



Amnesty International

Reading Group

NEWSLETTER

Summer 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

Meetings: In April we were introduced to AI's major new campaign **Stop Torture**, which will be a focus of a lot of our efforts over the summer. The May meeting took the form of a wide-ranging discussion about the future direction of AI, as requested by AIUK, who are keen to get members' opinions as the world-side movement formulates future strategy. In June Zoe Bedford from Reprieve gave an excellent talk on their anti-death penalty work in Indonesia, explaining how they pick strategic individual cases as a way of trying to effect positive change in the system as a whole.

Fund-raising: This spring saw us hold two very successful and enjoyable events. The first was a Quiz Night in March, hotly contested and great fun; it raised over £400. Then in May there was the delightful concert in the Chantry House, Henley-on-Thames. The Syrinx woodwind quartet (Janet Way, Rachel Porter, Peter Foster, Ben Colyer and Bill Fox) and the pianist Andy Spiceley performed a beautiful programme of music including extracts from 'The Mikado'. During the interval, the audience enjoyed Pimms and lemonade and also took action in support of Filep Karma; over 50 signed a petition calling for his release. The concert raised over £400 for Amnesty International, making it a great combination of activism, fund-raising and culture. Special thanks to Rachel Porter, the driving force behind it. If you know other musicians who might like to perform for Amnesty, please let us have their details.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Next group meeting, 10th July - a workshop on the **Stop Torture** campaign, with more information on the cases featured and a chance to try the creative action which will be used at UK festivals this year, including:-

WOMAD at Charlton Park, 24th - 27th July. Every year the Reading AI group organises a stall with a major campaign action from Friday to Sunday at this wonderful festival of world music and dance. This year's focus is **Stop Torture**; there will be action postcards to sign and fun creative action for all the family.

Are you going to WOMAD? Would you like to volunteer a few hours at our stall? If so, please contact Sue Bingham – s.bingham748@btinternet.com

There will also be an Amnesty presence at the **Caversham Festival** on **13th July** and at **Pride** on **30th August**. Volunteers would be very welcome at both of these: for details please contact Anne McFarlane – ammcf@o2.co.uk

NEWS

AIUK AGM 12th - 13th April 2014, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh. *Sue Bingham sends the following report:-*

Despite a later start (Sat 12.45), we still seemed to pack in as much with workshops, speakers, working parties and plenary sessions where the 2014 resolutions were voted on. As always, the debates were very engaging and the occasional niggling over wording and grammar in the resolutions was comical if at times a bit annoying!

The Director's report by **Kate Allen** covered key moments from the past year, and I was thrilled to see a photo of a past Henley College student with Kate delivering the petition on Women's rights in Afghanistan to Westminster. A glimpse of our Womad action on film also gave rise to a quiet surge of pride. Kate talked of how the mood at AIUK and the IS is now much more positive after all the turmoil of the last few years, and there is a huge desire to move forward together: mistakes have been made but valuable lessons learned.

The keynote speaker, **Mark Thomson**, from the Association for the Prevention of Torture, began by saying that torture is illegal, barbaric and inhumane. No country is immune from it, and the majority of victims are poor and forced to confess to crimes they haven't committed. It's not all bleak, though; progress has been made and Amnesty contributed to the setting up of the UN Convention against torture in the 70's. Although quite low-key and not the usual heart-rending or rousing speech we often get at the AGM, this measured talk was a good introduction to the global **Stop Torture** campaign which will run for 2 years (and will be the focus of our Womad festival action this year).

I thoroughly enjoyed it and came home tired but with some lovely new friends, new ideas and all fired up to carry on working for human rights.

For a nice short film on the AGM, more info and the AGM decisions: http://www.amnesty.org.uk/2014-agm-annual-general-meeting-national-conference%23.U6_GNFeHIU#.U7SAasJOUcA

As well as being an extremely active member of the Reading group, Sue is also AIUK Country Co-ordinator for Cuba and has written this account of a recent trip she made there:-

Cuba 15-26 May 2014 - No place for Amnesty

As Amnesty is not officially allowed in Cuba, I visited as a tourist and did not make contact with any dissidents or attempt to do any official Amnesty related research. I wasn't able to visit the UK Embassy as I did last year, as Tim Cole, the Ambassador, was in the UK, but I did speak by phone to his assistant, Rhys Patrick. I asked him where the Damas de Blanco (Ladies in White) do their peaceful march every Sunday on the way to mass, and how easy it would be to go there and take photographs. He monitors the event regularly, and urged caution, as it can sometimes become a "situation". I took his advice and did not go along. On my return to the UK I learned that a large group of women had been arrested on that day and detained without charge.

I did of course chat informally to lots of people, and there were several occasions when strangers (e.g. a bookseller in the Plaza de Armas, the guest house owner in Trinidad) told me that Cuba is a highly controlled society, with no freedom of information or expression. This willingness to criticise the system to complete strangers, openly and without any probing, has never happened before on my previous trips.

The streets seemed busier with a wider range of cars now that restrictions have been lifted on buying/selling them, but the "pop-up" shops in people's houses with imported clothes that I saw last year were less visible,

following the backtracking by the authorities on the new economic freedoms. They seem to have gone back to selling tourists T shirts and souvenirs, which must be made in Cuba.



There have been some very successful projects to rebuild Old Havana and restore the colonial buildings to their former splendour, but walking the streets of Central Havana can be hazardous as homes crumble almost on a daily basis. The ubiquitous signs praising the efficiency of socialism and the triumph of the revolution are still there.



I visited the town of Trinidad for the first time - a beautiful UNESCO world heritage site on the south coast. The colonial streets, houses and mansions have been beautifully preserved, and it's definitely on the tourist trail. Luckily in May (which Cubans call the rainy season but was mostly just overcast and breezy) it wasn't too busy and it was a joy to wander the cobble streets and discover the many bars, restaurants, art galleries, museums and music/dancing venues which are all within easy walking distance of each other (sensible footwear is a must though...).



I was asked by the guesthouse owner to be sure to give good feedback on Trip advisor. He rarely sees it as private homes are not authorised to have the internet in Cuba, and internet cafes are a new, rare and expensive luxury, but he is all too aware of its influence. Another luxury for most Cubans while I was there was loo paper - there had been a shortage for a while, and I was very glad to have a stock of the soft variety in my case!

My smart phone didn't work in Cuba, and access to the internet was very difficult, so I had really no idea of what was happening in terms of harassment and detention of government opponents, which is one of Amnesty's main concerns in Cuba now. The media is owned and controlled by the state, and the papers, TV and radio stations do not report these frequent incidents.

As always I had a marvellous time with Cuban friends, who are unfailingly hospitable, optimistic and resourceful, despite constant struggles firstly to find the money for basic necessities (the average monthly salary is still about \$20) and then to actually find the goods themselves. A lovely meal for three in a 16th century colonial mansion/museum in Trinidad was \$40 - a real snip for tourists but impossible for my Cuban friends.

On my return, Amnesty issued an Urgent Action for a man attacked in the street, apparently by state security officials, for his work as an independent journalist. This was very chilling for me, as Roberto was assaulted in the street in broad daylight in the very neighbourhood where I had stayed, Plaza de la Revolución.

Twitter: sue4cuba

Please scroll down for a model letter about the attack on the journalist to send to the President of Cuba.

ACTIONS

Please scroll down for model letters to **Egypt, (by 5 August)** where 183 people, supporters of ousted President Morsi, have been sentenced to death in a grossly unfair trial, to **Cuba, (by 1st August)** and to **Brazil**, pressing for investigations into possible police brutality.

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

- 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.freefilepkarma.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**

July 2014

Mahfouz Saber
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
Cairo
Arab Republic of Egypt
Email: mojeb@idsc.gov.eg

Your Excellency

5 people sentenced to prison, 183 people sentenced to death after an unfair trial

I write in connection with the trial and sentencing of 683 people accused of participating in the attack on al-Adwa Police Station in August 2013. This attack followed the disturbances that took place after the ousting of President Morsi, in which hundreds of his supporters were killed by the security forces.

I am very concerned at the way the original trial was conducted; the hearing on 25th March was boycotted by the defence lawyers after the same court, in a separate case, had referred 528 people to the Grand Mufti to have sentence of death confirmed on them. Nevertheless the judges continued with the trial of the 683 accused, taking only a few hours to question more than 50 witnesses and 74 defendants. This cannot be considered a fair trial.

While I welcome the subsequent acquittal on 21 June of 496 of the defendants, I am dismayed by the prison terms given to five of them and even more so by the death sentences handed out to the remaining 183.

I therefore urge you to quash all these sentences and to order a retrial that will comply with international standards for fair trials and which will not have recourse to the death penalty.

Furthermore, I call upon the government of Egypt to establish an official moratorium on executions, as a first step towards abolition of the death penalty.

Yours respectfully

Cc

His Excellency Mr Ashraf Elkholy. Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt, 26 South Street, London W1K 1DW

Email: egamboff.london@mfa.gov.eg ; egyemblondon@mfa.gov.eg

TO:

FROM:

Raúl Castro Ruz
Head of State and Government
Presidente de la República de Cuba
La Habana
Cuba

Fax: +41 22 758 9431 (Cuba office in Geneva);
+1 212 779 1697 (via Cuban Mission to UN)
Email: cuba@un.int (c/o Cuban Mission to UN)

Date:

Your Excellency

Roberto de Jesús Guerra Pérez

I am writing to you as I am very concerned to hear about Roberto de Jesús Guerra Pérez, director of the independent news agency Hablemos Press, who has been receiving threatening telephone calls and was assaulted on the streets of Havana on 11th June 2014.

On 17 June the same man who attacked Roberto shouted threats outside his house, including that he would kill Roberto and set fire to his house.

I am calling on the Cuban authorities to immediately investigate this assault as well as the telephone threats against him, and to bring those found responsible to justice.

I would also urge you to ensure that citizens who seek to peacefully exercise their right to freedom of expression, assembly and association are able to do so without harassment or intimidation.

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
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London WC1 6PA

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

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

Governor of Rio de Janeiro

Luiz Fernando Pezão
Palácio Guanabara
R. Pinheiro Machado,
s/n - Laranjeiras CEP 22238-900,
Rio de Janeiro, RJ
BRAZIL

June 2014

Dear Governor

On 22nd April 27-year-old Edilson Silva dos Santos was shot in the head and died during a protest in the Pavão-Pavãozinho community in Copacabana. Edilson and other residents from the community were unarmed in the protest while the military police officers policing the demonstration were armed with firearms. It had still not been established who fired the shot and no one has been held to account for his death.

The protest was a spontaneous reaction by residents to the death of Douglas Rafael Pereira da Silva, 26, who was found dead in the backyard of a children's day-care centre earlier that day. Initial investigations indicate that he died around 1am on 22nd April during a police operation in the community. Local residents alleged that he was killed by the police. Furthermore, there are strong indications that the crime scene might have been changed.

Since Douglas' death, his mother, Maria de Fátima, has made public calls for justice. She told Amnesty International on 28th April she was threatened by a man driving a car and carrying a firearm. She stated that he told her "if you don't shut up, I will do that".

I am writing to day to urge you to ensure a prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigation into allegations that police were responsible for the killings of Douglas Rafael Pereira da Silva and Edilson Silva dos Santos, and to ensure that any officers responsible for abusive use of force are brought to justice in criminal proceedings. Furthermore, I would ask that you ensure the safety of Maria de Fátima, and other family or community members who are mobilized seeking justice for the two killings, protecting them from any kind of intimidation or threats. Finally, I am seeking a prompt, independent and impartial investigation of all allegations of unnecessary or excessive use of force or other abuses by military police officers in the local UPP in Pavão-Pavãozinho.

I look forward to hearing from you on this matter.

Yours sincerely,

cc. His Excellency Roberto Jaguaribe, Embassy of Brazil, 14-16 Cockspur Street, London SW1Y 5BL