

Minutes of Amnesty International Reading Group Meeting, 12th November 2020

Acting Chair: Anne M^cFarlane

This meeting was held via Webex.

1. Welcome and introductions

Seven people joined the meeting: Hilary, Anne, Liz, Amanda, Helen, Ruth, Sue

Apologies from Peter & Michael

2. Amnesty Campaigning in a Digital Age

Helen gave an overview of the digital channels that our group currently uses – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and website. She particularly focussed on Twitter, explaining how this works and encouraging everyone to get an account. The group's Twitter account has almost 1,000 followers and so we can reach a lot of people through this medium. The use of @twitterusername will ensure that the tweet is seen somewhere on the twitter account of the individual mentioned. Hashtags can be used to make the content more searchable by commenting your tweet to a broader conversation on that issue (eg #refugeeswelcome). It can be used to team up with others to create a 'Twitter storm' when a lot of people tweet the same thing at the same time to the same person. It was also noted that other forms of communication such as traditional mail and emails can be difficult in certain countries, such as Cuba, where twitter is often more likely to get to the intended recipient.

As part of our commitment to being more active on social media, it was agreed that we should take screenshots at our next meeting in support of the individuals in the Write for Rights campaign and post on our media channels. It was also noted that it is possible to create cards digitally that multiple people can sign, and that this might be a good way to manage some of the solidarity actions.

3. Photo action

A screen shot of attendees was taken as a photo action to be posted on social media to support NAZANIN ZAGHARI-RATCLIFFE and call for her immediate unconditional release. #Free Nazanin

4. Campaign updates & actions

Sue reported that the Amnesty staff that would normally be investigating and reporting on human rights in Cuba have been co-opted on to Amnesty's Covid-19 response in the Americas and so there are no actions coming through at the moment. A recent international report on freedom on the internet has given Cuba a ranking of 22 out of 100. Cuba has once again been granted a seat on the UN Human Rights Council.

Amanda had circulated the most recent south Asia newsletter in advance of the meeting. This includes a number of updates but no specific actions.

Liz reported that the Trump administration resumed federal executions in July. Three men are facing execution in the next two months. Seven have already been executed. There is an action link in the monthly newsletter.

A number of the group had written to their MPs about Nazanin Zaghari Ratcliffe and Annosheh Ashoori, to ask the UK government to prioritise getting them both home to their families by Christmas. Responses have been received from Matt Rodda (Reading East), John Howell (Henley) and John Redwood (Wokingham).

Amnesty has asked that we send postcards/Christmas cards to people living in care homes. The aim is to give residents something to hold on to and treasure, and open new avenues for communication

and friendship. The group, Postcards of Kindness, can be found on Twitter and Facebook. We are encouraged to take a picture of your card and share on social media please include #AmnestyUK and #PostcardsOfKindness.

5. AI Central England Regions Festival of Social Justice

The Reading Group is still hoping to arrange a poetry event and a human rights trial for the Festival of Social Justice next year. This will be complimentary to the wide range of things being considered by other groups such as film events, book sales, theatre (Taming of the Shrew), musical events, quizzes and debates. We hope to get some support from AIUK in helping us to set up digital events. There is also a plan to set up a 'soapbox' (either physical or virtual) with some of these being stitched together in a youtube film.

6. Money & fund raising ideas

Peter has asked for approval to send £500 from our back account into Amnesty UK. This was agreed.

It was agreed that we should have a virtual street collection in early January as a proxy for our annual collection outside of Waitrose, Caversham.

The Paula Cox print has raised £250 on eBay.

7. Future group meeting

The December meeting will focus on the Right for Rights campaign and looking back at the year. It was agreed that we should all have mulled wine (or equivalent) and make this more of a social event.

Sue will speak to us about Cuba at the January meeting.

Helen shared that she had joined an online debate about Female Genital Mutilation hosted by the Hammersmith group. This could be a future topic, but also highlighted how we are able to join and share meetings between and across groups.

Amanda studying Modern day Slavery and would be happy to cover this in one of our future meetings.

A number of people expressed a desire to have a speaker to talk about the practical implications of Amnesty's draft Theory of Change document, which describes how AI understands the world and its role in making change in it.

8. AoB

Amanda alerted everyone to the Amnesty Academy App which provides a number of bite size courses on human rights.

We have had a few people join the meetings briefly but that have not come back. It would be worth getting in touch with them again to encourage them to return.

There was a short discussion about whether 8pm was still the best time to start the meeting, or whether 7.30pm might work better.

Next meeting: Thursday 10th December – Write for Rights, a look back at 2020, and an online social