

Lambeth Amnesty Group Newsletter

May 2013

Forthcoming dates for the diary

Tuesday 28 th May 6.30pm	Human Rights – A journey through London’s history Details and booking: http://amnestyradicalswalk.eventbrite.co.uk/
Monday 3 rd June 7.30pm	Wandsworth Amnesty screening of ‘I am a slave’ at the Exhibit, Balham
Tuesday 11 th June 6.15pm	Letter writing at the Dogstar, Brixton
Sunday 16 th June (TBC)	Celebrating Sanctuary stall on South Bank
Tuesday 18 th June 8pm	Lambeth Amnesty Meeting

Meeting Notes 21st May 2013 at Clapham Community Project

Present

Ros Davidson, Anita Sollis, Anna Reisenberger, Catherine Hallaband, Rebecca Aron, Elena Barbiero, Susan Evans, Isabelle Monk, Gareth Williams, Martin Hethering

The group welcomed **Joab Omondi and Lynn Carter from the Prisoners of Conscience Appeal Fund**. Lynn is the Director of PoC and explained that it was originally established in 1962 as the relief arm of Amnesty International. The Prisoners of Conscience Appeal Fund are a separate charity and the only agency in the UK making grants specifically to prisoners of conscience. Their website is here: www.prisonersofconscience.org

Joab is an environmental scientist and geography teacher from Kenya, where he was also an active human rights campaigner. His name is Joab as he was born early in the morning and he was brought up in a village surrounded by nature in western Kenya. When he was young he fell into the wetlands and nearly died. He believes that if nature nearly kills you then you become blood brothers and when he saw that the wetlands were being cultivated and drained he decided to do something about it. He organised peaceful mass protests against the government’s draining and pollution of the wetlands.

Joab was detained several times by the government’s secret agents during the single party era. On several occasions he was a victim of torture, receiving death threats, severe beatings and being held in cells flooded with water for long periods. In 1996, Joab’s environmental organisation (The Lake Victoria Wetlands Team) was officially deregistered and he was expelled from his postgraduate degree programme. The group continued operating secretly until Joab escaped to the UK in 2007.

With the help of a PoC grant, Joab completed a PGCE in Geography at the Institute of Education in 2002 and became head of his department in the school at which he taught. He is very proud of his students. He continues with his environment conservation work and has run several school programmes that enable students to visit other countries and be involved in short-term environmental conservation and management projects. With PoC assistance, Joab is now undertaking a PhD in Climate Change and how it is influencing people’s relationships with natural resources at Anglia Ruskin University.

Asked if there were still issues with the wetlands Joab explained that climate change is forcing people to do things that aren’t normal and the way they engage with nature is changing. He sees climate change as a human rights issue. With time things are getting better but the Kenyan police shot students near the University recently for protesting. There is a free press now though and Joab is going back to Kenya for a pilot study soon then will go back for the proper fieldwork which will be for six months. The group asked if he would be willing to return after six months to report on his findings and he agreed to that.

The group thanked Joab and Lynn for such an interesting and positive talk and for travelling so far to come and see us.

Secretary's Report, Campaign updates and upcoming events

Venue for letter writing on 11th June – decided on the Dogstar in Brixton. Ros to inform Southwark and Wandsworth groups and check Caroline has materials. Sue to check with Dogstar that this is OK.

Celebrating Sanctuary Stall – Gareth still waiting to hear if this event is taking place. Once he knows for sure he will let the group know and ask for volunteers.

Martin from the Southwark group came to the meeting and spoke about doing a joint Lambeth/Southwark (and possibly Wandsworth) action for the San Jose peace community in Columbia. The idea is that before the end of June, groups take photos of themselves around local landmarks and then send them to the community as a gesture of support. The group agreed this would be a good idea and that it could be done at the Celebrating Sanctuary event if it goes ahead. Lambeth will let Martin know when/if this is confirmed and then go on from there.

The group signed postcards to Jacob Zuma President of South Africa asking him to press the Zimbabwean authorities to ensure that the 2013 elections are free from violence, that all reports of political violence are investigated and that election observers are deployed.

The group also signed a letter to Alice Thomas Yusuf Samaan, Ambassador to the Embassy of the Kingdom of Bahrain asking for the release of Mahdi 'Issa Mahdi Abu Dheeb – former President of the Bahrain Teachers' Association (BTA) and other jailed prisoners of conscience.

Group roles

The group doesn't have a permanent Secretary or Chair at the moment so volunteers were called for. Gareth volunteered to do the newsletter and Sue to become Secretary (and receive the monthly mailing). In her absence Ros could cover. The Chair can be a roving one (Ros and Anita both volunteered to do this.) The group needs to decide who is dealing with the email account.

Staying in touch with Amnesty in London

There are numerous ways to find out about what Amnesty is doing in London:

- Lambeth Amnesty website: <http://www2.amnesty.org.uk/groups/lambeth>
- London Amnesty website: <http://london.amnesty.org.uk>
- London Amnesty Google group (you can sign into this to get regular updates of events and opportunities for volunteering): <http://groups.google.com/group/amnesty-london-region>
- Amnesty UK website for events: www.amnesty.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=10011

Next Meeting

Normally, meetings are held on the 3rd Tuesday of every month at the Clapham Community Project starting at 8pm (no meeting in August). The next meeting will be on **Tuesday 18th June 2013**.