



Amnesty International

Reading Group

NEWSLETTER

November / December 2014

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.

PREVIOUS EVENTS

The Galilee Quartet Concert



This event, held on 1 October at St Nicolas's, Earley, was a huge success, attracting a capacity audience and raising almost £1000. We were treated to a delightful mix of Western and Arabic music played by a most engaging and talented group of young musicians, and then had the opportunity to find out more about the situation in Palestine as the quartet, (four siblings), and their father took part in a question-and-answer session. The evening was organised by Amnesty UK and Katy Whittle, who had met the members of the quartet while she was teaching at the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music in Nablus. Omar, the oldest member of the quartet has already suffered imprisonment for refusing to do military service in the Israeli army; he was adopted as a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty and believes that pressure from AI helped secure his eventual exemption and release. Mostafa, the second brother, has already received his call-up papers and is also prepared to go to prison rather than take part in what he sees as the oppression of his fellow Palestinians.

(see <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/blogs/country-specialists/omar-saad-and-conscientious-objectors-imprisoned-israel-refusing-bear-arms> for more details).

The Reading Amnesty group is most grateful to Katy and her group of helpers for all their efforts and for allowing us to have a stall at the concert.

“Afghan Star”

This documentary about the arrival of Pop Idol in Afghanistan, screened at the end of October as part of the Reading International Festival, also attracted a good audience and proved to be a fascinating and thought-provoking film, exploring modern Afghan culture through the prism of its four protagonists and their own personal struggles. Showing aspects of Afghan life rarely reflected in ordinary news coverage of that country, it provided some grounds for optimism about the country’s future and demonstrated the courage of individuals who are determined to build a freer and more tolerant society. However, it also highlighted the enormous risks still faced by Afghan women who try to take part in public life, risks which were emphasised again afterwards by the AIUK country co-ordinator for Afghanistan in her Q/A session.

For more information on this topic go to <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/issues/Women's-rights-in-Afghanistan>



Since this event, we have received some news and thanks in relation to our work on Afghanistan.

We have had some good news on Brishna, the little girl who had been raped in Afghanistan. Her relatives have given undertakings that they will protect her. I know this is a small step, but an important one, contributing to changing hearts and minds about the status of women and girls.

Please can you pass this on to the group, especially as they have particularly mentioned the Amnesty appeals as being influential in their decision. I hope this will also inspire people when they are writing on Urgent Actions and other cases that our appeals do make a difference.

Christine Usher, AI's Afghanistan country co-ordinator

October and November monthly meetings

We have been reflecting on what aspects of Amnesty work we should be concentrating on and how we should arrange our group meetings to make all people feel welcome. If you have views on this, please contact our Chair Peter Howe peter@howedesigns.co.uk and cc our Secretary Anne McFarlane ammcf@o2.co.uk

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Thurs 11 December, 8pm at RISC – our meeting this month will feature the Write for Rights campaign and give us an opportunity to send greetings cards to individuals and groups who defend human rights or who are victims of human rights abuses. No doubt mince pies will also be consumed!

Sat 3 January – Collection at the Caversham branch of Waitrose. Please contact Peter Howe peter@howedesigns.co.uk if you are willing to take part for an hour.

Thurs 8 January, 8pm at RISC – guest speaker Lindsey Sharpe. Lindsey worked for EAPPI - the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme of the World Council of Churches - from April until July 2014. She was based in East Jerusalem, working with an international team as a human rights observer in the Old City of Jerusalem, notably the Al Aqsa Compound, in villages around Jerusalem and at the Qalandiya checkpoint.

Sat 7 March 2015, 7pm – 10pm: Barn Dance at the Warehouse, Cumberland Road, Reading RG1 3LB– live music provided by The Scamping Rogues. Tickets £12 per adult, £5 per child (primary school age or under). Fish and chips

supper included, veggie option available. Bring your own drinks. Should be a great evening! For tickets please contact amnesty.reading@gmail.com

NEWS

Cuba

This is the latest report from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office:

The overall human rights situation has remained unchanged in the last three months, with no real improvement on freedom of expression or association. The Cuban government continued to use short-term detentions to intimidate activists. There have been frequent reports of physical attacks, threats and harassment of family members.

The Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN) reported 1,695 such incidents during this reporting period. These figures are, however, impossible to verify. Among the short-term detainees were José Daniel Ferrer García and Jorge Luis García Pérez (aka "Antúnez"), who also had their homes vandalised; and Roberto de Jesús Guerra Pérez, Hablemos Press Director, who was brutally attacked by a plain-clothes agent.

The five prisoners of conscience named by Amnesty International in August 2013 are still in detention. The sentencing of three of these prisoners, originally scheduled for 1 July, was postponed with no further information. Opposition activists claim that there are up to 100 political prisoners.

Independent unionist Vladimir Bacallao Morera, who is in very poor health, received parole after a hundred days on hunger strike to demand his own release.

Although the new migration law has improved the right of freedom of movement, some Cubans - usually opposition activists who have been released on bail - are still prevented from travelling. Carlos Amel Oliva Torres, member of Unión Patriótica de Cuba, was not allowed to travel to Chile following an invitation he had received from a youth organisation there.

There was some positive news for freedom of religion as the Cuban government announced it will allow a new Catholic church to be constructed, following the destruction of an older building by Hurricane Sandy in Santiago de Cuba in 2012. However, in areas where religion and politics intersect, the Cuban government has continued to interfere. Around 100 Damas de Blanco (Ladies in White, an activist group made up of female relatives of ex-political prisoners) were detained on 13 July, following their normal Sunday march commemorating the 20th anniversary of the death of 37 Cubans who drowned while trying to flee Cuba.

In the last three months, the Cuban government's economic reform programme has continued, including further developments of the new Mariel Special Economic Development Zone and progress on monetary reform. These reforms are generating a number of new economic freedoms.

Sue Bingham, Reading group member and AIUK country co-ordinator for Cuba, also reports that Cuba and the UK have recently signed three memoranda of understanding in the area of sports, diplomatic relations and trade. The two countries state that bilateral cooperation will be marked by reciprocity, mutual benefit and commitment to principles of international law, the UN Charter and the Human Rights Declaration.

She also notes that on 28 October the UN General Assembly voted for the 23rd year in a row to condemn the US embargo against Cuba, with only the US and Israel voting against. Even in the US attitudes are rapidly changing, with Hillary Clinton saying the embargo is no longer useful to American interests and a poll conducted by Florida International University showing that about half of the Cuban-Americans surveyed its ending.

ACTIONS

Please scroll down for model letters to **Cuba** and to **Myanmar (Burma)** and an email Urgent Action to **Belarus**.

The Cuban letter is on behalf of three people, a member of the Ladies in White protest movement, her husband and a neighbour arrested in Cuba during a government crackdown on peaceful protests. After three previous postponements, their trial was finally due to start on 7 November but was once again postponed without explanation. No new trial date has been set and they remain in detention.

The Burma letter is about two groups of people arrested and imprisoned under a law often used to stifle peaceful dissent.

The email Urgent Action is on behalf of a man awaiting execution in Belarus, the only European state that still uses capital punishment.

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
- Our prisoner of conscience has a website where you can keep up-to-date with latest developments - www.freefilekarma.org
- And a facebook page - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/253959534694499/>

MEETINGS: second Thursday of each month at 8pm. All are welcome. **All upstairs at RISC, 35-39 London Street, Reading, RG1 4PS**

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@o2.co.uk.
Amnesty Reading Newsletter editor Helen Ball- email: helenball03@yahoo.co.uk

FROM:

TO:

Raúl Castro Ruz

Head of State and Government

Presidente de la República de Cuba

La Habana

Cuba

Email: cuba@un.int (c/o Cuban Mission to UN)

Date

Your Excellency,

Trial of Sonia Garro Alfonso, Ramón Alejandro Muñoz González and Eugenio Hernández Hernández

I am very concerned to hear about the case of Sonia Garro Alfonso, Ramón Alejandro Muñoz González and Eugenio Hernández Hernández, who have been in pre-trial detention since 18 March 2012, on charges of public disorder (desórdenes públicos) and attempted murder (asesinato en grado de tentativa). Sonia Garro Alfonso faces the additional charge of using violence or intimidation against a state official (atentado).

I believe that their trial has been postponed on four occasions, in November 2013, June 2014, October 2014, and the latest date set for 7th November, with no reason given for each postponement.

I am writing to ask that you ensure their right to a fair trial in accordance with international standards, including in particular the right to call defence witnesses and to challenge the evidence brought against them.

I would also urge you to guarantee that all charges against them are based on clear evidence and ensure full respect for their right to the presumption of innocence, and not to once again postpone the trial or else permit their release pending trial.

Yours truly

Copies to:

General Abelardo Colomé Ibarra

Interior Minister

Ministro del Interior y Prisiones

Ministerio del Interior,

Plaza de la Revolución,

La Habana, Cuba

Fax: +1 212 779 1697 (via Cuban Mission to UN)

Email: correominint@mn.mn.co.cu

Her Excellency Mrs Esther Gloria Armenteros Cárdenas

Embassy of the Republic of Cuba

167 High Holborn,

London WC1 6PA

Fax: 020 7836 2602 email: secembajador@uk.embacuba.cu

web: <http://www.cubadiplomacia.cu>

FROM:

TO:

Dr. Darío Delgado Cura

Attorney General

Fiscal General de la República

Fiscalía General de la República,

Amistad 552, e/Monte y Estrella, Centro Habana

La Habana,

Cuba

Date:

Dear Attorney General,

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Interior Minister

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Ministerio del Interior,

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La Habana, Cuba

Email: correominint@mn.mn.co.cu

Her Excellency Mrs Esther Gloria Armenteros Cárdenas

Embassy of the Republic of Cuba

167 High Holborn,

London WC1 6PA

email: secembajador@uk.embacuba.cu

web: <http://www.cubadiplomatica.cu>

FROM

TO

U Thein Sein

President

President's Office

Nay Pyi Taw

Republic of the Union of Myanmar

Date

Your Excellency

Media workers Kyaw Zaw Hein, Ko Win Tin, Thura Aung, Yin Min Htun and Kyaw Min Khaing

Two members of Movement for Democracy Current Force Ko Htin Kyaw and Naung Naung

In July media workers Kyaw Zaw Hein, Ko Win Tin, Thura Aung, Yin Min Htun and Kyaw Min Khaing were arrested following the publication in the newspaper Bi Middy Sun of claims that Aung San Suu Kyi and ethnic leaders had been elected to an interim government. They were each sentenced to 2 years imprisonment.

Ko Htin Kyaw is the leader of community-based organisation Movement for Democracy Current Force (MDCF). He was sentenced on 30 October to two years imprisonment after writing a letter to Naung Naung, a fellow MDCF member, which highlighted the need for the election of an interim government in Myanmar. Naung Naung was also sentenced to two years and four months imprisonment, for protesting without authorisation and for distributing leaflets stating that Aung San Suu Kyi and ethnic leaders had been elected as an interim government.

All these men were charged under Section 505(b) of the Penal Code, which makes it an offence to make, publish or circulate information which may cause public fear or alarm, and which may incite people to commit offences 'against the State or against the public tranquillity'. This law has been identified by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Tomás Ojea Quintana, as one of a number of laws used in the country to jail prisoners of conscience. Human rights organisations have also criticised it.

I consider Kyaw Zaw Hein, Ko Win Tin, Thura Aung, Yin Min Htun, Kyaw Min Khaing, Ko Htin Kyaw and Naung Naung to be prisoners of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression. I therefore call for their immediate and unconditional release, along with that of all other prisoners of conscience, and urge you to drop charges against all those arrested for the peaceful exercise of their human rights.

Meanwhile, as long as they are held in detention, I urge you to ensure that none of these men are tortured or ill-treated in detention, but that they have access to lawyers of their choosing and to visits from family members, that they are not transferred to prisons far from their relatives and that their conditions of detention meet international standards.

Finally, I call on you to take immediate steps to repeal or else amend legislation which restricts the right to freedom of expression, in strict compliance with international human rights law and standards.

Yours respectfully

TO: contact@president.gov.by (Salutation: Dear President)
info@prokuratura.gov.by (Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General)

cc uk.london@mfa.gov.by

I write to ask you to commute the death sentence of **Eduard Lykau** to a term of imprisonment.

I also urge you to ensure that full up-to-date information about the use of the death penalty in Belarus is publicly available and that lawyers and family members are given full access to the prisoners and to information about their cases.

I call on you to establish an immediate official moratorium on all executions with a view to the eventual abolition of capital punishment in Belarus.

Yours respectfully