



Amnesty International Reading Group **NEWSLETTER**

April 2013

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 NEWS

- **GREAT NEWS – CUBAN PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE RELEASED** - In our February newsletter, we had an action for Cuban journalist and prisoner of conscience Calixto Ramón Martínez Arias. He was released on 9th April with no charges. He has thanked Amnesty International and believes international action on his case led to his release. Read the urgent action update below for more information or follow this link. <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR25/004/2013/en>



- **OUR BARN DANCE** – Lots of fun was had by all at our Barn Dance in February. The Scamping Rogues led our dancing which kept us all on our toes!! Fish and chips, raffles, talks and laughter. A huge success with over £400 raised!



- **ARMS TRADE TREATY SUCCESS:** Twenty years, millions of actions taken by AI:UK activists, including the Reading group, six years of UN deliberations and it has all paid off. We now have an Arms Trade Treaty – read the blog below



http://www2.amnesty.org.uk/blogs/campaigns/arms-trade-treaty-youve-made-history?utm_source=aiuk&utm_medium=Homepage&utm_campaign=Arms&utm_content=ATTblog_nib

- **NATIONAL CONFERENCE AND AGM – WARWICK UNIVERSITY**



Two of our group members attended this year and here are their thoughts.

Our group secretary, Ann said “This year's AIUK AGM was run over two days rather than two and a half so it was always going to be busier than normal. Then it turned out that we had 31 resolutions to discuss - a conference record. Phew! I put myself forward as a teller for the first time and we were kept quite busy! As always there was a very moving keynote address - this year about Afghanistan. The take home message is to make sure that we don't let our MPs forget that country”.

Alex, our group chair, who also chaired a working party at the conference, said "The highlight for me was the talk by Amnesty's Afghan researcher, Horia Mosadiq, who told the story of her family in Afghanistan under a succession of abusive regimes: the Russian war, the warlords, the Taliban, the Mujahideen, and the western-installed Kharzai government. Under each it has been different, but there is violence and repression, especially for women, under each rule. Today there is corruption and impunity. There are many women in parliament, but they are second-class members: ignored, unpromoted, their concerns unheeded, their security not protected. Horia gave an insight into the hardships of the ordinary people in Afghanistan, and thanked Amnesty for our continuing support. I hope we can invite her to visit our group. As always there were many wonderful moments, not least Dan Jones' glittering awards, and guess what - Sue Bingham's Henley College Group won an award again. There was a very good action in support of Zimbabwe, and a talk from a member of WOZA - Women of Zimbabwe Arise. Lots of chewy debate as usual, as Amnesty continues to try to digest the big changes in our financial arrangements. There were more conciliatory noises this weekend than at the EGM in London in January, which was a relief. All in all, a positive couple of days."

Come along to our next group meeting on Thursday 9th May to hear more feedback from them both.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

- **Next group meeting** – Thursday 9th May at 8pm at RISC – review of the successful Arms Trade Treaty negotiations
- **WOMAD** - Group's annual presence at the wonderful festival in Wiltshire
- **PLANT SALE TBC**- a new venture for the group – more details to follow
- **CHANTRY HOUSE CLASSICAL MUSIC CONCERT** Our annual event, which always sells out – more information to follow.

ACTIONS

Please click the link or scroll to the end of this document or follow the links for actions you can take to support issues that the Reading Group follows closely.

- Ebrima B. Manneh, a journalist from The Gambia, recently featured in the Write for Rights campaign
- **Salim Shamsiddinov**, a lawyer and leader of the Uzbek community – by 7th May please
- **Mamadali Makhmudov**, a well-known writer from Uzbekistan – by 7th May please
- Urgent action up-date for **Calixto Ramón Martínez Arias**

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>
- NEW facebook page –search for Reading Amnesty International – Town Group = <http://www.facebook.com/groups/187525074719402>
- twitter = @amnestyreading

MEETINGS: second Thursday of each month at 8pm. All are welcome. **All 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

Mrs Elizabeth Ya Eli Harding
High Commissioner
The Gambia High Commission
57 Kensington Court
London W8 5DG
UK

Your Excellency

I am deeply concerned for the well-being of Ebrima B. Manneh, a journalist who was arrested by plainclothes police at the offices of the Daily Observer newspaper in July 2006. He has never been charged or tried and his whereabouts have never been revealed.

I call for his immediate and unconditional release. Ebrima is a prisoner of conscience, arrested solely for peacefully exercising his internationally recognised right to freedom of expression. If your government is not able to identify Ebrima's whereabouts or fate, I urge you to allow a thorough, independent investigation into what has happened to him.

I would like to remind you that the ECOWAS Court of Justice held his detention to be in direct violation of provisions of the African Charter, to which your country is a signatory. Please implement the court's ruling that he should be released immediately and awarded damages for his illegal detention.

I believe that Ebrima's case highlights a wider problem in the Gambia, where a number of journalists have been arbitrarily arrested and held incommunicado and without charge. I urge you to release them immediately and in future to recognise and respect the right to freedom of expression and a fair trial in the Gambia.

I look forward to hearing from you on these important matters.

Yours sincerely,

President Rakhmon
Dom Pravitelstva

Pr. Rudaki 80
734023 Dushanbe
Tajikistan.

Dear President Rakhmon,

Re: Salim Shamsiddinov

It is with great concern that we write regarding the disappearance on 15th March of **Salim Shamsiddinov**, a lawyer and leader of the Uzbek community in southern Tajikistan's Khatlon Region. It is noteworthy that his disappearance took place months before the Presidential elections in Tajikistan. We urge you to ensure that a prompt and public investigation is carried out into his whereabouts.

If **Salim Shamsiddinov** is currently being held in state custody, we ask that the location is disclosed immediately so that he has access to his family and legal representation of his choice. Also, that he may have access to any medical assistance that he might require.

Finally, we strongly urge that the authorities in Tajikistan ensure that political activists, their supporters and relatives can campaign peacefully in the run up to the presidential elections, without fear of harassment, intimidation or other reprisals.

Yours sincerely,

President Islam Karimov
Ul. Uzbekistanskaya 53
Tashkent
Uzbekistan.

Dear President,

Re: Mamadali Makhmudov

During the past 13 years there have been frequent calls urging you for an investigation, in accordance with international standards, into the trial and pre-trial conditions under which **Mamadali Makhmudov** was held and sentenced in August 1999. Unfortunately our repeated appeals have gone unheeded, as have our calls for a prompt and impartial investigation into all allegations of torture.

It has now come to our notice that **Mamadali Makhmudov**, at the age of 72, is in a seriously poor physical condition. Between April and July 2000 he was held in **Jaslyk** prison, which the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture has described as "*...its very location creates conditions of detention amounting to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment for both its inmates and their relatives...*". This period of detention at **Jaslyk** may well have contributed to his deteriorating health.

Since according to international human rights law the authorities in Uzbekistan have a duty to protect the physical and psychological wellbeing of those in custody, we urge you to ensure that **Mamadali Makhmudov** is immediately provided with all necessary medical treatment and permitted family visits.

Finally, on all the grounds described above, we call for his prompt release.

Yours sincerely,

URGENT ACTION

CUBAN PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE FREED

Independent journalist and prisoner of conscience Calixto Ramón Martínez Arias was released on 9 April after spending almost seven months in prison without charge in Cuba. He has thanked Amnesty International and believes international action on his case led to his release.

In the afternoon of 9 April, **Calixto Ramón Martínez Arias** was released from Valle Grande prison, on the outskirts of the capital Havana. He was detained on 16 September 2012 in relation to his work as an independent journalist and was never been formally charged. Calixto Ramón Martínez Arias initiated two hunger strikes to protest against his detention, the last one began on 8 March and lasted 22 days until he received an assurance from the Cuban authorities of his upcoming release. On 5 April he was transferred from Combinado del Este prison, where he spent the vast majority of his detention, to Valle Grande prison. After his arrest, Calixto Ramón Martínez Arias said that he had been appointed a lawyer but he could not access his case-file. During his arrest at Santiago de las Vegas police station in September 2012 police officers told him that the public prosecutor had ordered his preventive detention.

According to the conditions of his release, the judicial authorities lifted the precautionary measures (*medida cautelar*) that led to his pre-trial detention and he was unconditionally released without charge.

Calixto Ramón Martínez Arias thanks Amnesty International for its support and the international mobilization expressed on his case which he believes directly lead to his release.

No further action is requested from the UA network. Many thanks to all who sent appeals.