



# Minutes of [Amnesty International Reading Group](#) Meeting

## Thursday 13th June 2024

Chair: Anne McFarlane

This meeting was held via Zoom.

### Welcome and introductions

7 people joined the meeting tonight: Anne, Helen, Sue, Iona, Liz, Hilary, Ruth

- Apologies - Michael, Vicky

### 1. AGM ELECTIONS

The meeting began with the election of our main roles. These officers will serve for a year until our next AGM.

role	who was proposed	nominated by	seconded by	outcome
Chair	Anne McFarlane	Hilary Withey	Ruth Hollies	voted in unanimously
Secretary	Helen Ball	Anne McFarlane	Liz Bailey	voted in unanimously
Treasurer	Ruth Hollies	Helen Ball	Iona Ball	voted in unanimously

### 2. Group Accounts

Reading Amnesty International Group - Accounts 2023	
Group Name *	Reading
Funds held as of 1 January 2023 *	£1,711.85
Funds held as of 31 December 2023 *	£3,032.94
Individual donations/subscriptions (subs and one off sums donated to the group)	£170.94
Cash Collections	£169.33
Social Events (parties, dances etc...)	£1,061.78
Other (please specify in the box below)	£250.00
Total income *	£1,652.05
Please use the box below to add details of the events and activities that raised money for your group	We had stalls at Waterfest, Womad and Reading pride. We held a barndance with raffle. A previous member who passed away in 2023 left £250 to the group for a party.
Donations to the Amnesty International UK Section	£99.96
Group Affiliation Fee (£72) paid?	Yes
Other Costs (please give details below)	£159.00
Total Expenses *	£330.96

Please use the box below to add details of your group's expenses.

we paid for stalls at pride £48 water fest £28.35 and purchased a Banner @ £47.85 (although total price was £63.79 but got a discount for late delivery) and we have a group sumup at a cost of £34.8

Ruth presented these accounts.

We agreed to send £1500 to Amnesty now and review further donations once we've paid for the new gazebo.

- Please note £250 is reserved following the donation in Joy's will for a group party.

Anne thanked Ruth for creating these accounts. They were approved by the group and will be forwarded to Amnesty International.

### 3. Review of 2023

## Activities in 2023

Month	Meetings	Events
January	Qatar	Guantanamo demo, London
February	Russia	Regional Conference
March	Human Rights in the UK (?)	Barn Dance
April	Kashmir	
May	UAE	Chance2Dance4Charity
June	Group AGM & AIUK AGM Resolutions	Waterfest
July	Care4Calais	WOMAD
August	Pizza and planning	
September	Transgender – lived experience	Pride Freshers Fayre Chance2Dance4Charity
October	China	
November	Racial Justice	AIUK Conference
December	Write4Rights	W4R at Reading University

Anne reviewed all our main activities from 2023, a time that allowed more events following the pandemic.

### 4. CAMPAIGN UPDATES

#### CUBA - Sue

##### 1) Overview from latest Amnesty world report for CUBA for 2023 / 2024:

Repression of dissent continued as activists, political opponents and journalists were harassed, persecuted and imprisoned. / Human rights defenders faced obstacles and attacks, and some continued to be incarcerated without due process.

The economic and humanitarian crisis continued with shortages of food, fuel and electricity. Discrimination remained prevalent, affecting Afro-descendants, women and girls, LGBTI people, political dissidents, and members of religious communities.

Cuba lacked a national human rights institution in compliance with the Paris Principles, the country remained closed to international human rights organizations, and the international media faced obstacles in monitoring the trials of political dissidents.

In November 23, the EU and Cuba held their fourth human rights dialogue, at which the EU expressed concern over detentions and lengthy prison sentences related to protests in July 2021

2023 saw the implementation of a new Penal Code that retained the death penalty, as well as provisions that limited human rights and were used to silence and imprison activists.

- 2) Cuba is battling its worst economic crisis in decades**, caused in part by the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw the flow of much-needed tourism dollars plunge.
- Its economy has also long been [stymied](#) by US trade embargoes since the 1960's and sanctions imposed during Donald Trump's presidency which Biden extended.
  - Years of chronic mismanagement and underinvestment have also contributed to wrecking the economy, including the once-thriving and iconic sugar industry which has collapsed & Cuba now imports sugar to meet domestic demand.
  - There are severe fuel shortages for cars and agriculture – using oxen to work the fields
  - For the first time, Cuba turned to the UN's World Food Programme in February, requesting help in supplying milk to children.
  - In March hundreds of protesters took to the streets as the country faces food shortages and near-full day blackouts.

### **3) Amnesty's campaigning focus is on five prisoners of conscience**

1. **Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara** – artist & leader of a protest movt – detained 11 Jul 21 - 5 yr sentence
2. **Maykel "Osorbo" Castillo Pérez** - musician and human rights activist – 9 yr sentence since May 21
3. **José Daniel Ferrer García** - leader of an unofficial political opposition group, detained after attempting to take part in the demonstrations of 11 July 21, still no trial. One of the 75 people arrested in 2003 crackdown known as the Black Spring, in which 75 journalists were imprisoned and sentenced to long prison terms. His sentence was 25 years. After eight years in prison he was offered freedom in exchange for leaving the country, which he refused to do.
4. **Loreto Hernández García & Donaida Pérez Paseiro** - both Black activists, leaders and priests of the Yoruba religion – 7yr / 8yr sentences after 11J protests

In April published a digital book called [Cuba: Images of Rebellion](#) AMR 25 /7904/ 2024

- testimony to civic resistance in Cuba, featuring some of the over 21,000 letters and drawings of global support received by the artist Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara, as part of a campaign coordinated by Amnesty International for his release.
- Includes the stories of five prisoners of conscience.
- inviting readers to join the demand for a #CubaSinRepresión

### **Anti-Death Penalty Campaign - Liz**

#### **"Death sentences and executions in 2023"**

This [year's report](#) reveals the complexity of the current position of the death penalty. The negative headlines report that the global use of the death penalty recorded 1,153 known executions in 2023, an increase by 31% from 883 in 2022. However, in good news, there was a significant decrease in executing countries, from 20 in 2022 to 16 in 2023.

- The reality is that figures are unknown for China, North Korea and Viet Nam.
- Iran's largest number of executions are for drug related crimes.
- 2023 saw Uganda bring in the death penalty for "aggravated homosexuality".
- At least 27,687 were sentenced to death in 52 countries last year.
- Methods of execution used were beheading, hanging, lethal injection and shooting.
- Both Iran and Afghanistan held public executions – at least 8 people.
- At least 5 people in Iran were executed for crimes committed under 18.
- Some countries retain the death penalty but in reality, don't use it.
- Kenya, Liberia and Zimbabwe currently have bills pending to abolish it completely.
- Amnesty International recorded commutations or pardons of death sentences in 27 countries
- 3 countries exonerated 9 people – USA, Zimbabwe and Kenya.

## **TÜRKIYE - İona**

### **1. Human rights lawyer Tahir Elçi**

3 police officers acquitted of killing human rights lawyer Tahir Elçi

"It is a bitter irony that Tahir's life was cut short by the very violence that he was campaigning to end and justice has been sidestepped as a result of the endemic impunity that he dedicated his life to eradicate". Tahir campaigned for victims of human rights violations and in particular the rights of Kurdish people.

### **2. Osman Kavala**

In April 2022, Osman was sentenced to life in prison without parole – the most severe sentence that exists in the Turkish penal code – after being unjustly convicted of 'attempting to overthrow the government'.

His co-defendants – architect Mücella Yapıcı, city planner Tayfun Kahraman, lawyer Can Atalay, documentary filmmaker Mine Özerden, film producer Çiğdem Mater, higher education director Hakan Altınay, university founder Yiğit Ekmekçi were each sentenced to 18 years in prison for allegedly 'aiding' him.

It's being reported that one of the co-rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) who is responsible for monitoring Turkey's obligations and commitments, will meet with Osman Kavala, on Wednesday.

He remains behind bars despite judgments of the European Court of Human Rights in his favour. In March, the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers declared Turkey in "serious breach" of the European Convention on Human Rights and the principles of the rule of law due to Kavala's continued detention.

No word from Amnesty on this but sources are hoping this personal intervention could help pressurise the Turkish authorities into reviewing their actions.

## **South Asia - Hilary**

More details to follow.

- Hilary is going to consider whether she focuses on a couple of countries, rather than try to cover all 8 within this Amnesty region.

## **Our Prisoners of Conscience - Ruth**

Ruth reported that she feels a little too busy to give her best attention to our prisoners. She agreed to continue managing the case for now.

## **Group Action - a photo calling for the release of Dr Mohammed al-Roken to be posted on our socials on the day of his arrest**

### **5. Secretary updates**

- Feedback on recent MP advocacy group, encouraging members to attend local hustings or be ready to speak to canvassing party members
- reminder about Amnesty's manifesto for human rights
- update of recent events with local Hong Kongers, including a film showing of "she's in jail" featuring Chow Hang-tung and the 35th anniversary vigil of the Tiananmen Square massacre in Forbury Gardens.
- feedback from Helen & Iona who attended Anoosheh Ashoori, one of the British-Iranian who was released from incarceration in Evin Prison. Both were extremely moved, given how long we had campaigned for both Annosheh and Nazanin Zaghari-Radcliffe.
- feedback from Helen who attended monthly Guantanamo Bay vigil in Parliament Square
- Thanks to all who supported the group's stall at Waterfest this year.
- Our Hong Kong prisoners petition now has over 400 signatures.
- Refugee Week - signposting to Reading Refugee Support group activities and scheduling of refugee posts on our social media

### **Confirmed Future Events:**

- AIUK AGM - Saturday 22nd June - online or in person in Sheffield - Amnesty members only
  - WOMAD - 26<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> July, Malmesbury - BOOKED
  - Reading Pride – Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> August - BOOKED
  - Mulled Wine & Music – Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> December - BOOKED
- Events to be arranged
- An event for Reading's International Festival - October '24
  - Our 50th birthday party - early spring '25

### **AoB & monthly meeting schedule**

**next meeting - TBC**

please see our social media for further information