



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

Thursday 13th March 2025

Chair: Anne

This meeting was held on Zoom

Welcome and introductions

16 people joined the meeting tonight: Helen, Sue, Vicky, Liz, Ruth, Ian, Ilaria, Kate, Hilary, Michael, Iona, Durga Blanca, Paula

- Our guest speaker - Cherry Bird, AIUK's regional coordinator for South Asia

Women's Rights in Afghanistan

Cherry gave us a talk about womens' rights in Afghanistan to deepen our understanding and support our chosen campaign this year. Cherry briefly covered the last 100 years of political history in Afghanistan, so we could appreciate how things are as they are now.

Key restrictions for women and girls, and their implications, include

- no education for girls beyond grade 6 - this is the only country in the world to officially ban education
- virtually every sector of work is not allowed for women, including politics - this situation is worsening by the day
- freedom of movement vastly restricted
- a formal dress code exists - women are beaten in the street and arrested if they transgress
- forced and child marriages on the rise, which is one of the reasons for increased maternal mortalities
- girls are being "sold off" as they are seen as a drain on the family, of no worth
- health care - women can only be treated by women. The implications of stopping education for women will be catastrophic
- gender based violence has significantly increased
- freedom of expression has been severely hampered, particularly as female journalists are so restricted. Out of the house, women cannot raise their voices or be heard by others.
- the threat of arrests and torture prevail

- socialising - women are not allowed to use the parks, the gyms, beauty salons, cannot wear perfume or shoes that make a noise
- in homes and building where women can be seen, windows are to be boarded up
- uniquely in Afghanistan, female suicide are higher than men and increasing
- families are leaving, particularly educated women
- if they manage to get to neighbouring countries, such as Pakistan, Iran or Tajikistan, they are treated very badly.
- if they have access to social media, this benefits women as they can communicate - there is some education online but this is being clamped down when discovered
- Radio programmes are still going!

What can we do?

- continue to educate ourselves and others about the situation
- shine a light on the situation for Afghan women
- lobby other organisations, such as cricket, where the ICC are allowing the Afghan men's team to play, even though, under their own rules, all countries must have a women's team too.
- call on our leaders and world leaders to call the Taliban to account for their treatment of women and girls

Cherry mentioned 3 aid organisations should we wish to support and follow them

- Rukshana Media www.rukshana.com
- AfghanAid www.afghanaid.org.uk
- Paiwand www.paiwand.com

Cherry mentioned 2 books to read to learn more

- My Dear Kabul: A year in the life of an Afghan women's writing group - very readable and relate-able
- Farewell Kabul by Christina Lamb – a bit of a tomb, and some bits may be dated (2015) but very readable and informative

Amnesty has launched **a new petition** - **Break the Silence: End human rights violations in Afghanistan**

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/petition/break-the-silence-end-human-rights-violations-in-afghanistan/>

Anne asked if there were a team who wanted to lead our campaign on this for the group

Helen, Hilary, Ilaria & Paula volunteered. Also we talked about keeping in touch with Chris Manley from ACEN's Oppressed Peoples Campaign Group as they are looking to work on this campaign. Also Amnesty Feminists.

group to report back to the group next month

Group business

- **50th Birthday party review**

Anne led a review of the party - everyone was extremely positive about it. A real celebration of what being a part of Amnesty Reading means to us all and the people we've worked for.

The £250 Joy Nalpanis bequeathed us for a party was virtually all used, about £9 remains. But given some members of the group had donated some food, drink or cakes, we felt this could be a donation to the group.

Helen to email Joy's son Philip to let him know that the party went ahead and that Joy was remembered with great fondness

- **feedback from the Amnesty Feminist conference**

Ilaria and Helen had attended the Amnesty Feminist conference last weekend. Ilaria reported that we were treated very well, good amount of breaks, food & snacks and freebies. The business of the day was excellent, with excellent panels and workshops to support campaigning. One helpful session was from the [Joyful Activists](#), who shared ideas to prevent activism burn-out.

One grassroots campaign presentation was by a group called [Make it Mandatory](#) - They are passionate about Relationships and Sex Education being extended beyond 16, so Key Stage 5 pupils continue to have access to prevent violence and abuse against women. [please sign their petition here](#)

- **sponsored Human Rights Trail**

Iona and Helen shared more details and plans for the sponsored Human Rights trail.

Proposals include

- ❖ use trybooking so we can limit numbers to 20, which is safe for an outside walk
- ❖ entry fee of £10 which will come to the group

- ❖ use just giving to create a team page and encourage all walkers to raise sponsorship money - this to go to Amnesty's Charitable section so gift aid of 25% can be collected
 - ❖ Walk to be in central/city of London, and will have several stops linked to key campaigns
 - ❖ start and finish near cafes, etc
 - ❖ usual mention of need to change date if weather/circumstances make it too risky - we have been in touch with Amnesty to check risk assessments, etc
 - ❖ date - Sunday 14th September from 2.30pm - it will be about 2 hours
 - ❖ script could be shared with other groups
- group approved these arrangements, so more planning will occur!

- **FLAG**

Helen requested permission from the group to order a flag for demos and events. It will cost less than £20. AIUK have done the art work for us, so it's the official font/candle image. The group approved this purchase.

Helen to order

Group campaign updates

- **Anti-death Penalty**

- Good news - We are relieved to receive the news that Alabama Governor Kay Ivey has commuted Rocky Myers' death sentence, preventing his imminent execution. However, Rocky's fight for justice is far from over, he now faces life without the possibility of parole despite serious flaws in his case. Amnesty International has long supported Rocky, with thousands of activists worldwide taking action through petitions, letters, and calls as part of the Write for Rights campaign in 2023. While this commutation is a crucial step, Amnesty continues to call for a full review of his case and justice for others sentenced through the now outlawed judicial override system. Watch the emotional moment Rocky received the news [here](#).

- **Urgent Actions**

- Two women at risk of execution in Iran - **Pakhshan Azizi and Verisheh Moradi** [Watch Nazinin Zagheri-Radcliffe talk](#) about these cases and follow the link to [take action](#).

- Another women at risk of execution is **Sharifeh Mohammadi** [Please take action URGENTLY](#) to call for her freedom. You can post this letter or email to the Iranian Embassy in the UK - iranemb.lon@mfa.gov.ir
 - Two men are at risk of execution in Iran - Behrouz Ehsani and Mehdi Hassani. Again you can post a letter or email the Iranian Embassy - [Take Action here.](#)
- **UAE - our prisoners of conscience, Ahmed Mansoor & Dr Mohammed al-Roken**
 - During a hearing on 04 March 2025, the State Security Department of the Federal Supreme Court in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) rejected the appeals submitted by 53 people convicted in the case known in the media as the “UAE84” case. They include Ahmed Mansoor, who is on the Advisory Board of the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR).
 - 20th March is the anniversary of Ahmed’s arrest, so the group will be putting together a photo action to release on our socials on 20th, calling for his freedom
 - please send photos to Helen by 18th
 - [Read more here](#)
- **Türkiye**
 - **Good news** - Amnesty Türkiye chair, Taner Kiliç has been acquitted after a judicial process that has lasted almost 6 years.
 - **An Urgent Action** (came in the day after our meeting) Please take action (by 6th May) for Tabriz Saifi who is an Afghan asylum seeker currently in Türkiye, at risk of being returned to Afghanistan.
- **South Asia**
 - Hilary mentioned an action about garment worker - see [SA newsletter](#) for details
- **Cuba, South East Asia, Hong Kong** - none for this month

Reminders

- Chance2Dance4Charity - Friday 25th April [tickets here!](#)

AOB

- Blanca & Paula told us of Human Rights Festival in Oxford, starting this weekend - <https://www.oxfordhumanrightsfestival.net/>

- Helen informed the group that Amnesty’s National Conference and AGM would now be held in Warwick Uni, not Birmingham. [More details here.](#)

To carry forwards

- Chantry House music concert - the group are keen for Chantry House to happen again, though Helen has concerns about capacity of the team at that time of year, given that the Barn Dance is just a couple of weeks before that. Consider again before reaching out to Rachel and her musicians. Maybe request every other year?

Our Group’s confirmed Upcoming Events:

Event	Dates	Venue
Chance2Dance4Charity	Friday 25th April, 7.30-9.30pm	Peppard War Memorial Hall tickets here
Waterfest	Saturday 28th June, daytime	Forbury Gardens/Abbey Ruins
Reading Pride	Saturday 30th August, daytime	Kings Meadow
Sponsored Human Rights Trail	Sunday 14th September at 2.30pm	City of London
Barn Dance with the Scamping Rogues	Saturday 15th November, 7.30pm	St Michael’s church
Write for Rights	Thursday 11th December, 7.30-9.00pm	Reading Biscuit Factory

Other events likely to be planned in

- International Festival - October/November

Other Amnesty or local upcoming events:

Event	Dates	Venue
Demo at proposed site for new Chinese “Mega Embassy	Saturday 15th March 3pm	Royal Mint Court, London

Next meeting: Thursday 10th April 2025

Zoom at 8pm

Group session to discuss current campaigns and upcoming events

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82789559652?pwd=hQpxJaOWfEHppKy3KdMjzaob2X0hF6.1#success>

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