



THE BRIGHTON AND HOVE AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL GROUP NEWSLETTER

Forthcoming Brighton & Hove Amnesty Group Meetings/Events

Group meetings take place on the first Thursday of each month from 8-10pm at Community Base, Queens Road, Brighton

6th March

Guest Speaker Luis Munoz a Chilean exile who survived arrest and torture under the Pinochet regime. Author of *Being Luis: A Chilean Life*.

3rd April

Group Business meeting

Letter Writing Evenings

An evening once a month to sit and write letters with fellow Amnesty members. These evenings are hosted at member's houses. All welcome, simply contact the host/hostess for details:

20th March

Mike and Luke
michaelowenfisher@hotmail.com

Monthly Collection

Contact Catherine : 07759271399 to volunteer

Monthly Stall's

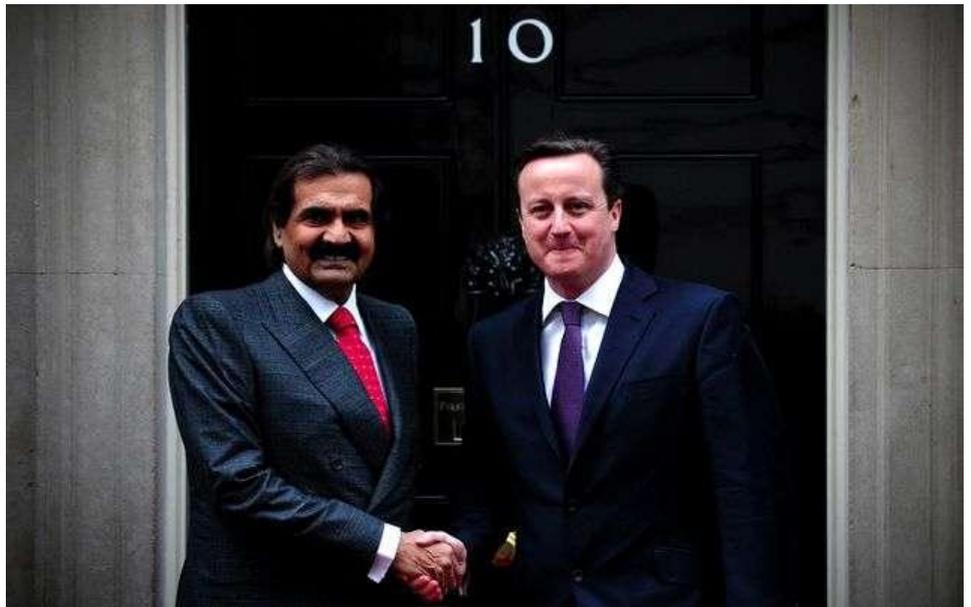
Contact Jill 01273 621697

Silent Auction

Get yourself a bargain!

For a chance to bid on some fantastic treats, days out and gifts see our silent auction inside this issue of the newsletter or available online through our website www.amnesty.org.uk/brighton
Deadline for bidding 14th April
Happy Bidding!

Sochi Hypocrisy



David Cameron and the Emir of Qatar Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa al-Thani, Jan 2013

In light of the recent Winter Olympics in Sochi, there has been much focus on Russia's attitude towards the LGBT community, as well as their human rights record in general. While homosexual relationships were decriminalised in 1993, the Russian authorities have routinely denied permits for Pride parades, and the intimidation and arrest of LGBT activists is a real cause for concern. In June 2013 Russia passed a law banning "the propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships" to minors, adding to several existing regional laws of a similar nature. Sochi is a city in one of the regions with such a law. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has been very weak in expressing concern, saying that

any athletes who protested or made political points in the stadiums or on podiums may be punished.

The UK and other western politicians have been stronger in their condemnation. The Russian legislation is quite similar to Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 in the UK, which stated that local authorities "shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality" or "promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship". Section 28 was finally repealed in 2003.

(continued on page 2)

(continued from page 1)

Shining a spotlight on Russia's homophobic new law is vital, as it enables activism and diplomatic pressure to be more effective in overturning such laws. However the concern expressed by the media and western governments for Russia's human rights record should be seen in a broader context. If the UK government is seriously concerned about the treatment of the LGBT community in Russia, and human rights more broadly, we should expect a similar concern to emerge about other countries who have a bad human rights record - especially those with which we do business.

News has emerged recently of the deaths of 400 plus Nepalese migrant workers on Qatari building sites, sites used for the construction of stadiums in preparation for the football World Cup in 2022. In 2013 Amnesty released a report called 'The Dark Side of Migration' highlighting these issues in Qatar (the report is easily avail-

able on the web). However there has been less focus on the fact that homosexuality is illegal between men in Qatar, punishable by up to 5 years in jail.

In January this year it was revealed that David Cameron used public money to entertain the Emir and prime minister of Qatar (amongst other guests) at his official country retreat. At the Queen's Diamond Jubilee lunch in 2012, among the distinguished guests were the Emir of Qatar, the King of Bahrain, a former prime minister of Kuwait, and a Prince from Saudi Arabia. In Bahrain torture is 'common' according to Human Rights Watch, while the crushing of the Arab Spring protests in 2011 (with the help of UK supplied 'crowd control' equipment) involved thousands of arrests, dozens of deaths, and the intimidation of doctors who treated the wounded. Saudi Arabia has a similarly terrible record on human rights, and is also the largest funder of Islamic terror in the world, alongside Pakistan - both of whom with the UK has close business

and strategic relationships.

It appears that the UK government and media is focusing on human rights abuses in countries like Russia with which the UK has a frosty relationship, while turning a blind eye to countries with which the UK does business. The focus on Russia during the Winter Olympics is very welcome. However if the government is serious about LGBT rights, putting public pressure on Qatar to reform their homosexuality laws in light of the approaching football World Cup is vital. Oh, and if we're to take the UK government seriously on human rights, they should probably stop selling arms to the worlds largest terror states too... and while we're at it, a proper investigation into extraordinary rendition... and maybe more pressure on the US to close Guantanamo wouldn't go amiss...?

*Luke
Control Arms Co-ordinator*

Monthly Action

RUSSIAN ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST LOSES APPEAL

On 12 February, the Krasnodar regional court ruled that detained environmentalist Yevgeniy Vitishko must serve three years in a penal colony. Amnesty International believes that he is a prisoner of conscience, persecuted for speaking out against environmental damage in Krasnodar region.

Please write in your own words or use the suggested wording below to write to the Prosecutor General

Yurii Ya. Chaika
Prosecutor General
15 A, Bolshaia Dmitrovka Street
125993 Moscow
Russian Federation

Dear Prosecutor General

I am deeply concerned about Yevgeniy Vitishko, who has been jailed for three years for spray painting a fence. He is an environmental activist whose crime is criticising the environmental impact of the Sochi Winter Olympics.

I believe he is a prisoner of conscience, and I strongly urge you to release him immediately.
Sincerely

Please see http://www.amnestyusa.org/sites/default/files/uaa01414_1.pdf for full case details and information on other officials to whom you can write

Putin and Pussy Riot Politics in the New Russia

**Feedback from the talk by Patricia Cockrell MBE
at the Lewes Amnesty Group in February**

Patricia Cockrell spoke on Putin and Pussy Riot to a packed house, at a public meeting of Lewes Amnesty Group on 13 February. Patricia has spent years in Russia working with NGOs, specifically on the development of hospices in Rostov, Yaroslavl and Nizhny Novgorod. She said there was relative freedom to develop NGOs during the Yeltsin years, but that since Putin arrived on the scene there has been far more regulation and restriction on all sorts of activities.

Putin has certainly achieved improvements in some areas; salaries for public servants are again being paid regularly, and pensions have been raised. (I was in Russia c 10 years ago and was horrified by the poverty we saw. My hostess, a university lecturer, had not been paid for 7 months). It is calculated that 20% of people like Putin, 24% dislike him heartily and 46% "accept" him. Many people fear chaos. But civil liberties are being eroded; it is now very difficult to demonstrate, for example, and heavy fines may be demanded. And there has been a spate of extra-judicial killings of people who oppose the regime, including

journalists, perhaps most notably Anna Politkovskaya, which is very sinister.

Putin is a member of the Orthodox Church, and religious education now has to be taught in all schools. However even the Orthodox Church is not united in approval of his regime. There are liberal priests within its ranks – at risk of their livelihoods – and there are numerous other churches, which were free under Yeltsin but which are less favoured now.

Pussy Riot are a feminist group who gave small presentations in the street, or in shops, then ran off when authorities arrived or they were turned out. The demonstration in the Cathedral was deliberately attention seeking; they wanted to make a statement about the fusion of Church and State. Some people were genuinely offended, and the group apologised for that. Patricia stressed that the girls were tried for their performance in the Cathedral by the state on behalf of the

church.

The penalties were very harsh indeed – imprisonment, with forced labour, 17 hours a day, for Nadya and Masha.

Pussy Riot did not take money for its antics, and is apparently unhappy that the Nadya and Masha danced with Madonna, and allegedly accepted payment for something. So there may currently be rift in the ranks, but the facts are hard to come by.

Questions and discussion followed Patricia's talk. One speaker from the floor suggested that political conditions in Russian in 2014 were much like those in 1914, and there was general sympathy with this view.

Madeline



The Save Shaker Aamer Campaign Valentine's Day Action outside MI6



Representatives from Brighton and Hove and Lewes Amnesty Groups were in attendance outside the MI6 building in Vauxhall on 14th February. The date is significant as it marks the birthday of Shaker Aamer's youngest son, whom he has never met in the twelve years since his birth. By a horrible irony, the date also marks the day when Shaker Aamer was first detained in Guantanamo Bay – TWELVE years ago.

The MI6 building is significant as it represents something of the secrecy and intransigence of the forces which, after all this time, still appear incapable of securing the release of Shaker Aamer. Mr Aamer has been in Guantanamo for twelve years, and yet has never been charged with any offence and in fact has been cleared for release since 2007. Why then, is he still there?

This question was demanded in the form of placards and banners which lined the

south side of the Albert Embankment, facing the front entrance of the holographic monolith. Despite the torrential rain, a large group of people clad in orange jumpsuits, chains and hoods chanted this question to MI6 for almost two hours. Ray Silk of the Save Shaker Aamer Campaign read out messages of support from Jeremy Corbyn MP, Bruce Kent, Vice President of CND and of Pax Christi and Lindsay German of Stop the War. These were followed by speeches from the SSAC Chair Joy Hurcombe, Andy Worthington, author of *The Guantanamo Files*, Maude from Brighton and Hove Amnesty and Val Brown from LGC, who spoke of the forthcoming speaking tour of the UK by Dennis Edney QC, Canadian lawyer of Omar Khadr, who was a child of 15 when he was captured and rendered to Guantanamo in 2002.

After this, we all walked across the road in solemn procession, with motorists

honking their support, in order to deliver a Valentine's card to MI6. The card included the following messages: MI6 – we would LOVE you to...support our demands for the release Shaker Aamer...tell the truth about torture... have a HEART – return Shaker Aamer to his family.

Oddly, the front entrance, which had been open throughout the afternoon, was mysteriously blocked at this point by an iron gate. We passed the Valentine's card over the top of this gate, but it was swiftly thrown back, landing in a puddle. This disrespectful action seemed to sum up, for many present there, the callous inhumanity of the continuing detention of Shaker Aamer. It also created a powerful piece of performance activism. A draft of the message inside the card was passed through on a piece of paper, and this was not returned. Perhaps the message might have reached a humane ear. In the meantime, we need to be writing to the new US Ambassador to the UK, Matthew Barzun, and to David Cameron, asking him to call in the Ambassador for an explanation as to why the US government still rigidly refuses to release Shaker Aamer after these twelve long years. And Shaker's Bitter Valentine's Day blog to his lawyers says all that needs to be said about the reasons why our PM needs to be doing this.

Maude

Shaker Aamer's Valentine Day Blog

It's 14 February. In Britain it will be Valentine's Day. In 2002, it was the day I arrived in Guantánamo Bay, and the day my youngest child was born - Faris, whom I have never been allowed to touch.

Yesterday, my fellow detainee Emad Hassan did not take his legal call, for the same reason every time he misses a phone call or a meeting. They intimidate him by telling him before he goes, "we'll do a full body search" - the "scrotum groping search" as they call it. So Emad goes with them to the Camp 5 exit where they plan to do the search, and when he sees them ready to carry out a full body search, he tells them that he refuses the humiliation, and demands to go back to his cell.

Indeed, the authorities don't want someone like Emad to let the world know what has happened to him. Recently, he encountered the worst doctor here in Guantánamo - the "Doctor of the Dark Side". I told him to write as much as he can about it and send it out, but it takes time for him to write in English, and it takes time for the letters to get through the censors.

I am on my hunger strike. Last night, I took one cup of coffee and added two creamers. As a consequence, all this morning I had bad diarrhoea and went to the toilet more than six times in half an hour. That is why I am writing now. I can't go to sleep, plus it is nice to write something about this place on the first day of my New Year.

There are 35 hunger strikers now. Eighteen of them are being tube-fed. These brothers go and return from feedings by the FCE [Forcible Cell Extraction] team. They even are weighed by the FCE team, but it's impossible to take someone's weight

whilst he is shaking so hard on the digital scale and tied to a board. But this means there are 11 or 12 soldiers required every time they have to be moved, as many as five or six times a day.

It is exactly 8:00AM and the National Anthem is playing so loudly. There are big rumours going around, and we hope they are true. It is said that the Government dropped the charges against 12 Yemenis and that only two Yemenis will be prosecuted (Bin Attash and Nashiri). The eligible ones will go to Yemen in three groups: only those who have conditions will be kept in the planned rehabilitation centre; those who have no conditions will be free; and the third group will be those who are to be prosecuted in Yemen, serving their jail sentence in Yemen.

What else... How do I feel with another year of my life gone unjustly and another year started? Truly, I feel numb. I can't even think about it. Years are passing like months and months like weeks. Weeks pass like days and days like hours. Hours feel like minutes, minutes seconds, and seconds pass like years. And it goes around in a strange circle that makes no sense. It all takes an age, and yet an age of my life seems to pass too fast. On and on and on.

I live in the dark, knowing nothing. Here I am, cleared for release for seven years, more than half my time here. What, why, when, how, where? These questions have no answers, only total darkness.

I feel lonely and lost. Not knowing my future is the worst torture. I am living just to die. I am confused about everything and everyone. It is not enough for them to leave us alone with all this pain we are suffering. It

is not enough for us to live only with our memories, which bring more pain. Dead people are better off than us. They are living a new way of life, knowing that they are dead and facing the consequences of their past actions.

But our suffering is endless - and with it, our loved ones' suffering is endless. We are not dead but they forget us after awhile, because they cannot see us or feel us and know how we truly are.

Yet still they do more harm to us: humiliating and insulting us, degrading us, anything to make us more miserable. Welcome to the Hell on Earth, welcome to Guantánamo. Welcome to the year 1984, the year 2014.

I have no doubt justice will prevail and the light of the truth will shine all over the world. What is happening to us and others is a small price for justice, peace, and happiness which will cover the whole world soon. Always, after total darkness, the sun rises again. I hope to see the sun of justice, peace, and happiness with my own eyes. It will be a great day.

If I don't get to see that sun, please remember that I have endured all this in the name of Justice.

Shaker Aamer

Alone in Guantánamo

Shaker relayed this blog post to his lawyer Clive Stafford Smith in an unclassified letter

[SOURCE: Huffington Post](#)

Women's rights in Afghanistan campaign update

At the beginning of February, Gwyneth, our Women's rights in Afghanistan campaign co ordinator wrote to local mp Caroline Lucas highlighting the increase in attacks against high profile women in Afghanistan and asking her to lobby the UK government to increase it's support to women's human rights defenders. The full text of Gwyneth's letter and the response from Caroline Lucas mp can be read below. If you want to find out more about this campaign then please go to : <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/issues/Women's-rights-in-Afghanistan>

Ms Caroline Lucas
House of Commons
London SW1A0AA
United Kingdom

Dear Dr Lucas,

Thank you for signing Amnesty International's pledge to be a supporter of women's rights in Afghanistan, this is an issue that I feel very strongly about and as your constituent I am very pleased to know that you do too.

There has recently been an increase in attacks against high-profile Afghan women and as you are a key parliamentary champion of this campaign, I am writing to ask that you take urgent action and call on the UK government to improve support and protection to women's human rights defenders (WHRDs).

In recent months two parliamentarians - Fariba Kakar and Rooh Gul - were attacked in separate incidents. Both fortunately survived, however, Rooh Gul's 8 year old daughter was killed. Additionally the last two most senior female police women in Helmand have been murdered; and Sushmita Banerjee, a well-known female author who had written about life under the Taliban, was dragged out of her home and shot 15 times.

As a member of parliament you will understand the motivation of these brave women to help shape and build their societies after almost thirty years of conflict. Unfortunately female parliamentarians and activists in Afghanistan regularly face violence and threats just for engaging with politics and supporting others.

Adequate investigation and provision of appropriate protection in cases like these is rare even for high profile women, so what chance do WHRDs with lower profiles - teachers, doctors, journalists, civil society activists - have?

Afghan WHRDs are among the most active agents for change in their communities. Their work is essential in promoting peace and stability, supporting families and in holding the Afghan authorities to account. Yet they face extreme challenges, for example:

- Parween, a Head Teacher from Laghman province, was targeted for running a girls' school. After receiving repeated threats from unknown men warning her to stop working, her son, Hamayoon, was abducted and killed.
- Dr. D. works as a gynaecologist providing healthcare to women suffering from abuse, including rape and domestic violence. She has told Amnesty International how the Taliban targeted her as a result of her work, murdering her brother and badly wounding her 11 year old son in a grenade attack.

Amnesty International is urging the UK government to become a champion for women human rights defenders in Afghanistan and to be a leader in improving support and protection to them.

The UK government should develop a country specific plan for supporting human rights defenders in Afghanistan, including a gender analysis and with particular reference to the challenges faced by WHRDs.

Developing a country specific plan is a key recommendation of the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders and could be extremely beneficial in a country like Afghanistan, which has such specific security concerns and - importantly - a cultural-specific context for women's rights and women's activism.

Such a plan could galvanise work in this area, ensuring UK staff in Afghanistan are aware of the risks faced by WHRDs and equipping them with an understanding of practical measures to support their work.

The Foreign Secretary has championed support for women human rights defenders through his Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative. Please write to him asking him to ensure this expertise is applied in Afghanistan and that supporting women human rights defenders is prioritised there, through developing and implementing a country specific plan of support.

Yours sincerely, Gwyneth Jones

Dear Gwyneth,

Many thanks for getting in touch about women's rights in Afghanistan, and particularly the important role played by women's human rights defenders (WHRDs). As you know, I am a parliamentary champion for Amnesty International's campaign, which means I have lobbied Ministers extensively, both to raise awareness of the work that WHRDs are undertaking to help rebuild Afghanistan and also about the urgent need to ensure that these incredibly inspiring women are given all the support and protection they need.

Last year, for example, I asked the Foreign Office to support Afghan women in the security transition and beyond by:

- i. Pressuring and assisting the Afghan government to fully implement the Elimination of Violence Against Women law
- ii. Providing greater support for action against domestic violence through Family Response Units
- iii. Increasing the recruitment and retention of women in the police force
- iv. Identifying and putting into practice specific and quantifiable improvements for gendered protection and support for female human rights defenders
- v. Pushing for meaningful representation of Afghan women in all peace negotiations.

I agree that a country specific plan would help deliver enormous benefits for women's rights in Afghanistan and so I will contact the Minister this week to urge this action is taken. I'll get back in touch as soon as I receive a response. In the meantime, do let me know if you need any more information and thank you for sharing a strong commitment to peace and equality in Afghanistan.

Best wishes, Caroline

Caroline Lucas, MP for Brighton Pavilion
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

Tel: 020 7219 7025

Email: caroline.lucas.mp@parliament.uk

Brighton & Hove Amnesty Meeting, 6 February 2014, Minutes.

January minutes were approved.

Treasurer's report: no report this month.

Newsletter

****The group discussed the cost-effectiveness of the monthly newsletter and whether we should switch to a bi-monthly edition. We decided to continue with the monthly newsletter but to consider other places (e.g. cafes, schools)

Fundraising

****It was agreed that the group would like to have a fundraising jumble sale. Maude would look into a suitable venue.

Letter-writing evenings

The next letter-writing evening was confirmed (Jill's house on 27 February).

Stall

The date of the next stall was confirmed as 8 February.

Monthly action

February's monthly action was for Darius Evangelista, and group members signed a campaign letter for him.

Lane Collection

The rota for the February collection was distributed.

Silent auction

Progress has been made on preparations for the silent auction. Several group members have arranged tickets, vouchers and goods from local companies to act as lots.

Minutes of February meeting continued

Guantanamo 12th anniversary

Several members of our group travelled to London for the demo on 11 January, which provided an excellent Amnesty presence. The event was well-attended and helped raise awareness with the public, but the sound system could have been better according to attendees.

Regional conference

This will take place in Dorking on 22 February. Some group members, including Julian, plan to attend.

National AGM

This will be in Edinburgh on 12/13 April. There might be the possibility of a concessionary place for our group.

Margaretta D'Arcy

Maude discussed the case of Margaretta D'Arcy, who is imprisoned in Limerick and told us how we can contact her to show solidarity.

Afghan women's rights

Gwyneth gave the group an update; we still await feedback from Justine Greening, the Secretary of State for International Development.

BRIGHTON & HOVE AMNESTY GROUP CONTACTS

Chair – Emma brightonandhoveai@googlemail.com Tel: 01273 232397

New Member Secretary: Sue Tel: 07790 755921

Mail Secretary: Volunteer needed

Email Secretary: Emma Tel: 01273 232397 **Group Email:** brightonandhoveai@googlemail.com

Minutes Secretary: Catherine 07759 271399

Treasurer: Catherine 07759 271399

Newsletter editor: - Emma Parker: Tel: 01273 232397

Please email any contributions for the newsletter to brightonandhoveai@googlemail.com

Lanes collection organiser: - Catherine 07759271399

Web Site co-ordinator: Michael Fisher - michaelowenfisher@hotmail.com

Amnesty Stalls co-ordinator—Jill Francis—01273 621697

Campaign Co-ordinators:

Afghanistan—Women's Rights—Gwyneth gwyneth.jones@ntlworld.com

Prisoner of Conscience – The Displaced People of Tawargha (Libya) Celia Stubbs—01273 593833

Security and Human Rights—Michael—michaelowenfisher@hotmail.com

Arms Trade Treaty—Luke lukebeale@hotmail.com

Amnesty Websites: international - www.amnesty.org AI UK -

www.amnesty.org.uk local group - www.amnesty.org.uk/brighton

Follow us on twitter @AmnestyBrighton

See our photos on Flickr—

<http://www.flickr.com/groups/amnestybrighton/pool>

Amnesty UK Human Rights Centre - Tel: 0207 0331500

