

# Action

November 2015



## 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*

(watch out for further announcements though as it seems likely that we will have to change venue to a massive increase in the rent)

12 November

(please note change of date due to bonfire night)

Guest speaker re Roma People

3rd December

Group business meeting and seasonal drinks and nibbles (please bring something to share)

7th January 2016

Film showing

"Those who dance" by Mayyasa Al-Malazi.

### **Letter Writing Evenings**

An evening on the 3rd Tuesday of the month to sit and write letters with fellow Amnesty members. These take place at The Emporium on London Road

### **Monthly Collection**

Contact Julian  
julianwatmore@gmail.com  
07469776295

21st November

19th December

### **Monthly Stalls**

7th November  
Sydney Street  
Contact Jill 01273 621697

### **Write for Rights**

Letter writing vigil  
5th December  
Friends Meeting House

Write for Rights  
Make a difference

**Saturday 5th December 2015**

**10—4pm**

**Friends Meeting House, Ship St, Brighton**

**Join us to write a message of hope to human rights victims worldwide**

"When I feel I am left with no hope, I'll get a letter out and it will inspire me. The light of hope appears again, and confidence in myself and my ability to change things returns." Ihar Tsikhanyuk on letters he received through Write for Rights. The simple act of writing a letter can make a huge difference. Whether you're contacting the authorities to pressure them to address an injustice, or writing to individuals like Ihar who have suffered human rights abuses, letting them know they are not alone in their search for justice – your messages together have the power to change lives. Messages from people like you bring hope and comfort even in the face of the worst abuses. They can also help keep individuals safe, as sack-loads of cards are a sign to prison guards and governments that the world is watching

## After almost 14 years, Shaker Aamer's road to freedom and justice at last.

and Hove and Lewes Amnesty groups, who have stood by Shaker for years, supporting the SSAC actions, whether in their orange jumpsuits outside Parliament, or holding letters which spell out his name to crowds in Trafalgar Square or on marches and rallies in Battersea, or in their visits to lobby their own MPs, or in signatures on the petition which brought about the backbench debate on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2015 in which the British Parliament debated and unanimously passed the motion: "That this House calls on the US Government to release Shaker Aamer from his imprisonment in Guantánamo Bay and to allow him to return to his family in the UK".

Following this, the SSAC called upon the All Party Parliamentary Group for Shaker Aamer, founded by John McDonnell MP in December 2014, to send a group of cross-party MPs to Washington, in order to lobby Congress for Shaker's release. SSAC crowd-funded to pay for this delegation, as well as having an all-day sponsored fast in Trafalgar Square, on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2015, : "14 hours for 14 Years" in which SSAC activist Becky stood hooded in a cage for fourteen hours, and many campaigners and supporters, including Jeremy Corbyn, came to offer solidarity.

On 19<sup>th</sup> May 2015 the delegation, consisting of MPs Jeremy Corbyn(Lab); David Davis (Con); Andrew Mitchell(Con) and Andy Slaughter(Lab) flew to Washington for meetings with high level congress representatives including Senators John McCain and Dianne Feinstein. Many, including Lucy Wake of Amnesty International UK, have called this delegation 'a game changer'. And on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2015, Noreen Shah, Head of Security and Human Rights, Amnesty International USA, told the APPG how it was the repeated images of the tireless grassroots campaigners in their orange jumpsuits which had a huge impact on public opinion in the USA. She also reminded us that on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2015, Guantanamo, which he began his term in office vowing to close, will have been open for longer under President Obama than under former President Bush, and will, if Congress has its way, remain his legacy. The longstanding London Guantanamo Campaign continues to campaign for the release and care of every one of the 113 men still detained there.

Shaker's amazing words confirm once more that it is the staying power of long campaigns which brings about change and justice, and how im-

portant it is to encourage one another during those times when it might only be one or two of you standing up for truth and justice in the rain and snow. As campaigns gain momentum, more and more people join them: the We Stand for Shaker campaign began just under a year ago, with its inflatable of Shaker regularly popping up at protests, and drawing celebrities to have their photos taken with it.

What lies ahead now for Shaker is the harsh reality that a smear campaign will begin, as those whose actions Shaker knows about will hate him and wish him to be discredited and silenced. Shaker knows at least three things that no-one else has witnessed: the fact that Sheikh al-Libi was tortured to extract the confession that took the UK and US to war; the fact that a British intelligence officer was in the room when torture took place, and the facts of a dreadful day in Guantanamo when three detainees were killed.

Ahead for Shaker lie also the answers to a question in all our minds: Why, if he was cleared for release twice, in 2007 and in 2010, why did the US and UK governments do nothing to bring Shaker Aamer home to his family? And the certainty that these answers can only begin to come about in the judge-led enquiry, open to public scrutiny, for which Amnesty UK is campaigning. On 30<sup>th</sup> October 2015, Shaker Aamer landed at Biggin Hill airport. He was met by his US lawyer, Clive Stafford Smith of Reprieve, and is now being represented by his UK lawyers, Birnberg Peirce, led by Gareth Peirce, under whose care-plan he was transferred to hospital. From there, he asked to speak to Joy Hurcombe, Chair of the Save Shaker Aamer Campaign, the grassroots campaign that has never ceased to speak out for justice for Shaker.

To Joy's amazement, Shaker spoke to her of how the fact that ordinary people had been campaigning week after week, year after year, outside Parliament in hoods and orange jumpsuits, in wind, rain, hail, sleet and shine, was what kept him going. He told Joy that he felt he couldn't give up, because people outside were not giving up. He wants to thank every single person who stood by him since the dreadful day in 2009 when he was not returned on the plane which brought Binyam Mohamad from Guantanamo to RAF Northolt. Joy says that his voice was clear and strong and amazing, and she was able to chat to him as easily as if he were one of her friends.

After such a long campaign, this is how many people think of Shaker now, including all the people in the Brighton

Gareth Peirce, who represented the Birmingham Six and the Guildford 4, has the experience to know the form that any hostile briefing to silence Shaker will take. Birnberg Peirce is directing media enquiries to George Pitcher, an Anglican priest and former Secretary for Public Affairs to the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Shaker and his family will need a long, long time and complete privacy in which to rebuild their lives and heal their unimaginable trauma. Let us hope that, with this care and protection

around them, Shaker and his family will have the right to boundless love and peace with which to rebuild their lives.

*Maude*

Now that Shaker has been released, Amnesty is focussed on the need for an independent judge-led inquiry into UK involvement in torture and rendition.

Please sign and share the petition calling for this

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/torture-uk-must-investigate-its-role?from=issues>

#### January Film showing

The film for Jan 7th is called "Those who dance" by Mayyasa Al-Malazi. It is the story of a small community in Rossport, Co. Mayo, Ireland, who have resisted Shell's attempts to construct a high pressure gas pipeline and refinery across their land, which would have potentially devastating environmental and social consequences. The film compares their situation to that of the Ogoni people of the NIger Delta, where Ken Sar'-Wiwa and nine others were murdered by 1996 because of their non-violent opposition to Shell's oil extraction operations and gas flaring.

#### UPDATE ON THE THREE MANSOURA WOMEN

Two weeks ago we had good news about two of the MANSOURA women Mena and Abra being released. Just heard that the presidential pardon for the two women is conditional on legal proceedings being completed. This will not happen until mid November when they should be released. Pressure needs to be kept up for Yousra Elktaheeb the third and unpardoned of the three, so that the authorities do not think that one amnesty for 100 prisoners is sufficient when tens of thousands continue to languish in prison untried.

### Annual Street Collection

I actually quite enjoy the Lanes Collection (our monthly Saturday collection behind the Friends Meeting House in the heart of the Lanes) – a good opportunity to spend a fascinating hour 'people-watching' (*Well! I wouldn't have put **those** two people together.....Crikey! How does she walk in those heels?...**He** looks bored.....Cute baby.....**They're** clearly lost...*) or snippets of conversation, usually along the lines of " *We've already been down here....No we haven't – we came from over there! I don't remember this corner*". I'll even smile politely and give hapless tourists directions without shoving my tin under their noses. And it's good to have a quick chat with the ones who do stop to donate, especially when they say "Yeah! Amnesty – fantastic! Well done! You're doing a great job! Thank you!" But I'm always a bit bemused by those who give me a pound or sometimes more, ask what it's for and then their eyes totally glaze over when I start explaining.

However, in my experience, the annual Street Collection can be a different story, when our designated area is North Street or Western Road – another world.... This year, thinking strategically about where to stand, I started outside a posh shoe shop at the bottom of North Street, thinking that people will be sauntering past the window. After 20 minutes of being totally ignored, I moved to the cash machine opposite – people will have their purses and wallets out, I thought. After another dull and totally unsuccessful 20 minutes, I went up to the Co-op – *surely* there will be some sympathetic shoppers *here*....After 45 minutes I had collected precisely **nothing, zilch, nada**. My only consolation was being able to grab two friends passing by, who willingly gave me some change and a much needed boost. After a quick break and a piece of Gwyneth's really good cake, I set off for another stint and after bumping into Emma, Tilly and Bee, who told me excitedly how well they'd done outside *Boots*, that's where I headed (unfortunately Emma wouldn't lend me her 8 and 6 year olds, who were obviously a great asset)....and waddya know? Quite a different species of shopper. In the first half hour I'd had about a dozen donations, including a five and ten pound note AND done some celeb-spotting in the form of the "Eagle twins" fresh from the Labour Party Women's Conference. I think I made a fairly respectable 30 quid or so. That's *definitely* my pitch next year – I might even have to sharp-elbow a *Big Issue* seller out of the way..... (not really). *Sue*

## **Stall update**

Date Saturday 10th October  
Time 11 - 1pm  
Venue Outside Amnesty Bookshop, Sydney Street, Brighton  
Weather Warm for the time of year  
Volunteers Peter, Andrew, Sue, Celia and Jill

Campaign WORLD DAY AGAINST THE DEATH PENALTY

Matsumoto Kenji has been on death row for 21 years. He was coerced into confessing to 2 robberies and a murder. He has a low IQ due to mercury poisoning and now suffers from a delusional disorder. He has been in solitary confinement and uses a wheelchair.

We sent 95 letters altogether to the Japanese authorities asking for his sentence to be commuted to a life sentence and that he be given suitable medical treatment.

Next stall will be on Saturday 7th November.

## **BRIGHTON & HOVE AMNESTY GROUP CONTACTS**

**Chair** – Peter brightonandhoveai@googlemail.com Tel: 01273 607110

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**Web Site co-ordinator:** Michael - [michaelowenfisher@hotmail.com](mailto:michaelowenfisher@hotmail.com)

**Amnesty Stalls co-ordinator**—Jill —01273 621697

## **Campaign Co-ordinators:**

**Individuals at Risk – The Mansoura women (Egypt)** Celia Stubbs—01273 593833

**Security and Human Rights**—Michael—[michaelowenfisher@hotmail.com](mailto:michaelowenfisher@hotmail.com)

**Stop Torture**—Michael - [michaelowenfisher@hotmail.com](mailto:michaelowenfisher@hotmail.com)

**My Body My Rights**—Jess 07740 344832

**Amnesty Websites:** international - [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org) AI UK - [www.amnesty.org.uk](http://www.amnesty.org.uk) local group - [www.amnesty.org.uk/brighton](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/brighton)

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**Amnesty UK Human Rights Centre** - Tel: 0207 0331500

