

SOUTH MIDLANDS REGIONAL CONFERENCE REVIEW:

(Carol Tarrant, Aylesbury Group Chair)

As Christmas and New Year wain in our memory, Aylesbury Amnesty Group girds its loins for the hosting of the South Midlands Regional Conference once again in the attic suite above our Multi Cultural Centre. We make lists, invite delegates to come and bring some sharing lunch and scrutinise Regional Rep Bob Corn's Agenda! We then negotiate to minimise annual multifarious glitch possibility in prop presence, and after copious lists and emails, come in briskly as a group one hour ahead of delegates, sticking up our graphics as we go up - to make the annual magic happen!

Attendance at 44 delegates from around the Region was up from last year, but lower than in previous years; our candle this year was lit by Kate Allen which is a great treat for we members out here in the sticks! Speakers – Hugh Sandeman, from the North Africa Team, gave a clear and illustrated update on the current position in North Africa; Kate Allen ably spoke to the Control Arms Campaign in place of Oliver Sprague, who sadly and suddenly could not attend. Young Syrian Architect Wisam Elmahoui, with Syrian Human Rights Lawyer Laila Alodaat, gave a passionate presentation on the current situation in Syria from personal illustrated perspectives and wider – all before lunch.

We wrestled tables into position and all sat together to share our 'loaves and fishes', which miraculously all seem to form a multi various and very adequate healthy feast each year! In the afternoon, Kate Allen as Director of AIUK, and Board Members Helen Parry, Sarah O'Grady and Treasurer Brian Landers (from the floor) formed a panel to discuss the new directions of the Amnesty International Movement, fielding questions which had over lunch been added on flip charts.....and answering many questions from the floor. Speaking for myself and our group from immediate feedback, we cleared the debris with lighter, more motivated, enthusiasm for the campaigning ahead, still with more questions to ask, but aware that our individual skills and campaigning passions are still considered relevant and appropriate to the capacity of our Amnesty International Movement.

There was again a proposal to host the Conference in Oxford next year to ring the geographic change – Bob is to canvass Groups in the Region for their views – this meeting agreed to the exciting proposal.