



Southampton Group AMNESTY NEWS

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

February 2012

One year on: The Arab Spring in the Arabian Peninsula

Paul Dawson - AIUK Coordinator for the Gulf States

Paul Dawson reminded us that the Arab Spring started in Tunisia and from there moved to Egypt and Libya. In all these countries the old governments have fallen and new one are being formed (with most progress in Tunisia). Protests and repression continue in Syria, where the situation is far from settled. The main conclusion that can be drawn by the events in these countries is that repression will continue until governments face the need for the large changes that are requested by their people.

Paul then focussed on the Arabian peninsula and, in particular, on three countries, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Yemen. While all these countries face some form of uncertainty and pressure for change, the Arab Spring has had limited effect in the Arabian peninsula with the exception of Bahrain.

In **Saudi Arabia** the government confirmed in March last year that protests were banned. These had started in Shia dominated regions of the country and were mainly against arbitrary arrests. There have not been many protests since that time, partly because the government has promised lots of money to the regions where the protests had occurred. The Arab Spring has had limited effect on Saudi Arabia, a country that has acted as a bulwark of repression and conservatism: Saudi Arabia has helped repress

revolts in Bahrain and has given refuge to dictators evicted from their countries.

Detention in Saudi Arabia is often without charge and in solitary confinement. Prisoners are often tortured until they undertake not to take action against the government. Usually detention is only for a few months. A leaked draft terror law was seen by Amnesty: it stated that all form of dissent will be considered as terrorism. It is not clear whether this law has been passed.

The death penalty is imposed in Saudi Arabia for a range of crimes, including sorcery. Foreign national are disproportionately sentenced to death. The court proceedings fall short of international standards of fairness. In particular, defendants are not informed of the progress of their trial and may learn abruptly that it has ended.

Women rights are a well known issue in Saudi Arabia. There has been some progress and women will, for example, be allowed to vote in local elections from 2015. They are, however, still banned from driving. Domestic violence is also a problem and takes two forms: husbands abusing their wife/wives, but also the abuse of domestic workers by the family they work for.

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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 and 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.

ACTION OF THE MONTH

Morocco: Seven activists from Western Sahara waiting for trial

Seven activists are facing charges of threatening Morocco's "internal security" in connection with their peaceful and legitimate activities in support of the self-determination of Western Sahara. All of them are released on bail but the risk of being convicted remains serious.

Ahmed Alnasiri, Brahim Dahane, Yahdih Ettarouzi, Saleh Labihi, Dakja Lashgar, Rachid Sghir and Ali Salem Tamek were arrested in Casablanca, just after getting off a plane coming from Algeria. They had been visiting refugee camps in Tindouf, in south-western Algeria, where the Polisario Front which calls for an independent state in Western Sahara runs a self-declared government in exile.

Ahmed Alansari, Brahim Dahane, Yahdih Ettarouzi, Rachid Sghir and Ali Salem Tamek have been on a hunger strike for over 40 days (Saleh Labihi for around 20 days).

The seven, who are released on bail, are facing a number of charges related to undermining the external and internal security of the state, including attacking its "territorial integrity". Amnesty International believes that the activities undertaken by the seven activists merely amount to the peaceful and legitimate exercise of their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly as guaranteed in international law and standards. The organization fears that the charges are a result of the seven activists' legitimate activities in support of the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara.

Dakja Lashgar, the only woman in the group, is a former victim of enforced disappearance, held in secret detention without contact with the outside world for over 10 years. She was provisionally released on 28 January due to her deteriorating health and psychological state.

Please write to:

His Majesty the King Mohammed VI, Bureau de Sa Majesté le Roi, Palais Royal. Rabat, Morocco

Salutation: Your Highness

H.H. Princess Lalla Joumala Alaoui, Embassy of the Kingdom of Morocco, 49 Queen's Gate Gardens, London, SW7 5NE

Salutation: Her Excellency

I am writing about the case of Ahmed Alnasiri, Brahim Dahane, Yahdih Ettarouzi, Saleh Labihi, Dakja Lashgar, Rachid Sghir and Ali Salem Tamek. I understand they that they are prisoners of conscience that were arrested for expressing their rights of conducting peaceful activities in support of the self-determination of Western Sahara.

I acknowledged that they all released in bail, however I am asking you to make sure that all their charges are dropped.

Their previous arrest and their current charges are against the Article 9 of the Moroccan Constitution and Article 9 and 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Morocco is a state party, which guarantee the right not be arbitrarily detained and to freedom of expression respectively.

Please use your influence and authority to take effective measures to ensure that human rights defenders and Sahrawi people are allowed to carry out their peaceful human rights activities without fear of arbitrary detention, harassment, intimidation or other human rights violations in line with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

I look forward to hearing from you on this important matter.

Best regards,

GROUP NEWS

1. There will be a stall at the Phoenix showing of Sarah's Key (Union Cinema, University of Southampton, Wednesday 25th January at 7.30pm). Brenda, Giampaolo and Mary will prepare cases for the stall.
2. We have received the Amnesty Planning pack. We had a preliminary discussion at the meeting. Full details will be reported at the next meeting.
3. Caroline Butler will run a training session on creative campaigning for the Romsey group on 19th March at 19:45 at United Reformed Church in Romsey. Details are on the Romsey group web site.
4. "At five in the afternoon", a film on women in Afghanistan will be shown in the Community Centre in Lyminster on 1st March at 7.30pm.
5. Amnesty is campaigning to ensure that women rights in Afghanistan are not traded away in possible peace talks with the Taliban (you may remember that we drew kites for this campaign last October). This issue was raised in parliament by Margot James (MP for Stourbridge) and also by William Hague at an international conference in Bonn.

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The situation in **Yemen** is very tense: there has been considerable civil unrest and 200 people have died in demonstrations against the government. Many more have been killed in military engagements between rival factions. The president has agreed to step down in February having secured immunity from

prosecution, but the situation remains very tense. However, the unrest has relatively little to do with the Arab Spring: Yemen is a very unstable country, poor, tribal, with high unemployment and with a median age of only 17.9 years.

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Figure below: Thousand of anti-government protesters march in Alexandria, Egypt, 11 February 2011 (from the later Amnesty Report: Year of Rebellion – The state of human rights in the Middle East and North Africa).



NEXT GROUP MEETING

Monday 13th February

The Hazara Community
in Pakistan

A representative from the
Hazara International Forum

Avenue St Andrew's
United Reformed Church
The Avenue, Southampton

ALL WELCOME

DIARY

January 2012

Wednesday 25th: Stall at the Phoenix Film Society's showing of 'Sarah's Key' to mark Holocaust Day. Students' Union, University of Southampton.

February 2012

Monday 13th: 7.30pm Group Meeting: The Hazara community in Pakistan. Speaker: A representative from the Hazara International Forum.

March 2012

Thursday 8th: International Women's Day.

Monday 12th: 7.30 pm Group Meeting: Open meeting-The Southampton Amnesty Group

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Bahrain is the country most affected by the Arab Spring: Amnesty is aware of at least 48 people who have died in protests since February. Protests started in February with hundreds of people detained for protesting against employment discrimination of the Shia majority by the ruling Sunnis. Saudi Arabia shored up the king. In March the police stormed the protest camp at Pearl Roundabout: 6 people died and hundreds were injured. Medical staff who tended the injured have been attacked and subsequently arrested and/or sacked. Interestingly, the king set up a commission of enquiry into police brutality: it gave a surprisingly frank report condemning torture and police

brutality and requesting that abusers should be brought to justice. Unfortunately, it is not clear at this moment in time whether any action will be taken. The situation is still fluid: the trial of health workers has been postponed until March; two protesters who were sentenced to death had their sentenced quashed and were sent back for re-trial. Amnesty will continue to monitor the human rights situation in this country, which will probably be the main focus for further action in the Arabian peninsula.

For more information see

<http://www.amnesty.org/zh-hant/node/29004>

and the detailed report at

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE01/001/2012/en>

SOUTHAMPTON GROUP - WHO'S WHO

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