



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

October 2014

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Group news

Thank you to all who helped with the street collection!



We held our annual Street Collection on Saturday 13th September in Manchester City Centre. This is an important fundraiser for us and we were really worried that we didn't have enough collectors. Thanks to some last minute volunteers, we managed to collect £329.67 - £4 more than last year with 16 collectors, which was one more than last year. A special thanks to our treasurer, Sean Dunne, who masterminded the event.

Roma Tearne at the Manchester Literature Festival



Don't forget our event at the Manchester Literature Festival on October 18th featuring Sri-Lankan born artist, writer and film-maker, Roma Tearne. She will be reading from her book *Brixton Beach*, a TV Bookclub pick and winner of a French Reader's prize, and *The Swimmer*, which was longlisted for the Orange Fiction Prize. Both novels offer the reader 'a rare insight into the subtle and

dramatic ways we are shaped by conflict' and draw on issues of civil war, persecution and torture, migration, self-identity and loss. Roma's talk will be followed by a Q&A and book signing and all proceeds will go to Amnesty International. Book your ticket now to avoid disappointment!

Roma Tearne

Saturday 18th October, 2pm
Cross Street Chapel

Tickets £7/£5 concessions Book on 0843 208 0500 or
<http://www.manchesterliteraturefestival.co.uk/events/roma-tearne-34967>

New Membership Secretary

Eleanor Kelly has agreed to take over this essential task from Mary McBride. She will be making a special effort to make new members welcome and will also keep an eye on our membership list. Thanks go to Mary who took on this role when Doug left for his foreign adventures.

Sad News

Olga Kenyon, a long standing member of the group and a dedicated schools speaker, was hit by a van in Manchester last Friday and later died in hospital from head injuries.

Acoustic Amnesty for Human Rights Day



Human Rights Day is annually observed on December 10th to mark the anniversary of the presentation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In conjunction with Greater Manchester Humanists and thanks to our indefatigable events organiser Steve Lindsay, we are holding a musical/poetry fundraiser at Sacred Trinity (at junction of Chapel St/ Blackfriars Road very close to the city centre) in aid of both Amnesty and Musicians Without Borders.

Tickets <https://www.wegotickets.com/event/291937>

This is instead of our usual December meeting – more info to follow.

Write for Rights

In December, instead of our regular letter writing session, we will be concentrating on sending greetings cards on behalf of Amnesty cases as messages of support to victims of human rights abuses and their families and to human rights defenders. In place of our usual group meeting we will hold a greetings card session at the Acoustic Amnesty event. We also hope to have a stall or two and will be supporting the Whalley Range Peace and Justice card writing event.

Greetings Card Campaign

Wednesday 10th December
Sacred Trinity Church
(as part of the Acoustic Amnesty event)
From 6.00 pm onwards
Pens, paper and case sheets provided



Group Meetings

Held 2nd Wednesday each month - Cross Street Chapel 7.30pm

8th October: What should Amnesty be concentrating on in the next five years? Come and air your views? See Strategic Goals 2016 -19 article below.

12th November: Human Rights in Egypt – talk by Helen Underhill on her PhD subject

Why not join a few of us for a pre-meeting drink/meal just after 6pm. This month we will be at The Grinch on Chapel Walks.

Strategic Goals Consultation

TAKE PART IN PHASE TWO OF THE STRATEGIC GOALS CONSULTATION

Amnesty International is working on setting out our strategic goals for 2016-19. Basically, where should the international movement concentrate our efforts and what do we want to achieve. The International Secretariat has consulted the international movement and has produced the first draft of the strategic goals paper. **They want our feedback by October 20th**. There are **three** different ways you can get involved:

1) Manchester Group October (8th) meeting

Laura and Anne will be facilitating a discussion on the proposals, using a workshop outline provided by AIUK.

2) Regional event

There is a free regional event in Manchester - 7 October, 6.30pm - 9.00pm at St Thomas' Conference Centre
For details and booking please visit www.amnesty.org.uk/consultation

3) Individual feedback

If you can't attend the group discussion or regional event, you can still feedback online. The questionnaire and consultation information will be available until 20th October at www.amnesty.org.uk/consultation

Draft proposals

The first draft of proposals is based on:

- Discussions and consultations with more than 50 submissions from sections and structures
- An analysis of the external context, (Situational Analysis)
- The agreed decision making criteria.

Here is a summary. Please see the briefing document sent out with this newsletter for more detail on why the IS considers these topics important, what they think we can add and proposed outcomes.

Human Rights Proposal 1: Exercising fundamental freedoms

- human rights education
- improved protection of freedom of expression (offline and online), assembly and association
- safer environment for human rights defenders and people's organisations

Human Rights Proposal 3: Responding to crisis

- reduced transfers of arms and military, security and police equipment where these are likely to be used to abuse human rights
- increased access to safety for people fleeing torture
- persecution and crisis

Human Rights Proposal 2: Securing rights for all

- reduced discrimination and identity based violence
- Improved realisation of economic, social and cultural rights "on the ground"
- increased recognition by states of the legally binding nature of economic, social and cultural rights
- new understandings of human rights approaches to tackling inequality

Human Rights Proposal 4: Ensuring accountability

- stronger human rights governance and accountability at the national level
- stronger regional and international human rights machinery for when governments fail to protect human rights
- accountability for human rights abuses amounting to international crimes
- and corporate accountability for human rights abuses

Organisational Proposal 5: Increasing our organisational effectiveness

- growth and improved digital capabilities/presence of the Amnesty International movement

Do you agree? How would you prioritise these? Anything missing?

Join in the debate at our October group meeting!

Campaigning

MONTHLY ACTION

Call for asylum support rates to be increased

There has been no increase in asylum support rates since April 2011. Following a legal challenge testing the lawfulness of the amount paid to destitute asylum seekers, in April 2014 the High Court found that the Government's assessment of the amount needed by asylum seekers to avoid destitution was flawed, and ordered the Home Office to carry out a review. However, in August the Government announced that, following this review, support levels would remain unchanged. This decision means that many people fleeing conflict and persecution are left without sufficient support to meet their essential living needs while waiting for a Home Office decision on their asylum application.

A cross-party Early Day Motion (EDM 99) calls on the Government to raise asylum support rates to at least 70% of Income Support. You can get involved in this action by writing to and or meeting your MP asking them to support the EDM. For more information, including suggested letters, please visit: <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/resources/groups-activity-pack-october-2014-call-asylum-support-be-increased>

Stop Torture

Three of us will be going down to the Human Rights Action Centre in London at the beginning of October for a 'Skill Share', to give us ideas for our activism around this campaign. At the Skill Share, Sameena and Anne are leading one of the workshops on using a stall to engage the public and Lianne, our campaign lead, will be getting lots of ideas for our activities. She will report back at the group meeting and will also have a campaign update and an action relating to the EU laws prohibiting tools used to torture.



Our Stop Torture subgroup are meeting before the monthly meeting - at 6.30 on 8 October at the nearby Waterstones Cafe to discuss plans for a sponsored walk. If you would like to help plan activities for this campaign, come along to the subgroup or drop Lianne Slavin, an email (lianne.slavin@gmail.com).

Women's Rights

Our women's rights subgroup held a meeting last Tuesday to discuss the recent updates from AIUK and how we can participate in this campaign. More info to follow.

If you want to be involved in the sub group working on Women's Rights email Marie-Louise (mlohanrahan@outlook.com)

Myanmar

Jean Mary, our group lead on Burma, is working on a comprehensive list of Burmese Prisoners of Conscience newly detained in 2014, with addresses for letters. More info to follow.

Southern Africa

We have received an update on Zimbabwe from Maggie Towse, the country coordinator. There are no actions this month. Here is a summary of her briefing:

The situation in Zimbabwe remains quite from a human rights' perspective with scarcely any reports from human rights activists of progress on any of the important issues that they face nor reports of any instances of overt harassment or arrests of any human rights defenders, including WOZA.

There has been a recent Conference of Human Rights NGOs in Zimbabwe where the delegates discussed how they would work with a National Peace and Reconciliation Commission as required by the new Constitution in Zimbabwe, which was adopted in 2013. The Commission has not yet been established, as no funding was made available for it in the last budget statement.

The Researcher from the IS who covers Zimbabwe reports: *The situation in Zimbabwe is generally quiet. However, the economy has been shrinking with many businesses closing resulting in job losses. People are busy scrounging for a living. Civil society has been quiet and one can safely say they are in survival mode with donor funds also dwindling. Indeed, the media is preoccupied with the internal struggles within both ZANU-PF and MDC-T. Government remains clueless on how to steer the economy. Basic services in most urban settlements are collapsing with municipal workers going for months without payment of salaries.*

The Researcher and the Section Director of Amnesty in Zimbabwe have met with Government ministers to discuss the implementation of the new Constitution. They were informed that there were about 400 provisions that did not comply with the new Constitution and that it would therefore take time to get all laws aligned. Some could be done quickly but others would require significant legislative time. These included the reform of the laws that have been used repeatedly to stifle freedom of expression and rights to assembly. They were also informed that further work also needed to be done on the abolition of the Death Penalty. There is a growing consensus that this is what should happen but there is still an important group of MPs who are resistant to the idea. The Justice Minister said that he would continue to work towards total abolition. In the meantime there are still 92 people on death row. Some of these may be commuted to life sentences and no executions are planned, the minister said. In relation to the ratification of the Convention against Torture, we have been assured that this has been approved by Cabinet, but that it has got stuck somewhere in the bureaucracy.

In late August President Mugabe became the Chair of South African Development Commission. The IS, in conjunction with Human Rights Watch, held a press conference at which Zimbabwe was reminded of its responsibilities to uphold and protect human rights at home and in the Region.

Finally, the plight of the people in Chingwizi who were displaced by floods in the early part of the year following a dam burst, remains of dire. The people are resolved not to move from the camp without compensation and being allocated bigger plots of land than the 1 hectare offered by government. Government delegations have been booed by the affected people each time Ministers tried to address the community.

Other News

Public Meeting: "Israel/Palestine - Democracy or Apartheid?"

Thursday October the 16th at 7 for 7:30pm at the Friends Meeting House in Kendal. Speakers: Baroness Jenny Tonge and Richard Barnes. Further information from Dave at amnestykendal@gmail.com

Syrian Conflict in Regional Crises: Complications, Implications, and the Way Forward



The flyer features a map of the Middle East with red circles highlighting Syria and Iraq. Below the map are the flags of several countries including the UK, USA, France, Germany, and others. The text on the flyer reads: "SYRIAN CONFLICT IN REGIONAL CRISES: COMPLICATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND THE WAY FORWARD". It is organized by the "BRITISH MUSLIM HERITAGE CENTRE" at "COLLEGE ROAD, MANCHESTER, M16 8BP". The event is on "FRIDAY 17/10/2014" from "18.00 - 22.00". It includes a QR code and contact information for "FOR QUESTIONS" at "AMNESTY UK" (011 202 2776). The flyer also lists speakers: Amin Durrani (Iraq), Raphaelle Ambrose (Syria), Anas Al Arabi (Iraq), Dr. Christopher DeLuca (Syria), and Dr. James Patton (Syria). A note states: "This conference will discuss the critical recent developments in Syria and their implications on the stability and security of the region and wider international community." It also lists two panels: "Panel 1: Syrian Crisis, stability and repercussions: US, Britain, Jihadists, UK media and politics." and "Panel 2: Decoding the future of Syria and the region: what should the UK and international community do?"

North West Conference

Booking is now open – flyer attached with this newsletter! Come along and meet other Amnesty activists in the North West. I am also told that Kate Allen, AIUK Director will be at the conference.

Getting Connected – Getting Stronger

Amnesty International North West Conference 2014

Queen's Park High School, Chester CH4 7AE

Sat 8th November 2014
10 am – 4.00 pm



PROGRAMME INCLUDES

Personal accounts from Human Rights Defenders

Presentations from Country Coordinators on the Stop Torture Campaign

Bringing campaigning and fund-raising together
Street Action- Stop Torture

Workshops on how to work more effectively together

An update from an Activist Board Member

Let's get together, make new connections

Stronger and more effective!

The Conference is open to delegates of all groups (local, student, school, TU and other networks) in the Region. Individual AI members are also welcome to attend, as are non-members if they share Amnesty's concerns.

Benefit Gig - 31st October

Whalley Range Peace and Justice present an evening of music, mirth and mischief with Anthony John Clarke and Dave Pegg (Fairport Convention) in aid of Amnesty International and to raise funds for postage for the greeting card campaign.

Friday 31st October 7.30pm at St Margaret's Church, Rufford Road, Whalley Range, Manchester M16 8EJ

Tickets £8 advance (£10 on the door). Buy them at our October group meeting.

Also available on eventbrite (booking fee applies):

<http://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/an-evening-with-anthony-john-clarke-and-dave-pegg-in-aid-of-amnesty-international-tickets-12920863651?aff=es2&rank=0>

Flyer attached.

Please distribute and share with your friends.

