



We wish all our members a peaceful and happy festive season

Manchester Group Quarterly Bulletin Number 11, December 2024

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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

Manchester 10 Appeals; Royal Courts of Justice (December 19th & 20th)



We have recently learnt that nine of the Manchester 10 boys will have their appeals heard on December 19th - 20th at the Royal Courts of Justice in London. Six of the boys are appealing their convictions and three of them are appealing both the convictions and sentences. As well as being a hugely significant event for the Manchester 10 and their loved ones, the appeals are also very important in the on-going campaign against racism within the Criminal Justice system.

There are six grounds for appeal, the first being, *'The approach to the law of conspiracy by the judge was wrong'*. Lawyers from Garden Court Chambers are representing some of the boys and you can read their summary of the decision to grant leave to appeal here: <https://gardencourtchambers.co.uk/the-manchester-10-where-a-racialised-gang-narrative-led-to-unsafe-convictions/>

The summary outlines the ways in which racist gang narratives were used by the prosecution including the fact that the word *'gang'* was used 118 times in the judge's summing up of the case. Keir Monteith KC, the lawyer representing one of the boys said, *'I hope that this appeal succeeds so this miscarriage of justice can be overturned and the broken justice system fixed. As in this case and for far too long, the prosecution have relied on stereotypes, myths and assumptions to convict young Black lads of crimes they just didn't commit.'*

At least three Manchester Amnesty members will be joining supporters of the Manchester 10 outside the Royal Courts of Justice at the start of both days to draw attention to the Manchester 10 case and to show our solidarity with and support for the boys' families as they arrive at the courts. If there is space, we also hope to sit in the public gallery in the court for at least some of the hearing.

Once again, we are hugely grateful to Kids of Colour, (a Manchester anti-racist youth work organisation that has supported the boys and their families) for keeping us updated on the appeals and for mobilising support for the Manchester 10 in Greater Manchester and also in London. You can find out more about the work of Kids of Colour with young people of colour in Greater Manchester on their website <https://kidsofcolour.com/> If you use social media, please consider following, liking & reposting Kids of Colour accounts in this important run-up to the Manchester 10 appeals:

Twitter/X: @KidsofColourHQ; Instagram: kidsofcolourhq; Facebook: KidsofColourHQ

Scrap Prevent Campaign



The Scrap Prevent campaign group members completed the exercise of researching Manchester councillors to identify those who might support our campaign, and drew up a short list of 12 councillors. Emails were sent to these at the end of September, and most replied with supportive comments or offers to meet. Three members of the group met with a councillor in October and received very helpful advice about the best approaches to getting the support of the council. This resulted in us drafting a letter to the leader of the Council, Bev Craig, which will be handed to her soon, together with a copy of Amnesty's Prevent report and a small felt symbol of anti-racism made by a member of our craftivism group.

Israel and Palestine

Weekly Vigil

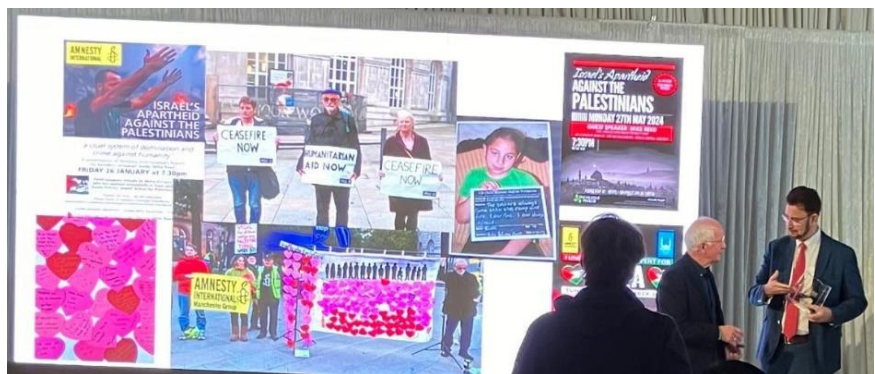
Our work on Israel-Palestine continues as the number of merciless killings mounts. We continue our weekly vigil (every Friday, 5 to 6pm in St Peter's Square). In October we reached the milestone of our 50th vigil. On this occasion many of our participants met in Central Library café for a drink and a chat - the first opportunity we have had to say a proper hello to each other, given that our vigil is held largely in silence. Later in October we were taken by surprise when we were joined by Julie Hesmondhalgh (star of stage and television). She made no fuss and simply stood in silence with those around her. She kindly gave permission for photographs.



In early November, when the darker evenings arrived, we changed the format of the vigil. We continue to hold large placards calling for observance of human rights and international law. We have reintroduced the display of tea lights, alongside large photos of the destruction of Gaza, and the message: CEASEFIRE NOW. Instead of offering the public the opportunity to write a message on a felt or paper heart, we now display a QR code leading to a simple action: this directs people to an Amnesty appeal to MPs to demand an end to arms transfers to Israel. Each week, many people stop and take the action instantly using their mobile phone. We continue to receive many warm messages of support and also generous donations from the public. Many have expressed their deep sadness, and some have shed tears as they try to express their feelings. The vigil participants also feel deeply moved and upset by the atrocities in Gaza and Lebanon. We feel we must publicly express our sorrow, our outrage and our demands. We have pledged to continue our vigil, and we currently have around 30 participants each week. We welcome others to join us, if only occasionally, to help us sustain this tremendous campaign action.

Award to Manchester Amnesty from the Muslim Community

On 22 November the British Muslim Heritage Centre held a gala dinner and awards ceremony, attended by the Bishop of Manchester and many other local dignitaries. The award for humanitarian work was given to Manchester Amnesty International Group, for our determined campaigning for the rights of Palestinians. Several Manchester Amnesty members attended and the award was presented by Afzal Khan MP to Mike Reed. He gave a short speech demanding respect for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and a return to the clear message announced at the birth of that declaration: NEVER AGAIN.



Support for Zaatra project

In November, via our friends at Rethink Rebuild Society, we learned about some research being undertaken, with great difficulty due to the living conditions there, by a group of students at Palestine Polytechnic University, West Bank. The project has described how water scarcity is profoundly affecting the lives and heritage of people living in a rural village, Zaatra, near Bethlehem, and aims to develop ways to remedy that situation. The students' work had been selected for presentation at a conference in Jordan and shortlisted for entry into a competition for some additional funding. We were asked to express our support for the project, which we did via a donation accompanied by the following statement:

Members of Manchester Amnesty International group wish you all the best with your valuable and important work for the people of Zaatra. Our donation comes from money donated during our weekly vigils held in Manchester city centre since October 2023 in support and solidarity with all those suffering in Palestine and Israel.

Recent developments relating to Israel and Palestine

In July the International Court of Justice issued an advisory opinion concluding that Israel's decades long occupation and annexation of Palestinian territory is unlawful because it violates some of the most fundamental tenets of International Humanitarian Law and denies Palestinians their human rights. Read more [here](#):

[NGOs call on all UN Member States to adhere to the ICJ Advisory Opinion on the unlawfulness of Israel's occupation - Amnesty International](#)

In September Israel shut down Al Jazeera's Ramallah office, another crushing blow for press freedom. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, at least 116 journalists and other media workers have been killed since 7 October 2023 making it the deadliest period for journalists since the gathering of data began in 1992. Read more [here](#):

[Israeli authorities' shutdown of Al Jazeera's Ramallah office a crushing blow for press freedom - Amnesty International](#)



In a report published in September, [Amnesty International said](#) that the Israeli military's campaign to significantly expand a "buffer zone" along the eastern perimeter of the occupied Gaza Strip should be investigated as the war crimes of wanton destruction and of collective punishment in a new investigation. Using bulldozers and manually laid explosives, the Israeli military has unlawfully destroyed agricultural land and civilian buildings, razing entire neighbourhoods, including homes, schools and mosques. In some videos, Israeli soldiers are seen posing for pictures or toasting in celebration as buildings are demolished in the background.

In November the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants against Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant of Israel and Mohammed Diab Ibrahim Al-Masri of Hamas for charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Amnesty International's Secretary General Agnès Callamard said: "Today's arrest warrants represent a historic breakthrough for justice and must signal the beginning of the end of the persistent and pervasive impunity at the heart of the human rights crisis in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory."

Read more [here](#):

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/11/israel-opt-netanyahu-gallant-and-al-masri-must-face-justice-at-the-icc-for-charges-of-war-crimes-and-crimes-against-humanity/>

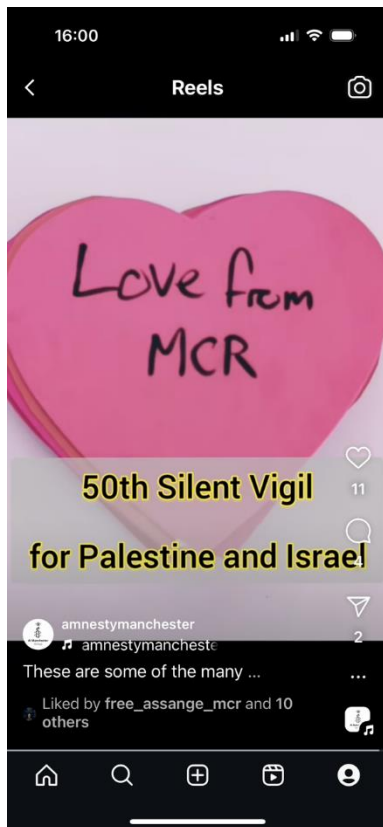
Distressing excerpt from an article commissioned but not published by the Guardian US

Dr Mark Perlmutter, an orthopaedic and trauma surgeon from North Carolina who volunteered as an emergency doctor in Gaza said: "Of all the disasters I've seen ... 40 mission trips, 30 years, Ground Zero, earthquakes, all of that combined doesn't equal the

level of carnage that I saw against civilians in just my first week in Gaza. I've seen incinerated children,... shredded children. Children are definitively being shot by snipers. Whole families buried alive en masse in the rubble of their homes, over and over; torn bodies; shredded bodies; broken bodies; burnt bodies; dismembered bodies everywhere; blood and gore in the town squares and roads; unreachable bodies rotting in the streets....”

The enormity of harm beggars belief. We don't yet have a language for it. As I watched exhausted families flee from place to place, hungry, thirsty, dirty, and bewildered, I kept thinking about the words of the Israeli general Rafael Eitan, who promised in 1983 that after the land was settled: “All the Arabs will be able to do about it will be to scurry around like drugged cockroaches in a bottle.” The state of Palestinians in Gaza is Israel's vision manifest.

Craftivism



We produced a short video using some of the hearts collected at our weekly Palestine/Israel vigils and posted it on Instagram to coincide with our 50th vigil. You can watch the video [here](#) Thanks to Sara for her work on this.

Members of the craftivism group have made a second banner using hearts collected at the Palestine/Israel vigils. This is in the form of a mobile (see photo). We still have many hearts left to produce more displays.

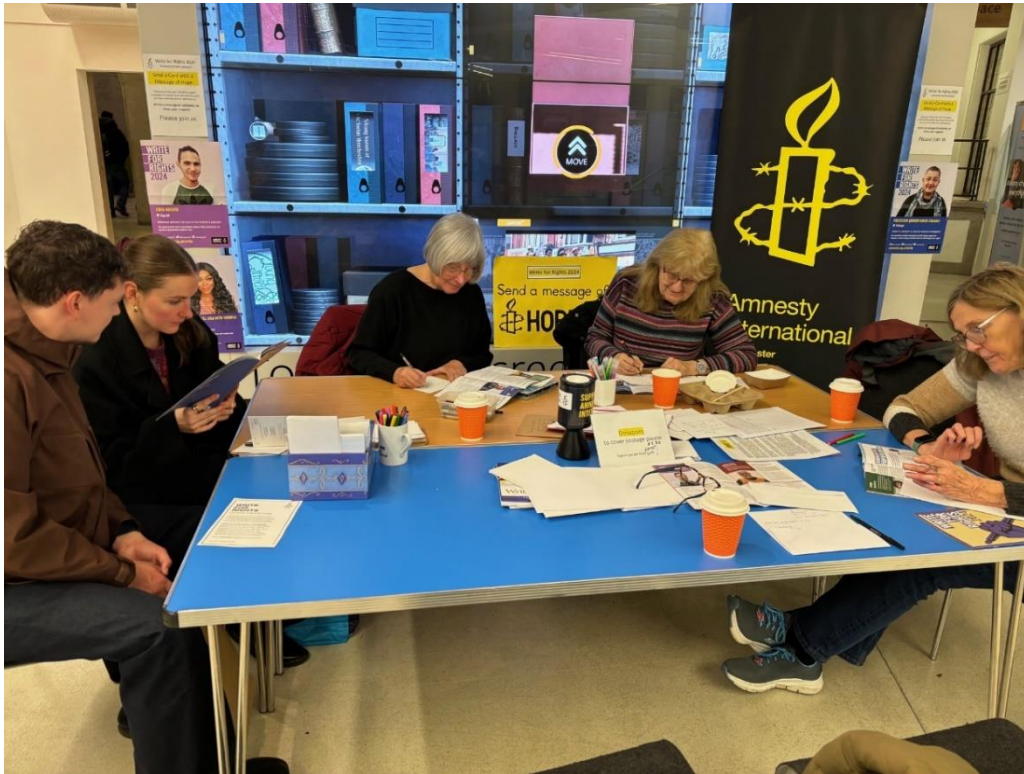


Recently, we have displayed our banners at the following events and venues:

Greater Manchester Friends of Palestine event, Klondyke, Levenshulme, 12th November;
Amnesty North West Regional Conference, Cross Street Chapel, 23rd November;
Greater Manchester CND Craft Fair, Birch Community Centre, Rusholme, 30th November;
Amos Trust Christmas Tour event, Ascension Church, Hulme, 3rd December -
and plan to display them at the Whalley Range Peace and Justice Write for Rights event in St Margaret's Church Hall on 7th December.

Individuals at Risk

Our final bi-monthly appeal-writing drop in session of 2024 (and possibly our final session full stop – see below) took place in the Library café on 30th November. The session focused on the cases in the 2024 Write for Rights booklet. Five members of our group attended, one of them a new member, and we were pleased that four members of the public stopped by to talk to us and write support cards. In total, we wrote 18 solidarity messages, 12 appeal letters and 4 emails. A very productive afternoon's work!



Anne Walker, who acts as one of our North West Regional Activism Reps, is stepping down from organising the Individuals at Risk drop-in sessions in the New Year and we would like to thank her for running these sessions over many years. However, if we are going to continue with the Individuals at Risk drop-ins, **we urgently need a new coordinator**. This is a role that is quite bounded. The 6 half days per year are booked in advance, the materials would be passed on (but would need replenishing) and the pre-session organisation is straightforward.

Are you interested in taking on this role? If so, please contact Anne or Alison soon!

Human Rights in the UK

We have not had a coordinator for our work on human rights in the UK since Iona left Manchester. We thank Iona for her work with us and wish her all the best for the future. Those who are interested in getting involved in campaigns in this area might like to join the Human Rights in the UK Collective coordinated by Elena Auer of the Liverpool group. Let Alison know if you would like to be put in touch with her. In the meantime, [this article](#) from the Guardian of 2nd December, about a completely innocent woman who was detained under the Terrorism Act on account of the (non-terrorist) activities of her daughter, should convince you that there is work to be done to safeguard Human Rights in the UK.

Refugee Rights



Recently published Home Office statistics show that there are [133,409 people waiting](#) for an initial asylum decision. The majority of these will be granted refugee status either immediately or on appeal. There is some evidence that the government has sped up the processing of asylum claims, but even so the “backlog” is bigger than it was 3 months ago; there is also a large backlog in appeals. [This piece](#) by The Migration Observatory suggests that the proportion of asylum seekers whose

claims are successful is falling, probably due to the more stringent criteria for successful claims which were set out in the Nationalities and Borders Act (NABA) 2022.

In October, AIUK published a [briefing paper](#) calling for a fair and efficient process for making asylum decisions, making five proposals to address this goal:

1. A single consistent process for deciding asylum claims
2. A designated individual, with decision-making powers, to deal with the entire claim
3. Legal aid for effective and independent legal assistance and representation
4. Decision makers should apply international law standards for determining claims
5. When the claim is successful, grant indefinite (rather than finite) leave to remain.

FAIR BEGINS HERE PARLIAMENTARY PROMISE CAMPAIGN

Together with Refugees, a coalition of over 600 local and national organisations committed to a kinder, fairer and more effective way of supporting asylum-seekers and refugees, has launched a campaign called Fair Begins Here, the aims of which align very closely with those outlined in the Amnesty briefing.

New legislation on refugees is likely to be introduced in Parliament next year. Now is the time to make sure local MPs know that a massive 80% of people in the UK want a well-managed, fair and compassionate asylum system. We need to both ensure that MPs know about the work already being done in their communities to support refugees and to secure their support for a fairer system.

The Fair Begins Here campaign seeks to have a dialogue with MPs in order to influence them to support a fairer asylum system. As noted in previous bulletins, Manchester Amnesty has signed the Fair Begins Here pledge and we will now work with other local refugee and asylum-seeker organisations to secure the commitment of local MPs.

We have incorporated the text in the box below into a petition. We will have the petition at the Whalley Range Peace and Justice Fair, Saturday 7th December 2 – 5pm at St Margaret’s Church, Rufford Road M16 8AE. From the postcodes of people who sign the petition, we will identify their MPs and call for meetings with them.

Please let Alison know if you would like to be involved in this campaign, and if you would like a copy of the petition to take to organisations and communities that you belong to.

The Fair Begins Here Parliamentary Promise asks MPs to confirm:

I am proud that in the area I represent, people go the extra mile to welcome refugees – opening their homes, volunteering, speaking up, donating. However, the UK's asylum system is not working. It's not working for refugees and it's not working for local communities.

Along with the majority of people across the country and hundreds of local and national civil society organisations, I want an approach to the asylum system that is well managed, fair and compassionate. We need a system that represents who we are and that works for everyone. I am calling for a fair new plan for refugees that:

- *Ensures protection for people fleeing war and persecution by upholding the UK's commitment under international law to the right to claim asylum.*
- *Provides a proper strategy for welcoming refugees, who do so much to enrich our society, by ensuring fair, rapid decisions on their application for asylum, and the chance to rebuild their lives through settling in a community.*
- *Forges stronger global cooperation to tackle the root causes that force people to flee their homes and provides positive solutions when they do, including through safe routes to refugee protection.*

I commit to do all I can to make this happen and promise to:

- *Stand together with refugees in my constituency and Parliament.*
- *Take action to win a fair new plan for refugees for our country.*
- *Support local groups in my community that welcome and support refugees.*
- *And I call on MPs from all parts of the country and all parties to join me and sign this Promise. Because fair begins here, with all of us.*

United Arab Emirates



Thank you, those members who wrote to their MP about our human rights activists in UAE prisons. One email was sent to all five Manchester MPs asking them to forward our concerns to David Lammy and requesting a meeting with Amnesty representatives. Two MPs have forwarded the letter and several others in the UK have also responded to other Amnesty group letters. The Reading and Sutton groups have received a reply from the FCDO, from the Minister for the Middle East, Hamish Falconer, but this merely expressed awareness of the situation and made no promises of any change in action. It did not recognise the new charges

brought against these prisoners in the summer of this year imposing a life sentence on Mohammed al-Roken (pictured). We are disappointed in this response and will consider our next moves at our coming meeting with the Amnesty UAE coordinator, Alma Rinaldi.

North West Regional Conference



Local Amnesty volunteers, led by the North West Activism Reps (Anne Walker and Elena Auer), organised our first regional get together since before covid, on November 23rd. This whole day event was held in Manchester and attracted some 40 people from across the region with a mix of local group members, individual members and people who were just interested in finding out what Amnesty is all about.



We had great sessions on racial justice, craftivism (with some hands-on activity), protest, anti-death penalty and improving our impact. It was a friendly, fun and inspiring day. Members of the Manchester group played a leading role – in particular, a huge thank you goes to Hazel, Alison, Kathryn and Lima for being prepared to speak in the sessions, to Sara for being part of the organising team and to Jenny for serving drinks and clearing up.

Enormous thanks to the organisers for all their work on this event, and thanks to all those who helped on the day.

The organising team and the Manchester speakers

