



## 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*

#### **3rd March**

Guest speaker to talk about the Kurdish people in Turkey

#### **7th April**

Group Business Meeting and campaign update  
All welcome

#### **Monthly Collection**

**19th March**

**16th April**

Contact Julian  
julianwatmore@gmail.com  
07469776295

#### **Monthly Stalls**

**5th March**

Sydney Street  
Contact Jill 01273 621697  
11am to 1pm

**23rd April**

**(to be confirmed)  
Jumble Sale**

**6th August 2016**

**Pride**

Group will take part in the parade and have a campaigning stall

**September 2016**

**Date to be confirmed  
Annual Street Collection**

**17th December 2016**

**Write for Rights**

10am to 4pm  
Friends Meeting House  
Ship Street

## **Kurdistan**

**Guest speaker**

**8pm**

**3rd March 2016**

**Community Base, Queens Road Brighton**

**Free talk  
All welcome**



*Kurdish refugees from Syria wait at the Turkish border*

We are delighted to be able to welcome Chris to our March meeting.

Chris has recently visited Kurdistan and would like to talk about the relationship between Turkey and the Kurds.

He will also talk about the military repression of the Kurdish people.

## IRANIAN BLOGGER GETS FIFTEEN YEARS IN PRISON

### Monthly Stall Update

Date Saturday 6th February

Time 11 - 1pm

Venue Outside Amnesty Bookshop, Sydney Street, Brighton

Weather Cold and dull but dry

Activists Andrew, John, Celia and Jill

Campaign HOSSEIN RONAGHI MALEKI

In 2009 Iranian blogger, Maleki was sentenced to 15 years in prison for offences including membership of the internet group 'Iran Proxy', spreading propaganda against the system and insulting the Supreme Leader. During this time he has been held in solitary confinement and allegedly tortured. We wrote to Ayatollah Khamenei asking that Maleki was unconditionally released as he is a Prisoner of Conscience, held solely for the peaceful exercise of his rights to freedom of expression and association.

We asked people in the street to sign letters and collected 80 which we sent to Iran.

Next Stall Saturday 5th February

Campaign Urgent Action from current Amnesty Magazine.

If you would like to help contact Jill on 01273 621697

## Country co ordinator vacancies

Amnesty International UK are currently accepting applications for the following country co ordinator positions:

1 vacancy in the **West and Central Africa** team

1 vacancy in the **China and East Asia team** (focus on China)

1 vacancy in the **North America and Caribbean team** (focus on Haiti and Dominican Republic)

Amnesty UK relies on a network of volunteer country specialists who work directly with researchers at our [International Secretariat](#) to ensure that we remain engaged and



informed of human rights developments around the world, including those that might not directly relate to any one of our core campaigns, or work on individuals.

See <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/country-coordinators> for more information and an application form.

## Albert Woodfox Release

On the 19th February 2016, his 69th Birthday, Albert Woodfox was freed from over four decades of solitary confinement. The last remaining of the 'Angola 3' to be incarcerated, Woodfox's conviction had been overturned three times. On 8 June 2015, Federal Judge James Brady granted Woodfox unconditional release and barred the state from retrying him. However, Judge Brady's ruling was overturned on appeal.



Over the course of the last five years, Amnesty's global movement has generated more than 650,000 actions on behalf of the Angola 3. UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Juan Mendez decried the indefinite solitary confinement imposed on Woodfox, saying that it "clearly amounts to torture and it should be lifted immediately."

Jasmine Heiss, Senior Campaigner for Individuals at Risk at Amnesty USA, said:

"After four decades of isolation, Albert Woodfox's release is long overdue and undeniably just.

"Nothing will truly repair the cruel, inhuman and degrading solitary confinement that the state of Louisiana inflicted upon him. But this belated measure of justice, on Woodfox's 69th birthday, is something he has been seeking for more than half his life. Amnesty International USA joins his supporters around the world in celebrating Woodfox and his legal team's tireless pursuit of justice."

You can write a message of congratulations or your thoughts on his release to Albert Woodfox by visiting:

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/albert-woodfox-free-louisiana-usa-after-43-years-solitary-confinement-us>

## NATIONAL CONFERENCE AND AGM 2016

Amnesty's National Conference & AGM takes place on 9-10 April 2016 at East Midlands Conference centre in Nottingham. All Amnesty International members can attend and vote. Please visit <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/agm> for more information and how to book your place.

The National Conference is about bringing people together to learn from one another and be inspired. There will be workshops you can attend on lots of different topics, as well as an action centre where you can learn more about the different things we do, inspirational speakers, one-to-one help in clinics, and a social where you can meet other activists and hang out with fellow human rights defenders.

This years conference is free of charge including food. Accommodation can be booked at either student halls or local hotel through the Amnesty website (link above) at either £40 or £60 per person.

## **SE Regional Conference 20 Feb 2016. Lewes Town Hall**

About 150 activists from Groups as far apart as Woking and Canterbury attended this year's SE Regional Conference in Lewes Town Hall. Six members of the Brighton and Hove group were there.

### **Human Right Act**

After the usual welcomes etc the first hour was given over to a presentation by Stephen Bowen, Director of the British Institute of Human Rights, on the Human Rights Act which became law in 1998. For the first time this Act embedded in law measures to protect the Human Rights of all resident in the UK and of British Citizens representing the government overseas, be it in the armed forces or the diplomatic corps.

Its main purpose, as represented in the equivalent law in over 100 countries around the world, is to protect the people from the power of government if this goes too far. In this our HRA is seen as a great success. So why does this government wish to replace the HRA with a new Bill of Rights?

Unfortunately, and not unsurprisingly, it is not to increase this protection. Notably, the protection would be limited to people resident in the UK. No extraterritoriality means no protection for citizens working abroad for the country. In addition the rights of foreign nationals guilty of criminal offences would be significantly reduced.

It would aim to take power from the judicial system and place it in the hands of politicians. This is always a fine balance, especially given the changing state of the world. The HRA should not be tinkered with in reaction to new circumstances. The rights embedded in it should be universal and non negotiable.

To get more detail on this look up BIHR on your search engine of choice.

AIUK will be campaigning against this government's manifesto proposal to replace the current law.

### **Lewes Priory School**

A group of 8 pupils from Priory School talked about the strength of their school group and the various impressive activities they engaged in. It seems very active and, a key issue for groups in educational institutions, able to keep going when people move on. They are supported by the Lewes AI group who also help groups in Ringmer Community college and Chailey School.

### **Group Reports on recent activities.**

9 groups gave short talks on recent successful activities. One which caught our fancy was getting an author of a book with a strong HR theme to talk about it.

After lunch there were 3 parallel workshops.

**The Death Penalty Campaign Workshop** discussed particular cases, and then general statistics, using quizzes prepared by AI trainer Philip Strudwick. We had to think of arguments in favour of the death penalty as well as against, and to rate in order of culpability (in our opinions!) a list of 24 offences, including genocide, abortion and blasphemy, which can incur the death penalty

Philip recommended we look at the Death Penalty Information Centre via Google. He said that opinion in the USA is turning against use of the death penalty. He is keen for local groups to continue to campaign for its abolition.

**Media Relations** led by Richard Woodman (our new SE Regional Media Support Officer) focused on getting our message across in traditional media. He feels that this is a more effective way to reach new groups of people whom we might not other reach and who would not come across us in the "Social Media".

We received lots of simple and obvious (when presented like this!) tips about how to create ac-

counts of news stories and then to get them get published.

### **My Body My Rights**

AIUK trainer, Maggie Hamilton, led an insightful workshop on the My Body My Rights campaign. Amnesty will be focussing on three areas: Decriminalising abortion in cases of rape, incest and when the health of mother is at risk; ending gender based violence; and access to sexual and reproductive education and services.

In a world where young women in El Salvador are imprisoned - sometimes for decades - for miscarrying, and where girls as young as nine are married off to settle debts in Burkina Faso, this campaign is highly relevant.

One task we had to undertake was to look through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and note down which rights we thought the campaign would protect. It turned out to be nearly every one. We discussed the difficulty in challenging cultural behaviours, the limitations of Amnesty's abortion policy and how to tackle the difficult questions we are all likely to come up against when working on this campaign. I found it really useful in clarifying the main direction of Amnesty's work and how being able to make decisions about your own body and sexuality is an important human right. For more information you can visit <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/issues/My-Body-My-Rights>

### **How Amnesty Works and is changing**

We finished with a session from Kate Allen (Director of AIUK) along with two of the 12 members of the Board of AIUK. This took us through proposals to improve the constitution and governance of AIUK. Potentially a rather dull topic but vital for the organisation to continue to grow from our current 120 000 fee paying members while remaining effective.

Some other notable points:

- Following the decision to move our focus "closer to the ground" the 13% of funding in 2011 directed towards the "South" has increased to 47% in 2015
- This has led to major growth. AI India can now call on 2 million + activists. This is reflected in other countries such as Brazil. These countries are moving towards being self funding.
- Nigeria is now setting up an AI headquarters.
- The Website is going to be improved.

An idea from the Media Relations workshop.



**WHAT WOULD YOU DO?**  
**Refugees are people like you.**  
**They just happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.**



## **UK FAILS TO PROPERLY INVESTIGATE ALLEGED HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES BY BRITISH COMPANIES**

**Providing key communications infrastructure for US bases involved in drone attacks on civilians... security services used at Guantánamo Bay and the West Bank Barrier... discriminatory treatment of employees... damage to local communities from oil and gas extraction... selling intrusive surveillance technology to repressive governments... These are all complaints received by the UK's National Contact Point about British companies since 2011. A new Amnesty investigation, published in February, assesses the NCP's response.**

The OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises (the Guidelines) are a comprehensive code of conduct for businesses. They are consistent with internationally recognised standards and cover employment and industrial relations, human rights, the environment, information disclosure, bribery, consumer interests, science and technology, competition and taxation. All 46 governments which have adopted the guidelines are obliged to set up National Contact Points (NCP), whose role is to undertake promotional activities, handle enquiries and contribute to the resolution of complaints. The UK's NCP is housed in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

First developed in 1976, the Guidelines were revised in 2011, putting far greater emphasis on human rights. Amnesty's report poses the question 'are British businesses being properly held to account for human rights abuses connected to their operations around the world?' **The report concludes that they are not.** This article looks at some of the reasons why.

**Two out of three complaints rejected:** Of the 25 cases investigated, two out of three were rejected at the initial assessment stage. Yet the rationale for rejecting the cases is unclear and demonstrates a misunderstanding of the Guidelines.

**Slow to respond:** Complaints should be assessed, examined or mediated and concluded within a year, but the UK NCP rarely hits this target. In certain cases this exposes communities to imminent risk of human rights abuses, such as lack of access to clean water.

**Inconsistency and partiality:** Amnesty is particularly concerned about the inconsistency of NCP's judgements, including when assessing the legitimacy of a complaint. Yet when it comes to the companies, the NCP is far less stringent, often accepting the companies' own reports which tend to emphasise the good and downplay the bad.

**Downplaying future impact:** The NCP often rejects concerns about the potential future impacts on human rights of certain business activities. This undermines the preventative aspect of the Guidelines to 'avoid causing or contributing to adverse human rights impacts'.

**Reluctance to make hard-hitting recommendations:** Even when the NCP concludes that there has been a breach in the guidelines, its recommendations tend to focus on the company's future activities, such as improving due-diligence mechanisms, and does not take into account the complainants requests. The NCP is particularly reluctant to suggest that the company ceases operations.

**Lack of resources:** Amnesty points to limited capacity as a key problem for the NCP. This includes a lack of powers to enforce participation and disclosure from companies, limited funding and inadequate expertise to deal with the variety and complexity of complaints.

**The report sets out a series of recommendations:** These include incorporating a panel of experts, strengthening the independence and capacity of the Steering Board, allocating the NCP appropriate resources, making the initial assessment stage fairer and penalising companies found in breach of the Guidelines.

The UK's watchdog has a very good reputation as being one of the best performing NCPs. Hopefully by taking on Amnesty's recommendations it can start to live up to that reputation.



*Past protests against an open-pit coal mining project in Phulbari, a highly populated and agricultural region of Bangladesh. The NCP rejected the complaint against British-based company, GCM Resources, last year.*

*Photo: Farjana K Godhuly/AFP/Getty Images*

To find out more, including details of all 25 cases and Amnesty's recommendations, the full report, *Obstacle Course: How the UK's National Contact Point handles human rights complaints under the OECD's Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises*, is available for download at <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/resources/report-uk-national-contact-point-how-human-rights-complaints-are-handled#.VtAbIpyLTIU>.

*By Freya Lyte*



## Take Action

### TAHER MOKHTAR, HOSSAMELDINE HAMMAD AND AHMED MOHAMED - DETAINED EGYPTIANS

On 14<sup>th</sup> January plainclothes officers from Abdeen police station raided a central Cairo flat where the above three men lived. In what they said was a routine check, without a search warrant they took mobile phones, laptops papers written for Egypt's Doctors; Syndicate and other items.

Dr. Taher Mokhtar and his two friends Mossameldine Hammad and Ahmed Mohamed were then taken to the police station and interrogated for nine hours without a lawyer present. Without releasing the minutes of the interrogation, they drew up a report which accused the three of being in possession of leaflets that called for the overthrow of the regime and trying to change the constitution. They also accused them, since 25<sup>th</sup> January 2011, of holding meetings in their apartment and inciting people to destroy state facilities. They are currently detained in the Investigations Prison of Cairo's Tora Prison complex. While his two friends were transferred to an ordinary cell Dr. Taher Mokhtar was beaten by police when he asked why he was not being transferred with his friends. The Doctors' Syndicate has filed a complaint with the Public Prosecutor and Interior Minister asking for an investigation into the treatment of Dr. Mokhtar.

Please sign the attached letter.

Thank you.

## **BRIGHTON & HOVE AMNESTY GROUP CONTACTS**

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## **Campaign Co-ordinators:**

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**Stop Torture**—Michael - [michaelowenfisher@hotmail.com](mailto:michaelowenfisher@hotmail.com)

**My Body My Rights**—Jess 07740 344832

**Amnesty Websites:** international - [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org) AI UK - [www.amnesty.org.uk](http://www.amnesty.org.uk) local group - [www.amnesty.org.uk/brighton](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/brighton)

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