**Watford Amnesty Group Activities**

Would you like more information?

Have you some ideas for more activities?

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Our web site: www.amnesty.org.uk/watford - Manager Chanda Shome, chandashome@hotmail.com

**January 2012 - Current Activities**

**Spoke on TV**  One of our very active members Sarah Hagger-Holt spoke on Channel 4 on December 31st describing the value of the family, especially at Christmas. She can be seen and heard on this web site:

<http://www.4thought.tv/themes/what-does-christmas-mean-to-you/sarah-hagger-holt>

**Campaigning Makes A Difference**

We have some good news from one of our members, Nathalie. She has told us that her father, Qiao Yongfang, was released from prison in China on 30th November, six months ahead of the original sentence date. The news came as a great surprise to her Sadly she has not been able to talk freely with him by phone but has learnt that he has lost all his teeth and nearly lost his eyesight. This is the first time she has been able to speak to him for two and a half years.

It was back in August 2009 that Nathalie started campaigning on behalf of both parents who were in prison because they practised Falun Gong, described by Amnesty as a spiritual movement. Her mother was released but her father was sentenced to three years in a special prison unit where he had to work long hours.

Nathalie has written to say that our efforts made a big difference for her family. She writes: “my appreciation is beyond word.”

**More Good News**We have just learnt that 20-year-9ld Jabbar Savalan has been released from prison in Azerbaijan after receiving a presidential pardon. Last May he was sentenced to two and a half years in prison on drugs charges. However, Amnesty International believed the charges were fabricated and the real reason was because of messages he had posted on Facebook calling for Egypt-inspired protests against the government. He was arrested on his way home from a meeting of the opposition Azerbaijan Popular Front Party. We campaigned on his behalf on several occasions.

**Life in West Papua**Hearing about life in West Papua proved a somewhat distressing experience when we welcomed Benny Wenda to a meeting on 5th December, at St Mary’s Parish Centre. We had been worried as to whether he would be able to come to Watford as an Interpol Red Alert had been placed on him but fortunately this can be only applied if he leaves the UK.

Benny began by playing his ukulele and singing a song, “A Cry for Freedom” - which he composed while in prison. He had been sentenced for 25 years for raising the West Papuan Flag and subsequently the sentenced was increased. As prison conditions grew worse Benny was convinced he would be killed and managed to escape via a ventilation shaft and then via Papua New Guinea to the UK.

While in prison he had a phone call from a staff member of Amnesty International. He said it raised his spirits to hear that people in other countries knew about his situation.

Unfortunately no one from Amnesty International is allowed to visit West Papua. All foreign journalists are banned including BBC correspondents.

The province of West Papua had been taken over by Indonesia after the Dutch left in 1961. It is in the western half of New Guinea, the world’s second largest island and 100 miles north of Australia. Whilst West Papua is rich in gold, copper, oil and timber its people suffer from the steady destruction of their natural resources. **PTO**

Currently Benny speaks to many organisations throughout the UK and is hopeful that one day he will return to his homeland, when democracy has been restored. We also welcomed Benny’s friend Sarogo, and Bob Corn, S. Midlands Regional Representative, who brought our guests to the meeting.

**Croxley Green Methodist Church Tree Festival**There were several cards for Jabbar written on by visitors to this festival, the weekend of 10th and 11th December. Sarah Haggar-Holt organised our participation in the Croxley Green Methodist Church Tree Festival so we set up a tree with lights and decorated it with greetings cards. Monique Jowers and Annie Conroy helped at the stall. There were 22 cards for posting, divided between Jabbar Savalan, and to other human rights activists: WOZA members in Zimbabwe, to Chen Guangcheng and Yuan Weijing in China, and to Sonia Pierre in the Dominican Republic.

Many of the cards were signed by young people. The occasion was a great opportunity for meeting local people in the community.

**Stall in Harlequin Centre**We will start the year with our stall for the Greeting Card Campaign on Saturday, 14th January, in the same area as last year, that is on the Upper Level near M&S and Disney Store. Many thanks to those who have offered to help but we would welcome more support so if you are able to come, if only for a short time, do let me know. We will be delighted to see you. We set up at 9.30am and stay until early evening.

**South Midlands Regional Conference**We are all invited to this conference on Saturday, 28th January, 10am to 4.30pm at Aylesbury Vale Multi-Cultural Centre, Friarscroft Way, Aylesbury, HP20 2TE. The theme is: “Ask not what you can do for Amnesty, but what Amnesty can do for you”. Speakers will include Ellis Brooks, Country Coordinator for Syria and there will be an action in support of human rights in Syria.

Several of us went to the 2011 conference and agreed it was a day well spent. We went by train from Rickmansworth which was very satisfactory.

**Group Meeting on Tuesday, 7th February**As we have the regional conference in January I guess it will be best to have our Group meeting in February. John and I would like to invite you to 122 Abbots Road, Abbots Langley, WD5 0BL, on Tuesday, 7th February, 7.45pm for 8pm. Do let me know if you are hoping to come.

**Refuge Rights and Asylum Wrongs**Group members have been invited by the Watford and Three Rivers Refugee Project to their AGM to hear a talk by the Rev’d Professor Nicholas Sagovsky on “Refugee Rights and Asylum Wrongs”. He holds professional posts at both Liverpool Hope and Roehampton Universities. He works with “Article 26”, a project of the Helena Kennedy Foundation which helped asylum-seeking young people, who are offered a place at UK universities to take up their places.

The talk will be on Monday, 20th February, 7.30pm at the Watford Quaker Meeting House, 150 Church Road, Watford WD17 4QB.

**Update on the Arms Trade Treaty**In response to many requests to hold meetings in Rickmansworth we will hold our March meeting at Berry Lane Methodist Church, WD3 7HJ. Brian Wood, from AIUK, will be updating us on the Arms Trade Treaty Campaign in which he plays a very important role. This will be on Wednesday, 14th March, 7.45pm for 8pm.

Amnesty International says: “In Spring we’ll be pushing for a bulletproof international Arms Treaty to stop the arms trade to countries where they are used to commit torture and other human rights violations.”

*Best wishes for 2012*

*Margaret*