

North Africa Region Newsletter September 2014

Welcome to the Autumn edition of the North Africa team's ezine. Read about political and human rights developments in Libya and Egypt; an update regarding the case of Jabeur Mejri; Amnesty's demonstration outside the Moroccan Embassy to highlight Ali Aarrass's case on the Global Day Against Torture; the Jersey Freedom Cycle Ride and the thousands who signed the petition to "Stop making excuses for sexual violence and repeal harmful laws" in the Mahgreb. Take action for Egyptian Yara Sallam and much more. Read on and happy campaigning this Autumn.

Libya: governance and the rule of law at risk

Three years and three national elections on from the fall of Gadaffi's regime, governance and the rule of law in Libya have come near to collapse. Over the summer, some of the powerful armed groups that formed along regional, tribal and ideological lines in the 2011 uprising have fought in Tripoli and Benghazi, wrecking the country's infrastructure and putting unarmed civilians and civil society at risk.

The new Libyan parliament has been meeting since its election in June in the eastern city of Tobruk, effectively in exile from the violence and intimidation of militias in the capital Tripoli. Turnout in the national elections for the new parliament was low, a result of public disillusion with the failure of the political process in Libya, and intimidation by regional and Islamist militias who do not want to see the emergence of a secular national government.

One person who paid a high price for supporting the cause of free and open elections was Salwa Bugaighis, a lawyer living in Beghazi. Salwa had taken a leading role in the uprising against Gadaffi, and had asked publicly for more protection for voters from threats of intimidation. She was shot and killed by unidentified gunmen on returning home from voting on the day of the elections. Many of you kindly supported the appeal to the Libyan government and the solidarity action sent to her family.

Following that appeal, we decided for the moment to suspend further direct appeals to the Libyan government on human rights issues in Libya. With the central government near to collapse, we think it will be more effective to concentrate on solidarity and other actions that are directed at officials who have the authority to respond to our requests.

On that basis, the campaign for the safe return or resettlement of the displaced people of Tawargha continues. We are still collecting pictures of people holding up the road signs that point to Tawargha, with the aim of delivering these in a photo petition to the Misratah Local Council. The Misratah Local Council represents citizens of the coastal city near Tawargha, home also to one of Libya's most assertive militias. In contrast to the central government, the local city government could take action on the situation of the displaced people of Tawargha. Hopefully this petition will be ready by the end of the year. If your group has not already done the road sign campaign picture, please email for details to:

hugh.sandeman@amnesty.org.uk

Egypt: update

There has been brutal and sustained repression since the ousting of President Mohamed Morsi in July 2013. Kate Allen recently referred to "Egypt's truly atrocious human rights record with a surge in arbitrary arrests and detentions since July 2013, harrowing cases of torture in police and military detention".

The last 12 months have seen 80 deaths in custody and 4,000 people detained or indicted; 1247 death sentences handed down in mass show trials with 247 confirmed by the Grand Mufti and 7 carried out in June. There are very serious concerns about the ability of the judicial system to deliver independent and

impartial justice particularly for anyone perceived to be remotely connected to the banned Muslim Brotherhood. Meanwhile the police and security officials use lethal force and torture with seeming impunity.

In June President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi was elected by 43% of the population promising to bring stability and long overdue financial reform. Promotion of stability is being pursued by continuing the crackdown on all protest with harsh prison sentences for infractions of the draconian Protest Law which effectively criminalizes all protest and public demonstrations (see section on **Yara Sallam** below). Financial reform has started by reducing the public subsidies (accounting for a third of the budget) on fuel and food. Elections for parliament are scheduled for the autumn and since there are to be no religious parties, the Muslim Brotherhood's political party has been disbanded.

ENCOURAGING SIGNS OF JUDICIAL CHANGE

On 4 June a **new law criminalizing sexual harassment of women** was introduced. Following brutal attacks on women during the celebrations for al-Sisi's inauguration as President, al-Sisi visited one of the victims in hospital. Three men were jailed, two for life and the third for 20 years. A large fine was imposed in compensation. This certainly suggests a higher profile for an endemic problem.

Al-Sisi, commenting on the sentencing of the three Al_Jazeera journalists (imprisoned for "destabilising the government" by reporting both sides in a protest concerning the ousting of President Morsi) admitted that it would have been better if they had been deported. While resisting requests to pardon the men and declining to interfere with the appeals procedure it is to be hoped that the President's comments will positively influence the appeals court judges.

The Grand Mufti, Shawqi Allam, to whom all death penalty cases are referred for confirmation (though his recommendations CAN be ignored) **rejected the death penalty** for Mohamed Badie and other Muslim Brotherhood leaders. This sentence had been given by the Giza criminal court on 19 June which held them responsible for inciting pro-Morsi demonstrations resulting in numerous deaths. The reasons for the rejection included insufficient direct evidence for crimes which did not carry the death penalty.

On 12 August 3 judges of Cairo's Criminal Appeal Court panel **refused to hear a case against 494 defendants** arrested for participating in a protest in Ramsis Square on August 16/17 2013 in which 97 people died. 400 of the defendants had been given the death penalty in a mass trial. The judges' grounds were that the prosecution evidence and investigation was partial, flimsy and improperly scrutinised and most of the witnesses would be from the police or government. For more information see: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE12/042/2014/en>. This decision is a precedent and suggests that some judges are extremely concerned at the quality of justice available.

Action: Ann Marcus writes about the case of Yara Sallam – lawyer, feminist and North African nominee for the Human Rights Defenders award in 2014 - now a detainee in Qanater Women's Prison, Cairo.

Last month I had the privilege of attending an evening organised by the International Secretariat for the 5 Egyptian women activists who had come to London for the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict hosted by William Hague and Angelina Jolie. Each one spoke about her work helping women and young people in a variety of ways whether through reporting, helping them recover from sexual harassment or accessing rights denied them in a conservative and patriarchal society. They were inspiring, totally committed and achieving amazing results –but not one of them mentioned the **huge risks** they took and the personal sacrifices which their work imposed on them. They happily talked of the new law against sexual harassment and its limitations which included broadening the definition of the term but they did not mention the **proposed law to criminalize all NGOs** and place them under the control of the Security Services which would effectively end their jobs.



I asked each of them how far their lives and work were affected by the current constraints on NGOs. They answered that the government did not appear interested in efforts to help build civil society and certainly did not look favourably on organisations that sought to change the norms and alter perceptions of women and their place in society. State organs demonise all NGOs whether local or international and the state controlled media suggest that activists are dangerous revolutionaries aiming at destabilising the country. This meant in one case that the family, fearful of taint by association, had effectively ostracised their relative.

I should, therefore, have been more prepared when I heard that my friend **YARA SALLAM**, who works for the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, had been arrested in late June and was sent to prison to await trial. She had taken part in the peaceful march against a draconian Protest Law designed to smother all public opposition. There is no other way to show disapproval since all independent media outlets have been closed down. The march was dispersed with tear gas which, as Yara explained to me when we spent time together two years ago, burns the throat and causes the eyes to sting badly. As she and her cousin were buying some water from a kiosk, four plain clothes policemen arrested them for taking part in the march and took them to a local police station where they were charged with violating the Protest law, causing obstruction, damaging property and carrying weapons. Only the first accusation has any substance. The women gave virtually identical accounts of their movements but while her young cousin was allowed to depart, Yara as a well-known activist was detained with 22 others in a clear effort by the authorities to silence critics of the regime.

The trial, due in early July, was postponed until 13 September and the seven women were sent to one prison and sixteen men to another. So far reports state that the women are being treated well and lawyers are being allowed to visit.

At the end of this ezine you will find a suggestion for a letter that can be sent to the Egyptian authorities at the following addresses:

Counsellor Hesham Mohamed Zaki Bakarat
Office of the Public Prosecutor
Supreme Court House
1"26 July" Road
CAIRO
Arab Republic of Egypt

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi
Office of the President
Al Ittihadia Palace
CAIRO
Arab Republic of Egypt

Deputy Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs for
Human Rights
Mr Mahy Hassan Abdel Latif
Multilateral Affairs and International Security
Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Corniche al-Nil
CAIRO
Arab Republic of Egypt

London Ambassador
His Excellency Dr Ashraf Elkholy
Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt
26 South Street
LONDON W1K 1DW

If any group or individual would like to send a solidarity message to Yara please send them to me at ann.marcus@amnesty.org.uk and I will transfer messages electronically. They will be delivered as and when appropriate. In the case of cards it might be wiser not to mention Amnesty. I can supply an address if you contact me.

For details of the Urgent Action go to <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE12/037/2014/en> This action is still current so you can ignore the August deadline. It is hoped that there will shortly be a blog on the Amnesty website about the case for anyone interested in following it.

Tunisia: Jabeur Mejri Imprisoned Again

As you will recall from our last ezine, Jabeur Mejri was pardoned in March of this year for publishing online articles and cartoons deemed offensive to Islam. However whilst he was still in prison an arrest warrant

relating to a complaint of embezzlement dating back to 2011 was issued against him. He was released from prison provisionally pending completion of an investigation into the allegations which Jabeur denied. Amnesty International feared that the charges were brought as a form of judicial harassment.

Jabeur was arrested again on 18th April 2014. Apparently he had an argument with a court registrar when he went to inquire about his case and the date of his next court session. His family and lawyers explained that the argument was probably due to the level of stress that Jabeur was experiencing. A travel ban against him added to this stress and his fragile emotional state.

On 29 April 2014 Jabeur was sentenced to eight months in prison on charges of "insulting a public official" and "violating sacred values" in relation to his argument with the court official. He is currently held in Mahdia Prison. There are concerns that Jabeur may have threatened violence in the latest incident and therefore Amnesty International is involved in further investigations and considering what, if any further steps, we can take regarding Jabeur's situation.

Group Campaigning

Stop Making Excuses for Sexual Violence: Repeal Harmful Laws Petition



Thank you to all of you who signed the above petition. As a result of members of groups working on North Africa signing the petition, together with members of the Children's, Women's and Student Action Networks, the petition appearing on the homepage of the AI(UK) website for a week and being sent to subscribers to Amnesty UK we have so far collected, **amazingly**, some **28,354** signatures. In addition some **4,665** people, many from the UK, have signed the petition set up by the IS on the same issue. If you have not signed the petition yet then please do. It will be available until the end of August at <https://amnesty.org.uk/actions/protect-survivors-sexual-violence>

The signatures will be presented to strategic government authorities in the Maghreb.

Thank you too to groups who sent photos of themselves standing in solidarity with survivors of sexual violence. To see your image and those of many others from all over the world go to <http://stand-by-maghreb-women.tumblr.com/>

These photos will be sent to women in shelters in the Maghreb. If you would like to add your group's image then please send it to me by the end of August at beverley.foulkes-jones@amnesty.org.uk and I will upload it for you.

Jersey Amnesty Group' Freedom Cycle Ride

"Freedom is not just a word to those who have lost it"

Imagine being on a beautiful island. Jersey Island: sea and sand, stretches of sun-kissed beaches. Imagine you are fortunate enough to meet amazing people on this island who are dedicated to upholding the Universal Charter of Human Rights, to campaigning for the release of prisoners of conscience, and to opposing torture and the death penalty around the world. The Jersey branch of Amnesty International is very active. You may feel really lucky if you happen to have the opportunity to meet the remarkable members of this local group. Has the situation always been like that in Jersey? Not really. The Island changed a lot under German rule during World War II and the islanders faced a lot of dangers.

A visit to the Jersey War Tunnels is a spine-chilling reminder of a dark time in Jersey's history. During World War II, the Crown left Jersey defenceless and the Island became occupied by German forces. Jersey War Tunnels are a product of five long years of occupation; they bore eyewitness to the actual cruelty of

the Nazi regime. Mined deep into the hillside by forced and slave workers from nations across Europe, the unusual tunnels run over 1 kilometre in length. They now contain an underground collection of thought provoking galleries that detail Jersey's occupation from resistance, through to starvation, and then eventual liberation (<http://www.jerseywartunnels.com/>). If you go there you may never believe this happened on British soil. When I visited the War Tunnels I read some wise words by Frank Keiller: "Freedom is not just a word to those who have lost it". I could not agree more.

The Jersey Amnesty Group organises the Freedom Cycle Ride to remind us all of what happened during the War and to remind us that freedom is not just a word. This year the Freedom Cycle Ride coincided with the launch of the Stop Torture Campaign in May 2014 which the Jersey Amnesty Group is participating in and supporting. Hundreds of islanders gathered in St Helier on a Sunday morning for the start of the 19th annual Amnesty International Freedom cycle ride. The activists took cyclists on a 44 mile route around Jersey to feel the taste of Freedom. You can see some of the photos of the event by following these two links:

(<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.647706945310850.1073741836.140197172728499&type=1>)

(<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.242325192557834.1073741827.115488421908179&type=1>)

Vilyana Tsekova

Can your group work on the case of Ali Aarrass?

Ali Aarrass's case is one of the five cases in the Stop Torture Campaign. Ali is a Belgian-Moroccan national, who was forcibly returned to Morocco from Spain, where he had been supporting his ageing father. His extradition took place despite warnings from the UN Human Rights Committee and Amnesty International that doing so would put the father-of-one at risk of incommunicado detention, torture and other ill-treatment, and unfair trial. Since December 2010 Ali has been detained; he has not tasted freedom. For the first 12 days he was held incommunicado and tortured in a secret detention centre: he was beaten on the soles of his feet, given electric shocks to his testicles, suspended from his wrists, and burnt with cigarettes. Everybody in this world has the right to live free from torture.

On 21 May 2014 the Moroccan authorities re-opened an investigation into Ali's claims of torture. The Moroccan authorities have said this development is directly linked to Amnesty work on Ali's case.
<https://www.facebook.com/NorthAfricaTeam/posts/665915513489993>

We seek justice for Ali. Please contact our North Africa Team if your group would like to work on Ali's case and support him through his struggle. Thank you.

To keep up to date with Amnesty's actions regarding Ali and other actions in the region go to Facebook.com/NorthAfricaTeam – the content of our page is available to all and does not require Facebook registration

Global Day against Torture

On 26th June 2014 I attended the Moroccan Embassy in London as Amnesty's country expert on Morocco with staff members and other supporters to call for justice for Ali Aarrass. The Moroccan Ambassador would not meet us and would not accept a letter from us. Our supporters, armed with placards and photos of Ali, peacefully protested for an hour outside the Embassy by shouting slogans such as stop torture now, stop cigarette burns, stop electrocution, stop beating on the feet, Ali Aarrass we are with you, Ali Aarrass we want justice now. I was interviewed by a Nigerian TV station outside the embassy. The police were called and stood on the steps of the Embassy. I think we made our point.

Beverley Foulkes-Jones



Events:

Wandsworth Amnesty International Film Night: Death and the Maiden

Monday 1st September 19:00 £5

The Exhibit • Balham

(12 Balham Station Rd, SW12 9SG)

Dir. Roman Polanski, 1994

(103 minutes)

Paulina Escobar is a political activist whose husband is a prominent lawyer in an unnamed South American country just out of a dictatorship. One day a storm forces her husband to ride home with a neighbour.

That chance encounter brings up demons from her past, as she is convinced that the neighbour (Dr. Miranda) was part of the old fascist regime that tortured and raped her, while blindfolded. Paulina takes him captive to determine the truth. Paulina is torn between her psychological repressions and sombre memory, Gerardo is torn between his wife and the law, and Dr. Miranda is forced to endure captivity while husband and wife seek out the uncertain truth about the clouded past.

STOP TORTURE Embassy Crawl

Saturday 25 October – meet at Embankment Station at 10.45

Join Wandsworth Amnesty group who are organising an “Embassy Crawl” to promote Amnesty’s current STOP TORTURE Campaign. They will be calling at all the embassies whose countries have cases featured in the campaign including Ali Aarrass from Morocco.

At each embassy they will deliver a letter and have a brief talk on the torture practice of that country.

There will be a break for lunch in Hyde Park, at the Lido Café Bar. If possible please wear black. Remember to check the weather and come prepared if it looks like rain! The end point is very near to Gloucester Road tube.

Join the Country Coordinators’ network!

If you’re an active member of your local group, and you’re used to doing things like organising street stalls and actions, arranging for letters to be signed at your group’s meeting, or giving a talk to your own group or a local school about one of your priority campaigns, then you’re already doing the sort of work that country coordinators do. You’ve already become the sort of Amnesty activist we need to recruit to the Country Coordinators network, to keep up our work of taking priority cases and campaigns to Amnesty members and the public all over the UK. Anybody, anywhere, can be a country coordinator – from students to retired people, from the South West to Scotland – if you have 5-6 hours on average you can spare a week, if you are dedicated to Amnesty work, and if you’re a good communicator (or planning to become one!).

Right now we have three vacancies, in teams covering:

- **Former Soviet Union**, with focus on Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgystan and Kazakhstan. This role also involves working through 2015 on the Stop Torture campaign, which features a case from Uzbekistan.
- **West and Central Africa**
- **Europe**

If you’d like to apply or know more, please email Jeni Dixon, Community Organiser, at Amnesty International UK, on jeni.dixon@amnesty.org.uk

Contact the North Africa Regional Team

Tunisia

Beverley Foulkes-Jones
beverley.foulkes-jones@amnesty.org.uk

Algeria and Libya

Hugh Sandeman
hugh.sandeman@amnesty.org

Morocco and Western Sahara

Vilyana Tsekova
Vilyana.Tsekova@amnesty.org.uk
(Please copy in Beverley Foulkes-Jones at the address above)

Egypt

Ann Marcus
ann.marcus@amnesty.org.uk

Find us on FB: <https://www.facebook.com/NorthAfricaTeam?ref=hl>

Find us on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/ANorthAfrica>

August 2014

Dear

Detention of Yara Sallam and 22 others following arrest on 21 June in Cairo

I am writing to express my concern that **Yara Sallam** was among those arrested and detained by the security forces after an unlicensed protest had been dispersed when she was buying water from a kiosk on 21 June 2014. The accusations, for which defence lawyers say there is no evidence, include destruction of public and private property and possessing dangerous tools. It appears that **Yara Sallam** was targeted as a Human Rights Defender who works for women's rights through the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights and its management.

The trial of the 23 detainees has been adjourned until 13 September. Yara and her six co-accused women are being held in Kanater prison. I would ask you to encourage the judicial authorities to release **Yara Sallam** unconditionally as a **Prisoner of Conscience** detained solely for exercising her right to freedom of peaceful association.

Likewise, I ask you to press the appointed judge on 13 September to try the 23 detainees in accordance with internationally accepted standards and to recognise that all those arrested on 21 June were also merely exercising their right to freedom of peaceful assembly.

Yours respectfully