**Minutes of Amnesty International Reading Group Meeting, 14th May 2015**

**Chair: Helen Ball**

1. **Welcome and introductions**

Ten people attended.

Apologies from Peter Howe, Anne McFarlane, Sue Bingham, Sean O’Leary and Liz Bailey.

1. **South Asia – Hilary and Charlotte are our new country co-ordinators and presented an overview for the group**

**Bangledesh –** key issue for campaigning is the Chittagong Hills area. Human rights abuses include no freedom of expression, no freedom of movement so no information gets out. Health and education is very poor and there is a great deal of violence towards the indigenous people. Land is taken away by the army. HR activists disappear. Officially secular, but secular bloggers have been murdered and others have received death threats.

**India** – communication is easier because of the internet. Key issue Bhopal Disaster which happened 30 years ago. Many still suffering, hardly any compensation received. AI looking for accountability and a clean up of the region. Violence against women has been in the news; the recommendations of an advisory committee was recently denied. Difficulties for indigeneous and tribal people. Coal mning communities are having their rights denied, communities evicted to make way for mines; campaigners imprisoned and tortured. Kashmir – ongoing problems. Transgender people legally recognised, although homosexuality is still illegal.

**Sri Lanka** – 26 years of civil war ended in 2009. HR atrocities committed on both sides. UN enqiry postponed until September 2015. Now Singelese majority government with Tamil minority. New president elected in January 15. There are many disappeared people; will this be recognised?

**Afghanistan** – recognised as one the most dangerous places to be a women. Taliban and ultra-right organisations srpeadging their influence again. Attacks on high profile women and women’s shelters. Issues include forced marriage and “honour killings”. AI campaigning to improve women’s rights to education and work. There is a EU Protection Plan for HR defenders, where they can be placed in safe houses and access visas to leave in an emergency.

***Possible event???? A short script called “Even if we lose our lives” tells the stories of 3 women – we could perform it???***

**Pakistan** – 140 childrne and teachers were murdered by the Taliban in Pashwar. Death penalty has been re-instated. 12 people executed in recent mass execution. Children aged 14/16 are at risk. No access to fair trials. Justice system barely functions. Internal armed conflict. “honour killings” not investigaged. Impunity for murder. Education for girls in rural areas is very limitied. HR defenders and journalists are not protected. Security forces have sweeping powers. Homosexuality is illegal.

 **Syria – Elahe and Dina gave a presentation and gave out a handout – see attached**. Please note, not all actions are Amnesty specifically.

***Possible event – a film to be shown at the Reading International Festival????***

**The group thanked our new campaigners and were keen to be involved and active for these new countries.**

1. **Campaign updates**

See recent newsletter for all the actions and updates

1. **AIUK monthly news:**
* The monthly actions were
	+ to send a solidarity message to Mahdi Abu Dheeb who has been imprisoned in Bahrain for supporting teachers’ rights.

[**https://www.amnesty.org.uk/mahdi-abu-dheeb-bahrain-prison-teachers-rights#.VWrcE89Viko**](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/mahdi-abu-dheeb-bahrain-prison-teachers-rights#.VWrcE89Viko)

* + to create a petition for Dr Mohammed Al Roken, a human rights lawyer in UAE, calling for his freedom

[**https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/uae-94-united-arab-emirates-free-mohammed-al-roken-human-rights-lawyer**](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/uae-94-united-arab-emirates-free-mohammed-al-roken-human-rights-lawyer)

1. **Events**
* 18-19th April – Amnesty UK AGM at Warwick University. Helen & Alex gave a review of the recent conference, including feedback on the actions we debated at the last meeting. Great pages on Amnesty website to see more about it all. Take a look at our May newsletter for photos of the group in action.

[**https://www.amnesty.org.uk/2015-national-conference-and-annual-general-meeting-AGM#.VWrdNs9Viko**](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/2015-national-conference-and-annual-general-meeting-AGM#.VWrdNs9Viko)

* 14th May – monthly meeting – AGM and letter writing
* 14th June – East Reading Festival in Palmer Palk. Peter asked for volunteers.
* 24-26th July - WOMAD Charlton Park, Wiltshire. Free tickets are available for people that change their electricity provider to Ecotricity.
* 5th September – Reading Pride – a rota was started for volunteers on our stand.

**AOB –** Helen told the group about a local secondary school pupil, Rosalind Byard-Jones at the Piggott School in Wargrave, who was short-listed for the Amnesty Youth Awards. Follow this link to read her entry. <https://www.eventsforce.net/amnestyuk/frontend/reg/tOtherPage.csp?pageID=2862&eventID=4&eventID=4>

HB 31.5.15

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| **Reading Amnesty International Group Plan - 2015** |
|  | **Chair** | **= group meetings**  | **\*events** |
| **January** | Peter | **✓= EAPPI – Liz Bailey** | **✓\* 3rd – Caversham Street collection – Peter Howe** |
| **February** | Peter | **✓= Planning meeting** |  |
| **March** | Anne | **✓= West Papua / Benny Wenda – Sean O’Leary**  | **✓\*7th – Barn Dance – Liz Bailey** |
| **April** | Peter | **✓= AGM motions debate – Anne McFarlane** | **\* 18 & 19th - National conference - Warwick** |
| **May** | Helen | **= campaign review. Focus on new campaigns – Syria & Indian subcontinent** |  |
| **June** |  | **= Group AGM & letter writing** | **\* 14 June East Reading Festival** |
| **July** |  | **= Womad prep – Sue Bingham** | **\*24-26th - WOMAD – Sue Bingham** |
| **August** |  | **= social media – Anne McFarlane** |  |
| **September** |  | **= Stop Torture campaign** | **\*5th - Pride – Anne McFarlane** |
| **October** |  | **= letter writing** | **\*International Festival????****??? Syria ???** |
| **November** |  | **= Cuba – Sue Bingham** |  |
| **December** |  | **= Write for Rights – Anne McFarlane** |  |
| **January ‘16** |  | **= Indian sub-continent – Hilary**  |  |
| **February** |  | **= Planning meeting - all** |  |