



CRISIS AND TRANSITION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

This is a shorter mailing than usual designed to give you a brief update on some of the work which has been taking place in the Middle East and North Africa in recent months.

In May, Amnesty released its Annual Report where once again, the MENA region was prioritised. The report details how many people across the region suffered from gross human rights violations committed on an extreme scale. It also showed that change is possible, and the ruling elites in the region have been shaken by the events of 2011 that led to the downfall of four heads of state. Governments are being taught by their people that trying to shoot their ways out of political crises is neither sustainable nor likely to keep them in power.

Examples of some of the progress in the region include:

- the release of thousands of political prisoners in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya;
- the establishment of some mechanisms – albeit limited and sometimes flawed – to look into and deliver accountability for past crimes, particularly in Tunisia and Egypt;
- the creation of greater space for freedom of expression, particularly in Tunisia and Libya, which, despite subsequent setbacks, have seen expanded opportunities for media and civil society.

Despite the massive challenges presented by transition, a momentum has been generated in e.g. Tunisia and Egypt to reform constitutions and legislation and build new, accountable institutions. That fragile opportunity for change needs to be grasped urgently and go beyond the short-term measures which have so far been taken, such as the dissolution of former security bodies.

Human rights in the Middle East and North Africa have been brought up the agenda internationally and increased scrutiny by media and civil society of the position of international powers, reinforcing the point that support for repression and human rights abuses undermines long-term political stability.

Even the complacent attitudes of some of the states in the region to their neighbours' human rights abuses have been challenged:

- Libya was suspended from the Arab League in February 2011.
- Syria was later suspended and, while it was widely criticized, the Arab League monitoring mission was a genuine effort to stop the bloodshed under extremely challenging circumstances.

You can read the full annual report on our website: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/annual-report/2012>.

SYRIA: We continue to prioritise our crisis response work on Syria, as the crisis deteriorates and appears to have evolved into an internal armed conflict in some parts of the country. We should not lose sight of the fact however that the vast majority of people opposing the Syrian government are peaceful protesters and the vast majority of those being brutalised by that government remain unarmed civilians.

In June, we released our most recent report on the country, *Deadly Reprisals* – deliberate killings and other abuses by Syria’s armed forces. This documents disturbing new evidence of grave abuses – many of which amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes – committed by forces of the Syrian authorities between February and May 2012. In light of this report, and as the death toll exceeds 10 000, our calls for Syria to be referred to the International Criminal Court, an arms embargo and assets freeze remain as valid and urgent as they were a year ago.

In the shorter term we are saying the mandate of the UN Observer mission in Syria (UNSMIS) is not fit for purpose to deal with the current situation: namely it lacks a human rights component which could monitor, investigate and publicly report on human rights violations. We are calling on the UN to ensure that the UN observer mission has an adequately resourced and strong human rights component with the mandate and capacity to monitor, investigate and publicly report on all human rights abuses. These monitors should be provided with necessary logistical and other support, including security, so they can travel to all areas of Syria to monitor and investigate reports of abuses and visit all places of detention.

The UN monitors of course need to be able to travel around the country in relative safety. How that is achieved is an issue for the UN itself: we are not prescribing what equipment and procedures should be used to best accomplish this, as these details are operational matters. But it would not be unreasonable in some circumstances for monitors to be accompanied by armed escorts to deter attacks.

There is an updated action on our website which targets the Russian authorities to use its influence to stop the bloodshed in Syria. Please visit the website to take action www.amnesty.org.uk/syria

EGYPT: The presidential elections in Egypt during May had a symbolic importance both inside and outside the country. Egyptians expect a new president to lead the country into a reform process that would translate the demands of the “25 January revolution” for dignity and social justice into reality. However, peaceful protestors calling for an end to military rule continued to be repressed by the security forces. Ahead of the presidential elections, deadly clashes between protestors and unidentified assailants took place in the neighbourhood of Abbasiya, with the security forces initially doing very little to stop the violence.

We have seen increasing reports of sexual harassment against women protestors in Egypt. A group of activists calling for an end to sexual harassment of women protestors were reportedly groped and punched by a mob of men as they marched across Tahrir Square on Friday 8th June. Amnesty continues to call on the Egyptian authorities to immediately launch an investigation into reports of sexual harassment and assaults against women protestors.

Trial of Mubarak: On June 2 ex-president of Egypt Hosni Mubarak was sentenced to life imprisonment for the killing of protestors during the “25 January revolution” last year. Mubarak’s then Minister of Interior Habib Adly was also sentenced to life imprisonment on the same charges. This is a significant step towards combating long-standing impunity in Egypt. However, the acquittal of all the other defendants, including senior security officials, leaves many still waiting for full justice. The Egyptian authorities must now establish an independent and impartial commission of inquiry to fill the gap that the court left open. For all the latest Egypt information and actions visit www.amnesty.org.uk/egypt

LIBYA: Libya remains in the midst of probably the most difficult transition of any of the North African countries. The country has fragmented into various different kinds of authority and the shape of the new state is only being negotiated now. Significant human rights abuses continue in many areas of the country in a climate of impunity; the authorities have recently passed legislation granting revolutionaries who committed abuses during and following the armed conflict immunity from prosecution and preventing victims from lodging criminal or civil complaints. The transitional authorities need to take

action to hold perpetrators accountable and provide redress to victims. For all the latest Libya updates visit www.amnesty.org.uk/libya

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS: Some of the work that Amnesty UK is doing may not be immediately visible to many supporters, but we are working hard with activists from the region, to help develop relationships and partnerships with them. We would like to share with you some examples of this work which we have been undertaking in recent months.

SYRIA SKILLSHARE TRAINING:



On Saturday 5 May, AIUK’s Active Learning Programme (based in the Casework& Activism team) ran a one day communications skills share event for 24 activists from British Solidarity for Syria. We have been working with this group since autumn 2011 and worked closely with them on the ‘I am not afraid’ photo stunt, the ‘Road to Freedom’ march and rally in London in October 2011 and the Global Day of Action in February 2012. AIUK has also been advising them on policy, messaging and campaigning where relevant.

Julie and Clare, Amnesty UK’s Active Learning Managers, along with 3 of our excellent volunteer trainers delivered a lively, participative event which was designed to build British Solidarity for Syria’s understanding of good communication, and increase activists confidence to be more effective campaigners. The skill share focused particularly on constructing key messages for specific audiences and trying them out in a variety of situations. We also ran workshops on media, lobbying and public speaking. The day was clearly a success for the participants, as their comments show:

“It allowed us to come out of our comfort zone and pick up new useful skills”

“Open and welcoming atmosphere, well thought out sessions. Gave me confidence in speaking and answering questions”

“I am absolutely impressed with the high profile trainers!”

It is great to see that since this training was delivered in May, British Solidarity for Syria have been putting their skills to great use – already having organised a lobby of parliament in June for their activists in June. They have also been training their own activists based on the training model we developed.

British Solidarity for Syria (BSS) are keen to put their training into practice and their members are often available to visit local groups and give talks on the situation in Syria. Please contact Amy Summers with any enquiries, who can pass on your details to BSS. amy.summers@amnesty.org.uk

The Syrian Non Violence Movement (SNVM)

AIUK are also developing its relationship with the SNVM. We are currently developing a plan to work together. A key objective of our work with the SNVM is to increase media and political profile of Syrian opposition activists advocating nonviolence.

Mounir Atassi, who was the keynote speaker at our AGM (see a video of that here - <http://bambuser.com/v/2551566>) spoke at the Scottish Office Annual Report launch. Omar Assil from the SNVM executive committee spoke at the Annual Report launch at the IS in London and did substantial media - here is the IS press statement: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/exiled-syrian-activist-calls-international-pressure-assad-2012-05-29>

We are expecting a draft plan from the SNVM executive by the end of June on how Amnesty UK can assist more. It should be noted that most of their members are inside Syria. Amnesty UK would like to provide the group with some campaign effectiveness training and we will be looking into this.

Finally we are part sponsoring a Syria day in Manchester along with BSS and the SNVM – the Manchester group will be there with a stall and one of their members should be speaking. More information here - <https://www.facebook.com/events/461563693870484/>

Egyptian Women's Human Rights Defenders

The third initiative came as part of our commitment to working on women's rights in the MENA region. In March 2012, Amnesty UK hosted a visit from two leading human rights defenders working on the advancement of women's rights in Egypt. Yara Sallam (from Nazra for Feminist Studies - <http://nazra.org/en>) and Dalia Abd El Hameed (from Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights - <http://eipr.org/en/>) were in London for a week of capacity-building and training, which covered a range of issues such as research, international advocacy and how to develop campaign strategies. The activists also took part in a series of public and private meetings and joined up with other leading women's rights activists from Egypt, Libya and Iran, in order to learn from each other and share

As part of our MENA campaign, some of our work is focused on supporting human rights defenders in the MENA region, helping to enable them to do their work. These initiatives demonstrate how Amnesty UK is doing that, helping to develop the activist communities in the region / within diaspora communities; plus also growing some great partnerships which Amnesty UK will learn and benefit from for our work.

Upcoming new casework: We are currently working on developing a number of new case files for individual cases in Syria, Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, which we hope will be ready soon. Country Coordinators will support groups who want to work on these cases and they will be able to provide more information. To find a list of the relevant Country Coordinators please visit www.amnesty.org.uk/resources and click on the 'Regional Representatives and Coordinators' link.

Communicating with the Campaign Manager If you would like to engage with the MENA Campaign Manager, Kristyan Benedict, in more detail there are several options (as well as calling or emailing). He has just started a blog on the AIUK platform - <http://www2.amnesty.org.uk/blogs/kristyan-benedict> where you can engage in discussion on the campaign and share relevant posts. You can also arrange for a Skype video chat with him. This could be arranged for your local group meetings where he is happy to engage in question & answer sessions with Amnesty activists. If you would like to arrange a Skype video chat please email amy.summers@amnesty.org.uk.

Read all the latest news, updates and actions at www.amnesty.org.uk/protest