors:

http://www.manchester.gov.uk/info/100004/the_council_and_democracy/6383/council_wards_in_manchester

Refugee Campaign

New refugee campaign 'I WELCOME'

The global strategic campaign is to launch this Autumn and will be called 'I Welcome'. The aim of this campaign is that refugees are protected, welcomed and enjoy their human rights, through strengthened global responsibility-sharing and international cooperation. The Manchester group will be involved in this campaign – if you are interested in being in the subgroup planning actions, please email laurahelengibbons@gmail.com.



National Refugees Welcome march

The Refugees Welcome march in London is taking place on September 17th, two days before a major United Nations meeting in New York. AIUK's priority for September is to make the national Refugees Welcome march as large and vibrant as possible.



Please try to attend if you can! There is a Facebook page with offers of lifts/coaches -

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1745452965725338/>

Burma update

There has been little movement on the Burma front since we received a long letter towards the end of July. As explained then, AI's Burma co-ordinators are working with the UN on the campaign front, and hope to have negotiated the tricky areas around the need to highlight the Rohingya situation and their lack of citizen status. They are supporting a UN investigation into the violation of Human Rights in Rakhine state.

The names and details of various Prisoners of Conscience, who are still held in prison in Burma, can be accessed on the website of **Burma Campaign UK**: <http://burmacampaign.org.uk/>. Otherwise we wait probably until the autumn, when AI officials hope to announce a campaign to urge the NLD Government to seriously address the issue of citizenship, and protection of

human rights for the Rohingya, many of whom still anguish in refugee camps on the border with Thailand.

Individuals at Risk

Planning has started for this year's Write for Rights campaign which will start in November in the run up to Christmas. We are hoping to work with the Challenge Project and Whalley Range Peace and Justice Group again but will probably do a stall or two ourselves. If you know any good venues – do let Hazel know (hazelerrey@gmail.com).

In the meantime, come along to our regular bimonthly informal letter writing session at the end of the month. Enjoy a slice of cake and a cup of tea whilst you put pen to paper. Help will be on hand if you have never written on behalf of Amnesty cases before.

Next Letter Writing Session

Saturday 24th September 2-4pm

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

All Welcome.

North Africa

Algeria –Journalist Mohamed Tamalt

In July 16 we wrote as a group in connection with British-Algerian journalist Mohamed Tamalt, imprisoned arbitrarily for Facebook posts, which allegedly offended the President. Due to his unfair detention Mohamed started a hunger strike on 27th June 2016. Sadly, we have received news that he has been in a coma since end Aug 16 and he is being treated in intensive care. At the Sep meeting we will sign a letter reiterating our request to release him.

Egypt- Enforced Disappearances

At least three or four people disappear in Egypt each day. Amnesty International has documented numerous cases where the National Security Agency (NSA) of the Ministry of Interior has used enforced disappearances to deter opposition and to prevent peaceful dissent.

Since the appointment of Magdy Abd el-Ghaffar as Minister of Interior these enforced disappearances have increased. Madge Abdel Ghaffar is a long serving officer under the State Security Investigations service (the secret police under former President Hosni Mubarak), which is responsible for abductions, torture and serious human rights violations.

A report published on 13th July 2016 entitled '*Hundreds disappeared and tortured amid wave of brutal repression*' can be found at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/07/egypt-hundreds-disappeared-and-tortured-amid-wave-of-brutal-repression/>.

At the September meeting we will sign a letter addressed to Madgy Abdel Ghaffar concerning Aser Mohamer, a 14-year-old boy subjected to enforced disappearance for 34 days, during which he was tortured to confess belonging to the banned Muslim Brotherhood and attacking a hotel. During his detention Aser was given electric shocks and was suspended from his limbs for long hours.

Southern Africa

Zimbabwe –Deteriorating Human Rights Situation

Amnesty International is concerned that both the government of Zimbabwe and local authorities continue to forcibly evict thousands of people without due process or adequate housing alternatives. We are also concerned about the persistent failure to hold to account members of the security forces responsible for human rights violations, including abductions and enforced disappearances of government critics and arbitrary arrest of human rights defenders and journalists.

Zimbabwe retains the death penalty and over one hundred persons are on death row despite the fact that no execution is known to have been carried out since 2005. Amnesty will submit an updated report on this to the UN in occasion of the Universal Periodic Review due to take place in Nov 2016

Children's Human Rights, , Women's Rights

No updates this month

Group News

Pride Parade

We were in the Pride Parade again this year. This year the theme was 'Once upon a time ..' and we used this to celebrate the case of John Jeanette who won the right to be considered a woman after an Amnesty campaign led to a change in Norwegian law. Four of us dressed up as Amnesty candles fighting for her rights with letter shields and pencil swords. Here we all are at the end of the parade:



Manchester Literature Festival

We have an event in partnership with the Manchester Literature Festival and MMU on Saturday 15th October at 1pm in Central Library.

North Korean-born writer and activist Sungju Lee will talk about his memoir 'Every Falling Star', co-written with author and journalist Susan Elizabeth McClelland. The book recounts his experience of living on the streets following abandonment by his parents at the age of twelve and gives insight into life in North Korea, one of the most isolated countries in the world where many of the freedoms we take for granted do not exist.



Tickets cost £7/ £5. Get your tickets before they sell out! Tickets booked on 0843 208 0500 or buy tickets online: <http://www.manchesterliteraturefestival.co.uk/events/sungju-lee-37279>
N.B. 50% proceeds donated to Manchester Amnesty International Group

Didsbury Lantern Parade November 12th

We have applied to be in the Lantern Parade which is linked to Disbury Arts Festival and will take place in Didsbury Park. We envisage a giant Amnesty candle or maybe some doves with letters in their beaks. Creative ideas welcome!



Sameena's Trek

A message from our Regional Rep and ex chair of Manchester Amnesty:

"I am taking part in a trek to Machu Picchu because I want to raise awareness of human rights and to support Amnesty International, an organisation I have been a member of for over 20 years and whose work is unfortunately still as relevant as when I first joined. I have been an active member in UK since 2005 (and active member for a few years in Denmark before that) with voluntary roles from campaign coordinator and chair for the local Manchester group, a member of Amnesty UK's Activism Sub-Committee and now for the last year a Regional Representative for the North West, where I support local groups and volunteers in their work. Throughout my voluntary 'career' I have been focused on supporting members and volunteers, helping them in their role but also coaching newer members to get involved. The trek is a personal challenge but one I wouldn't do if it wasn't in the name of Amnesty and I hope to raise awareness of its campaigns and work through this - it is better to light a candle than curse the darkness.



The money raised will partly go to Amnesty International and partly pay for some of my costs (travel, accommodation, etc) but I am paying for registration fees, insurance, UK travel, kit, etc. I am raising money at work through taking part in the Salford 10k run, cake bakes, dress up and raffles, will be working with the Manchester group to organise a quiz night and also try to raise money at other events. However I have a large fundraising target, so any help is much appreciated.

You can donate at www.justgiving.com/sameena-matthiessen and also follow my journey on Twitter @takeahike_sm17. Thank you!"

CND meeting

We are invited to a **one-day conference about tactics and strategies** for peace and anti-nuclear campaigners hosted by Greater Manchester & District Campaign for Nuclear

Disarmament (CND). The conference, on 23rd October in Manchester, is a chance for activists to reflect on their methods and the changing political climate, as well as network and plan for the year ahead. See their Facebook page for more info: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1029083507168632/>
For more information and registration, visit: www.cnd-open-conference.eventbrite.co.uk

