



Amnesty International Reading Group **NEWSLETTER**

2nd Summer 2016

PROTECT THE HUMAN

*We are ordinary people from across the world standing up for humanity and human rights.
Our purpose is to protect individuals wherever justice, fairness,
freedom and truth are denied.*

Recent Events and Meetings

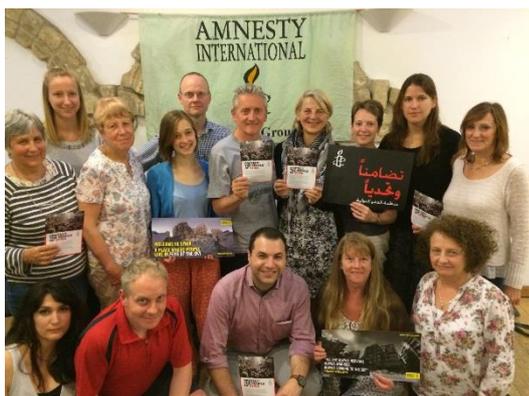
WOMAD – Action for Syria – July 16

WOMAD was a huge success this year for the Reading Group. Our WOMAD co-ordinator, Sue Bingham, brilliantly organised our stall and actions to support **human rights in Syria**. We had

- 1,406 signatures on our petition to the Foreign Secretary urging measures to help reduce the suffering of the Syrian people
- Virtual Reality headsets of bombed district of Aleppo used over 2 days
- 242 messages of solidarity & drawings of homes on our giant creative visual petition
- Just under £530 raised in donations
- 2 new Amnesty members signed up
- 16 volunteers worked 71 hours on the stall rota over 3 days, 12 - 6pm



Huge thanks to all the volunteers who gave up their time to help run the Amnesty stall this year, especially Simon & Peter for arriving on Wednesday with all the heavy gear, setting up, & bringing it all back again on Monday. Also thanks to Kristyan & Farshid at AIUK for help with the petition, VR sets & leaflets, and to Wassim.... for an inspirational talk at our Womad workshop in Reading. And to Ian @signpeople for making the brilliant Syria placards at short notice, at cost price.



Our July meeting focussed on our preparation for WOMAD. We are very fortunate to have **Wassim Al-Adel, a British-Syrian blogger and writer**, as our speaker. Wassim inspired us through his informed viewpoint, with personal stories with amazing compassion and positivity. He gave us the background to the current situation in Syria, explaining that there are many different perspectives on the cause and justification of what has happened. He explained that

half the population is now displaced – either internally or internally – with 4m in Turkey, 25% of the Lebanese population now being Syrian and a large camp in Jordan.

We are delighted that Wassim has agreed to be a speaker at our event during Reading's International Festival on 22nd October – see below.

East Reading Festival – June 2016

We had a stall at the East Reading Festival where we were taking action for our new prisoner of



conscience Mohamed Al-Roken. Mohammed al-Roken, a human rights lawyer and long-time Amnesty member, is serving a 10-year prison sentence in the UAE, following his conviction on 2 July 2013 in a mass trial of government critics and reform activists.

We raised just over £40, which is more than double the amount raised last year, and received a lot of signatures on the letters to MPs. John Redwood has provided a (standard) response.

Reading Group's Up Coming Events



Reading Pride. Do come and along to this year's event – **Saturday 3rd September, 12noon-5pm, Kings Meadow.** Please email me if you'd like to help on the rota. <https://readingpride.co.uk/pride>
We really need extra people to help on this one as lots of our regulars are on holiday!!!!

Reading's International Festival, Thursday 22nd October at 7.30pm at RISC. Our group will present an evening about Syria. We will be joined by British-Syrian blogger, Wassim Al-Adel.



Music and Mince Pies, Friday 16th December – a classical music concert in the beautiful setting of **Chantry House, Henley.** We are delighted to host this event again after a couple of years break. Keep the date for your diaries.

AI:UK's up coming events

Amnesty Skills Share – Saturday 22nd October

Amnesty will be running a Skills Share session on its new refugee campaign on 22nd October at the HRAC between 9.30am and 5pm. This is a free event but registration is required, before 3rd October, at <https://amnestyuk.wufoo.com/forms/m19nmovj0rvo9yl/>

Trek in Peru – May 2017



Calling all explorers!

Next May, travel to #Peru with #TeamAmnesty for a 10-day trek of a lifetime. Explore the Inca capital of Cusco, challenge yourself on a hike in the Peruvian Andes to #MachuPicchu, and meet #AmnestyInternational Peru. You'll even be trekking with Amnesty UK Director Kate Allen! Now there's an opportunity for some selfies your friends will actually be jealous of!

To book your place, visit www.amnesty.org.uk/perutrek or email team@amnesty.org.uk

Cuba update from Sue Bingham,

Country Coordinator, Cuba & English Speaking Caribbean, North America & Caribbean Team Leader

The IS Caribbean team is continuing its current research projects (for which I have interviewed the FCO desk officers, a number of academics, authors and Cuba specialists). A new report and campaign action is due early next year.

1) Cuba voted with the UN to make history on sexual orientation & gender identity

The UN Human Rights Council, in a defining vote, adopted a resolution on June 30, 2016, on "Protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation, and gender identity," to mandate the appointment of an independent expert on the subject. The expert will be tasked with assessing implementation of existing international human rights law, identifying best practices and gaps, raising awareness of violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, engaging in dialogue and consultation with states and other stakeholders, and facilitating provision of advisory services, technical assistance, capacity-building, and cooperation. Cuba was one of 23 in favour, with 18 against and six abstentions.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/06/30/un-makes-history-sexual-orientation-gender-identity>

2) Oxfam urges U.S. to end embargo on struggling Cuba HAVANA | By [Sarah Marsh](#) July 13, 2016

The director of Oxfam broke the global aid agency's long-time silence on the U.S. trade embargo on Cuba, urging the American Congress to lift it "sooner rather than later" given the island's mounting economic woes. Winnie Byanyima said in an interview in Havana that Oxfam was set to formally campaign against the embargo as part of its broader strategy to increase support to Cuba.

President Raúl Castro told Cubans last week to brace for tough times as the country had to cut spending and energy supply as it dealt with a cash crunch and reduced oil assistance from Venezuela. Byanyima

said she was visiting Cuba to see how Oxfam could adapt its work in response to the island's growing difficulties. Oxfam is working mainly in the eastern part of the country, on projects to tackle drought, increase farming output and empower women in rural areas. A key issue is that, despite being a tropical country, Cuba imports 80 percent of its food, partly due to a decline in productivity when farms were nationalized after the revolution, said Byanyima.

As part of its market-style reforms, Cuba is leasing out land to smallholder farmers, helping increase output and local incomes. Yet many Cubans have lost their farming know-how.

"They have lost maybe two, three or four generations of agriculture culture, so there is a need to build up again this knowledge amongst families for smallholder farming," she said, noting Oxfam had strong experience transmitting that knowledge from farmers throughout the world.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-cuba-usa-oxfam-idUSKCN0ZU2CJ>

3) It is reported that renowned Cuban dissident **Guillermo Fariñas** has begun a hunger strike demanding the government end torture and other human rights abuses against opponents. Fariñas, awarded the European Parliament's Sakharov human rights prize in 2010, told AFP that he stopped consuming food and liquids to coincide with the first anniversary of the reestablishment of Cuba-US diplomatic relations. "We are not asking that the government stop arresting us...but that they stop the beatings, the tortures when they arrest us," Fariñas said in a phone interview from his home in Santa Clara, in western Cuba. His health is deteriorating along with several other members of UNPACU who are also on hunger strike.

<https://uk.news.yahoo.com/leading-cuban-dissident-begins-hunger-strike-214620704.html>

- **LETTER TO PAKISTAN**

See below for a letter to Pakistan's Prime Minister, calling for an investigation into the disappearance of human rights activist, WAHID BALOCH. Please send letters by 9th September 2016.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS – always 2nd Thursday of the month at 8pm at RISC, Reading
All are welcome, upstairs at RISC, 35-39 London Street, Reading, RG1 4PS

- Thursday 8th September
- Thursday 13th October

Don't forget to keep up to date with our group's news, frequently updated with photos and updates:

- Website = <http://www2.amnesty.org.uk/groups/reading>
- Facebook page –search for Reading Amnesty International – Town Group = <http://www.facebook.com/groups/187525074719402>
- twitter = @amnestyreading

ALSO: We raise funds for Amnesty International, and can provide speakers about Amnesty and human rights issues for local organisations: contact our secretary Anne McFarlane, ammcf@btinternet.com
Amnesty Reading Newsletter editor Helen Ball- email: helenball03@yahoo.co.uk

Prime Minister of Pakistan
Muhammad Nawaz Sharif
Prime Minister House
Secretariat, Constitution Avenue
Islamabad
Pakistan

Dear Prime Minister

I am deeply concerned to hear about the disappearance of WAHID BALOCH on 26 July 2016, when he was apparently forcibly removed from a street on the outskirts of Karachi. Mr Wahid Baloch was an active human rights campaigner, and is the latest in a line of disappeared individuals belonging to the ethnic Baloch community, from the province of Balochistan.

I would therefore urge you to order an immediate, impartial and independent investigation into Wahid Baloch's fate and whereabouts, keeping his family fully informed at all times. If he is in state custody, he should either be released or, if there is credible evidence of an offence, he should be charged and remanded by an independent court.

I urge you to ensure that Wahid Baloch's human rights are protected and respected at all times. This includes (1) his right to freedom from torture and other ill-treatment and (2) his right to access to his family, to a lawyer of his choice and to adequate medical care.

I further call on you to bring those responsible for his apparent enforced disappearance to justice in fair trials without recourse to the death penalty.

Yours sincerely

