

Amnesty International Stratford upon Avon Group
37 Maidenhead Road, Stratford upon Avon
www.amnesty.org.uk/stratfordonavon
November 14th, 2012, 7.30

Present: Eileen Alberti, Christine Boylan, Penny Freedman, Kathy Stredder, Sonya Millman, John McDermott, Sarah O'Grady, Elspeth Baillie, Maryann Dobbin, Rosie Keep, Jo Pettitt, Chris Jones, John Ryder, James Stredder, Trevor Trueman

Apologies: Penny Young, Abeer El-Sayed, Linda Butland

Minutes: The Minutes of the October meeting were accepted.

Matters Arising: Under 'Amnesty UK Workers' Strike' John summarized more recent updates from Unite with reference to the *AIUK – new structure*, (AIUK's) document. This document indicates that future campaigns will be seriously reduced, including the campaign for human rights defenders and the women's rights campaign; and that meaningful consultation with AIUK staff had still not taken place. A third day of strike action will take place on November 20th; that members could add their names to a request (see email 27/10/12 from Penny Freedman) for an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) when proposed AIUK changes will be discussed by the membership for the first time; and reminded members that they could donate to support the striking staff (see email 15/11/12 from Penny Freedman for details of where to send donations.)

AIUK update: From the Board's perspective, Sarah reiterated AIUK's obligation to increase its assessment fee to the International Secretariat with the subsequent consequences for reducing AIUK costs. She announced that the likely date of an EGM would be the 12th January; and that comments on the proposed structure should be sent to capp@amnesty.org.uk by November 29th.

The Chair asked members to refrain from discussion because of the crowded agenda, and invited everyone to come prepared to discuss the AIUK situation and changes in December (see Chair's Report).

Chair's Report:

- In preparation for a discussion of changes in AIUK at the December meeting members are asked to read the document *AIUK - new structure – Delivering the Role* (emailed to members on 27/10/12 by Penny Freedman).
- The SBT has contacted us to say the Jack Mapanje event raised £472 for Amnesty.
- Three members attended the Mid-Warwickshire Amnesty Group event on 13/10/12 where there was an excellent panel of speakers on the desperate plight of refugees and migrants in the UK. The meeting was very well attended.
- Members were asked to keep the Chair informed of all events and actions undertaken on behalf of the Group.
- Refreshments: December – Elspeth and Rosie; January – Penny Freedman
- Bourneville Group and Freedom from Torture have invited us to a Christmas

concert for Human Rights, Dec. 15th, Carrs Lane Church, Birmingham 11.00 – 12.30, £6.

Monthly Action: Members were alerted to the passage of the Justice and Security Bill through Parliament, with the extension of Government powers to demand secret hearings where national security risk is claimed. Amnesty research suggests adequate powers exist and that this extension could undermine principles of fairness and open justice. Members were encouraged to write to their MP.

Campaigns:

Individuals at Risk

- Elspeth recruited volunteers for the unfilled sessions for the *Write for Rights* stall on Saturday, December 8th to be held in the Cornmarket, Stratford. She announced that she will be emailing all those on the rota with guidance notes.
- Elspeth announced the IaRs (M. Huseynov, Azerbaijan; G. Zhisheng, China; Cofadeh, Honduras; Pussy Riot, Russian Federation) who will be featured at the stall. Copies of the *Write for Rights 2012* booklet were given to all members present and they were asked to write to as many of the 15 cases featured in the booklet as possible.
- Eileen offered to contact our MP Nadhim Zahawi to request a card signing; Rosie offered to take a photograph.

Women's Rights Campaign

- *A Campaign Update* has been received. In the absence of a Group 'contact' for this campaign, members were invited to review the *Update*. Meanwhile, a photo action for the Young Women for Change (YWC) organisation in Afghanistan was suggested for the next letter writing meeting.

Fundraising

- Heather Gerrard recruited volunteers for an 8 a.m. – 7 p.m. Amnesty collection at Budgen's in Bidford upon Avon on October 13th. The grand sum of £230.28 was raised. Members thanked Heather and her helpers for their wonderful effort.
- Jo announced this year's carol singing to take place on Wednesday, December 19th, 7.00 p.m., top of Broad Walk, Stratford, with refreshments afterwards at 82 Shottery Road. All be there.
- Sonya has booked the hall at KES for a quiz on the evening of Saturday 16 February 2013. Mick Jennings has agreed to be the quiz-master and, as in previous quizzes, entry will be £10 per person which will include a pizza supper. Teams should be of 4 people. As well as raffle tickets, drinks (wine, beer and juice) will be on sale, with all profits going to the group. Flyers with full details will be emailed to all members after Christmas.
- Sonya asked members to bring any other 2013 fundraising ideas to the December meeting. For each idea, she will need to know the proposed month of the fundraising event, together with an estimate of the costs that will be incurred and the income that will be raised.

Talk: Dr Trevor Trueman. *The Ethiopian Oromo People – Victims of Arbitrary Arrest, Torture, Rape and ‘Disappearances’*

Dr Trevor Trueman was welcomed by the Chair and proceeded to give a most interesting and frequently disturbing account of his recent visits to Oromo refugee camps in Somalia, Sudan and South Africa.

The Oromo people number some 30 million and form an estimated 40% of the population of Ethiopia. Following the overthrow of the Derg military dictatorship in 1991, the Oromo people were represented in the transitional administration of Ethiopia through its major political party the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). However, OLF representation was relatively small and easily sidelined by more powerful political/tribal groupings. During the 1992 elections there was widespread arrest and intimidation of OLF candidates. An estimated 45,000 suspected OLF supporters were detained and many hundreds killed. In the following 20 years persecution of the Oromo people, especially those thought sympathetic to the OLF has continued. In consequence many have fled Ethiopia seeking refuge in neighbouring countries. Dr Trueman is a practising GP and for many years has been spending much of his free time visiting Oromo refugee camps. His mission has been twofold, to train health workers and also to do what he can to draw the world's attention to the dreadful suffering that the Oromo people continue to be subjected to not only in Ethiopia, but sadly in those countries where they have sought refuge.

In the interviews he conducted at the various refugee camps, Dr Trueman found that 88% males had been tortured whilst in detention in Ethiopia, and 50% of the women had been raped, frequently by groups of soldiers or policemen and on numerous occasions. When such people do manage to flee from Ethiopia they find they are unwelcome elsewhere. It is very difficult for them to be granted refugee status in the countries they escape to, and, therefore, extremely difficult to gain work permits. In consequence there is real destitution and alarmingly high rates of child malnutrition. And women are by no means free of sexual abuse. One of the examples Dr Trueman gave was of a woman living in a South African refugee camp who had been raped in broad daylight by two South Africans, one of whom told her, 'You Ethiopian women are safe – you haven't got AIDS.'

Dr Trueman concluded his talk by wryly observing that the British Government gives more aid to Ethiopia than to any other country. The figure is £3 billion. Ethiopia is a country where there is desperate poverty and appalling abuses of human rights. It is also the country with the second biggest, best-equipped army in the whole of Africa.

In conclusion, members signed a letter to the Minister for Africa, Mark Simmonds, asking him to note the contents of an open letter (re: human rights, civil society restrictions and the media in Ethiopia and written on behalf of a host of international organisations) to the new PM of Ethiopia; and to apply pressure for reform accordingly.

Dates for your diary:

Tuesday, November 27th - letter writing morning at The Falcon Hotel (10-12)

Saturday, December 8th, 9.30 – 3.30, The Corn Market, Stratford, the *Write for Rights* stall

Wednesday, December 12th - 7.30 – the December monthly meeting

Saturday, December 15th – 11.00 – Xmas Concert for Human Rights, Carrs Lane Church, Birmingham, £6.00

Wednesday, December 19th - 7.00 – Carol singing, meet at top of Broad Walk, Stratford
(There will be no letter writing morning in December)

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