

North Africa Region Newsletter March 2014

Welcome to the Spring edition of the North Africa team's ezine. In it you will find a new action for the Tawargha in Libya, an update on the worrying situation in Egypt and the case of Jabeir Mejri, a report of a meeting held in the House of Commons regarding Western Sahara and others interesting information and news. We currently only have the Tawargha case to work on but we will send you Urgent Actions and other actions as they arrive. We hope to see some of you at the AGM in Edinburgh in April

Libya: The Road Back to Tawargha

Three years on from the uprising against Gaddafi, Libya still has no effective government to protect people's rights and build new institutions. Human rights abuses – like the forced displacement of the nearly 40,000 people of Tawargha – go unresolved. And the government ministers whom we usually write to or email in Amnesty campaigns, are either not in their posts, or have no power to do anything. Libya's prime minister was forced from office in mid-March and fled because he was powerless to stop the illegal export of oil by a local militia. Whether Libya remains a single state or eventually breaks into pieces, power for the moment resides with a number of different militias.

One of the most powerful is the Misratah militia, based in the city that holds the key to the safe return home – or the re-housing and restitution – of the displaced people of Tawargha. We can still send messages to Misratah, through the city's local council.

Here is a simple action that could have real impact. This is a photo of two road signs to Tawargha that have been made, one in Arabic and one in Roman letters, in the style of Libyan road signs.

They symbolise the way back home for the people of Tawargha, which is still blocked by the people and militia of Misratah. When the Misratah militia attacked Tawargha and drove out its people, they defaced the road signs to the town, shown in the picture below:



We plan to compile an album of pictures showing activists holding the new road signs to Tawargha, and when it is ready, we will ask Amnesty's Libya team at the International Secretariat to take it to Misratah to give to the Misratah City Council. We will also seek media coverage in Libya for the album, with the IS's support. Scarborough Amnesty Group and Amnesty LDN Group have already taken this action.

If you would like to support this campaign, please let me know. The provisional time frame is to complete the album by mid-summer. I can either bring the road signs

to your meeting, or can send you the art work for the road signs by email, so you can print them out and return the picture.

Thank you for your continued support for the safe return of the displaced people of Tawargha.

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Egypt - an increasingly intolerant situation

Following the worst political massacres on 14 August 2013 of pro Morsi/Muslim Brotherhood (now designated a “terrorist organisation”) supporters in Cairo’s Rabaa al-Adawiya and al-Nahda Squares, in which hundreds died and thousands were arrested, a new “Protest Law” was introduced on 24 Nov 2013 by interim President Adly Mansour. This was designed to control freedom of assembly. Any gathering of more than ten people requires permission from the Interior Ministry three days in advance unless it is an electoral campaign meeting. Flouting this law can incur imprisonment of up to five years and a very hefty fine. Security forces are allowed to use excessive force such as bullets if protestors damage property or attack security personnel. Amnesty has strongly objected to this infringement of human rights and asked Mansour to reconsider it.

When the Interim government failed to act or even acknowledge any responsibility for the deaths on 14 August 2013, Amnesty International, together with twelve Egyptian and international human rights organisations, issued a joint statement in January entitled “*No Acknowledgment or Justice for Mass Protestor Killings*”. This called on the Egyptian authorities to set up a fact finding committee to acknowledge and thoroughly investigate the killing of up to 1,000 people by security forces dispersing Muslim Brotherhood sit-ins on 14 August. It also listed thirteen occasions since Jan 2011 when security forces have killed protestors.

Meanwhile on 3 December, Amnesty International issued a Public Statement (<http://bit.ly/18CcJR8>) on the UN Committee’s review of economic, social and cultural rights findings, describing it as a damning indictment on Egypt’s record.

This covered the following areas:

- Worker’s rights
- Lack of affordable housing which means workers living in informal settlements without sanitation and water
- Gender discrimination and inadequate protection for women against sexual attacks
- Sectarian attacks on Coptic Christians in Aug 2013 and lack of any government action to rebuild destroyed churches, businesses and houses.
- Cuts in spending on health, education and housing
- Failure to tackle banned practices such as FGM and child labour, and no access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

You will have received various Urgent Actions on some of these issues to put pressure on the authorities to act but these rights appear to count much less than concerns about suppressing public dissent and criticism, controlling NGOs and the media. The new constitution in Jan 2014, confirmed with a 98% YES vote (38% turnout), includes all these rights but guarantees seem decidedly weak. Analysts suggest the vote was fundamentally about Field Marshal al-Sisi’s popularity so he can claim the people want him as President when he finally announces his intention to run in the election later this year.

All criticisms, requests and recommendations (making Amnesty International extremely unpopular) have been ignored by the Egyptian authorities, so in March 2014 the International Secretariat joined with International human rights groups to call for intervention by the United Nations Human Rights Council to address the grave human rights situation in Egypt and ensure respect for democratic development with an open letter “*Silence is Not an Option*”. It stated that the serious and rapid deterioration of the human rights situation in Egypt requires the Human rights Council to take a principled position of addressing this situation now, through the adoption of a resolution on Egypt. It can be read on <http://bit.ly/OTHEQi>

Supporters will have noticed that there are no Individuals at Risk cases for Egypt at present. Both the family of Mohammed Abdel Latif and Azza Suleiman herself have said that they prefer to allow the situation in Egypt to settle and hope to get justice and reparation from the authorities in due course. Amnesty would certainly not wish to intervene counter-productively. Very many thanks for your tremendous and imaginative support over the last three years and for responding to the recent deluge of Urgent Actions. Thankfully, despite the setbacks faced by Amnesty at the macro level there are many good initiatives by

NGOs to enable respect for human rights at the local level. These programmes are continuing albeit in an increasingly difficult climate.

Western Sahara

What is the price you pay for standing up for your beliefs? For some people this price could mean being arrested and spending long periods in prison. It could mean being subjected to torture simply for exercising the right to express their views. There are those who choose to help others without thinking about their own safety, defining their human rights struggle as the only sensible option. As you read this article, you can decide whether this struggle is brave or impractical. Making a change, achieving something nobody else has done before is never a straight forward practical process. However it definitely requires a great deal of courage.

The first British parliamentary delegation to Western Sahara visited the capital Laayoune (El-Aiun) in February 2014. The purpose of the visit, organised by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Western Sahara, was to witness at first hand the situation experienced by the Saharawi people. The delegation held a public meeting on 25th February 2014 to report back on its findings in the House of Commons. The meeting was also attended by the dedicated Saharawi human rights activist, Brahim Dahane.

During its visit the delegation met with several Saharawi civil society organisations, as well as human rights organisations, the families of Saharawi activists killed or disappeared by Moroccan state forces, the families of political prisoners held in Moroccan prisons and organisations working to protect the territory's natural resources for the benefit of the Saharawi people. It was reported that all these organisations expressed their concerns at being denied any legal status by the Moroccan authorities, preventing them from operating freely as civil society organisations, holding public meetings or raising funds. The Saharawi people that the delegation met also called for the right to freedom of assembly, freedom of association and freedom of expression – rights currently denied by the Moroccan state.

The organisations called for the release of all Saharawi political prisoners and the extension of the mandate of the UN monitoring body, MINURSO, to include the monitoring of human rights. It was stated that all leading figures in the organisations which the delegation met have themselves suffered substantial human rights violations at the hands of the Moroccan authorities over a period of many years.

Brahim Dahane is one of them. He is a former prisoner of conscience and has been active in the fight for human rights, not least by founding the human rights organisation ASVDH - The Sahrawi Association of Victims of Grave Violations of Human Rights Committed by the Moroccan State (Originally in Spanish: Asociación Saharawi de Víctimas de Violaciones Graves de los Derechos Humanos Cometidas por el Estado Marroquí).

In 2009, the prize in memory of Per Johan Valentin Anger in Sweden, was awarded to Brahim Dahane. The Per Anger prize is awarded to individuals or groups who have distinguished themselves. At this time Dahane was incarcerated in Morocco and his sister represented him at the ceremony in Stockholm. The trophy, which weighed the same as a human heart has hopefully filled Brahim's heart with some more hope as his human rights struggle was recognised internationally.

In 2009 Brahim Dahane said in a statement received via his family: "For a quarter of a century, we have been victims of arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearance and harassment as a result of our views, expressed peacefully."

The delegation reported they were able to witness first hand, on the evening of 15 February 2014, the amount of violence and intimidation experienced by the Saharawi people at the hands of the Moroccan forces. Three members of the UK parliamentary delegation were themselves briefly detained during a demonstration when they were made to leave the car in which they were driving. The car was confiscated by the Moroccan police. A camera belonging to one of the delegation members was snatched out of his possession and returned later, after an extensive protest, with all photos of the demonstration wiped off its memory card.

When the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) was last renewed in April 2013 Amnesty said that the UN Security Council's failure to add human rights monitoring to the mandate of its Western Sahara peacekeeping force, despite ongoing reports of abuses in the region, was a "missed opportunity".

MINURSO is one of the few UN peacekeeping missions in the world without a human rights mandate. It will be renewed in April 2014 again. An Amnesty briefing regarding this matter will shortly be available.

Video footage from the meeting that was held on 25th February 2014 is available online here:

<http://waronwant.org/news/events/previous-events/18085-western-sahara-report-back-house-of-commons>

Tunisia

Jabeur Mejri Released

Thank you to all of you who took action for Jabeur Mejri who spent two years in prison for publishing articles and cartoons online deemed offensive to Islam.

A Presidential pardon, which did not expunge his criminal record, was announced for Jabeur on 19th February 2014 but he remained in detention as an arrest warrant relating to a complaint of embezzlement dating back to 2011 was issued against him on 28th January 2014.

The Court of Appeal in Monastir approved a request by his lawyer to release him provisionally on the evening of 4th March 2014, pending the completion of an investigation into these allegations. Jabeur denies the allegations for which he could face up to ten years' imprisonment and his lawyer has said that there is no evidence to back them up. Amnesty International fears that the charges were brought as a form of judicial harassment against Jabeur.

The filing of a new arrest warrant against Jabeur two weeks before the Presidential pardon was granted is a worrying sign that his ordeal may not yet be over.



When Bones Speak: The Struggle to Bring Faysal Baraket's Torturers to Justice

After years of uncertainty, the full facts in the iconic case of Faysal Baraket, a Tunisian student who died in police custody in 1991, are coming to light, bringing an end to years of denial and deception by the Tunisian authorities.

The above report published on the 22nd anniversary of his death in October 2013 details the ordeal faced by his family in their quest for truth and justice and Amnesty International's lengthy campaign to challenge the authorities' claim that the 25 year-old died in a car accident rather than being tortured to death.

As stated by Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa, "Faysal Baraket's case underscores how the security forces for years tortured dissenting voices then denied it and covered it up, as well as the urgent need to reform the security apparatus and judiciary which played a central role in how the case was handled." His body was finally exhumed in March 2013, two years after the fall of Ben Ali, providing further forensic evidence that he had been tortured. Amnesty International is now calling for those responsible for his death to be brought to justice.

"Faysal Baraket's exhumation represents a significant step towards achieving justice for his death. Justice must now be served to bring his family's ordeal to an end," said Hassiba Hadja Sahraoui. "His case also marks a symbolic moment for hundreds of other torture victims of Ben Ali's regime. All those responsible for torture, including those behind Faysal Baraket's death, must be brought to justice without further delay."

Faysal Baraket, a member of the then-outlawed Islamist opposition party, Ennahda, was arrested on 8 October 1991 after he criticized the Tunisian authorities during a television interview. His brother, Jamal, was arrested days earlier and tortured repeatedly in detention.

After Faysal Baraket's death, the Tunisian authorities orchestrated a cover up to hide the true cause, telling his family and Amnesty International that he had died in a car accident. However, in January 1992 the

organization gathered evidence from witnesses who said they heard him screaming as he was tortured and beaten for hours in the Nabeul Police Station. Later they saw him slumped in a corridor, unconscious. His body was contorted in the position used in the “roast chicken” torture method – where the victim is tied to a horizontal pole with hands and feet crossed over and tied together. His face was bruised and he had cuts around the eyes.

Amnesty International asked Dr Derrick Pounder, a British forensic pathologist, to examine Faysal Baraket’s autopsy report in February 1992. He concluded that Faysal Baraket’s death could not have been caused by a traffic accident. Instead he found evidence that he had been sodomized and identified a pattern of injury in line with a systematic physical assault. The report also noted that his feet and buttocks had been badly beaten.

The case was submitted to the United Nations Committee against Torture (CAT), which concluded in 1999 that Tunisia had breached its obligations to hold a prompt and impartial investigation into the death, and recommended that the body be exhumed in the presence of international forensic experts.

“The former Tunisian authorities repeatedly botched investigations into Faysal Baraket’s death and deliberately covered up the fact that he had been tortured. It has taken 14 years to implement the Committee against Torture’s recommendation to exhume his body. No one involved in his death has yet been held accountable. The Tunisian authorities must put an end to such impunity,” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui.

Under Ben Ali, thousands of government critics, including political opponents, journalists, lawyers and human rights activists, were arbitrarily arrested, held in incommunicado detention and imprisoned after unfair trials. Torture and ill-treatment of detainees was widespread.

A comprehensive framework to ensure justice for such crimes has yet to be established. Some positive steps have been taken but progress on reform has stalled in recent months. Laws to establish a national mechanism to prevent torture and a commission to investigate human rights violations, have been discussed but not yet been adopted. Human rights violations in Tunisia have continued on a smaller scale since the fall of Ben Ali.

“In order for Tunisia to make a clean break with the past, accountability must be a priority. In the immediate aftermath of the uprising security officers were shuffled around and some heads fell but the security apparatus with all its flaws remains wholly unaccountable. As for the judiciary, it still intrinsically lacks the independence from the executive necessary to bring to justice those implicated in torture, from low-ranking officers to the highest level of the state,” Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui said. The new constitution is a first step in this direction.

“Faysal Baraket’s case highlights the crucial role that independent forensic expertise can play in investigating torture. Strengthening Tunisia’s forensic capacity should form part of a comprehensive transitional justice strategy to bring truth, justice and redress to all those who have suffered torture.” It also shows how painstaking research by Amnesty International and activism to keep cases alive can have results many years later.

If you would like to read the whole report contact Beverley on beverley.foulkes-jones@amnesty.org.uk

Group News: Scarborough Amnesty and North Africa

Scarborough Amnesty Group has a long connection with North Africa. Though I regret I cannot provide exact dates, in 1990/91 work was being done on a prisoner in Syria, which continued for many years. This was followed by work on Turkey as a whole.

Our involvement with Algeria probably began in 2000/2001. Our campaign focused on an individual at risk named Toufik Del Mokhtar. Many letters were written and we were in contact with his family, some of whom I think were in Italy. An amnesty was offered by the government in Algeria which the family accepted so we had to accept this too and conclude that Toufik was dead.

After a slight organisational hiatus in the group and a complete change of officers, we have recently campaigned to raise awareness of the human rights violations in Tawargha, the Libyan town of 30,000 people accused by armed groups in Misratah of being pro-Gaddafi. The town has been rendered a ghost town, Tawarghans having been driven out and dispersed across the country. Another possible reason for this discrimination is that Tawarghans are black ethnic Libyans.



The Scarborough Group was able to prevail upon the Labour Group on Scarborough Council to write a letter in support of the return of Tawarghans to their home town and this initiative has been taken up by other Amnesty groups both in this country and abroad. Their letter, together with several others, was presented to Misratah Council by an Amnesty delegation.

The Scarborough Group has had a number of interesting events in the town in the last 12 months centred on North Africa. All the North Africa Country Co-ordinators have come to speak while we have mounted displays highlighting our support of the Displaced People of Tawargha at the Library and in cinemas as well as at fund-raising events such as the Big Gig and Music in the Precinct. We have also established a link with the Wadi al-Nile Association in Egypt through the HRD, Christeen Maher. She spoke very movingly to our conference in December and we updated our members recently by showing them a touching and inspiring YouTube clip.

It is encouraging to be able to continue our work with North Africa.

Leslie Stones, Committee Member, Scarborough Amnesty Group

<https://www.facebook.com/NorthAfricaTeam>

This is our Facebook page – our face to the world. One of the best things about it is that the whole content of the page is publicly available and you do not even need to log in to your Facebook account. Just click on it and see. Our page does have a personality. We try to make it attractive, however often this is not possible as human rights abuses in North Africa do not look nice, even online.

<https://www.facebook.com/NorthAfricaTeam> is our way to be interactive, available, open-minded and keep you up to date with what is going on in North Africa and of course what the Amnesty International UK North Africa Team is doing. You can find out more about current Amnesty campaigns in North Africa from a wider perspective. Whether you are new or very experienced and share the passion about human rights that we all have in common, we very much hope that you will find an opportunity to meet us online.

Our North Africa Team covers Egypt, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco and Western Sahara and is made up of ordinary people from a variety of backgrounds who share in common a trust in freedom and justice. What unites us is our human rights work across the North Africa region and we believe in having a great respect for human rights simply because we are humans.

You may have strong and well-established human rights beliefs or be very unsure about these beliefs. Whoever you are, you are welcome to visit our page and let us know what you think about our work. And when you visit <https://www.facebook.com/NorthAfricaTeam>, please do not worry about what to wear. Just be comfortable. Or be uncomfortable and tell us what you want to know more about. Just visit <https://www.facebook.com/NorthAfricaTeam> and make up your own mind. As they say “communication is the key” and we would like to share our key with you.

Please feel free to contact us on Facebook at any time.

See you at the AGM!

Amnesty International UK

2014 National Conference and Annual General Meeting



We look forward to catching up with many of you at the AGM in Edinburgh on Saturday 12-Sunday 13 April. All four of us – Bev Foulkes-Jones, Ann Marcus, Vilyana Tsekova and Hugh Sandeman – will be there, and we'll have a small share of a table in the Exhibition space in James Watt 2, the same building as the main auditorium. Please come by and share your news, and we can bring you up to date with what's going on in the North Africa region. We will also have a short photo action for you to do with us, in support of the displaced people of Tawargha (see separate article). See you in April!

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