

Amnesty International

Reading Group

NEWSLETTER

Spring 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

Quiz Night

Saturday 5th March saw one of our regular events make another appearance. Our Quiz Night was a real success, lots of fun and fundraising too! Well done to everyone involved in making our Quiz Night, particularly Nigel, Liz, Hilary and Peter.



Puzzling over the questions.....trying his luck at our raffle!



Our December meeting saw the group taking part in Amnesty's Write for Rights Campaign – lots of greetings cards written for Human Rights across the world.



Our January street collection got 2015 off to a great start, raising £281.

Our secretary, Anne, attended the Regional Conference in January, picking up good tips about campaigning.



See our plan for 2016 attached to this newsletter so you can see our other plans for this year.

National Conference and AGM, Nottingham - Saturday 9th – Sunday 10th April

We are all looking forward to taking part in Amnesty's annual conference and AGM in less than two week's time. It's free this year, so a great opportunity to learn more about the development of Amnesty's work.

However, as all members should have received information about how you can vote online, then you don't have to be there to vote on the important motions being debated.

<https://www.eventsforce.net/blueprint/frontend/reg/thome.csp?pageID=25271&eventID=58&redirecting=1&traceRedir=2&eventID=58>

Actions to Take – please scroll down to find letters ready for you to send

1. Syria – please add in your MP's name
2. India – HR defendess - please send by 7th April
3. Iran – death penalty case
4. Georgia – same sex marriage ban
5. Cuba – please follow this link to read an open letter to President Obama as he travels to Cuba <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/03/obama-trip-to-cuba-argentina-a-golden-opportunity-to-tackle-mutual-human-rights-shortfalls>

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 April – letter writing
- Thursday 12th May – Burma

- *Possible additional event -Thursday 28th April – trainer on lobbying against the Human Rights Act – date and venue TBC. Please check facebook/website/twitter for updates*

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

DearMP

The UK are key participants of the UN negotiated talks in Geneva between Syria authorities and opposition groups. We need to prioritise key human rights benchmarks for progress, as per UN Security Council resolution 2254, which specifies humanitarian access and ending attacks against civilians as well as for parties to “immediately comply with their obligations under international law.”

Please could you write to the Foreign Secretary, Phillip Hammond, to ensure the UK champions human rights benchmarks at the Syria talks and lobbies parties to the conflict to:

End unlawful attacks against civilians and civilian objects: all parties to the conflict must be made to end all direct attacks on civilians and civilian objects, and indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks;

Lift the sieges: parties to the conflict must be made to stop blocking or restricting the delivery of food, medical aid, and other life-saving supplies;

Allow unfettered humanitarian access: all parties must be made to provide unfettered access to the UN and its implementing partners;

Release those detained and abducted solely for exercising their human rights: parties to the conflict must be made to release all those held solely for exercising their human rights or perceived opposition to the ruling party;

Ensure effective participation of women and civil society in peace talks: delegations to the peace talks must ensure that sufficient female delegates are present, that they can participate effectively and fully and that women's perspectives are represented; Syrian civil society must also be able to contribute.

End impunity: independent monitors, such as the Independent International Commission of Inquiry, must be given unfettered access to the country, including to all places of detention. The UK government should further work with partners to accept a shared responsibility to investigate and prosecute crimes under international law committed in Syria, in particular by seeking to exercise universal jurisdiction to bring suspected perpetrators to justice before national courts.

Yours sincerely,

TO:.

- 1) **Union Minister of Home Affairs, Rajnath Singh, 17 Akbar Road, New Delhi, India.**
Email: 38ashokroad@gmail.com
- 2) **Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh, Raman Singh, Chief Minister's Secretariat, DKS Bhavan, Mantralaya, Raipur – 492001, Chhattisgarh, India.**
Email: cmcg@nic.in; cmcg@gov.in; cmhouse11@yahoo.co.in
- 3) **Inspector General of Police, Bastar, SRP Kalluri, IG Office, Bastar range, Chhattisgarh – 494001, India.**

Dear Sirs

We are extremely concerned about the plight of human rights lawyers, activists and journalists in Chhattisgarh. Despite repeated requests for security, it appears that in several instances the police authorities have failed to provide individuals with adequate protection from harassment and intimidation, which seem intended to prevent them from carrying out their legitimate business.

Specifically: (i) Journalist Malini Subramaniam and her family left their home in Bastar on 18/2/16, fearing for their safety due to threats and intimidation. (ii) Lawyers Isha Khandelwal and Shalina Gera, members of the Jagdalpur Legal Aid Group (JagLAG), left Bastar on 20/2/16, in response to a threatened attack which had been announced by the police. (iii) On 20/2/16, three unidentified men threw a black substance on the face of Adivasi activist Soni Sori, when she was on her way to her home in Geedam, and they warned her not to continue her activism; she has been receiving extensive medical treatment at a hospital in New Delhi.

Human Rights Lawyers have a crucial role in upholding the rule of law. I urge you to take all reasonable steps to ensure the safety of members of JagLAG and all human rights defenders in Bastar.

I further urge you to conduct thorough, independent investigations into attacks and threats against them and to hold to account those responsible for intimidation, harassment and improper interference in the lives and business of activists, lawyers and journalists in Bastar.

Yours sincerely

March 2016

Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani

Head of the Judiciary
c/o Public Relations Office Number 4, Deadend of 1 Azizi
Above Pasteur Intersection
Vali Asr Street
Tehran
Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: info@humanrights-iran.ir

Your Excellency

Amir Amrollahi

I write to express my concern about the case of Amir Amrollahi, now aged 26, who was first sentenced to death in 2007 in connection with the fatal stabbing of a boy in a fight which took place when Amir Amrollahi was only 16. This sentence was passed despite an official forensic report which concluded that he had not attained “mental growth and maturity” at the time of the crime. Mr Amrollahi was granted a retrial but has now been sentenced to death for the second time.

Since Amir Amrollahi was undoubtedly a minor at the time of the crime for which he has been convicted, I urge you not to execute him but rather to commute his death sentence without delay.

I also call on you to not to execute anyone who was under 18 when they committed their crime.

Furthermore, I urge you to take legislative measures to completely abolish, without any discretion for the courts or other exceptions, the death penalty for crimes committed by people below the age of 18, in line with Iran’s obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Yours respectfully

Cc

H.E Mohammad Hassan Habibollahzadeh, Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 16 Princes Gate,
London SW7 1PT. Email: iranemb.lon@mfa.gov.ir

Prime Minister and Head of the coalition “Georgian Dream”
Giorgi Kvirikashvili
7 Ingorokva St
Tbilisi 0114, Georgia

Dear Prime Minister,

We are concerned about the proposed amendments in the Constitution banning same-sex marriage.

By limiting the constitutional definition of marriage to couples of the opposite sex, the amendment directly discriminates against LGBTI people who live or wish to live in a same-sex union, and denies them the enjoyment of their right to family life, the right to marry and all the economic and social rights associated with marriage. According to the Civil Code of Georgia, same-sex partners do not currently have the right to marry or register and exercise their right to family life, but an explicit ban on marriage equality in the Constitution would aggravate the situation as it would prevent legislators from extending marriage to same-sex couples in the future and will run counter to the emerging global trend of recognition of marriage equality.

NGOs working on LGBTI rights in Georgia issued a joint statement on 17 February condemning the plan to narrow the definition of marriage to exclude same-sex couples. The statement also explained that due to the existing levels of hatred, discrimination and violence towards LGBTI people, Georgian LGBTI activists had never taken the decision to campaign for marriage equality, and that the public discussion created by the proposal will further marginalize LGBTI people in Georgia. The passing of the amendment will have a long-term chilling effect on human rights of LGBTI people beyond the right to family life and the right to marry as it will entrench the discrimination that same-sex couples experience in everyday life in Georgia.

We call on the coalition “Georgian Dream” to withdraw the amendment aimed at restricting the constitutional definition of marriage as this would effectively discriminate against same-sex partners.

Finally, we urge the Georgian authorities to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of all people in Georgia regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Yours sincerely

Similarly to Speaker of Parliament David Usupashvili

cc President of Georgia Giorgi Margvelashvili

Her Excellency Tamar Beruchashvili, Embassy of Georgia