

AMNESTY NEWS

www.amnesty-volunteer.org/uk/southampton-city

September 2004



Amnesty International Works

Many people ask "Does Amnesty International's work really help?"

AI has a record of real achievement. AI knows this because people they have been trying to help say that AI's pressure has had an effect. AI recognises that their letters and publicity are not the only reasons for cases being closed. Often, other factors such as political change, economic pressure, or the campaigning of other activists working independently, are the reasons for more humane behaviour on the part of governments.

Some of these have been legal changes, leading to people's rights being protected, like the 1984 UN Convention against Torture, which AI campaigned for. Some have been changes in policy, which AI has also campaigned for, like the abolition of the death penalty in the UK and many other countries. To bring to justice those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity, AI campaigned for an international criminal court, which 120 nations agreed to set up in 1998. AI's contribution to human rights has been recognised internationally and AI was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (1977) and the United Nations Human Rights Prize (1978).

Quote from Colin Firth:

"I was in Argentina working on a film connected with the dictatorship...and encountered people who had been tortured....If I had been sitting in a cell

**Group Meeting
Monday September 13th 2004**

**SUDAN
Rev Ian Woodward
Member of Sudan Committee
Salisbury Diocese**

**Avenue St Andrew's
United Reformed Church
The Avenue, Southampton
(Use main Church entrance)
7.30pm
ALL WELCOME**

by myself there would be so little hope. The words Amnesty International kept going around in my head as the only hope for a lot of people."

Amnesty International has quotes from the people they have helped in Europe, Africa, The Americas, Asia and the Middle East and North Africa.

If you want to read the words of people AI has helped all over the world go to the AI web site:

<http://www.amnesty.org.uk/amnesty/works.shtml>.

The above article is a summary of the information appearing on the Amnesty web site at the above address. If you do not have access to the world wide web and would like further information, please contact me. See "Who's Who" page 4.

AI's VISION

is of a world in which every person enjoys all of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international standards.

AI's MISSION

is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of its work to promote all human rights.

AI's CORE VALUES

remain those of : international solidarity, effective action for the individual victim, global coverage, the universality and indivisibility of human rights, impartiality and independence, and democracy and mutual respect.

Worldwide appeal for August 2004

BULGARIA: Children in care need help

Physical conditions for the children of Dzhurkovo's care home have improved since the winter of 1997 when six children and one 18 yr old died from hypothermia and malnutrition. But clean sheets, warm dormitories and basic medical care are not sufficient for the 69 children of Dzhurkovo, a remote village in the Rodopi mountains. The lack of assessment, treatment and rehabilitation by therapists, psychologists and physicians is profoundly damaging to their development and deprives them of their fundamental right to life with dignity and respect.

18 children have been diagnosed with Down's syndrome and 51 with cerebral palsy. 43 are considered "bedridden" and are provided with very little contact or activity. There are three "educators" for the entire institution but they do not have appropriate training. In June when an AI delegate visited the institution, there was only one "educator", with a degree in chemistry, on duty



*Send appeals on behalf of
the children of
Dzhurkovo, Bulgaria*

for all "bedridden" children. Their individual activity plans and rehabilitation reports appeared to be superficial and aimed at complying with regulations rather than addressing the needs of the child. One 8 yr old girl with Down's syndrome had been observed three years earlier chewing the sides of her wooden cot was found, apparently still reduced to this state by inactivity and lack of attention. A specially equipped playroom and gym, as on

previous visits, did not appear to be in effective use. The children of Dzhurkovo need appropriate developmental and educational programmes to help them develop their full potential and give them the chance of an independent and full life. This can only be achieved if they are moved from their remote mountain location and provided with appropriate facilities in a major urban centre where they will have access to the specialists they require.

Please write: calling on the authorities to move the children of Dzhurkovo to an urban centre to receive appropriate care and to take all steps to reintegrate the children into the community as appropriate.

Send appeals to:
Prime Minister Simeon
Saxe-Coburg Gotha,
Dondukov Boulevard
number 1,
1194 Sofia,
Bulgaria

Letter writing guide

- *Always be polite. This rule is essential and invariable. Your aim is to help, not to relieve your own feelings. Governments don't respond to abusive or condemnatory letters (however well deserved!)
- *Always write your letters on the basis that the Government concerned is open to reason and discussion.
- *It is important where possible to stress a country's reputation for moderation and justice, to show respect for its constitution and judicial procedures, and to demonstrate an understanding of current difficulties. This will give you more scope to point out ways in which the human rights situation can be improved.
- *Follow strictly the instructions given by AI.
- *Never use political jargon. Don't give the impression that you are writing because you are ideologically or politically opposed to the government in question. It is far more effective to stress that your concern for human rights is not politically based in any way, but in keeping with basic principles of international law.
- *If appropriate, explain who you are and what you do. It shows your letter is genuine, and that people from varying walks of life are following events in the country concerned.

Group News: AGM July 2004

Veronica Tippetts welcomed all to the AGM. The following reports were presented:

1) Jenny McConnell, membership secretary:

Currently there are 54 mailings per month. We need to consider the issue of recruitment, currently we follow up any interest but we do not actively pursue new members. Jenny would welcome any suggestions to aid recruitment.

2) Eileen Sharp, parliamentary officer:

October 2003-letter back concerning world trade;
December 2003- letter on asylum seekers;
March 2004- arms trade, and letters from local MPs explaining why they don't sign all early day motions;
Euro elections-we sent AI manifesto to two candidates, no replies.

3) Mary Brown, press officer:

We have had three items in the ECHO:
October- information about the street collection;
March- SEGALULA concert led to a feature article.
June- 40th Anniversary Birthday photograph at the Amnesty Tree.

Fran Stanfield had also had the Mayor, Parvin Damani's photograph published in AI Newsletter.

It was agreed that we need to improve on our coverage. (see below for ideas).

4) Mary Brown, mailing secretary:

The monthly mailings from AIUK came through regularly, each one containing a brief Group Action. In October 2003, AI reorganised its systems, the News Letter moved to bi-monthly.

Campaigns appear to be much longer, with periodic updating, but not much new work. The "Violence Against Women" campaign is very behind its original plan.

It was agreed that we needed to give serious consideration to our campaigning activity, which had considerably reduced.

5) Giampaolo D' Alessandro, treasurer:

There was little good news on the financial front. Raised £2440, including 48 paid subscriptions (£390); outgoings were £2009, with £500 being sent to AIUK. In previous years we had sent at least £1000. Our Group costs eg printing postage and venue costs (£569) exceeded our subscriptions (£390).

Two suggestions were discussed, firstly, to increase the dissemination of Amnesty News in electronic for-

mat. Secondly, to raise subscriptions to at least cover Group costs.

Whilst there was general support for the need to raise subscription rates, there was considerable discussion about the appropriateness of doing this without giving notice to the membership. It was agreed that the incoming Chair should write to the membership proposing a raise from £7.50 to £10 at our September meeting.

6) Richard Green, CASA:

The sub group continues to meet. Focus on Mexico and Guatemala, linked to the Violence Against Women campaign.

7) Death penalty, John Williams:

This year the work had included a briefing for the Group and various actions including the death penalty in USA.

8) Thursday day time letter write:

Generally 3 people.

Veronica thanked people for their support, and said she would be happy to continue as key holder, and keeping contact with the City Council and various other contacts. However, she had decided to stand down from the Chair. Frank proposed a vote of thanks.

The new officers are identified in Who's Who (page 4).

The Group owes a large debt of gratitude to all those who have held office in the last 12 months and those who are prepared to do so in the forthcoming year.

Becky John will shadow Jenny in her role in the next 12 months and will also assist Mary in trying to raise our profile.

The term "mailing" will be dropped from the title "mailing secretary" and will revert to "secretary".

The AGM concluded with a Social Event, many thanks to all who contributed.

