



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

November 2014

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

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Recent events

Literature Festival

On 18th October we hosted a stimulating and thought provoking talk from the author Roma Tearne as part of the Manchester Literature Festival. Originally from Sri Lanka, Roma's books often deal with conflict situations. She read a moving extract from her book, Brixton Beach based on her mother's experience of prejudice and then went on to talk about the difficulties that she faced when weaving such real life incidents into her works of fiction. An audience of fifty five then enjoyed a lively question and answer session. Roma finished with a book signing.

We raised £243 through this event. Thanks to the group members who organised it, especially to Sue Ferry, and to Jennifer Devans for chairing the event.



Benefit Gig

On 31st October, Whalley Range Peace and Justice held a sell out evening of music, mirth and mischief with Anthony John Clarke and Dave Pegg (Fairport Convention) and raised over £1000 in aid of Amnesty International. They will use part of this to fund postage for their excellent greetings card campaign and will send the rest to AIUK. We were invited to run a stall at the event and sold a few packs of Christmas cards.

A great fun evening – and a huge thanks to Whalley Range Peace and Justice.

Women's Rights in Afghanistan

Our Women's Rights sub-group were out in force in Manchester City Centre on Sunday 2nd November carrying out our first ever 'Flash Protest' to raise awareness of the dangers Afghan women face in their everyday working lives. Donning hard hats and high-vis jackets, and carrying warning placards, the group created a series of 2 minute mini-protests at key locations in the city centre, after which we simply laid down our placards and dispersed into the crowds.

Despite the Manchester Derby being on, we certainly got noticed, and hope to continue to find new ways to highlight this important campaign.



North West Regional Conference

Amnesty members from across the North West gathered in Chester for our annual regional conference last Saturday, 8th November. We heard moving talks by two human rights defenders from Belarus and Sudan, shared fundraising and advocacy ideas, heard an update from AIUK Director Kate Allen and explored how country coordinators can help our Stop Torture campaigning. We took the Stop Torture campaign into Chester Town Centre with a Stop Torture chant and demo.



Group News

Olga Kenyon

We reported in our last newsletter the sad news that Olga Kenyon, a long standing member of the group and a dedicated schools speaker, had sadly passed away after a road traffic accident. Olga was a lovely lady with a deep seated belief in humanity.



There is a lovely tribute to Olga in the Manchester Evening News: see <http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/tributes-paid-olga-kenyon---7953048>

Write for Rights

As part of the Write for Rights campaign, AIUK is featuring 12 cases from around the world and is asking for appeal letters on their behalf and for greetings to be sent to prisoners, families and human rights defenders, to show that they are in our thoughts during the festive season. We are still busy making plans, including a stall at Unicorn, but the following are confirmed:

Letter Writing at Eighth Day Café Saturday 22nd November, 2-4pm

An informal session to write the appeal letters whilst enjoying the excellent Eighth Day fare. Pens, paper and case sheets provided

The Pen is Mightier than the Sword Saturday 6th December 2-5pm

Whalley Range for Peace and Justice are holding their twelfth consecutive greetings card event at St Margaret's Church, Rufford Road, Whalley Range with live entertainment from Open Voice Choir and the Beech Band, stalls and drinks and food.

Greetings Card Campaign

Wednesday 10th December From 6.00 pm onwards

We will be holding a card signing session before the Acoustic Amnesty event at Sacred Trinity Church, (at the junction of Chapel St and Blackfriars St, 2 mins walk from Deansgate)



N.B. This replaces our normal December Group meeting!

Acoustic Amnesty

December 10th is Human Rights Day. Thanks to Steve Lindsay's hard work, we are holding another Acoustic Amnesty event to mark the day, this time in conjunction with Greater Manchester Humanists.



Steve has put together a great line up as you'll see from these videos:

- Kieran King <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTBNfuQigHM>
- Rod Tame <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jp1D-zAWowA>
- Martin Stannage aka Viseral <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15gg2BjNcJI>
- Greater Manchester Humanist Choir http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f06FuY_2CDA
- Manchester Samba http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MG_fpK9yW1Q
- Stone Flowers (the Musicians Without Borders band) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=msE_BNsDP8s

It will be seated and totally silent for performances with the (well stocked!) bar in a separate room.

Tickets are only £8.80 in advance for all of this entertainment - <http://www.wegotickets.com/event/291937>

Flyer attached with this newsletter – circulate to all.
Let's make this even better than the last one!



National Conference and AGM 2015

Amnesty's national Conference & AGM takes place on 18-19 April 2015 at Warwick University. All Amnesty International members can attend and vote.

Visit <http://amnesty.org.uk/agm> for more information and how to book your place - details and booking will be available from Monday 1 December.

Group Meetings

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

12th November: Human Rights in Egypt – talk by Helen Underhill on her PhD subject

10th December: Greetings card campaign – send cards to prisoners and their families and the human rights defenders to show your support. 6 – 7pm Sacred Trinity Church (at the junction of Chapel St and Blackfriars St, 2 mins walk from Deansgate). N.B. this precedes the Acoustic Amnesty event and replaces our usual group meeting for December.

14th January: David Maidment, who heads the Children's Network for AIUK will be talking about the need for paying special attention to children's rights and about the work of the network.

*Why not join a few of us for a pre-meeting drink/meal just after 6pm.
This month we will be at The Pizza Express on the top end of King Street.*

Campaigning

MONTHLY ACTION

Convention on the Rights of the Child

This month marks 25 years since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 20 November 1989, and entered into force on 2 September 1990. The Convention on the Rights of the Child was the first treaty that sought to address the particular needs of children and provide a minimum standard of protection for children's rights. It is the world's most widely accepted human rights treaty, having been ratified by almost every member state of the United Nations. However, despite having signed the Convention in 1995, the **USA** has still not ratified it.

We will be signing a letter to the US Ambassador and a petition at our next meeting.

On the 25th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child we believe it is unacceptable that the US government has yet to protect these vital rights. Almost every country in the world has ratified this treaty. The USA has yet to join them. We, the undersigned, urge the USA to finally commit to protecting one of the most vulnerable groups in the world, and to ratify the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

Stop Torture

- **Moses Akatugba case** (one of the priority cases related to one of the campaign's focus countries, Nigeria). Amnesty have confirmed that the Governor of Delta State has responded publicly to calls asking him to commute Moses Akatugba's death sentence. He stated that an appeal process needs to finish before he can do anything. In the meantime, Amnesty members are being asked to leave a comment thanking him for his message. Visit: https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=924967634184360&utm_source=Email&utm_medium=Mass&utm_campaign=General%20fundraising%20or%20membership&utm_content=goodnews-moses



- **EU Torture Tolls Petition.** Amnesty members are being asked to sign a petition calling on the EU to urgently close loopholes that allow people to profit from torture. In addition to the letter that members signed at last month's monthly meeting, individuals are asked to sign online at: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/eu-torture-tools-trade-uk>. The Stop Torture subgroup will be meeting to discuss possible

lobbying actions related to this cause and an email will be sent round about this in due course.

- **Sponsored Walk.** There are also plans for a sponsored walk to raise funds and awareness for the campaign next Spring. Planning is at an early stage and all ideas are very welcome! Please send them to lianne.slavin@gmail.com.

South Africa

This month the action from the southern Africa region comes from South Africa and is about Noxolo Nogwaza, who we have campaigned for in the past. She was a lesbian woman who was an active LGBTI activist in South Africa. On the morning of 24 April 2011 Noxolo was brutally murdered. She was beaten, raped and her body was found in a ditch. There has still not been any investigation into her death. Amnesty is calling for a thorough and immediate investigation into her death so that the perpetrators can be brought to justice. Amnesty believes that the murder was a result of her sexual orientation.

Please write a letter or card of solidarity to Noxolo's family, addressed to: The Nogwaza Family, c/o Amnesty International, 3 on Glenhove, Melrose Estate, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Suggested messages (but please feel free to write your own messages of support if you would prefer):

My very best wishes are with you. I wish your whole family strength.

I am thinking of you and send you my best wishes. Your friend from Amnesty, [name]

To make sure the SA office can forward the cards to the family by Christmas please send them by the end of November. Please refrain from any religious cards or messages (i.e. Seasons Greetings is fine but not merry Christmas). Please don't include return addresses as the family can't write back.

Myanmar

Here is an update from our group campaign coordinator, Jean Mary:

There seems to have been a flurry of activity on Myanmar/Burma in the last week or two!

Wendy, one of the co-coordinators of another local group has sent her "testimony" explaining why we must continue to campaign for those suffering human rights abuses in Burma. One point is that there are various minority groups, who are at risk. The Rohingya are Muslims who live in the North East, and are persecuted by the majority Buddhists. They are often referred to as "migrants" who have come into Burma recently, although this is not true. On these grounds they are ostracized and suffer unemployment, and active persecution. Many have fled over the Burma Thai border and are housed in refugee camps. This is the group Wendy is concerned about, as she goes out every winter to work with these people and sees their need for support.

In addition, the new UN special rapporteur has highlighted the number of people who have been arrested, charged, tried and are now in prison accused of transgressing the "Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law." This law was intended to set the boundaries and so allow people to assemble, and protest legally. It has now become an instrument to clamp down on this, and limit, or even prevent people using their right to freedom of expression and assembly, and protest. In 2014 at least 60 people have been charged under article 18 of this law, and the actual number is believed to be higher. These include political activists, land rights and environmental activists, human rights defenders; farmers; and other peaceful protesters.

Although the maximum sentence has been reduced to six months, it is possible for one activist, to be charged with the same offence in several different township courts, thus imposing a cumulative sentence. For example - Ko Htin Kyaw leader of the Movement for Democratic Current Force has been sentenced to a total of 10years and four months' imprisonment by 10 Township courts under section 505 (b) of the penal code. This is a clear continuation of patterns of arrest and detention observed by Amnesty International and others in 2013

President Thein Sein has stated, at Asian –European meeting in Italy, on Oct.17th that "*his Government is committed to overcoming challenges, and will continue the reform process, without back tracking*" He has urged the European Union to end submitting frequent reports on Human Rights in Myanmar. AI's comment on this is that there would be no need to submit such reports once the Myanmar authorities end the practice of detaining, charging and convicting media workers, journalists and protesters who are simply exercising their right to freedom of expression.

AI urges action by writing to the President, urging him to release all such political prisoners, and also by sending copies of such letters to our MPs, MEPs, and members of the Parliamentary Commission on Burma, including any VIP s who are concerned with Burma. Baroness Cox, Lord Alton of Liverpool, and Lord Kinnock were suggested.

Last but by no means least, Dr. Tun Aung remains in prison, we continue to write, and urge he is released.