



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

May 2014

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Campaigning

Planning our campaigning

The group coordinators held a meeting last month to discuss the planning pack recently received from AIUK. We have decided to opt into most (but not all) of the campaigns. The campaign leads will be outlining what each campaign is about at the June meeting, with an opportunity to brainstorm ideas to get us going.

Stop Torture. This international priority campaign will be launched on May 13th. We have received the first campaign mailing. Lianne is leading (Lianne.slavin@googlemail.com.)

Women's Rights. There are two campaigns of relevance: Women's Rights in Afghanistan and My Body My Rights. We decided that the Women's Rights subgroup will look at both of these areas. Marie-Louise (mlohanrahan@outlook.com) and Mary Gibbs (gibbs.mary@gmail.com) are leading.

Individuals and Groups at Risk. This is such a key area of Amnesty work. Our main input is likely to be via our allocated Burmese long term case file (lead Jean Mary chnmanchester@gmail.com) and our regular letter writing and seasonal Greetings Card sessions (lead Hazel hazelerrey@gmail.com)

Regional Campaigning. We will continue to receive actions on Southern Africa, predominantly Zimbabwe (Anne to lead anne.walker9@ntlworld.com) and have also opted in to the Middle East and North Africa regions, including Syria and Egypt (Helen helsunderhill@yahoo.co.uk to lead).

If you are interested in being part of a sub group specifically working on one of these areas, contact the lead for more info.

Burma - Dr. Tun Aung.

We had some good news 10 days ago, that Dr. Tun Aung was being moved to Insein Prison. In Insein prisoners are given access to medication, better food, and more healthy living conditions. Often prisoners are transferred to Insein prior to release. And this is the hope for Dr. Tun Aung.



Rakhine State.

Conflict between Buddhists and Moslems continues. At a recent conference "Decades of Persecution and Destruction of Myanmar's Rohingya" the chief concern was

that there are signs that this persecution is on the brink of genocide.

One speaker defined what counts as genocide by international law, and how to anticipate genocide. The signs he gave that indicate that genocide might be imminent were :

1. Hate speech - There is one monk in Burma who regularly speaks against Moslems.
2. Abuse - Moslems are called "dogs" (a big insult) and "African carp" (fish reputed to breed like rabbits and eat each other).
3. Frequent violence - against Moslems and their property.

Other speakers spoke of many signs that something worse than the massacre in Rwanda in 1994 could happen in Burma.

One speaker had noted that "many activists inside Burma are unprepared for or cannot see "the persecution of the Rohingya"

It is not all gloomy. A speaker of the Sentinel project said they were trying to predict attacks by "mapping hate speeches" and trying to use mobile phones to warn possible victims to get out of the way.

Possible action could be to write to our UK MPs, and ask for Dr. Tun Aung's release, and also ask them to urge the FCO and our embassy in Rangoon to urge the Burmese government to stop the nationwide verbal and physical violence against Moslems.

The Burmese Vice President has recently said "The Rakhine issue has made democratic government difficult and turned the international community's positive view of Burma into a negative view". This may mean that if the FCO speak on the Rohingya issue it might tip the balance.

Urgent Action.

Two journalists Zaw Pe and Win Myint Hlaing have been arrested, tried and sentenced to one year in prison for investigating and criticizing the education authority in Magwe. Details are on the AI web site. - <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA16/006/2014/en> we are asked to write before June 15th.

Zimbabwe

Maggie Towse, The AIUK Zimbabwe country coordinator reports that things continue to be fairly quiet in Zimbabwe. WOZA, and other human rights groups, have kept a low profile for most of this year, apart from their traditional Valentine's Day marches in January. Much of the press in Zimbabwe has been preoccupied with the persistent corruption scandal and the recent celebrations for President Mugabe's 90 birthday and Independence Day celebrations on 18 April.

President Mugabe made several long speeches at these events and repeated some of the content in his recent BBC interview. He continues to re-iterate his hostility to homosexuality and has threatened to eject any foreign diplomats who encourage 'any gay activity'. This rhetoric has increased recently and activists from Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ) must be feeling very vulnerable. There have been no reports of arrests or other victimisation.

The economic situation is worsening, with over 75 major companies having closed since the beginning of the year, formal unemployment running in excess of 85% and the informal economy under increasing state interference. Recent figures suggest that maternal mortality is again showing an increase and now stands at 525/100,000 live births. Malaria is cited as being a major killer here as women who pan for gold use no protection against mosquitos. Illegal gold panning is increasingly common as people are desperate for money and food.

There are few signs that the government is working towards implementing the reforms necessary to align repressive

legislation with the new constitution and the opposition parties remain hopelessly split. Warring factions within ZANU-PF continue to jostle for position.

We are expecting to receive an action to mark World Press Freedom Day and the Zimbabwe team, now based in Jo'burg, is planning a regional press release and an international action on the use of radios in Zimbabwe and the need to free up Zimbabwe's media laws.

Write for Rights

Come along to our informal letter writing session in a friendly city centre café. Eat cake and write letters!



Letter Writing

Saturday 17th May
The Eighth Day Café, Oxford Road
2-4pm

Pens, paper and case sheets provided!

Remember - Letter-writing changes lives.

A letter from you could help free a prisoner, stop an execution or help a bereaved family receive justice.

Group news

Musicians Without Borders

We are delighted to be welcoming to our May meeting guest speaker Lis Murphy from Musicians Without Borders.



Established in 1999, Musicians without Borders is a global network organization using the power of music for healing and reconciliation in areas torn by war and conflict. Working with local communities, musicians and civil society organizations in countries across the world including the Balkans, the Middle East and Rwanda, Musicians without Borders seeks to use the power of music for healing,

reconciliation and building tolerance where war and conflict have left people isolated, divided and in despair.

We are working with Musicians Without Borders to put on a fundraising gig during Refugee Week. Make sure that you come along and bring your friends.

Didsbury Festival

We will be having a stall at the very popular Didsbury Festival on Saturday June 7th. It will feature the Egg game and family friendly campaigning material.



It is great fun and volunteers will be needed! If you can spare an hour or two any time between 11am and 4.30pm, get in touch with Anne (anne.walker9@ntlworld.com) or put your name on the list at the group meeting

Kate Allen, AIUK Director

We were all really disappointed when Kate's visit to the group in February was cancelled at the very last minute due to the awful weather. So, we are delighted to announce that Kate has found a spot in her diary for our September meeting. Get **10th September** in your diary now!



Subscriptions please!

Annual donations from members are vital to keep the Group going. The suggested sum is £20 if you have a wage, £3 otherwise, or whatever you can afford to give. If you haven't yet made a contribution, please bring your

cash or cheque to the next meeting or contact Treasurer Sean Dunne (Sean.a.dunne@btinternet.com) and he will tell you how to get the money to him.

Monthly Group Meetings

Held 2nd Wednesday each month - Cross Street Chapel
7.30pm

14th May: Speaker Lis Murphy from Musicians Without Borders

11th June: Campaigning review.

9th July: Stop Torture Campaign Workshop

Why not join a few of us for a pre-meeting meal just after 6. This month we will be in the bar at The Grinch on Chapel Walk. It would be good to see you there.

Acoustic Amnesty For Refugee Week



Steve has finalised the line-up for the musical/poetry fundraiser on **Friday June 20th** at Sacred Trinity (on Blackfriars Road very close to the city centre) in aid of both Amnesty and Musicians Without Borders.

Tickets are from <http://www.wegotickets.com/event/267175>

Keep an eye on the Facebook page for updates -
<https://www.facebook.com/events/236787429860057/?>



A flyer is attached with this newsletter. Send it to your friends, put it on Facebook, get it out there!

News from AIUK

AIUK AGM



Laura, Sameena, Mary and Anne spent an invigorating weekend in Edinburgh in April at the AIUK Annual General Meeting. We met lots of lovely AI people, from staff

members, other groups and networks, and even a lone individual member who happened to come from Manchester (we immediately invited her to our group meetings). Here we are enjoying a group hug with Farshid, the AIUK staff member who deals directly with all the local groups.

The main business of the meeting was to debate and vote on the resolutions. The only topic that generated much heated debate was whether AI should have a policy on sex work and if so, what this should be (decriminalisation or not). Typically, conference voted for both not having a policy and for having a policy calling for complete decriminalisation of sex work, not a very clear message for AIUK to take to the International Secretariat.

Most of the other motions were amended in a sensible fashion so that we felt able to support them; having been

assured that voting for them would not mean other areas of AI's current work would suffer.

We also listened to some inspiring speeches, notably from Reem al-Assil, cofounder of the Free Syrian Translators and Mark Thomson, Secretary General of the international organisation the Association for the Prevention of Torture.

Kate Allen, AIUK Director gave an up-beat speech reviewing the year. The last year has been difficult at The Human Rights Action Centre due to the major restructuring but it is clear that people are now in post and getting to grips with their new responsibilities.

Strategic Goals Consultation

As you may know Amnesty International recently started the process of consulting with all AI sections and members on where to focus our collective attention and energies from 2016-19. This is the start of a process which will run until April 2015 when the final recommendation – informed by this consultation with our global membership - will be compiled in time for the 2015 International Council Meeting (ICM), where the final decision on our 'strategic goals' will be determined.

We are being asked big open ended questions:

Question 1. 'Big picture trends' that are shaping the world.

Question 2. Where should AI focus/focus less in its work?

Unfortunately, all sections need to make their first draft submissions by the end of May 2014 and so, we are being asked to provide some initial feedback by 23rd May 2014. However, AIUK will continue to gather information and input this throughout the process until April 2015 and will be regularly updating the International Secretariat on the discussions at Amnesty in the UK. Given the timescale, we will try and make time for a brief discussion at the next meeting and then may well then arrange a focus group meeting and will revisit this during future group meetings.

European Parliament Elections

We will be voting for our MEPs on May 22nd. AIUK have issued a briefing outlining the main human rights recommendations for the candidates. If you run into one out canvassing, or if you feel moved to write to them, make sure you ask them a question on human rights. The briefing is attached with this newsletter.

School Speaker Training

Talking to young people in schools about human rights and about Amnesty, is both challenging and rewarding, but, above all, is an essential building block for Amnesty's work in the future.

If you are interested in becoming a trained school speaker, there is a training day coming to the north west on July 7th.

Anyone who is interested in attending, or finding out more about what the commitment involves, needs to send their contact details to speakers@amnesty.org.uk.

North West Conference 2014

This year's North West Amnesty Conference will take place on Saturday November 8th in Chester and is being hosted by Chester and Wrexham Group, supported by Colwyn Bay Group. Laura and Anne have volunteered to provide some help but will not be able to take very active roles on the organising committee this year as they are too busy being chair and secretary for the Manchester Group. As Manchester is probably the biggest group in the region it would be good if we could be represented.

Any one interested??? Please let Anne know.