



Manchester Amnesty Group 2013 review



<http://manchester.amnesty.org.uk/>

find us on facebook - follow us on twitter @amnestymanc

Campaigns

Burma

At the beginning of the year, we were assigned the case of Tun Aung (right), a medical doctor and Chairman of the Islamic Religious Affairs Council in Maungdaw, in western Myanmar. Due to his position, Dr Tun Aung was asked by the authorities to help diffuse troubles between local communities. However, having done this, he was subsequently arrested on charges of inciting violence. He has been held incommunicado since June 2012. During the year, his prison sentence was increased so that he will not be eligible for release until 2029 when he will be 81 years old.



In June, we staged a 'mock arrest' to raise awareness of Dr Tun Aung's continued imprisonment at the hands of the Burmese authorities. The weather was not ideal but mercifully the rain held off and we got many signatures for our cards to send to AI UK to forward onto Dr Aung's family to show our support.

In July, we arranged a screening of *They call it Myanmar* at the Buddhist Centre. As well as raising awareness of the troubles in Burma which still exist despite current reforms, we raised nearly £90 to help us continue our work on Burma. Special thanks to Olga and the Manchester Buddhists for welcoming us.

Laura Barsby has led our campaigning on Burma and she achieved the rare coup of a letter from the Burmese High Commissioner for Human Rights, acknowledging our letter on behalf of Dr Tun Aung – welcome proof that letters can get through and be read.

Zimbabwe



We marked the 10th anniversary of WOZA (Women and Men of Zimbabwe Arise) by signing a card and taking a picture of us all with a birthday cake and roses. These were sent to WOZA after Anne Walker took them to a rally at the Zimbabwe Embassy in London.

Leading up to elections in July, we sent letters and postcards to the Southern African Development Community (SADC), requesting they ensure the elections were free from the extreme violence that marred the 2008 elections. We also wrote to police chiefs in Zimbabwe, asking for the continued targeting of human rights defenders to cease and that the perpetrators be brought to justice.

Fundraising

This year we've had some great events which were enjoyable as well as effective fundraisers. Our annual accounts are available from Treasurer Sean Dunne.

Anne Walker hosted an **Amnesteas** (selection of cakes illustrated right), games and produce sale plus letter writing, which raised £216.

Steven Lindsay drew on his many contacts to set up **Acoustic Amnesty**, a mix of music and poetry from a great range of generous artists, raising £325.

Sean Dunne co-ordinated our annual **Street Collection** which raised £325 – star turn was new member Sr Jean Mary who coaxed an amazing £59 out of the Manchester public.

In addition, we had a generous donation of £127 from **ESOL students** at Abraham Moss College, and raised £455 from members' **subscriptions**.



Raising the profile in Manchester



Becky Carr co-ordinated our stall at **Didsbury Festival**, promoting women's rights in Afghanistan. For once, it was a sunny day. 286 signatures were collected, the stall was visited by the mayor (left) and MP John Leech, and AIUK came up to video it all.

Michelle Eddisford set up a stall at a charity event arranged by **British Syrians and Syria Relief**, with a projector & screen showing AIUK film and info clips on Syria plus information about the journalists in the recent AI report on the danger of reporting in Syria, with actions for missing journalists and bloggers.

A planning group co-ordinated by Mary McBride brought Bidisha to the **Manchester Literature Festival** talking about her experiences in Palestine – our highest profile speaker and a very popular draw. Bidisha is an internationally renowned writer, a regular guest on the BBC's Front Row, The Review Show and Saturday Review and guest presenter of the World Service books show The Word. She is a regular contributor to the Guardian and the Observer. She generated a lively discussion with our sell-out audience of 100 and the event raised £160, including proceeds from the sale of Bidisha's book, *Beyond the Wall: Writing a Path through Palestine*.



Natalie Dodds and Sameena Matthiessen got a big crowd together for **Pride** parade featuring Love is a Human Right 80s style (there has to be some excuse for this photo!). The neon gear kept everyone in high spirits throughout the day. We also discovered the banner we made for last year's parade, remembering Noxolo Nogwaza, an LGBT activist raped and murdered in South Africa in 2011, was used in Pride parades in that country.



Mike Reed got in a plug for Manchester Amnesty when Nigel Kennedy was a studio guest on **BBC Radio 4's Saturday Live** – Mike sent a message recalling the time Nigel played for us outside the Bridgewater Hall in support of our campaign for prisoners in Burma.

Katie Allen was interviewed on **BBC Radio Manchester** about the adoption by the UN General Assembly of the Arms Trade Treaty that Manchester Amnesty members and AI members throughout the world had campaigned for for many years.

Activities at national and regional level

In January, five group members attended an **Extraordinary General Meeting**, raised in response to concerns about the impact of the higher level of funding AIUK will be required to pay to the international movement, to fund growth of the movement in the south and east of the world. It was at times a difficult meeting, but ended with a commitment to greater openness and communication between the AIUK Board and the membership



Nine of us attended the **AIUK AGM** in Warwick in April (line-up left). We heard international speakers from Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe and India, and Horia Mosadiq, an Afghani human rights activist and Amnesty researcher, gave the keynote speech.

Sameena Matthiessen was invited to a **reception at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office** in May, to mark the adoption by the UN of the Arms Trade Treaty. She got involved with the Control Arms Campaign when she joined the group and got in plenty of mentions for Manchester Amnesty.

Sameena was also invited to join the **Active Membership Sub-committee**, a committee of AIUK's Board which aims to strengthen links between

the Board and the membership. Mike Reed was invited to join a **Governance Task Force**, set up at the AGM in response to concerns about governance within AIUK.

In March Laura Barsby and Katie Allen attended a **skill share** on the campaign for women's rights in Afghanistan at the Human Rights Action Centre in London. The focus was upon providing activists with the tools and information to invigorate the campaign, and attendees were also treated to Q & As with leading Afghan Women's Rights activists Samira Hamidi and Horia Mosadiq, as well as tips on getting the support of MPs from Heidi Alexander MP. They brought back lots of ideas to help plan activities such as the Didsbury Festival stall that was such a success in June.

Anne Walker and Laura Barsby were involved in the planning of the **NW Regional Conference** in Manchester in November, with several other members helping on the day. Amnesty groups from as far as Workington and north Wales attended. There was a speaker and creative activities linked to the forthcoming campaign on torture (right), plus interactive sessions on Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Afghanistan and the Roma.

Our group activities featured in **Groups News** (six pictures in October edition!) and a photo of our Arms Trade Treaty campaign action appeared in the **Planning Pack** that goes to all local groups.



Group activities and changes

Group **meetings** have included a workshop on Afghan women's rights and some inspiring speakers – Min Min, a former Prisoner of Conscience in Burma, Len Grant, author and creator of Life Without Papers, a blog shortlisted for an Amnesty media award, and Amy Lythgoe, founder of the Manchester-based Refugee Welcome Trust.

We held five **Writing for rights** sessions at Eight Day Café, sending letters on behalf of Individuals at risk, and ended the year by generating over 150 cards in events around Manchester as part of the former Greetings Card campaign. Jennifer Devans has also maintained an e-group of letter writers on death penalty concerns.



In May, we decided on a co-ordinated approach to **tweeting**, with volunteers taking one day each week. When we started the shared tweeting we had 770 followers and now have 1,017. At that point, we had tweeted 1,498 times and by the end of the year we had tweeted 4,076 times, a huge effort from everyone involved.

At our AGM, we said a big thanks to Sameena Matthiessen for her **chairing** of the group for the past few years, and welcomed Helen Underhill into the role. A longstanding member, Doug Kelly, who has welcomed new members and looked after all our products and "stuff" for many years left

Thanks

for more exotic places, and Mike Reed, who has been active in the group for several years, particularly engaging us with work on Burma, has also moved on. Katie Allen and Becky Carr who led on campaign actions have also left us as they moved away from Manchester. Thanks to everyone, named and unnamed, who contributed in any way to the success of our events this year.

A sad loss for Manchester Amnesty

We also said a final goodbye to a long standing member of the group, **Mavis Shankland**, who passed away in March after a short illness. Mavis will not only be remembered as having acted as 'group meeting catering manager' but also for impeccably masterminding the Christmas Card Stall for many years, leading work on adopted prisoners and setting up the Didsbury festival stall. Thanks to the generosity of Mavis' friends and family, we received a donation of £105 following her funeral.