



News from the Minehead Group

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Chris Wood

Our friend and loyal group member, Chris Wood, sadly died on 26 January 2016. We asked a few members for their thoughts: *Chris's quietly authoritative and informed contributions to debate, especially around the Arms Trade Treaty, stood out. He felt strongly, but spoke softly – a rare talent. Chris came regularly to our meetings, and supported all*

our campaigning work. (AD) Chris was supportive and helpful at so many AIM events. We worked easily together on photo campaigns and stalls. We had a good time making and painting the cage some years ago. At an event, he would often say 'this is going really well', even when I thought it wasn't. I shall notice his absence often, but hold to his encouragement to us. (CL) As with everything he did in life Chris was thorough and reliable with tasks he took on for AI. I never heard an impatient or pessimistic remark from dear Chris, who was a joy to know. (JW) We will all miss him greatly.

A Memorial Meeting for Chris is being planned for Monday 11 April at 1100 at The Beach Hotel. Jenny invites AIM members to attend. RSVP to Jenny please.



Actions you can take this month:

- ✓ **Come along** to our annual **Quiz** on Friday 4 March at Minehead Social Club and bring your friends.
- ✓ **Celebrate International Women's Day** on Tuesday 8 March by helping at (or visiting) our action stall between 1000 and 12 noon, outside Iceland on The Avenue, Minehead.
- ✓ **Sign the petition** to stop the UK government turning a blind eye to corporate abuses. When UK companies are suspected of human rights abuses, the government has a complaints process in place, but evidence shows this process isn't working properly. Many allegations against UK-headquartered corporations are being dismissed before they've even been examined. Ask the Secretary of State for Business to ensure these allegations are properly investigated. Go to www.amnesty.org.uk/actions
- ✓ **Send a letter** to the Ethiopian Embassy in London on behalf of Eskinder Nega and another on behalf of Ibni Oumar Mahamet Saleh in Chad (letters attached to the emailed version of this newsletter).

Round up of February group news

We held our **group AGM** in February and agreed our outline plan of activities for the year. The group's annual report has been sent to AIUK and is attached to the emailed version of this newsletter. We agreed that 2015 had been a successful year of campaigning, awareness-raising and fund-raising. And we were particularly pleased to have been able to send **£1,600** to AIUK – the most we've ever raised in a single year. Well done everyone!

Diary Dates

Monthly meetings:

We meet on the fourth Tuesday of the month (except August and December) at 1930, at the Quaker Meeting House on Bancks Street, Minehead. The first part of the meeting is open to all and features a speaker, film or workshop. After a tea break, AI members are invited to stay for a short business meeting which will end by 2130.

Friday 4 March

Fund-raising Quiz:
1930 at Minehead Social Club, North Road, Minehead.

Tuesday 8 March

International Women's Day action stall 1000-1200 (set up at 0930) outside Iceland, The Avenue Minehead.

Tuesday 22 March

Group meeting: AIUK AGM resolutions – discussion and guidance to our delegate on voting.

Sat/Sun 9-10 April

AIUK AGM & annual conference.

Tuesday 26 April

Group meeting: report back from AGM

Tuesday 24 May

Group meeting: speaker from the Children's Human Rights network



Alison and Cherry attended the **Regional Conference** in Exeter on 20 February. They found it to be an excellent day and said that the overall message from all speakers was that our most useful contribution is to keep campaigning, demonstrating, raising public awareness and writing letters. As part of the conference, everyone took part in a photo action outside the cathedral, holding up prison bars and banners saying 'Seeking asylum is not a crime' and 'Refugees welcome'.

Cherry writes: We started with an excellent speaker from **Kyrgyzstan**, a country of about 6 million mainly Muslim people, separated from the Soviet Union in 1991. **Aida Baijumanova** talked about the work of her NGO, supporting various human rights organisations. Her message was that the HR situation is getting rapidly worse and the political space is shrinking. **Steve Symonds** (AIUK) talked about the **refugee** situation, saying that we need to recognise we are in a new era in terms of refugee and migration numbers, which will not go away. In the last two years the number of refugees worldwide has gone from 10 million to 15 million, for which most of the burden is borne by developing countries. I attended the workshop on **China**, where we heard that under Xi Ji Ping the HR situation has deteriorated. The drive to reduce corruption is often only a tool to remove opposition and disappearances are common, such as Wan Yu, a lawyer who supports HR cases and the Hong Kong bookshop people. In the workshop on South Asia, members were told that **Afghanistan** is still the worst place to be a woman, with very high rates of maternal and child mortality. Three quarters of adult women are illiterate, although the positive news is that girls are now able to go to school. It is possible that Amnesty will restart the previous work on Afghan women, which stopped at the end of 2014. In **Pakistan** use of death penalty has increased hugely since the school bombing just over a year ago (350 executions since then). Government says this is to deter terrorists but most of the victims are 'ordinary' criminals or not guilty of any crime but convicted on the basis of confessions under torture. Corruption and insecurity are major problems. Things are better in **India** but there are problems related to indigenous land rights (at risk from industrial development and coal mining).

Alison attended a workshop on AIUK's **Asylum Justice Project**. *She writes:* the aims of this project are: end the destitution of asylum seekers; change public perception; put pressure to encourage fairer decision making; reduce immigration detention. (30,000 are currently in UK detention centres with no set time limit.) Unfortunately the All Party Parliamentary Group Inquiry into detention is not discussing the no time-limit dimension. We are asked to raise awareness of the injustices in our detention system by talking to a lot of people about asylum and immigration detention. Refugee week (20-26 June) might provide opportunities for campaigning. We will also be taking part in AI's new global campaign being launched in mid-September 'People on the Move'. If you're interested in finding out more about refugees, the following charities have excellent websites: Asylum Aid, Refugee Action and The Refugee Council.

Campaign News

At our AGM, our campaign coordinators gave overviews of their campaign activities during the year. As you'll read in our annual report, we have had a successful year of campaigning and awareness raising for AI's priority campaigns of Stop Torture, My Body My Rights and Write for Rights. We have also been kept busy writing letters for our individual prisoner case, Eskinder Nega. A letter is attached to the emailed version of this newsletter in connection with Eskinder. This month we are also asked to write on behalf of Ibni Oumar Mahamet Saleh, opposition leader in Chad, who was arrested eight years ago by Chadian security forces. Despite requests from his family, international human rights organisations, the UN & the EU for information, his whereabouts remain unknown.

How to contact the Minehead Amnesty International Local Group:

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