



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

5th March

Business meeting and rehearsal of
Even if we lose our lives

2nd April

Speaker from the Kurdish
Community
Dr Salima Tasdemir

7th May

Group AGM
And planning 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:

Thursday 19th March
At Emma's House
Tel: 01273 232397

Monthly Collection

21st March
18th April
16th May

Contact Julian
julianwatmore@gmail.com
07583334740

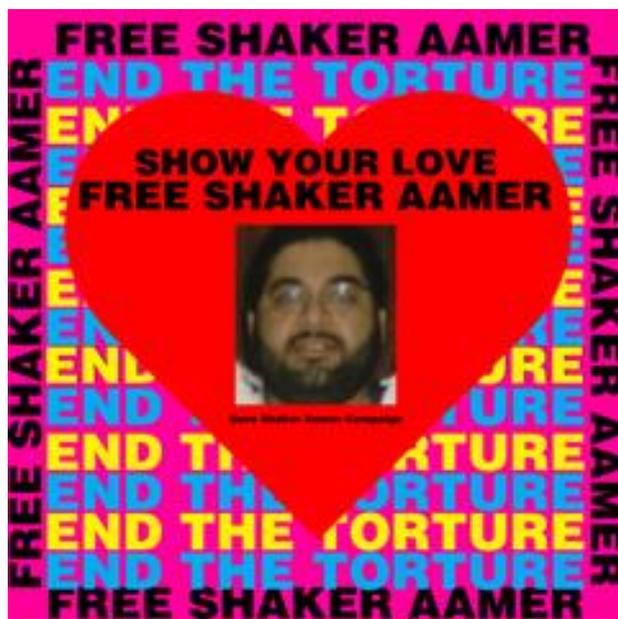
Monthly Stall's

21st March
Sydney Street
Contact Jill 01273 621697

Live reading of Even if we lose our lives

7th March 2015
New Venture Theatre

Shaker Aamer Valentine's day protest



Members of Brighton and Hove, Lewes and Sussex University Amnesty groups hired a coach to support the thirteenth anniversary protest called by the Save Shaker Aamer Campaign (SSAC) to mark the continued incarceration of Shaker Aamer in Guantanamo Bay. The anniversary falls on Valentine's Day, which is also the birthday of Shaker's youngest son, who has never seen his father.

Along with members of local Amnesty groups from all over the country, we gathered at Parliament Square, facing the Palace of Westminster, where the indomitable weekly protests of the SSAC take place every Wednesday while Parliament is sitting, whatever the weather. We had Amnesty banners and colourful placards and some of us helped to carry the large SSAC Valentine's Day SHOW YOUR LOVE: FREE SHAKER AAMER banner, and the END GUANTANAMO TORTURE banners of the SSAC and the London Guantanamo Campaign(LGC).

We were in our hundreds by the time we began to march to Downing Street, noisily chanting and halting the traffic all round Westminster as we went, and attracting the attention of hundreds of motorists and passers by. Once outside Downing Street, we heard passionate speeches from an impressive line-up.

Shaker Aamer Valentine's day march—continued from page 1



Joy Hurcombe, Chair SSAC, described how, 13 years ago today, in 2002, British resident Shaker Aamer, having been abducted in Afghanistan in 2001, began his long years of torture and abuse in Guantanamo. Joy said "There he remains despite being cleared for release for over 7 years. We are here today to ask why is Shaker still in Guantanamo? "

Joy pointed out that even though the last Government was complicit in the torture of its citizens and residents by the US, it did listen to public protest: 15 UK prisoners were released from Guantanamo during its term. Only one British Resident remains: Shaker Aamer. Despite claiming that Shaker's release 'is a priority', David Cameron has not tried hard enough to bring him home. Noting that soon, while celebrating Magna Carta, we will be told that the UK and the US way of life are founded on the principles of equality, freedom, justice and the rule of law.

Joy loudly stated "If David Cameron loves equality, Shaker Aamer should not be denied his equal rights. If David Cameron loves freedom, Shaker Aamer should be free. If David Cameron loves justice, Shaker Aamer should not be in chains in a steel cell without any hope of an end to these years of utter brutality. If David Cameron loves the rule of law, Shaker Aamer should not be held for years when he has done no wrong."

Katie Taylor, one of Shaker's lawyers from Reprieve, spoke about the terrible new legislation which may be passed by the US Congress which would include a ban on any more releases from Guantanamo until 2017. She told us of the video tapes of 315 instances in which Shaker has been FCE'd (Forcible Cell Extraction) beaten up and abused." Reprieve has repeatedly asked the UK government to request these

tapes, only to be met with assurances from that US state that Shaker's treatment is fine. Obviously all the evidence is to the contrary.

Bruce Kent veteran peace campaigner and chair of CND, reminded everybody present of Articles 38 & 39 of Magna Carta, including the famous 'habeas corpus' paragraph: "No free man shall be seized or imprisoned, or stripped of his rights or possessions, or outlawed or exiled...except by the lawful judgement of his equals or by the law of the land."

Sara Birch, Chair of Lewes Amnesty group spoke in outrage at the abuse of Shaker's human rights, ending her speech with a rousing call to David Cameron to act now to obtain Shaker's freedom.



Imam Suliman Gani, Tooting Islamic Centre, reminded us of the gross injustice done to Shaker of his family's suffering at home, with no husband and father. and the agony and pain they have been enduring. He reminded us of the last 13 years of our own lives - about our children, our grand children and every little detail of the love of friends of family, while Shaker has been shut up in a cell for all that time.

Lindsey German, Chair Stop the War campaign highlighted the lies and smokescreens of successive UK governments during the 'war on terror' and of the ways in which the Muslim Community are made to feel ashamed of everything they do, their culture, their religion. They should not feel ashamed about anything, she said. Yvonne Ridley, speaking of the 'special relationship' and the fact that Mr Cameron returned empty handed from his recent meeting with President Obama in Washington, said "Now is the time to prove it Mr Cameron, pick up the phone to President Obama. You have 82 days to keep your promise and the clock is ticking.

There is no love in Guantanamo, I've been there...it is the most godless place in the world."

Andy Worthington, author *Guantanamo Files* referred to the UK government's "dreary mantra" that it is up to the US to decide on Shaker's release. He stressed that Shaker is a legal British resident and has the right to return home to this country. For 13 years the UK government has abandoned Shaker, "it is time for this to come to an end...Free Shaker Amer" he said.

Louise Christian, Christian Khan Lawyers referred to Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures (TPIMS), which in January 2012 replaced control orders, replicating the worst aspects of the control order regime. They operate outside of the criminal justice system and frequently punish the innocent with electronic tagging and restrictions on movement, while the truly dangerous may remain at large in the community.

After the speeches, a delegation went across the road to Number 10, where they handed in a giant Valentine's Day card for Shaker, with a folder of cards and letters written to Mr Cameron, including 24 by members of our Sussex groups, asking him to show love and humanity towards Shaker by acting for his urgent release

Overall, protesting with others was a way to channel our grief and rage. It was an antidote to the dreadful swivelling of our moral compass and the erosion of our humanity caused by the



numbing drip-feed of information about the horrific behaviour of our governments in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the chilling details of the recent release of the CIA torture files. The ethical foundations of UK civil society appear more shaky today than they have ever done, and this may be due to Guantanamo and what it has done to our collective psyches. Indeed, in the UK today, as part of the immigration process, 3,675 people are held in indefinite detention, purely administratively, having committed no crime, some having been there for as long as 4-5 years. It's doubtful this human rights abuse would have been able to slip past our collective awareness without the 'grooming' effect of Guantanamo. Protests like this one for Shaker's release, renew our determination to uphold all human rights, most crucially those of Shaker Amer today.

Maude



Even If We Lose Our Lives

First hand accounts from Afghan Women
Human Rights defenders

Scripted by Christine Bacon for Ice & Fire Theatre Company, in collaboration with Amnesty International

“Parween” voiced by Madeline Peasgood

“Manizha” voiced by Alex Kenney

“Dr D” voiced by Sandra Mills

The Men’s voices: David Benedictus

The Girls’ voices: Catherine Forman

Produced by Gwyneth Jones

Christine Usher, Amnesty International UK Middle East Country Coordinator, will lead a discussion about the future for women in Afghanistan, after the performance.

New Venture Theatre
7th March 2015 7.30pm

Places to be reserved by email: donations to Amnesty International welcome at the event. New Venture Theatre Bedford Place, Brighton, BN1 2PT. Enquiries and ticket bookings: brightonandhoveai@googlemail.com



Report back from South East Regional Conference

On 7th February 2015 at Chichester

General

About 60 people travelled to the far South West corner of the region for the regional conference. It was hosted by the Bognor Regis, Chichester and District local group. The group decided to provide drinks and cakes but not lunch. Instead they sited it a church hall complex very near a street with lots of great cafes. The kitchen was small but sufficient for teas and coffees, so the arrangement worked well. It was also near the railway station and car parks. The only disadvantage was that it was upstairs, which a few people found difficult. We were honoured to have five members of AIUK staff, including three giving workshops and Sam Strudwick with an overview of Amnesty, as discussed below, and Gemma Hoskins and Yvonne Heaton who, as fairly recent recruits, wanted to experience a regional conference. The conference consisted of four sections as below.

Celia Ouellette from Reprieve

Celia is a Staff Attorney on Reprieve's Death Penalty Team. She works on Reprieve's cases of British and EU nationals facing the death penalty in the US. There are about 40 of these people and she looks after about seven of them. Her talk was entitled "Who is a Client on Death Row in the US?" The case she described is of a man she called Tyler, who had an appalling childhood. Celia described her examination of the development of this man from the age of four by comparison using words and pictures with her normal but privileged life. He was badly abused and then rejected by both parents. Since the case is in a pre-trial state she could not go into great detail, but extremely interesting and worrying information came out from the discussion afterwards. The whole process of jury selection appears highly biased to British eyes. To me it was even worse to realise that the jurors in USA have to agree to the possibility to the death penalty, which badly distorts the results. In Texas the jurors also have to decide whether the accused is a danger to society and whether the aggravating circumstances outweigh the mitigating ones. The indifference to the accused by the defending attorneys is terrible. We also discussed cases which partly depend on the question of the guilt of a "non-trigger man". This occurs when the defendant in a trial did not shoot anyone but was with an accomplice to another who did shoot. In one case the non-trigger was confirmed by three people who survived the shooting. Many people at the conference signed up to receive more information about Reprieve.

Workshops

There were three workshops using the main hall and two smaller rooms:

- Lobbying & general election – Shoomi Chowdhury (AIUK Human Rights Education Officer) & Laura Trevelyan, (AIUK Advocacy Coordinator – Outreach)
- Social Media – Emerson Povey (AIUK Communities Editor)
- Refugees and Asylum Seekers: Rights and Responsibilities – Philip Strudwick (Trainer)

The numbers attending were about one dozen for each of the first two and two dozen for the third. The difference between the sum of these numbers and the total was due to those washing up, those who arrived late and the people running the workshops. There were problems with projectors and the lack of internet connection in the building. There is a general difficulty in that a lot of Amnesty material does rely on the use of computers. It should be possible to run workshops without them but that is probably not possible for one on social media. I should have sorted that aspect out before suggesting that particular workshop.

Torture in the Philippines

Lesley Burgess, who has recently become the Country Coordinator for the Philippines, gave a wide ranging talk on the Stop Torture Campaign in the Philippines. She gave background information on the history and geography of the country to show how they influenced the present situation. She included the history of Amnesty's opposition to torture. A worldwide survey of attitudes to torture by Amnesty showed many disturbing facts, such as that in many countries people fear that if they are arrested they will be tortured. Basically the police force in the Philippines is small, badly paid and ill trained. As in other places they find it easier to arrest lots of people for crimes and then try and get them to confess by torturing them. The police are not subject to any form of accountability for their behaviour. They act with impunity. There are many concerns about what happens in the Philippines including: enforced disappearances, abuses by paramilitaries (effectively private armies of the few wealthy families in the country), ethnic conflicts, and death squads in the South. Lesley showed a picture of the "torture wheel" used by the police to determine which form of torture will be used against known drug

Regional conference report continued from page 5

dealers. In one case torture was recorded on CCTV and later shown on TV. A senior police officer was known to be carrying out some of the torture and yet he is still in his job and is on a national human rights commission. There was an Anti-Torture Act in the 2009 in the Philippines, but no-one has been convicted under it. According to Amnesty there are many ways to prevent torture including: access to relatives and lawyers, monitoring of interrogations, an independent complaints process, protection against reprisals on people who give statements against those being tried, and independent medical services for the accused. There is an Amnesty report on torture in the Philippines called "Above the Law", which asks for an independent police commission. The researchers interviewed 55 people who had been tortured.

The state of Amnesty International

Sam Strudwick gave a summary of the present state of Amnesty and a little on the future direction. He started with some of the basic facts. There were about 7 million activists for Amnesty in 2014, including all those who wrote letters or contributed financially. Of those about two million are members. Amnesty has a presence in 216 countries. Internationally there has been a large growth in numbers with the best being an approximate doubling in India. There are now four Hubs carrying out local research and several more are planned.

Sam mentioned some of Amnesty's recent successes including: a reduction in torture round the

world; the My Body My Rights campaign has led the Moroccan government to change the rape laws; the Crisis and Country Campaign has helped induce Uganda to drop the anti-homosexuality bill; considerable activity in the Central African Republic, in Syria and in Turkey; help for Human Rights Defenders in Afghanistan; assisted in rejecting the charge against Elena Klimova in an anti-gay propaganda trial in Russia; help with securing the release of Hakamada Iwao in Japan from the longest running period on death row in the world; working on the freeing of Meriam Ibrahim from death row in Sudan for refusing to give up her Christian faith; ensuring that there is new training for those escorting people being deported from UK after cases of deaths in custody; and the case of Raif Badawi who has not been flogged for the last three weeks after being sentenced to 50 lashes a week for 20 weeks.

The plans for 2015 include more emphasis on fundraising as the membership has declined slightly. The main campaigns will be: Individuals at Risk; defending the Human Rights Act; My Body My Rights; Crises and Tactical Campaigning; Stop Torture. The AIUK development focus will include more on governance, connecting better with people, and more involvement of people. There will be an International Council Meeting for the whole of Amnesty in August. AIUK is now on a sound financial footing until 2018. There will be a relaunch of the International Secretariat website on 28th February.

Philip Strudwick
South East Regional Representative

UPDATE ON THE THREE MANSOURA WOMEN – Our Prisoners of Conscience

ABRAR AL-ANANY, MENATALIA MOUSTAFA and YOUSRA ELKHATEEB remain in prison for their actions on 12th November 2013 protesting peacefully at Mansoura University. When the security forces moved in with armoured vehicles and tear gas 70 protesters were injured and 23 arrested including these three young women. Abrar and Menatalia were jailed for 2 years in Yousra for 6 years. At a special court on 12th April their case is being reviewed and this is the last chance they have to challenge their conviction.

Do sign the attached letter and if possible send a photocopy to His Excellency Mr.

Nasser Kamel, Ambassador, Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt, 26 South Street, London W1K 1DW.
Many thanks. Celia



NEW AMNESTY REPORT ON THE CONFLICT IN BENGHAZI

A new and detailed report from Amnesty on the conflict in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi was published at the end of January and is on our website for viewing: www.amnesty.org.uk.

Amnesty now estimates that there are about 400,000 displaced people in Libya and explains the conflict that has raged in Benghazi since last October and how the two main groups of contestants have become aligned with two rival governments, one in Tripoli, the capital of Libya, and one in Tobruk in the east (though neither of these rival governments actually has the authority or power to govern effectively even in part of Libya). This slows clearly the reason why our group among others, had to stop campaigning for the safe return home of the 40,000 or so displaced people of Tawargha.

The report describes serious human rights abuses and violations of international law by all sides in the conflict which intensified in Benghazi last October when General Khalifa Haftar's "Operation Dignity" fighters launched an operation to capture the city from the control of fighters loyal to the Shura Council of Benghazi Revolutionaries (SCBR). More than 260 civilians and fighters went missing in June – November last year. Many abductions were carried out by groups affiliated with the city's Shura Council. Operation Dignity forces have also captured, tortured and killed fighters and civilians.

An estimated 90,000 people have been displaced by this conflict alone; there are other local and regional conflicts in different parts of the country.

Amnesty International's report notes that many in Libya are hoping for a stronger message from the international community to the warring factions that are tearing their country apart, and

emphasises that the countries that took part in NATO's military campaign against the regime of Colonel al-Ghaddafi "should stop looking in the other direction and play a more active role in addressing the situation in Libya.

Amnesty makes the following recommendations in this report :

- The International Criminal Court should investigate crimes under international law committed in Libya since the overthrow of Gaddafi in 2011
- The United Nations Security Council should impose targeted sanctions, including travel bans and asset freezes on individuals or organisations planning or committing acts that violate international law
- All states should ensure the UN arms embargo on Libya is fully implemented and support measures to end impunity in Libya.

This Report has been sent to the Foreign Office.

Celia

To see the full report please go to

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde19/0001/2015/en/>

Event Noticeboard

What is the link between Chaucer and contemporary refugees? Answer: The Refugee Tales <http://refugeetales.org/>

THE REFUGEE TALES : A walk in solidarity with refugees and detainees from Dover to Crawley via Canterbury.

The Refugee Tales: A Walk in Solidarity with Refugees and Detainees from Dover to Crawley via Canterbury celebrates Refugee Week. An eighty mile walk over nine days (13 to 21 June 2015) follows the route of the old Pilgrim's Way, and is modeled on The Canterbury Tales. At each of the stopping points of the walk there will be readings and performances of Tales connected with the refugee experience commissioned from well-known writers and poets. This is a walk reminiscent of that of the Canterbury pilgrims and it is inspired by journeys made by countless refugees, many on foot, fleeing war and persecution. Their experiences will be shared on the walk.

Message of support from Helena Kennedy QC **'The Canterbury Tales collected together a host of stories about the lives of a set of travellers in England in the thirteenth century. From my experience as a current day lawyer, refugees' stories are just as affecting: horrifying but also life-affirming, frightening but also uplifting. Our humanity is measured by our empathy and willingness to step into the shoes of others. The idea of sharing the migrant's experience by travelling with them and lending an ear as well as a hand is ingenious. This is a journey worthy of our support.'**

Those walking the entire walk will be offered the option to stay with the walkers in simple accommodation, vegetarian food is provided and the cost to walk the entire route with entry to evening performances of the Tales is £165. Day walkers can sign up for £5 a day. The walk ends with The Ex-Detainees Tale and a reprise of many of the Tales performed at The Hawth Theatre in Crawley on 21st June at 7.30pm. We invite participants to walk their support for refugees in the UK and be part of a positive news story created from the real stories that Gatwick Detainee Visitors Group visitors hear.

Come and walk your support for Refugee Week 2015 – Register now online!

Facebook: The Refugee Tales

Twitter: @RefugeeTales

BRIGHTON & HOVE AMNESTY GROUP CONTACTS

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

New Member Secretary: Sue Tel: 07790 755921

Group Secretary—Catherine brightonandhoveai@googlemail.com 07759 271399

Treasurer: Luke lukebeale@hotmail.com

Newsletter editor: - Emma Parker: Tel: 01273 232397

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

Lanes collection organiser: - Julian julianwatmore@gmail.com 07583334740

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 Mansoura women (Egypt) Celia Stubbs—01273 593833

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

Arms Trade Treaty—Luke lukebeale@hotmail.com

Stop Torture—Michael Fisher - michaelowenfisher@hotmail.com

My Body My Rights—Catherine 07759 271399

Tactical Campaigns—Luke lukebeale@hotmail.com

Amnesty Websites: international - www.amnesty.org AI UK - www.amnesty.org.uk local group - www.amnesty.org.uk/brighton

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

Amnesty UK Human Rights Centre - Tel: 0207 0331500.

