



Manchester Amnesty Statement made on 9th August

After the tragic loss of life in Southport, we have been horrified to witness the hateful response of what we believe to be a small, unrepresentative minority of our fellow human beings. Manchester Amnesty wishes to send a message of support and solidarity to all of those who have been affected by the appalling violence which has taken place on our streets and in our communities. We stand with all those who have been threatened by racist, Islamophobic and dehumanising speech and actions. We applaud the communities that have come together to recognise our common humanity.

**Manchester Group Quarterly Bulletin
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This newsletter is compiled by the Group Communications Secretary, Alison Wearden (alison.wearden@gmail.com). If you have any ideas for short or more in-depth articles for the newsletter, please feel free to contact her. We would welcome pieces on any area of Amnesty's work, and also human-interest stories. If you would prefer to stop receiving this newsletter, please let Alison know.

Anti-Racism and Prevent

In July, two of us went to the Royal Courts of Justice in London to attend the hearing for seven of the Manchester 10 boys' leave to appeal. We were part of a large group of supporters with a visible presence outside the courts prior to the hearing and then filling the public gallery throughout the day. Kids of Colour (KoC, a Manchester anti-racist youth work organisation that has supported the boys and their families) provided transport for many of the boys' family members so that they could attend the court hearings and the KoC staff supported them throughout what must have been another emotionally gruelling day for them all.



We felt privileged to be part of the wider support network able to witness the barristers' speeches and arguments that illustrated the institutional racism that is inherent in the UK's Criminal Justice System. Initially the lead judge appeared (to our inexperienced eye) hostile to the lead barrister. As the day progressed however, the three judges appeared to listen intently, including to the lead barrister's plea for the courts to take the first step in addressing institutional racism within the CJS by acknowledging that it exists and that it played a significant role in the initial trial of the Manchester 10.

The seven Manchester 10 boys and their families had to wait a further 19 days before they were informed that they had been granted permission to appeal, which must have been the best news for them all. Added to this good news, the grounds on which leave to appeal their conviction was granted included the incorrect approach to the law of conspiracy used by the judge in their initial trial. As Kids of Colour point out, we still don't know if any of these grounds for appeal will be successful but it allows for full arguments to be made on these grounds in a full hearing. It is thought that the appeal will be heard towards the end of this year in London, possibly lasting two days. We hope to have a presence again within the Manchester 10's large support network by attending the appeal hearings and standing alongside the many other groups and individuals who are calling for an end to the institutional racism within our Criminal Justice System and a just outcome for the Manchester 10.

In addition to this part of our work, we are continuing our work on Amnesty UK's Scrap Prevent campaign based on the recent report, *This Is The Thought Police: The Prevent duty and its chilling effect on human rights*. <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/prevent>. A working group has been formed including Amnesty members and fellow-activists from a range of organisations within Manchester, and will meet again on 12th September. We are currently identifying possible allies within the Manchester City Council councillors who we could initially approach with a view to gaining support for Amnesty's campaign within the council as a whole. The United Nations has recently recognised human rights violations inherent in the Prevent strategy. You can read more about this development [here](#).

Israel and Palestine



Demolition of Palestinian-Bedouin homes in the Naqab

In the June bulletin we set out a long list of crimes committed by Israel. The recently published Amnesty International Annual Report for 2023, which you can access [here](#), provides evidence of many such crimes, including:

- Bedouin homes demolished, whole villages destroyed, including one over 200 times
- Lethal policing operations in the West Bank, with 110 Palestinian children killed
- Detentions without charge or trial at record levels
- Excessive police force and arbitrary arrests at anti-government demonstrations
- Bans on anti-war protests in Palestinian communities

The daily news brings evidence of more such crimes. In recent weeks we have seen reports of the following:

Detention of medical personnel

Military raids on the Occupied West Bank with indiscriminate killings

Serious abuse of prisoners in Israeli prisons including mistreatment of children.

On 5 August *The Guardian* published [a report](#) on the abuse of Palestinian prisoners in Israel's jails. This provided substantial evidence of: starvation and sexual assault; denial of medical care; women denied sanitary products, verbally abused and threatened with rape. Ashraf al-Muhtaseb described leaving Israel's jails with no hearing in his left ear, four fractured ribs and a broken hand. He was dropped at an Israeli checkpoint, but he was so ill and weak from hunger he could no longer walk and had to crawl to safety. Musa 'Aasi, 58, father of four, said he heard guards beat 38-year-old Tha'er Abu 'Asab to death in a neighbouring cell. Interviews by *The Guardian* and by the Israeli human rights organisation, [B'Tselem](#), found that abuse was so widespread it must be official policy. **Warning – the B'Tselem report makes extremely harrowing reading.**

International Law



Most of these crimes and atrocities are breaches of international law - war crimes, crimes against humanity, and blatant human rights abuses. Amnesty's work is based on international law and human rights conventions, and some of Amnesty's leaders have recently given excellent talks on this theme. I would particularly recommend two which you can see and hear online.

Agnes Callamard speaking at the Balfour Project annual conference.

Agnes Callamard, who is Amnesty's secretary General, gave an inspired talk at the Balfour Project annual conference in June. Her theme was the frightening trend of nations and governments walking out on the international agreements made in the aftermath of the atrocities of the second world war. These laws and conventions were designed to "keep shut forever the gates of hell" and yet they are now being ignored and abandoned. Here is the link to this excellent talk: <https://balfourproject.org/2024conference/>

In July, Kristyan Benedict, a long serving staff campaigner with Amnesty UK, also gave a talk sponsored by the Balfour Project. His theme was the central importance of international law and human rights to resolving the longstanding crisis between Israel and the Palestinians. He believes that the failure to place human rights at the centre of the "peace process" and previous attempts to resolve the situation has been the main cause of their failure. You can find his talk online here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjsjGtPvCrg&t=1s>

Weekly Vigil





In light of the above, and in recognition of the deep suffering caused by these breaches of human rights, we express empathy for the bereaved and deprived in Israel and Palestine. through our weekly vigil. This is held in St Peter's Square every Friday from 5-6pm. In October we will hold our 50th vigil marking a year since we started. As things stand, with no ceasefire, no return of hostages, and no resolution of the war, it looks like we will have to continue. At the vigil, people of Manchester passing through the square are invited to write their message of empathy and support on a paper heart. We have collected over 1,000 of these messages on hearts, and we will be devising ways of displaying and communicating these to a wider audience and attempting to help them reach people in Palestine.

On the occasion of our 40th vigil Steve Roman and Mike Reed prepared a letter to the Manchester Evening News, which was published shortly afterwards.

We are grateful to our loyal supporters who turn out to support our weekly vigil. We encourage everyone to drop in, if only once, to experience the vigil, and stand with others whose hearts reach out in empathy to the people of Gaza and Israel.

Craftivism

As reported in the June bulletin, the Craftivism group have made a banner from some of the hearts collected at the weekly vigil. The banner has now been shown in three venues, most



Our banner hanging at HOME, Manchester

notably at HOME Manchester, where it hung for two weeks on one of the cinema-floor corridors (an area with a high footfall). We are currently looking for more places to display the banner, but also want to consider what we can do with the remaining hearts. Various ideas have been put forward for different types of artwork (mobiles, chains of pennants, hanging on trees, giving the hearts away) or for a qualitative analysis and summary of the various sentiments and messages written on the hearts. If you have any ideas, please do get in touch!

Human Rights in the UK



On 7th June several members attended the annual Manchester Metropolitan University sustainability festival and held a stall which featured information about climate rights together with a “Human Rights in the UK” quiz.

The human rights quiz was delivered with the aid of the human rights wheel, borrowed from the Liverpool group, and turned out to be very popular with the young people attending the event.

After the announcement on that there would be a general election, we wrote to our MPs to share the Amnesty International UK manifesto for human rights in the UK. The subsequent change of government on 4th July presented us with a further opportunity to make some of our demands for human rights in the UK known to our newly elected (or re-elected) MPs. Thanks to Iona for drafting a letter which formed our weekly action on 26th July. If you have not yet sent this letter, you can still do it – please contact alison.wearden@gmail.com or ifbruce99@gmail.com for a copy.

The letter asked MPs to support the following Amnesty International demands relating to human rights in the UK:

1. Suspend arms transfers to Israel and champion the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court, including the execution of all arrest warrants.
2. Fairly and efficiently decide the claims of people seeking asylum in the UK, however they may arrive.
3. End the criminalisation of homelessness and make sure people across the UK can afford safe and decent homes.
4. Protect the right to protest by repealing those sections of the Police Crime Sentencing and Courts Act and the Public Order Act which have been used to punish peaceful protesters exercising their human rights.

Over the past weeks, there has been very limited progress relating to the above demands. The announcement on 2nd September by the Foreign Secretary David Lammy that the government was suspending 30 of 350 licences to sell arms to Israel in light of the possibility that these arms might be used to commit illegal acts, was described as “too limited” by Sacha Deshmukh, AIUK’s chief executive:

“While this decision appears to demonstrate that the UK has finally accepted the very clear and disturbing evidence of Israeli war crimes in Gaza, it’s unfortunately too limited and riddled with loopholes.”

“Exempting the F-35 fighter jet programme - essentially giving this programme a blank cheque to continue despite knowing that F-35s are being used extensively in Gaza - is a catastrophically bad decision for the future of arms control and misses a clear obligation to hold Israel accountable for its extensive war crimes and other violations.”

One good piece of news with respect to the situation in Israel and Palestine was the announcement by the government on 26th July that it would drop its challenge to the International Criminal Court over the issue of an arrest warrant for Benjamin Netanyahu, a move which was [strongly welcomed](#) by AIUK.

With respect to the criminalisation of homelessness and the need to respect basic economic and social rights here in the UK, AIUK has recently released a report [Broken Britain: Voices from the frontline of the fight for everyday rights](#). Using the stories of 301 people whose rights have been violated by poverty, adversity and stigma, the report focuses on rights to employment, education, health care, housing, security and transport, and sets out a set of priorities for the new government. It is an interesting read.

As readers will be aware, the right to protest in the UK has been severely curtailed by a number of pieces of legislation passed in the last two years, notably the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 and the Public Order Act 2023. Over recent months, we have seen just how draconian this legislation is. Many of the prosecutions that have been brought under these Acts don't make the news, but there was widespread revulsion at the jailing on July 18th of 5 Just Stop Oil activists who were sentenced to prison for terms from 3 to 5 years for conspiracy to cause non-violent disruption to national infrastructure. AIUK condemned the sentences and [wrote](#) of its “alarm over the ongoing crackdown against peaceful protest in this country, which violates all our human rights.” Twenty-two Just Stop Oil non-violent protestors have been jailed since the general election. Other cases relating to climate justice activists are ongoing, and there have also been arrests of pro-Palestine campaigners as detailed in this [report](#) from Netpol.

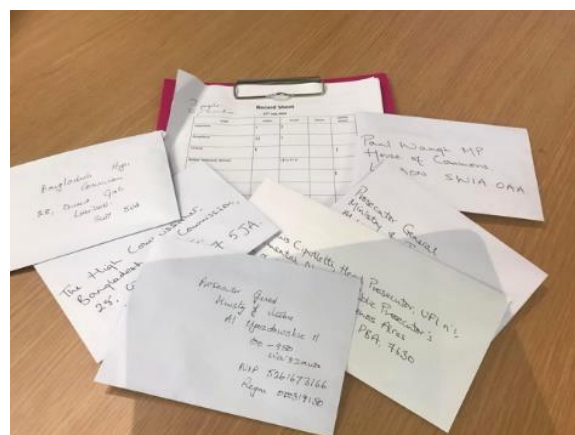
There was better news for human rights campaigner Trudi Warner, who had been charged with contempt of court for holding a placard reminding jurors of their right to acquit in accordance with their conscience. On 9th August, the government announced that it was dropping its case against her.

For developments on the rights of asylum seekers, see the Refugee Rights section below.

Individuals at Risk

We continue with our appeal writing get togethers near the café in Central Library. These take place on the 4th Saturday of every second month. At our July session only 3 people took part, nevertheless we sent 11 appeals, a mixture of letters, emails and online for cases in Egypt, Iran, Argentina Poland and Bangladesh, actions re Poland and Iran

Our next session will be on Saturday September 28th, 2-4pm Central Library. We provide details of current cases and all the information you need to write an appeal letter. However, if you prefer



you can also send emails and tweets (wifi is available in the Library). Do drop by for as long as you can spare - all are welcome. It's a very convivial way to get involved in Amnesty work. Sara Baptista and Anne Walker are currently sharing the organisation of this but it would be good to get someone else involved, especially as Anne and Sara are taking the lead in organising the regional conference this year (see below).

We also need to start thinking about our involvement in this year's Write for Rights campaign. Every year Amnesty provide 10-12 cases for an international focus for both messages of support and for appeals to the authorities. It runs though out November and December and is a great way to engage with members of the public about our work. We normally hold several stalls and there is the possibility of doing a more major event. If you are interested in helping plan this, please get in touch with anne.walker@amnesty.org.uk.

LGBTQ+ rights

On June 25th, at their invitation, Zoe, Alison and Hazel gave a talk about protest at one of the community events hosted by Pride MCR. We structured the talk around Amnesty's 5 messages about protest:

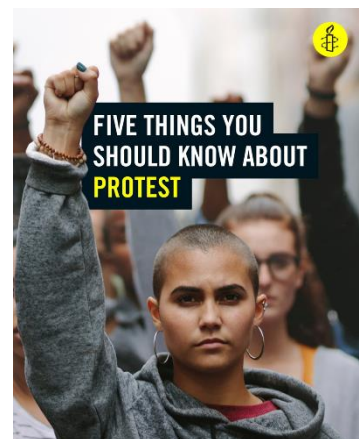
- Protest is a Human Right
- Protest is under attack in the UK
- Policing of protest is not always equal
- Protest is varied
- Protest makes a difference

and focused particularly on recent deteriorations in protest rights in the UK and on how the LGBTQ+ community can experience unequal policing of protest.

The talk took place before the group decided that it would have to drop out from the Pride Parade (see below) and was well-received.

In the past quarter, we have had to make a few changes to our original campaign plans for the LGBTQ+ subgroup. We were not able to hold a stall during the Sparkle weekend this year due to an increase in the admission fee and difficulty obtaining timely information for preparation.

In July, we discovered that one of the performers scheduled to appear at Pride had pulled out due to the Parade's sponsorship by booking.com, a company which profits from accommodation in the illegal settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. After discussion with colleagues at AIUK and an emergency meeting in the Manchester group, we reached a consensus that Manchester Amnesty should withdraw from participation. We subsequently issued a statement (reproduced below) which was placed on our social media sites and later covered in an article in [The Mill](#). The article is well worth reading. At the moment, the subgroup is looking into the possibility of joining an alternative Pride in September.



'It is with regret that Manchester Amnesty International group is withdrawing from this year's Manchester Pride due to the event's sponsorship by Booking.com, a company that promotes and profits from properties in illegal settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Amnesty International has highlighted Israel's unlawful occupation of Palestinian territories and its discriminatory laws and policies against Palestinians in its [2022 report \[amnesty.org.uk\]](https://www.amnesty.org.uk): Israel's Apartheid Against Palestinians

At a time when the Israeli government and IDF are flouting international law on an unprecedented scale resulting in the killing of over 38,000 Palestinians, mostly civilians, our members feel it is increasingly important to show our solidarity with the Palestinian people whose human rights have been so blatantly disregarded with such catastrophic results.

We also wish to make clear our condemnation of the atrocities committed by Hamas fighters against Israeli civilians in October 2023 and the continuing suffering of the remaining hostages and their families.

Although we will not be present at Manchester Pride this year, Manchester Amnesty continues to campaign for the rights of LGBTQ+ communities and we have committed to finding alternative actions for our members to take over the coming weeks.'

Statement to Manchester Pride from Manchester Amnesty

North West Regional Conference - Save the Date!

Saturday 23rd November 10am-4pm, Cross St Chapel, Cross St, M2 1NL

Plans are afoot to hold a get together of Amnesty activists from around the North West, organised by the NW Activism Reps Elena Auer and Anne Walker, with the help of Sara Baptista from the Manchester group. It will be in Manchester so we hope that you will all support it and lend a hand on the day.

The programme is in the very early stages of development, but we hope to have sessions on racial justice, facial recognition, craftivism and getting involved in Amnesty activism.

Look out for updates in the Weekly emails.

Press Freedom and Julian Assange

On 22nd June, at the AIUK Annual General Meeting, members of the Manchester Press Freedom and Julian Assange subgroup, together with members of the Global Amnesty Assange Network, put an emergency resolution to the conference requesting that the UK Section Board formally calls on the AI International Secretariat to review the position of Julian Assange as prisoner of conscience. The resolution was accepted.

At the time that the resolution to the AGM was accepted, Assange was still incarcerated in Belmarsh Prison. Three days later, on 25th June, Julian Assange was suddenly released from prison to be flown to the North Mariana Islands, which are part of US territory. He subsequently appeared in a US court there and pleaded guilty to a single charge of conspiring to obtain and disclose US classified documents. He was sentenced to 5 years imprisonment, which he had already served and was consequently freed.



While the release of Assange after all these years of incarceration without charge, under threat of extradition, was wonderful news for him and for his family and friends, [Amnesty International](#) were among many commentators who spoke about the untold damage done to press and media freedom by the relentless prosecution of Assange by the United States. AI's Secretary General, Agnes Callamard, made the following points:

“We have stated for years that the charges against Assange should have never been brought against him in the first place, that he certainly should have never been in prison, and that the UK should have never certified the extradition request.”

“Assange was wanted for activities that are fundamental to all journalists and publishers, who often receive sensitive government information from outside sources. The public has a right to know when a government is wrongdoing in its name. The US authorities have failed to conduct a full and transparent investigation into the alleged war crimes that Wikileaks brought to light. Instead, they chose to target and make an example of Assange for publishing information in the public interest that was leaked to him by sources”

Even though Assange is now, thankfully, free, the GAAN will continue to press for him to be recognised as a prisoner of conscience, arguing that such status will make it possible for him to be pardoned. Furthermore, it would mark the fact that the prolonged incarceration of Assange was politically motivated and an assault on press freedom. At the time of writing the issue is still under consideration by AI's International Board.

Members may have read about the arrest of journalist Richard Medhurst at Heathrow Airport, where he was held under provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism act, under suspicion of supporting a proscribed organisation as a result of his support for the Palestinian people. The National Security Act 2023 included amendments to the Terrorism Act 2000, giving the police new tools to investigate and respond to threats to national security, and empowering law enforcement bodies to act against individuals deemed to be aiding foreign powers. While the National Security Act is generally presented as modernising the UK's security system, it is feared by some commentators that this act could enable the arrest and detention of journalists for political reasons, and to suppress media freedom, just as happened with Assange.

Refugee Rights

While the new government quickly made the welcome announcement that it had dropped the Rwanda scheme, followed by an announcement that it would decommission the Bibby Stockholm and no longer use it to house asylum seekers, the general tone of pronouncements and rhetoric surrounding asylum seekers and refugees is very little changed from that of the previous government. AIUK have expressed the opinion that the focus on [border security](#) and “[smashing the gangs](#)” will be ineffective in addressing the problem of a huge backlog in asylum claims and the continued tragic loss of life of people trying to reach the UK. Instead [safe asylum routes](#) coupled with a fair, efficient and adequately staffed asylum system and the repeal of the Illegal Migration act are desperately needed.



Manchester Amnesty has signed up to the Together With Refugees “Fair Begins Here” campaign. See the June edition of the bulletin for the text of a letter which was sent to editors of various media outlets at the start of the month of June. During June (refugee month), we carried out a group photo action for posting on social media and also attended an open garden in Didsbury where we gave out orange hearts linking to our messages about refugees and asylum seekers. These are:

- *Restore the right to asylum for all who need it, with safe and fair decisions made in good time.*
- *Provide access to adequate legal, financial, housing and language support and give asylum seekers the right to work.*
- *Working in collaboration with other countries, create safe routes so that people seeking asylum do not have to use people smugglers and human traffickers.*
- *Repeal the Illegal Migration Act 2023, provisions of the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, and all other legislation which does not comply with international human rights law.*

In the coming months, we hope to take further action with the Fair Begins Here campaign. The campaign have prepared a letter which they are asking supporters to send to five contacts (organisations, charities, partners) to try to spread the messages and so that there is a critical mass to put pressure on the government in the autumn. If anyone would like to take part in this campaign or has ideas for organisations to contact, please email alison.wearden@gmail.com.

United Arab Emirates



On July 10th the UAE authorities announced the outcome of the trial of 84 defendants who had been accused of “establishing and managing a clandestine terrorist organisation in the UAE”. This 2014, abusive counterterrorism law was not in place when most of the defendants were initially sentenced for signing a letter requesting democratic changes to the government. Our two human rights activists were both part of this trial. Dr Mohammed al-Roken, who has already spent over ten years in prison, has been given a life sentence and Ahmed Mansoor, who already has a ten-year sentence, has been given 15 years. This is dreadful news. You can read Amnesty International’s response [here](#).

Sima Watling, the Amnesty researcher for the UAE spoke at our July meeting to update us on the situation for human rights in the UAE. She gave a bleak picture of a ruling family in total control of the media and a population unable to talk freely about human rights.

She urged us to continue to keep the names of the imprisoned activists on social media as this message gets through to their families and to the authorities. We plan to continue our and will coordinate social media campaigns with other groups over the coming months.

Over the coming weeks and months, together with other groups we will write to the Foreign Secretary David Lammy, seeking a meeting with him to discuss the human rights situation in the UAE. Towards the end of September, we will write to Andy Burnham, while other groups will write to their local mayors or councillors, including Sadiq Kahn. At this time we will also provide a letter for members in the 5 Manchester constituencies to write their MPs.