

AMNESTY NEWS

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

September 2005



Welcome to a new year of Campaigning

A message from Southampton Group's new chair: Becky John:

"2005/2006 will be an interesting year to be in Amnesty International. The UK Section, as part of a global shift, has seen some significant, and often controversial changes in the way we work. This year, we plan to bring in speakers who can tell us why and how this has been done, so we can still feel engaged with the wider network.

The Group now actively campaigns on the "Administration of Justice" (covering the Death Penalty), "Business and Human Rights", "Central America", "China", "Controlling Arms", "Refugees" and "Stopping Violence Against Women". If you have a particular interest in any of these areas, and would like to know or do more, see the back of this News Letter for the relevant contacts.

We're looking for ideas for fundraising and, equally importantly, awareness raising events, the bigger and brighter the better! Please contact us with any thoughts, however ambitious or frivolous they seem - the more ideas we have the more likely we are to get a few good results.

Group Meeting
Monday September 12th 2005

Human Rights
in the
MALDIVES
Speaker: from
"Friends of the Maldives"
Avenue St Andrew's
United Reformed Church
The Avenue, Southampton
(Use main Church entrance)
7.30pm
ALL WELCOME

Lastly, we have started building a network of people who might be able to help us out occasionally, people who support Amnesty but don't want to be part of the Group. If you know of people who might like occasional, no commitment involvement, please ask them to contact us - we'll call on them no more than three times a year for assistance, and their time can really make a difference.

Please see the Calendar enclosed with this mailing for our 2005/6 programme.

Looking forward to seeing you through the year."

Becky John, Southampton Group Chair.

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: PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY: Risk of execution

Between 30 and 50 prisoners held on death row in the Palestinian Authority are at risk of execution at any time.

Four men were executed on 12 June when President Mahmoud Abbas authorized the first executions to be carried out by the Palestinian Authority since August 2002. According to PA officials, the President ordered the resumption of executions in response to increased crime and lawlessness in areas of the Occupied Territories which fall under Palestinian Authority jurisdiction. It is feared that more executions will be carried out in the near future.

Many of those on death row were sentenced to death after unfair trials in the State Security Court, in military courts or in other courts. Most were convicted of murder, abductions or rape, and others were convicted of collaborating with Israeli Intelli-



gence agents to assassinate other Palestinians.

On 22 June, the President ordered a retrial for all those sentenced to death by the State Security Court. However, while AI welcomes this decision there are concerns that they could be executed even after a retrial and that prisoners sentenced

by other courts remain at risk of execution.

AI believes that resuming executions will in no way solve the problem of increasing crime and lawlessness in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and is a step backwards for human rights.

Please write:

Urging President Abbas not to ratify more death sentences and to impose a moratorium on executions. Call for all those sentenced to death after unfair trials to be retried in compliance with international standards.

Send appeals to:

President Mahmoud Abbas
Office of the President
Palestinian Authority

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: July and AGM

SPEAKER

This month's speaker was Brian McDonald of the LGBT committee of AIUK.

He started with a brief history of the LGBT Network. In 1991 AI recognised that people imprisoned for their sexuality were POCs, and in 1997 the Network was formed. The rights which are infringed when gay people become victims are basic human rights-like many POCs they are frequently tortured and/or sentenced to death.

Brian felt there is still some resistance within the IS to LGBT issues being addressed, eg they did not feature in the Russia campaign despite persecution there, because it was considered "too sensitive". Brian was pleased to report that the UK Section was very supportive of the Network.

Homosexuality is an offence in over 70 countries. A current campaign focuses on 3 countries. In **Saudi Arabia** in March this year, 100 men were arrested for attending a gay wedding. They were sentenced to up to 2000 lashes, which amounts to a death sentence. In **Columbia** there is widespread abuse of men and women, including rape and murder, in a climate of impunity. The third country is **Jamaica**, where the beatings and shootings are carried out by mobs, incited to violence by so-called "murder music" and ignored by government authorities.

Recent Urgent Actions have included a case in Mexico, and a sentence of stoning for "sodomy" against a man in Nigeria, which is being highlighted in the hope of achieving a reprieve.

The EU has passed legislation giving transsexuals a legal right to a new identity. In the UN, homosexuality is not addressed specifically in any human rights convention, rather it relies on general human rights standards to protect people. Considerable resistance to wider recognition within the UN is led by a powerful triumvirate: the Vatican, the Muslim Council and the USA.

Finally, Brian emphasised that members of the LGBT Network do not just focus on issues relevant to themselves, but fully support all aspects of AI's campaigns.

GROUP AGM & BUSINESS MEETING

Reports:

Jenny said she had greatly enjoyed her year as Chair, and recalled the highlights and achievements. It was agreed to continue with some letter-writing evenings in the new programme, while inviting speakers to the majority of meetings. Jenny thanked everyone who had helped and supported her and the Group over the past year.

Becky John was elected as the new Chair.

Giampaolo D'Alessandro (Treasurer) confirmed the Group's financial position was sound. £700 had been sent to AIUK, and the current balance was £738. It was agreed to keep subs at £10. The above Bar Tin Rattle will be discontinued.

Mary (Secretary) reported the Group had participated in most of the Group Actions, and that communication with AIUK (facilitated by e-mail) was functioning well. A letter to President Bush regarding AI's concerns about detainees at Guantanamo and elsewhere, was signed by those present. An offer to stage a fundraising concert by a string orchestra during "Protect the Human Week" was welcomed.

Membership: 13 new members during the year.

Outreach: Veronica has worked hard to publicise AI in the City. A small AI candle has been donated to the Hansard Gallery. Both MPs had received information packs.

CASA: Frank reported regular work mainly on Mexico and Guatemala, in both of which murders of women were widespread.

China: Judy had received 4 actions.

Administration of Justice: Letters written **North Korea:** Fran explained that action on this has been downgraded by AIUK.

Refugees: Jilly reported a successful multi-cultural music event by Pukhar. Cards from the public supporting rights for refugees had gone to AIUK. 3 letters and small para had appeared in the Echo.

Southampton Group Who's Who:

Group Officers:

Chair:

Becky John

Vice-Chair:

Jenny McConnell

Secretary & Press:

Mary Brown

Treasurer:

Giampaolo D'Alessandro

Membership Secretary:

Jenny McConnell

Outreach:

Veronica Tippets

Parliamentary Officer:

Frank Capocci

News Letter Editor:

John Williams

Subgroups:

CASA/Victor Pineda Henestrosa:

Frank Capocci

CHINA:

Judy Horton

Administration of Justice (Death Penalty):

Giampaolo D'Alessandro

John Williams

Refugees:

Jilly Cooke (023 8058 3749)

Stop Violence Against Women:

Becky John

Business and Human Rights:

Becky John

Control Arms Campaign:

Barbara Lupton

Korea:

Avenue St Andrew's Church Group

- Diary:
- ◆ **Monday 12th September:** Group Meeting: "Human Rights in the Maldives". Speaker: from "Friends of the Maldives". 7.30 pm Avenue St Andrew's. All Welcome.
 - ◆ **Monday 10th October:** Group Meeting: "Letter Writing-focusing on China". 7.30pm Avenue St Andrew's. All Welcome.
 - ◆ **Saturday 15th October:** Music for Strings by ARCORDA. 7.30pm at Avenue St Andrew's.
 - ◆ **Thursday 20th October:** Live Jazz at Talking Heads, featuring "Dinner Jazz Revolutionaries". Doors open 7.00pm for 8.00pm.
 - ◆ **Saturday 29th October:** Southern Regional Conference. Bristol
 - ◆ **Thursday 10th November:** Tenth anniversary of execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa. Event tba.
 - ◆ **Monday 14th November:** Group Meeting: "Workshop on Business and Human Rights" with AI trainer Peter Hammond-Seaman. 7.30pm at Avenue St Andrew's. All welcome.

Peter Benenson's Memorial Service

Mary reported, at the AGM, on the memorial service for Peter Benenson at St Martin-in-the-Fields, a moving occasion made more poignant by its coinciding with the terrorist attacks in London.

Candles were lit by family members and worldwide representatives of Amnesty International.

There were readings and tributes by former Prisoners of Conscience and Irene Khan gave an inspiring address about Peter's legacy to the world.

On police advice the planned action in Trafalgar Square was abandoned, but all present signed a post card on behalf of an individual at risk.

Donations were invited for a memorial fund to inspire young people to continue Peter's work. £25 was collected from individual members of the Southampton Group in support of this.

CHRISTMAS GOODIES

Cakes, gifts preserves etc-will be welcome for Mary's Kitchen Sale on November 26th. Also please save empty jars (with lids if possible), they can be filled with jams, chutneys and mincemeat.

Contact Mary or bring to a Group.

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