



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

March 2014

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

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Group Meetings

Every second Wednesday in the month

Cross Street Chapel - 7.30pm

It is such a pity that we had to cancel our last meeting at which Kate Allen, Director of AIUK, was due to speak. The weather was so awful that evening and Kate was stuck on a train somewhere with no hope of getting to us on time. Our apologies to anyone who didn't get the last minute messages and turned up to the meeting. Kate hopes to be able to get up to meet us at one of our meetings over the summer.



Our next meeting will be on **Wednesday 12th March**. Louise Joyce, Programmes Coordinator Human Appeal International will be speaking. Human Appeal is a non-profit organisation originally established in Manchester which works across the globe to strengthen humanity's fight against poverty, social injustice and natural disaster through the provision of immediate relief and establishment of sustainable development programmes- see <http://beta.humanappeal.org.uk/>. We also have a monthly action on Syria – see below.

*Why not join a few of us for a pre-meeting meal just after 6. This month we will at The Grinch on Chapel Walks next to Cross St Chapel.
All Welcome*

Campaigns

Women's rights

We have just received a Campaign Update on Women's Rights in Afghanistan. As the introduction to the briefing points out, 2014 is likely to be a critical year for Afghanistan as international troops withdraw from the country and Presidential elections are held. There are very real concerns regarding the progress made on women's rights as things now seem to be going backwards again.

A range of actions are suggested in the new update for us to take – holding a reading event, a photo-action and further work with MPs. Our Women's Rights subgroup, lead by Mary and Marie-Louise, will be looking at how we can participate in this campaign. In the meantime, they will be leading a Twitter action to mark International Women's Day 2014.

International Women's Day

Saturday March 8th is International Women's Day. This year we will mark this day with a stream of Twitter feeds featuring quotes and images on women's rights with an especial emphasis on women's rights in Afghanistan.

If you are on Twitter, please follow our Twitter account:

@amnestymanc

and retweet our posts.

Let's get a real Twitter storm going!

Syria

Our monthly action at the March Group Meeting will be to mark the 3rd anniversary of the Syrian Uprising – a grim reminder to the world of its failure to stop the suffering of the ordinary men, women and children caught up in the conflict.

Amnesty is part of a global coalition of NGOs and civil society who have created a joint campaign to mark the anniversary with a demonstration of solidarity with ordinary Syrian people. These actions will culminate in candle-lit / light based vigils attended by thousands of people across the world around major global landmarks on 13th March 2014. The aim is to demonstrate global solidarity with children, men and women struggling each day to survive the Syria conflict and improved access for the civilian population of Syria to basic necessities, including food, medical aid and fuel.

As well as signing some letters, we plan to hold our own little photo shoot in either St Ann's Square or Albert Square immediately after the group meeting. **We hope that you will be able to stay and take part!**



Zimbabwe

Anne has just received an update from the Zimbabwe coordinator. Once again WOZA members marched through the streets of Harare and Bulawayo on their traditional Valentines' Day demonstrations and were once again met with police brutality. On each occasion WOZA handed out roses and copies of a handbook on the new constitution. This was in great demand and WOZA quickly ran out of copies. Their demands were for implementation of the Constitution and for universal free primary school education by December 2014. The new constitution in several important aspects requires an improvement in basic rights for Zimbabweans.

We are asked to again write to the Police Commissioner about the police reaction to these peaceful demonstrations. Anne will be bringing letter for us to sign along to the group meeting.

Stop Torture

This major international campaign isn't due to start until the summer. However, we have had our first subgroup meeting as we hope to feature this campaign at an event during the Manchester Literature Festival in October. Lianne and Sue are busy contacting possible speakers and will hold another subgroup meeting soon. If you want to help, email Lianne at Lianne.slavin@googlemail.com

Write for Rights

As you know, the Manchester Group took part in the annual Write for Rights campaign leading up to Christmas and have continued to write appeal letters on behalf of some of the cases featured at our regular bimonthly letter writing session. AIUK have sent out a summary of the campaign with feedback on some of the cases (attached with this newsletter). It is really encouraging to hear messages of thanks and support from the people that we are campaigning for.

Our next informal letter writing session is coming up! Put the date in your diary and turn up to boost the number of letters written.

Don't forget that you can always send emails, sign petitions and write letters at home as well. Make a habit of regularly checking the AIUK website for new cases to move you to put pen to paper. Go to <http://www2.amnesty.org.uk/actions> for cases to work on.

Letter Writing

Saturday 22nd March
The Eighth Day Café, Oxford Road
2-4pm
Pens, paper and case sheets provided!

Subscriptions please!

Annual donations from members are vital to keep the Group going. The suggested sum is £20 if you have a wage, £3 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.

Thanks!

Other Amnesty news

AIUK AGM 2014

So far we know that Laura, Sameena and Anne plan to attend the 2 day AGM in Edinburgh on 12th -13th April 2014. If you are interested in going see www.amnesty.org.uk/agm for full details. We will be discussing the resolutions at our April meeting so that we can provide some guidance to our representatives when voting.

Sex Worker Policy Consultation

We have now received a consultation pack on the issue of the policy that Amnesty should take regarding how best to protect the human rights of sex workers. This is a difficult area with strongly held opposing views but please note that the consultation will not change Amnesty International's longstanding position that trafficking into any form of forced labour, including forced sex work or any other aspect of non-consensual sex, should be criminalised as a matter of international law. This view is firmly expressed throughout the draft policy proposal.

Please find attached with this newsletter a short 2 page summary of the document (the full pack runs to 13 pages) which was put together by Eilidh Douglas for the Edinburgh University Group. If you want a copy of the full consultation papers, please email me anne.walker9@ntlworld.com.

If time permits, we will have a short discussion at the March group meeting but may well then decide to have a further separate meeting to thrash out our response to the consultation, which has to be in by 21st March. There will be further discussion and voting on the AIUK position at the AGM.

International News

Internationally, Amnesty has embarked on an ambitious restructuring and is establishing major research and campaigning hubs in Johannesburg, Nairobi, Hong Kong and Dakar as part of the Global Transition Programme. Anne, as group secretary, has received an update on the progress of this programme and has also received the **International Board Bulletin No.10 February 2014** which covers such issues as strategic goals, governance reform, fundraising, IS staff and the 'use of force' policy. She will happily email both documents to anyone interested. Just drop her at email anne.walker9@ntlworld.com.