



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

2nd October

Guest speaker
Lesley Burgess
Philippines' country co ordinator

Letter Writing Evenings

An evening once a month to sit and write letters with fellow Amnesty members. These evenings are hosted at member's houses. All welcome, simply contact the host/hostess for details:
Emma 01273 232397
15th October 2014

Monthly Collection

18th October
15th November
Contact Julian
julianwatmore@gmail.com
07583334740

Monthly Stall's

11th October
11am -1pm
Sydney Street
Contact Jill 01273 621697

Write for Rights 2014

6th December
Friends Meeting House
Ship Street

50th anniversary stall

Brighton Station
2pm to 5pm
16th November 2014

Live reading of Even if we lose our lives

7th March 2015
New Venture Theatre

Happy 50th Brighton and Hove Amnesty Group



Sunday 16th November Brighton Station 2pm to 5pm.

This month we are very proud to say that we are celebrating the 50th anniversary of the formation of the Brighton and Hove Amnesty group. Thanks to the hard work and commitment of all the volunteers over the years the Brighton and Hove group have played a key role in campaigning, fund raising and raising local awareness of human rights since the group was formed in October 1964.

Join Amnesty members to celebrate the groups' achievements at our November stall at Brighton Station. Afterwards group members have suggested going for a celebratory curry so please let me know if you are interested in joining us so we can get an idea of numbers.

We want to have a display of some of our most memorable moments so if you have any photos or newspaper cuttings of Brighton and Hove Amnesty group over the years I'd love to have them.

Emma 01273 23397

Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group

Our visit from the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group

Just down the road from Brighton, near Gatwick airport, about 600 men are currently being detained by the UK Border Agency (UKBA). These men cannot leave. They are locked into their rooms at night and are permitted only limited contact with the outside world. Yet, Tinsley House and Brook House are not technically prisons. They are two of thirteen immigration removal centres in the UK. These centres are intended to facilitate the removal of persons without the right to remain here, yet in reality, detainees often stay months, if not years.

The Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group was set up in 1995 to support those in immigration detention at Gatwick. Brighton and Hove Amnesty has long held ties with the charity so we were very happy to welcome Lauren and Maude to September's monthly meeting. Lauren works in the offices of the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group (GDWG) supporting volunteers and assisting detainees. Maude is a long-term volunteer, visiting detainees at Tinsley and Brook House on a weekly basis. This article aims to summarise their informative and often hard-hitting, presentation and their answers to audience questions.



Tinsley House

Who is detained for immigration purposes?

Anyone liable to be deported, this includes:

- Refused asylum seekers
- Those who have overstayed on visas
- International students
- Foreign national prisoners

The case of foreign national prisoners

About half of the detainees in Brook House fall into this category. As a group, they probably garner the least public sympathy. However, the situation is not as simple as the media would have us believe. In the UK, if you do not have a British passport you face automatic deportation if you receive a prison sentence of over twelve months. Many people who moved to the UK as small children have never gone through the often complex and expensive process of acquiring a British passport, yet they have spent most of their lives here. Consequently, upon completion of their prison sentence, many foreign national prisoners face deportation to a country they do not remember and where they know nobody.

The conditions in immigration removal centres

Although these centres are intended to perform an administrative, not punitive function, conditions are often worse than conventional prisons. Access to legal aid and health services is very limited and opportunities for education and training are almost non-existent. Both Brook and Tinsley House have category B security status (just one

level below a maximum security prison) and are run by the private security firm, G4S. According to the GDWG, the G4S staff lack the specialist training which detainees really need. Most troubling, is that prisoners have no idea how long they will be detained for. In the UK, unlike countries such as France and Germany, there is no maximum time limit for immigration detention. For example, the GDWG supports a detainee who has been there for 51 months. In its most recent report, the HM Inspector of Prisons acknowledged an improvement in conditions at the Gatwick immigration removal centres, yet criticised Brook House for its provision of legal advice, the slow pace of immigration casework and the high levels of self-harm and Tinsley House for its shortcomings in mental health provision.



Arguments against detention for immigration purposes

- Mental health impacts: some detainees have been victims of torture. The act of detention can be a re-traumatising experience for those suffering with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). For all detainees the reality of not knowing when they will be released is incredibly damaging.
- Detention splits families: decisions regarding families are rarely taken at the same time, therefore, family members can be separated by detention and deportation. This is especially the case now legal aid has been abolished for article 8, 'the right to family life'.
- The economics do not make sense: An immigration detention centre costs about £8 million a year. It costs £120 a day to detain someone at Brook House.
- It undermines the reputation of the UK: many immigrants come to the UK as they believe it is a fair place. Yet the Home Office decision-making process is inefficient, often rushed and very arbitrary.
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The experiences of a volunteer visitor

Maude has visited a diverse group of men throughout her time as a volunteer visitor. We were all deeply absorbed by her stories. She emphasised the importance of sitting quietly and allowing the person to tell their story. The barriers come down and there is no judgement. They manage to communicate even when they do not speak the same language.

Maude was honest about her experiences, explaining that hearing the stories of torture survivors has sometimes been deeply traumatising for her. However, getting to know these men has reinforced her belief in the resilience and resourcefulness of the human spirit. There are also the little details. Maude enjoys learning about the everyday life in the home countries of the people she visits.

She would encourage anyone who is interested in becoming a volunteer and emphasised the brilliant training provided by the GDWG, including on issues such as PTSD.

How can you support the GDWG?

Become a volunteer. Attend 'Refugee Tales' on October 9th.

For further information and more ways to contribute, please visit their website: <http://www.gdwg.org.uk/>

By Freya Lyte

Stop Torture Campaign

On Saturday 6th September we held our usual stall outside the Amnesty Bookshop in Sydney Street. The weather was fine and we had plenty of volunteers including some new ones (Barney and Patrick). I had obtained postcards from Headquarters for people to sign.

The case this month was 'Justice for Dilorum', part of our 'Stop Torture' campaign which includes four more individual cases. Dilorum Abdukadirova fled Uzbekistan in 2005 after security forces killed hundreds at a largely peaceful protest she had attended. She returned in 2010 to her family, only to be charged with attempting to overthrow the constitutional order and illegally leaving the country.

After two unfair trials she was sentenced to 18 years. In court relatives said she looked unusually thin, had been hit in the face and was not wearing her headscarf as usual. Amnesty considers her to be a prisoner of conscience.

The postcards had a tear - off part with Dilorum's story and a photo of her on it. We gave these to the members of the public who signed the cards that we sent to the President of Uzbekistan. We collected 94 cards altogether. Many thanks to those who volunteered and took part.

Jill

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Amnesty Websites: international - www.amnesty.org AI UK -

www.amnesty.org.uk local group - www.amnesty.org.uk/brighton

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<http://www.flickr.com/groups/amnestybrighton/pool>

Amnesty UK Human Rights Centre - Tel: 0207 0331500

