



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

7th May
Group AGM
And planning meeting

4th June
Guest speaker
from Kurdish Community

Letter Writing Evenings

An evening once a month to sit and write letters with fellow Amnesty members. These evenings are hosted at member's houses. All welcome, simply contact the host/hostess for details:

To be confirmed

Monthly Collection

16th May
Contact Julian
julianwatmore@gmail.com
07583334740

Monthly Stalls

23rd May
Sydney Street
Contact Jill 01273 621697

To see a copy of the video featuring the Brighton and Hove Group at our letter writing vigil in December please see

<https://vimeo.com/124404699>

Don't let them Drown



On Wednesday 22nd April, prompted by the worst tragedy yet in the Mediterranean migrant crisis (when 800 people were drowned, on Sunday 19th), Amnesty International UK organised a media stunt on Brighton Beach, to draw attention to the devastating consequences of the EU's decision to stop funding search and rescue operations. Some of us answered the call and went down to join the action. It was quite intensive. We laid out two hundred body bags, on the beach by the Pier, and blew up hundreds of balloons. The balloons were used to fill most of the body bags, to simulate the rows of shrouded dead after a migrant shipwreck. About 70 volunteers and Amnesty staff got into the rest of the bags, and we all simply lay still. The image we created was impressive in scale, and eerily convincing. Our message, addressing the immediate humanitarian crisis, was DON'T LET THEM DROWN. The media turned up in force, camera shutters started clattering, and some people, staff and volunteers, were interviewed. The story was covered in the Guardian, the Independent and many other venues, including the BBC national and local news.

The event was well organised and well thought out. We were all very glad to be able to take part. European leaders are now holding crisis talks on how to deal with the issues. Outcomes are not yet clear, but it seems generally agreed that the decision to cut search and rescue funding must be reversed. There has been no reduction in the people-trafficking, just a grim increase in deaths.

For further info: <http://amnesty.org.uk/what-if-people-trying-cross-mediterranean-sea-were-washing-brighton-beach#.VT-DYNLBzGc>

Amnesty Stall Monthly Report - APRIL

Date Saturday 18th April
Time 11 - 1pm
Venue Outside Amnesty Bookshop, Sydney Street, Brighton
Weather Warm and Springlike
Volunteers Gwyneth, Celia and Jill
Campaign ELECTION PLEDGE CARDS

Previously we had written to all election candidates in the local area to find out their stance on human rights issues. We only got replies from two Liberal Democrat candidates who were in favour.

The pledge cards were for the general public to sign to say they were supporting human rights, with a space for them to add their own issue such as refugees rights. These cards were collected up and sent to Head Office from where they will be sent to the newly elected MPs in their various constituencies. Hopefully these cards will act as a spur to stimulate debate in the new parliament.

Target 89 cards were signed and sent off to HQ. The response from the public was mixed as usual but it was rather distressing that so many people said they weren't interested in human rights - may be they were just in too much of a hurry !

Election Campaign Update

We wrote and asked parliamentary candidates in Brighton and Hove to outline their policies on key issues regarding Human Rights and Torture. As their responses come in you will be able to see them on our website at : <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/groups/brighton-and-hove/parliamentary-candidates-answer-questions-about-human-rights>

The following information gives some insight into Amnesty's position on the Human Rights Act and Torture and this information was sent to the candidates.

Human Rights Act (HRA)

The Human Rights Act 'incorporates' into English law most of the rights in the European Convention on Human Rights. The Convention was created from the ashes of the Second World War and it was inspired by the desire to protect individuals against those abuses happening again. It drew on a lot of British ideas; in fact, British experts drafted most of it and the UK was the first state to sign up to it in 1951.

What unifies the rights in the act (for example protection from torture, the right to a free trial) is that they are all considered fundamental in a civilised society. They are all rights which you have because you are a human being, not because the government believes you have 'earned' them by behaving a certain way and not because you happen to have been born in the UK. **Human rights are for everyone.**

Torture

Over the last five years, Amnesty International has reported on **torture and other forms of ill-treatment in at least 141 countries** from every region of the world. The secretive nature of torture means the true number is likely to be higher still.

Inquiry into alleged UK involvement in torture

The release of the US report on CIA torture reveals how they used waterboarding, 'rectal feeding', mock executions, sleep deprivation, stress positions and other cruel and degrading treatment against detainees. But we still don't know how deeply the UK was involved. The UK government needs to properly investigate the truth.

UK government's ability to deliver on the Torture Prevention Strategy will be intrinsically linked to whether it delivers on its commitment to an adequate investigation into allegations of UK complicity in torture and other abuses. We continue to urge the UK government to establish a human rights compliant inquiry on alleged UK involvement in human rights violations, including torture and other ill-treatment of detainees held overseas.

Torture prevention is currently a priority for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). The FCO's Torture Prevention Strategy includes a campaign to press countries to sign up to international agreements such as United Nations Convention against Torture.

Chelsea Manning

Chelsea Manning was one of the cases featured in the 2014 Write for Rights campaign. Many of you wrote letters campaigning for clemency in her case and to Chelsea herself, showing solidarity with her during our letter writing day in December.

Chelsea recently began a Twitter account (@xychelsea) and thanked Amnesty supporters, among many others, for their support.

Also see the following blogs for more updates.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/articles/blogs/2015/04/whistleblower-chelsea-manning-thanks-amnesty-activists-for-their-support/>

http://www.amnesty.org.uk/blogs/global-voices/chelsea-manning-im-so-thankful-all-your-support?utm_source=TWITTER&utm_medium=Social&utm_content=20150408170500&utm_campaign=Amnesty

Below is a letter that she has written to Amnesty thanking all of those who have campaigned on her behalf and those who have written to her.

I wanted to thank all of you so very much for your actions of support and solidarity. I understand that over 200,000 actions were taken - that's absolutely incredible!

I am also so grateful for all the heartfelt support from the tens of thousands of people out there who took the time to write to me and the President [asking him to pardon and release her].

These cards and letters literally flooded the mail room and my cell during my birthday, the holidays and Amnesty's Write for Rights campaign in December. I read each one! And I greatly appreciated all of your strong words of support, and your warm words of comfort. I wish I had the time and ability to thank each one of you for giving me a little bit of joy with each letter and card. But, as much as I can try, it is difficult to do from here.

My days here are busy and very routine. I work at a vocational wood shop during the week – about the same number of hours as a full-time job. I am taking college correspondence courses for a bachelor's degree. I also work out a lot to stay fit, and read newspapers, magazines and books to keep up-to-date on current events around the world and learn new things.

I am now preparing for my court-martial appeal before the first appeals court. The appeal team, with my attorneys Nancy Hollander and Vince Ward, are hoping to file our brief before the court in the next six months. We have already had success in getting the court to respect my gender identity by using feminine pronouns in the court filings (she, her, etc).

I finally began my prescribed regime of hormones to continue my overdue gender transition in February. It's been such an amazing relief for my body and brain to finally come into alignment with each other. My stress and anxiety levels have tapered off quite considerably.

Overall, things are beginning to move along nicely. I'm so thankful for having all of your support to keep me optimistic. I'm staying strong because of you!

*With warm regards
Chelsea Manning*

Take action

MOHAMED SOLTAN – EGYPT

US Egyptian national Mohamed Soltan was sentenced by an Egyptian court In April this year to 25 years in prison along with 36 others including six journalists.. The court sentenced 14 others to death. The Public Prosecutor had charged them with running an “operations room” and spreading false information in order to destabilise national security

Mohamed Soltan’s health has deteriorated severely following a 14 month hunger strike; he has taken liquids but no food. He remains in solitary confinement in Tora Prison. He is in need of medical attention.

A letter is attached for action.

Thank you. *Celia*

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Amnesty Websites: international - www.amnesty.org AI UK -

www.amnesty.org.uk local group - www.amnesty.org.uk/brighton

Follow us on twitter @AmnestyBrighton

See our photos on Flickr—

<http://www.flickr.com/groups/amnestybrighton/pool>

Amnesty UK Human Rights Centre - Tel: 0207 0331500

