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| Dates for your diary | Tuesday 01/04/2025, 19:30: Group AGM (online) Saturday 05/04/2025, 1300 – 1600: South East Regional meeting, Balcombe Saturday 21/06/2025, 19:30: Concert, Christ Church / Festival of Chichester |
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Dear writers

Local events

Tuesday 01/04/2025, 19:30 Group Annual General Meeting (online). Our Group Constitution requires an AGM every year. The Group Committee would like to provide you with our annual reports, which are included with this Newsletter, and hope you will be able to attend the Group AGM via Zoom.

- A reminder email, **with the Zoom link included**, will be sent out the week before the online meeting takes place

Agenda for Bognor, Chichester & District Group AGM, 19:30, online via Zoom

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the last AGM, 02/04/2024 (copy available on request rdewick2@gmail.com)
3. Matters arising
4. Reports
5. Elections of officers
6. Future programme
7. Any other business

Saturday 21/06/2025, 19:30: Fund-raising concert for Amnesty, Christ Church, Chichester. As part of the Festival of Chichester 2025. Details to follow.

Other events

Kent Network Speaker meeting (online). This is co-ordinated by Arianna Pisetti, who is the Activism Representative for the South East (Surrey, Sussex and Kent) and helps organize the Surrey and Sussex Network. This helps us to continue to have regular meetings, with limited resources and people, as we share the meetings with others across the southeast. These take place every third Tuesday, online: the next one is **Tuesday 18/03/2025, 19:30 – 20:30**. Please contact Kath bognorandchichesteramnesty@outlook.com if you would like to attend, and she can share the link and the topic with you.

Saturday 05/04/2025, 1300 – 1600: South East Regional meeting, Balcombe Parish Hall. Members of the South East region (Kent, Sussex and Surrey) are meeting in-person to share experiences, discuss local groups health, and plan a future South East Regional meeting (formerly 'conference'). The Bognor Regis, Chichester & District Group will be represented by Kath, our Chair; and other members are welcome to attend. Further details of a future regional meeting will be shared with you all, after the planning meeting.

Carry on writing!

Bob Dewick, Amnesty

Annual reports for 2024

Treasurer’s Report for the year Jan 2024 – Dec 2024

| Income | Expenditure | Total (£) |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|-----------|
| Subscriptions | | 475.00 |
| Donations | | 00.00 |
| Arias for Amnesty | | 00.00 |
| Street Collection | | 00.00 |
| Amnescoffee morning | | 00.00 |
| GreetingsCardsCathedral | | 00.00 |
| | Secretary | -82.45 |
| | Membership Sec | -00.00 |
| | Other postage | -00.00 |
| | Rent | -35.00 |
| | Greetings Cards postage | -00.00 |
| | AIUK affiliation fee | -72.00 |
| | AIUK Donation | -500.00 |
| | Brought Forward | 909.13 |
| | Balance | 694.68 |

After the group's report for last year were submitted to AIUK, we received the following acknowledgment from Richard Glynn, the organisation's UK Community Group's Fundraiser, to which I would like to add my personal thanks:

It's good to see the group's finances are in good shape and that you were able to fund your campaigning activities and make a generous contribution to Amnesty International UK.

I can see that all your income came from donations from group members. Please pass on my thanks to all who contributed – Amnesty international UK depend on donations from individuals like this to fund the movement.

This year, the group does, in fact, have a fundraising event in the offing, on 21 June at Christchurch in Chichester, a return of the very popular concert by Rebecca (Grove) and friends. Please keep an eye out for more details in the newsletter and do support the event if you can. As always, thank you so much for your continued support.

Breege Gallagher

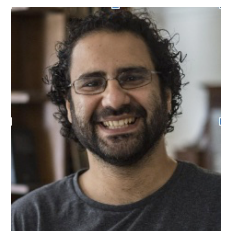
Review of the year: Campaigns March 2024 – March 2025

The group continues to focus on the terrible human rights situation in Egypt. **Margaret Robertson’s** dedicated work in co-ordinating the group’s actions in 2024 have focused on the following cases:

Alaa Abd El-Fattah

Campaigning to support Alaa Abd El-Fattah has continued to dominate this year’s actions, although, tragically, the on-going catastrophe in the Middle East, triggered by the horrific events in Israel and Gaza, overshadowed other recent developments in the area.

The situation in Egypt at the start of 2024 did not bode well for any prospect of release for Alaa, following the re-election of President al-Sisi with a majority of 89.6% the vote. Sadly, despite continued campaigning throughout the year on his behalf, including:





- **March 2024** appeals to President al-Sisi to grant a Presidential pardon at the end of Ramadan and letters to the then Foreign Secretary, David Cameron urging him to put pressure on the Egyptian government to allow Alaa UK consular access
- **July 2024** a Father's Day event in Brighton in July and online petition appealing for Alaa to be reunited with his son who now lives in Brighton
- **August 2024** Keys to Freedom appeal

in **October 2024** we received the deeply disappointing news that, although Alaa had already served five years in detention, he would not be released because the time he had spent in pre-trial detention would not be included. This was in contravention of Egyptian law. At this point, his mother, 68-year-old **Laila Soueif**, a maths professor at Cairo University, announced her intention to go on hunger strike until her son was released.

November- December 2024 The news of Alaa's continued detention sparked international outrage and gestures of support. Alaa was nominated by internationally acclaimed author Arundhati Roy, to share her PEN Pinter Prize 2024; there has also been on-going support for Alaa and his family from prominent celebrities and Nobel Laureates and a vigil was held on 19 December by Alaa's family and supporters outside the Foreign Office to highlight his case.

January - February 2025

As the new year starts, **Laila Soueif**, has been on hunger strike for over three months. She is now in frail health and her family and supporters are increasingly concerned about her condition. A letter of support and solidarity has been sent to Laila and her family on behalf of the Bognor & Chichester group There is also growing anxiety about Alaa's own mental health and his growing sense of despair. Letters shared by his family with *The Guardian* journalist, Patrick Wintour, reveal that Alaa is considering renouncing both this Egyptian and U.K. citizenship as he feels neither country has acted effectively to defend his human rights. This knowledge must surely motivate us to intensify our efforts in his support as a matter of great urgency.

The group has also campaigned on behalf of a variety of other Egyptian cases including:

- **Hoda Abdelmoniem.** Human Rights lawyer, **Hoda Abdelmoniem**, who has already been held in detention for five years, is now facing new trumped-up charges preventing her release. She is reportedly in very poor health.
- **Anas al-Betlagy** has been detained for 10 years and held in terrible conditions solely because he is the son of prominent Muslim Brotherhood leader, **Mohamed al-Betlagy**.
- **Tawfik Ghanem.** The group sent urgent action appeals on behalf of **Tawfik Ghanem**, 68-year-old Egyptian journalist who has been arbitrarily detained since May 2021 and is being denied appropriate medical treatment for a variety of medical issues including diabetes, a bone disease and a skin condition.
- **Oqba Hashad** Disabled prisoner, **Oqba Hashad**, is detained because of his brother's activism. He has already been detained for longer than the two-year pre-trial period permitted and has been denied his legal rights of representation as well as medical treatment and the use of his prosthetic leg. **Oqba** was one of the **2024 Write for Rights** cases.
- **Mahmoud Hussein** Mahmoud was arrested in 2014 for wearing a t-shirt with an anti-torture slogan and subjected to two year pre-trial detention. In 2016 he had been released on bail but in 2018 he was sentenced to life imprisonment in his absence in 2024. He was rearrested in June 2024 and suffered torture and ill treatment while in detention in Badr Prison. He is now reported to be in very poor health.
- **Badr Mohamed** was convicted in 2023, after a very unfair trial, on charges relating to protests in Ramsis Square in 2013 when he was aged 17. He is now held in the notorious Badr prison in dreadful conditions and separated from his wife and young child who are in Austria. We have taken action twice on his behalf in 2024.
- **Sudanese Refugees in Egypt** The group has also acted in support of Sudanese refugees in Egypt, who are subject to mass arrests and forcible deportation based on their migration status.

And finally, some positive news

Many of you will remember campaigning for the closure of **Case 173** which had involved the harassment, including freezing of assets, of at least seven organisations and 11 NGO workers, as well as travel bans against at least 31 human rights defenders and NGO staff in Egypt. **Case 173** is finally closed. However, assets remain frozen for many of the human rights workers, including renowned women's rights lawyer, **Azza Soliman**, for whom we campaigned for a number of years.

Working with Amnesty's Middle Eastern regional network, Margaret has also highlighted for us further actions, as follows:

Algeria

- **Good News from Algeria:** **Ihsane El Kadi** is an Algerian journalist who was been arrested, fined and imprisoned on vague charges because of his outspoken criticism of the repressive regime in Algeria. Following urgent action appeals in 2024, we were delighted to hear the news of his release in December 2024.

Libya

- **Maryam Mansour** is a Libyan blogger and activist who was arrested by security forces after criticising the distribution of cooking gas by the Libyan armed forces in southern Libya. She is held in poor conditions and not allowed visits with the result that she is in poor mental health. Urgent action appeals were sent in September 2024.

Morocco

- **Good News from Morocco:** In July 2024 we were happy to share the news that the Moroccan authorities released journalists, Omar Radi, Taoufik Bouachrine and Soulaïmane Raïssouni and human rights activist, Saida Alami on 29 July 2024 after they received royal pardons.
- **Morocco:** However, many activists are still unjustly imprisoned including **Nasser Zefzafi**, sentenced in June 2018 to twenty years in prison for his peaceful campaigning and held in terrible conditions. An online petition was signed in August 2024 to call for his release.

Tunisia

The situation in Tunisia continues to be repressive so we have been asked to take action on behalf of a variety of Tunisian cases this year including:

- **Sihem Bensedrine**, (aged 74), who was on hunger strike in protest against the extension of her pre-trial detention on charges relating to her roles as President of the Truth and Dignity Commission.
- **Noureddine Bhiri** ex-Justice Minister, and senior Ennahda leader, unjustly convicted and detained because of charges of his wanting to 'change the form of government.'
- **Sonia Dahmani**, a Tunisian lawyer imprisoned because of comments she made about migration.
- **Abir Moussi** an activist detained because of her comments criticising the electoral process in Tunisia and alleging that elections are rigged.
- **Rached Tambour** imprisoned for peacefully voicing his critical opinion through art/graffiti.
- **Jaouhar Ben Mbarek, Khayyam Turki, Issam Chebbi, Ghazi Chaouachi, Ridha Belhaj and Abdelhamid Jelassi**, politicians arrested on unfounded accusations of "conspiracy against state security." They face charges which might incur the death penalty.

Other campaigning actions undertaken:

- In support of journalist **Maria Ponomarenko**, held in solitary confinement in the Russian Federation.
- For **Toomaj Salehi**, Iranian rapper, activist and hip-hop artist who remained in detention despite his death sentence being overturned.
- For **Afghan women**, suffering appalling human rights abuses under Taliban rule.
- Against serious rights violations by troops from Türkiye and militias supported by Türkiye in Afrin in **Syria**, including arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, looting and the taking over of schools, thereby disrupting the education of thousands.



Chair's Report, March 2024 – March 2024

- We welcomed Arianna Pisetti as the new Activism Representative for the South East, who took up her role in 2024. Arianna is the new South East Activism Rep and also an Amnesty member of the Guildford local group and the newly established Amnesty Surrey and Borders Network. She was part of Amnesty Italy before moving to England in 2015. She is hoping to work with the Amnesty groups near Surrey (Portsmouth, Horsham, Bognor Regis and Chichester, Esher, Southampton) to start a Network together, like Kent has done three years ago or so.
- We have benefitted from Arianna's involvement in the Kent and Surrey Networks online, being invited to regular online talks for an area of the South East where it is difficult to maintain the more traditional 'Amnesty group' organization. This has led to the creation of an online network which tries to ensure regular online meetings for Amnesty members to gain the benefit for a group/network affiliation. We expect this work to develop over 2025, with a regional meeting ('conference' currently being planned)
- We were sorry to see the disappearance of the regular *Real Lives* section in the Amnesty magazine, but urge members to continue to support individuals at risk through completing actions advertised through our Newsletter as well as seeking case through the online Urgent Action page.
- Our Autumn **Pumble** (pub-ramble) this year was Fishbourne Harbour, ending at the Bull's Head in Fishbourne itself.
- Our **Write for Rights** action this year took place in Barnham. Hosted by Scott and Margaret, attendees completed cards for all the WfR cases highlighted by Amnesty and letters to the authorities in a number of key cases, fuelled by cake and coffee.

My grateful thanks to the members of the Committee for their hard work, support and friendship over the last year – mainly online but great to have a couple of face-to-face meetings/social events – and to group members who have been able to support the Group's work this year. Please do consider coming along to one of our Zoom meetings to find out what we do and if you can help support the Group: particularly if you are interested in steering a campaign on a topic that particularly interests you, or helping to run a social media account, or just supporting the planning of future events: you would be very welcome!

Chair,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate Steerfame". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a thin horizontal line.

Amnesty action: campaigns & letter-writing

Egypt update from Margaret, our Campaign Co-ordinator

I am sure you will all be extremely concerned that I have not received any further updates about Alaa's situation or the rapidly declining health of his mother since my update in last month's newsletter.

Thanks very much to all of you who responded to the recent very urgent appeal to President al-Sisi reminding him about the desperate situation regarding **Alaa Abd el-Fattah's** mother, **Laila Soueif**. (pictured here with Peter Greste in February 2025) As you will know from last month's newsletter, she is in a critical condition as a result of her hunger strike in protest against the refusal of the Egyptian authorities to release Alaa, although he has served the full sentence of five years in prison.



- If you have not yet responded to that urgent appeal, please take this opportunity to renew pressure on the Egyptian government by emailing President al-Sisi using this template message (below)

Please be assured, I will pass on any news as soon as I hear anything further.

Thank you all for your support.

What you can do

Pease send Appeal on behalf of Alaa Abd el-Fattah to President al-Sisi at

p.spokesman@op.gov.eg

Your Excellency,

I am writing to express my deep concern that prominent Egyptian-British activist **Alaa Abdel Fattah** continues to be detained, even though he had completed the length of his five-year prison sentence on 29 September 2024.

In protest at his ongoing detention, on 30 September 2024, Alaa Abdel Fattah's mother, **Laila Soueif**, announced an open-ended hunger strike, surviving on herbal tea, black coffee and rehydration salts. On 24 February 2025, **Laila Soueif** was hospitalized in Saint Thomas Hospital in London after her vitals dropped significantly, including her blood sugar and blood pressure. After nearly five months of hunger strike and losing nearly 30 kilograms, "there is now an immediate risk to life including further deterioration or death", according to a report by a medical consultant in Saint Thomas Hospital dated 25 February 2025.

Egyptian security forces last arrested **Alaa Abdel Fattah** on **29 September 2019**. In December **2021**, an Emergency State Security Court (ESSC) convicted **Alaa Abdel Fattah** on charges of "spreading false news" for sharing a social media post under Case No. 1228/2021. **On 3 January 2022**, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi ratified the verdict against **Alaa Abdel Fattah** and two other defendants. A document issued by the prosecution and seen by Amnesty International indicated that the authorities are refusing to count time spent in pre-trial detention as part of his prison sentence and consider that his sentence commenced from the date of ratification, rather than from the date of his arrest. The document states that **Alaa Abdel Fattah** is to be released in January **2027**.

On **28 January 2025**, during Egypt's Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the UK has called for the release of **Alaa Abdel Fattah**. On 16 February, **UK's Prime Minister Keir Starmer** announced that he met **with Laila Soueif** and is committed to do everything in his power to secure his release; a commitment repeated during Prime Minister's Questions on 26 February 2025. **On 27 February 2025, a group of UN Special Rapporteurs urged the Egyptian authorities to immediately release Alaa Abdel Fattah.**

Despite this chorus of voices calling for his release, he remains arbitrary detained while his mother's life is at risk. I urge you to release **Alaa Abdel Fattah** immediately and unconditionally, as he is detained solely for exercising his human rights. Pending his release, he must have regular access to his lawyers, family and adequate healthcare and be held in conditions that meet international standards for the treatment of prisoners. He must be granted a consular access without further delay.

Yours sincerely

Urgent Action: Libya – Appeal on behalf of Sheikh Muftah Al-Amin Al-Biju

Ailing 79-year-old **Sufi Sheikh Muftah Al-Amin Al-Biju** has been forcibly disappeared since his arbitrary arrest from his home in Benghazi on 4 February 2024 amid an intensified crackdown on Sufi clerics and activists by armed groups allied to the self-proclaimed Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF), in de facto control of eastern Libya. Concerns over his health and wellbeing have been heightened by recent reports on the use of torture and other ill-treatment in Gernada prison, where he is believed to be held.



What you can do

Please send your appeal to

- Field Marshall Khalifa Binqasem Haftar, General Commander of the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF)
- c/o The Libyan Embassy, 15 Knightsbridge, London, SW1X 7LY

Dear Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar

I am writing to express my deep concern over the ongoing enforced disappearance of 79-year-old **Sufi Sheikh Muftah Al-Amin Al-Biju** (hereafter **Shaikh Al-Biju**), since his arbitrary arrest from his home in the area of Bouatni in Benghazi on 4 February 2024 by heavily armed men in plainclothes. **Sheikh Al-Biju's** detention is part of a larger crackdown targeting Sufis not espousing the Madkhali Salafi ideology to which many powerful armed groups allied to LAAF adhere. A year on, the family has received no official information regarding his whereabouts, fate, or legal status.

Amnesty International learned that the some 20 armed men who arrested **Sheikh Al-Biju** also ransacked his home and stole some 150,000 Libyan dinars (33,270 USD) before driving away in six vehicles to the Security Directorates' Support Body base in the eastern region, located in the Ras al-Minqar area in Benghazi, and nominally under the oversight of the Ministry of Interior to the "Libyan Government" of Acting Prime Minister Ossama Hamad. Officials at the Security Directorates' Support Body denied having him in custody, and a complaint to the Attorney General of the Benghazi Appeals Court on 15 February 2024 regarding **Sheikh Al-Biju's** disappearance has gone unanswered.

Amnesty International learned that relatives were told by unofficial sources that **Sheikh Al-Biju** was being detained in Gernada prison, near the eastern city of al-Bayda, where his health has been deteriorating since his incarceration. Even prior to his detention, **Sheikh Al-Biju** had diabetes and a frail immunity system being a cancer survivor. A family member also learned of **Sheikh Al-Biju's** brief transfer to Cyrenaic Teaching Hospital, located in Shahat, in September 2024, but was unable to visit or obtain more information. Concerns about his wellbeing are mounting amid reports of torture and other ill-treatment in Gernada prison. Former detainees also recount cruel and inhuman detention conditions including exposure to extreme cold without climate appropriate clothing or bedding, and denial of adequate healthcare.

I urge LAAF to immediately disclose the fate and whereabouts of **Sheikh Al-Biju**; and release him immediately as his detention is linked solely to his exercise of his human rights, including to freedom of religion. In the meantime, the LAAF must grant **Sheikh Al-Biju** access to his family, lawyers and adequate healthcare, including in outside hospitals if necessary. He must be protected from torture and other ill

treatment and held in conditions meeting international standards. Finally, the LAAF must also allow independent monitors unfettered and unannounced access to Gernada prison and other prisons and detention facilities under its control in eastern and southern Libya.

Yours sincerely

Some good news to share – Sihem Bensedrine and Idris Hasan

Thank you for your mobilization and for all the work that you did to support our Urgent Action for **Sihem Bensedrine**. The Tunis Court of appeals this month approved a request for her provisional release and put her under a travel ban. This is a major win, in a context where pre-trial detention has become routine and interminable for most detainees in politically motivated cases in Tunisia. We are incredibly relieved that she is back with her family. The charges against her might still lead to trial, so the IS will keep following the case closely and will keep us updated: but let us hope that no further action is required.



Some of you will remember in May/June 2022 doing an Urgent Action for **Idris Hasan**.

He is an ethnic Uyghur man who was detained in Morocco and at risk of extradition to China: we were asking that he not be extradited. Amnesty have been campaigning for his release since he was first detained in July 2021. Idris is now safe and no longer at risk of extradition: thank you for all that you did to achieve the above.



Good news: Rocky's death sentence lifted

Just over a year ago, over 22,000 Amnesty UK supporters, and thousands more across the world, showed their support for the case of **Rocky Myers**, a Black man with an intellectual disability who has been on death row in Alabama since 1994, despite flawed legal proceedings and no evidence directly linking him to the crime for which he was convicted. We are pleased to let you know that Alabama Governor Kay Ivey reduced Rocky's death penalty sentence to life in prison. This is only the second time a death penalty case in Alabama has been changed since 1976, and - while Rocky is still facing life in prison without parole - this is an important step in the flight for justice in his case.



Your support was important – thank you.

Want to do more?

Urgent Action Network

When you take action, you do it as part of a movement of tens of thousands of people across the world, working together to raise our voices, demand justice and make change happen. Please do take action, in solidarity with individuals at risk everywhere:

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions>