



MANCHESTER AMNESTY GROUP NEWSLETTER

December 2020

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

Facebook page: Manchester Amnesty International

Facebook group: Manchester Amnesty

Twitter: @amnestymanc

Campaigning

THIS WINTER

Your voice is powerful

Send a message for human rights



This year's Write for Rights campaign is in full swing in the run up to the festive season. The campaign features ten cases from around the world – download the booklet at <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/write-rights-2020-get-started>.

You can send messages of solidarity and support, in the form of a greetings card, a letter and on social media.

Make sure that you add the ten cases to your greetings card list!

You can also send appeals to the authorities, again as a letter or email or via social media. We have already featured some of the cases as part of our Weekly Actions where quick online actions were available. If you haven't done these online actions yet – go to <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/write-for-rights> and get clicking.

We have also been contacting local communities inviting them to take part e.g. places of worship, schools, women's groups, neighbourhood groups etc. **If you have any contacts for groups who you think might be interested, please let Kathryn Fletcher have the details at bussk@btinternet.com ASAP.**

December Online Group Meeting

6.30pm Monday 14th December

Write for Rights

We will discuss this year's Write for Rights cases, do some of the actions suggested for some of the cases and take a group photo of us all holding up our cards ready for the post. Don't forget to have your cards ready!

We will send out a link over the weekend. Keep an eye out for it

N.B. Our regular group meetings will be at 6.30pm online on the second Monday of the month until further notice.

Whalley Range Write for Rights event – Saturday December 12th

The marvellous Whalley Range Peace and Justice Group normally hold a very large Write for Rights event in St Margaret's Church in Whalley Range. This unusual year, they still plan an event in the church but following social distancing guidelines.

If you want to take part, you will need to book a slot for your household to attend (email WRPJ2020@gmail.com) – see the attached leaflet for more information.

Campaign for the release of Dr Mohamed al-Roken and Ahmed Mansoor, imprisoned in the UAE.

Update on Ahmed Mansoor and Mohammed Al-Roken

We have no news on the Ahmed Mansoor or Mohammed Al-Roken. We believe that they are still in solitary confinement and unable to see their families.

International pressure on the UAE

Five United Nations Special Rapporteurs published a joint report on 13th Nov outlining their concern about draconian UAE anti-terror laws that have led to the unjust imprisonment of scores of journalists, peaceful dissidents and human rights defenders. These laws break the UAE's commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Arab Charter on Human Rights.

This week, Human Rights Watch has also called on the US government to Suspend the sale of arms to the UAE because of its airstrikes on Yemen and Libya.

A group of protestors condemned the UAE Human Rights violations and war crimes outside the UAE embassy on UAE National Day on 2nd Dec.

Next year we could join them!



Twitter Storm for Ahmed

We will, once again, join other organisations and Amnesty groups in a Twitter Storm **on Sunday 20th December**, calling for the release of Ahmed Mansoor. The UAE is sensitive to its social media profile and it's thought that Twitter is an excellent platform to get our message through.

Please write as many tweets as you can, on that day. We'll send out a reminder with more information with suggested Tweets in the Weekly action on the previous Friday.

Refugee Rights

While many of us will be considering whether to see family members during the 23rd-27th December, please take a moment to think about those who won't be able to, and haven't seen their family for much longer than the 9 months we've been living with Covid 19 restrictions.

The Brexit deadline is causing asylum screenings and interviews to be rushed in order to return people back to other European countries, as per the Dublin regulation. This sad news saw a flight to Jamaica send around 13 (rather than the planned 50) people to Jamaica, despite many of them living in the UK since they were children. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/dec/06/uk-races-to-deport-asylum-seekers-ahead-of-brexite>

The Home Secretary continues to curb 'unlawful' migration across the channel by signing an agreement with France to increase the number of patrols that take place in the water and making it more difficult for small boats to arrive in Britain. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/nov/28/uk-and-france-sign-deal-to-make-channel-migrant-crossings-unviable>

Action:

We ask you as part of Write for Rights, to ask that all charges against the El Hiblu 3 are dropped.

In Malta, three youths risk life in prison for their roles in helping fellow asylum-seekers escape torture. Call for justice for The El Hiblu 3.

In March 2019, three African teenagers (aged 15, 16, 19) boarded a crowded rubber boat, fleeing Libya. Along with 108 people, they were rescued by a cargo ship, El Hiblu.

Ship captains have a legal duty to rescue those in danger at sea and take them to a safe destination. Libya is not a safe destination. The experiences refugees and migrants face there are well documented: arbitrary detention, torture, rape and exploitation.

The rescued people were promised they would be taken to safety in Europe, but as time passed, they realised they were being taken back to Libya. They began to panic, horrified at the prospect of returning to the torture they had escaped.

"People started crying and shouting: 'We don't want to go to Libya!', 'We prefer to die!'"

Knowing he spoke English, the chief officer of the ship asked the 15-year-old boy "What can I do to get them to calm down?" The boy replied: "Don't take us back to Libya".

The ship turned around and set off for Malta. The three youths helped the chief officer by interpreting his words to the rest of the rescued people, calming the panicked passengers.

But media and politicians spun the story, accusing the three boys of 'hijacking' the El Hiblu, and the Maltese army stormed the ship. The three youths were disembarked in Malta in handcuffs, despite the police testifying that the crew were in control, no one was hurt, and nothing was damaged.

The youths are seen by many as heroes. Regardless, they now face life changing charges.

Crisis and Tactical

HONG KONG

On 2nd December, opposition activists Joshua Wong, Agnes Chow and Ivan Lam were given prison sentences for their involvement in protests outside Hong Kong Police Headquarters last year.

Wong had pleaded guilty to inciting and organising an unauthorised assembly under Hong Kong's Public Order Ordinance, while Chow and Lam admitted to the incitement charge. "Incitement" in this case refers to the defendants' use of a megaphone to shout slogans during the protest.

Amnesty states that "these three activists have been jailed in violation of their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Their convictions should be overturned without delay and they must be released immediately and unconditionally."

Read the full press release here, which also explains the legal requirement to obtain police permission to protest in Hong Kong:

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/hong-kong-opposition-activists-must-be-released-immediately-and-unconditionally>

ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

The art of the steal - Israel's slow motion annexation

As part of September's diplomatic deals between Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain, Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu announced a 'temporary halt' to plans to formally annex parts of the occupied West Bank. Despite this, Netanyahu continues to suggest that annexation will still happen and the government continues to expand its settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.



2020 has seen the most Israeli settlement houses approved for construction since 2012, while hundreds of Palestinian

properties have been demolished leaving hundreds homeless.

International condemnation of these policies are not enough. Amnesty has been calling on the UK government to urgently [ban goods made in illegal settlements](#) from UK markets, as well as to prevent [UK companies](#), such as construction company JCB, from operating in the settlements.

Read the post by Rebecca Nguyen, AIUK's Crisis and Tactical Campaigner, here:

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/blogs/campaigns-blog/art-steal-israels-slow-motion-annexation>

Come to January's Manchester Amnesty meeting to hear about a local campaign calling on local authorities to ensure contracts are not given to companies operating in illegally occupied land.

USA

State Department's attack on BDS movement violates free speech

In November, Mike Pompeo visited an illegal Israeli settlement, becoming the first US Secretary of State to do so. This is a move that is criticised as legitimising the illegal settlements. During his visit, he announced that the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement is now designated by the US State Department as antisemitic.

Amnesty state that "the US administration is following the Israeli government's approach in using false and politically-motivated accusations of antisemitism to harm peaceful activists [...] and shield from accountability those responsible for illegal actions that harm people in Israel, in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and here at home".

Read the full statement here:

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/usa-state-departments-attack-bds-movement-violates-free-speech>

MYANMAR

NLD wins 2020 elections

The National League for Democracy (NLD) won the popular vote in the general elections that took place in November 2020. This is Aung San Suu Kyi's party, a leader who is no longer seen as a beacon for democracy and peace on the international stage, following what has been judged a poor handling of the Rohingya crisis. The Rohingya are an ethnic minority, who have been subjected to killings, arbitrary detentions, torture and unspeakable violence by the hands of Myanmar's military.

Following the election, Amnesty International issued the following statement: *"The new government must, as a matter of urgency, repeal or amend all repressive and discriminatory laws and ensure humanitarian access to at-risk populations and justice and accountability for crimes under international law in ethnic minority areas. Amnesty International urges all Members of Parliament to respect, protect, fulfil and promote human rights for all, and to publicly commit to meeting Myanmar's international human rights obligations. The next government can and must champion human rights."*

Please, find a link to Amnesty's report on Myanmar: <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ASA1633552020ENGLISH.pdf>



An image of the Rohingya community

KIRIN suspends payment to military company

In Sep 2020, Amnesty International exposed how the Japanese beverage company Kirin was financing Myanmar's military.

Jointly with Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (MEHL), Kirin owns Myanmar Brewery Limited and Mandalay Brewery Limited. The profits of these two breweries was provided to MEHL, whose shareholders include military units responsible for crimes under international law.

In Nov 20 Kirin [announced](#) that it has suspended all dividend payments to MEHL.

Montse Ferrer, Researcher on Business and Human Rights at Amnesty International, stated:

"This is an important step by Kirin, and shows it is taking its human rights responsibilities in Myanmar seriously. We have repeatedly documented the business links between

MEHL and military units [directly involved](#) in atrocity crimes against the Rohingya and other minorities in Rakhine, Kachin and northern Shan States. Any company partnering with MEHL risks complicity in these horrors, and we therefore welcome the measures Kirin has taken.

"However, suspending payments is not enough. MEHL has shown no willingness to meaningfully engage with its business partners or reform its structure, which makes proper human rights due diligence impossible. Kirin has appointed Deloitte to investigate the destination of the profits from its Myanmar operations, which should lead it to a decision to responsibly end all business ties with MEHL."

Here is a link to the report:

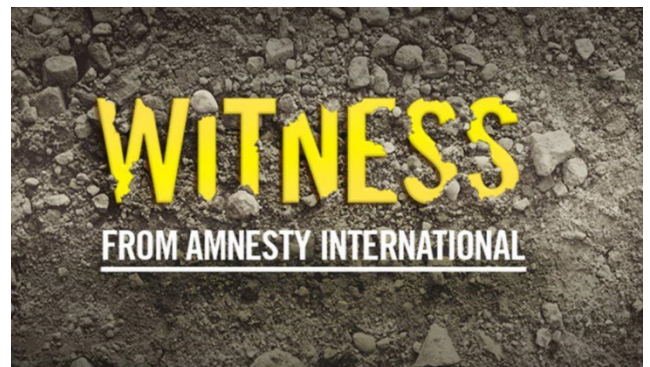
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/09/mehl-military-links-to-global-businesses/>

SYRIA

Blog 'Witness'

In Sep 2020 Amnesty launched a new blog called Witness, reporting on the work that Amnesty's Research and Crisis Response team do in Syria. It is worth listening to it or reading the transcript!

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2020/09/witness-episode-one-the-party/>



COVID-19 -The Syrian government is failing its citizens

Amnesty reports that after eight months after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Syrian government is still failing its citizens. Amnesty has identified the following **key points**:

► Shortage of hospitals and equipment

The Syrian conflict has decimated the number of functioning hospitals (some of which have been bombed by the Syrian military). According to the World Health Organization, only 50% of hospitals across Syria are fully functioning, 25% are partially functioning due to a shortage of staff, equipment, medicines or damage to hospital buildings, while the remaining 25% are not functioning at all.

Witnesses have told Amnesty that public hospitals have been forced to turn patients away due to a lack of beds, oxygen tanks and ventilators. Private facilities have had to turn away COVID-19 patients because the authorities are only allowing public hospitals in Damascus to treat COVID-19 patients.

► Inadequate distribution of personal protective equipment

While WHO and other Damascus-based international humanitarian organizations claim that they have provided the Syrian government with PPE, humanitarian workers told Amnesty that the authorities have been extremely slow in its distribution for unknown reasons.

► Lack of testing

According to the UN, there are five laboratories to process COVID-19 tests for the 15 million people living in all of the

areas under the government's control. There continues to be no testing sites in Daraa and north-east Syria where infection rates have significantly increased in past months.

Testing is key in understanding the scale of the outbreak and informing government policy.

► Lack of transparency:

The Syrian authorities appear to be significantly under-reporting COVID-19 counts. As of 10 November, the Ministry of Health reported 6,352 cases of COVID-19, including 325 deaths. However, the inability of health care facilities to cope and the rising numbers of death notices and burials indicate that actual cases far exceed official figure.

The Ministry of Health is not publishing information about the impact of COVID-19 on health workers. Eleven health workers are reported to have died of COVID-19, but Syria's union of doctors have reported that at least 61 health workers had died of the disease as of August 2020.

The publishing of data is crucial so the public is informed and understands the scale of infections and its impact on society and the health sector.

Amnesty International calls on the Syrian government to ramp up its public health response by ensuring adequate access to quality health care for all, and ensuring that health workers have access to necessary protective equipment. Moreover, the expansion and disclosure of accurate and up-to-date information about the spread of the virus is key to effectively address COVID-19.

Group News

AIUK Groups' News

Every quarter AIUK produce the Groups' News, which is an update on campaigns and what group's around the country have been getting up to. It's nice to see that Kathryn's picture is on the front, taken during our demo outside the Etihad, with a write up about our UAE campaigning inside under the WE STAND WITH YOU section.

You can download it at:

http://email.amnestyuk.org.uk/files/amf_amnesty/project_58/GNL_Winter_2020_FINAL.pdf

Google Groups

We seem to have made the changeover to Google Groups for our email list, apparently without any major issues.

Please let the group secretary know if you have any problems receiving the emails – anne.walker9@ntlworld.com.

We have used Yahoo groups to curate our email groups for many years but this will cease to exist on 15th December. We have made the change just in time!

Other News

Christmas cards and presents.

Most years we buy a large stock of cards and other festive products to sell to our group members and at Christmas Fairs etc in the run up to Christmas. This year we won't be

doing the usual stalls or meeting face to face.

However, you can still buy a wide range of Amnesty cards and Ethically Produced products from the online Amnesty Shop.



Click the link and get shopping!

<https://amnestyshop.org.uk>

Online courses

Do you want to develop your knowledge of human rights, and get the skills and confidence to defend?



Amnesty has a whole range of on-line learning:
<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/online-learning>

Seasons Greetings to all our members

N.B. If you wish to subscribe to, or unsubscribe from this newsletter and other general group emails from the Manchester Group of Amnesty International, please email manchestergroup@amnesty.org.uk