



Southampton Group **AMNESTY NEWS**

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

March 2010



FEBRUARY MEETING SPEAKER

GIAMPAOLO D'ALESSANDRO

Sexual Violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Giampaolo gave us a fascinating talk on the history of this troubled country, the challenges it currently faces and the concerns Amnesty has about the country and its government. We then watched the film 'Invisible Crimes' produced by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) which examines widespread sexual violence in DRC and its effects on victims.

AMNESTY'S CONCERNS IN DRC

Armed conflict: Government forces failed to protect civilians in the conflict zones and were themselves responsible for many human right violations, including killing of civilians, rape and torture.

Unlawful killings: State security forces as well as Congolese and foreign armed groups committed hundreds of unlawful killings.

Violence against women and girls: High levels of rape and other forms of sexual violence continued throughout the country, with a concentration in eastern DRC.

Child soldiers: An estimated 3,000 to 4,000 children were still serving with armed groups in 2008.

- Many children reportedly also still served with the army, although child recruitment should have ended in 2004.
- The Lord Resistance Army reportedly abducted at least 160 children from several villages in Dunga territory.

Political killings: Aimée Kabila (repudiated half-sister of the president), shot dead at her home; opposition politician Daniel Botheti murdered in Kinshasa.

Refugees: More than 1.4 million people were internally displaced by conflict in North Kivu and a further 30,000 were forced to flee to Uganda.

Torture, arbitrary detention: Torture and ill-treatment were routinely committed by government security services and armed groups, directed predominantly against perceived political opponents. Main targets:

- Supporters of the political opposition (Mouvement de Libération du Congo) lead by Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo;
- individuals suspected of supporting the CNDP.

Prisoner releases: In July the government ordered the release of 258 military and civilian detainees. While welcome, the release appeared to follow no organised or transparent judicial process.

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

Don't let Britain become a safe haven for war criminals

The UK Government are planning imminent changes to the law, to avoid any future attempts to prosecute suspected war criminals, Israeli or otherwise.

This would see the UK renege on its international treaty obligations, particularly those under the Fourth Geneva Convention which

commit signatories to 'seek out and prosecute persons suspected of war crimes wherever and whoever they are, whatever their status, rank or influence, against whom good prima facie evidence has been laid.' Such an attempt to undermine the judiciary's independence and integrity must be rejected in the strongest terms.

Please call on the Prime Minister to state clearly that the government will not alter the law on universal jurisdiction, and will continue to allow victims of war crimes to seek justice in British courts.

Dear Prime Minister,

I am shocked at suggestions by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office Minister Ivan Lewis and Foreign Secretary David Miliband, that Britain may consider changing its laws to avoid any future attempts to bring to trial suspected war criminals, Israeli or otherwise.

The UK must not renege on its international treaty obligations, particularly those under the Fourth Geneva Convention (Article 146) to seek out and to bring to trial persons suspected of war crimes wherever and whoever they are, whatever their status, rank or influence, against whom good prima facie evidence has been laid.

I oppose any attempt to undermine the judiciary's independence and integrity. A judge who finds sufficient evidence of a war crime must have power to order the arrest of a suspect, subject to the usual rights to bail and appeal.

The power to arrest individuals reasonably suspected of war crimes anywhere in the world should they set foot on UK soil is an efficient and necessary resource in the struggle against war crimes, and must not be interfered with. Nor should the government succumb to pressure from any foreign power to change this crucial aspect of the judicial process.

I therefore urge the government to state clearly that it will not change the law on universal jurisdiction, and will continue to allow victims of war crimes to seek justice in British courts.

Sincerely,

Gordon Brown - Prime Minister

10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

GROUP NEWS

Segalula

an uplifting evening of popular song and world music
celebrating the positive in human nature,
all sung in glorious harmony

St Michael's Church
Bugle St, Southampton

Saturday March 20th
7.30pm

Tickets £6 from Mary or on the door

NEWSLETTER

Sending physical copies of this newsletter has an obvious financial and environmental cost. If you currently receive yours by post but would be prepared to receive it by email, please let me know at akibobrob@googlemail.com

Thanks!

FUNDRAISING EVENT

Saturday 24th April, meet at 11.30 am

GUIDED WALK AROUND ELING VILLAGE

with its ancient church, tide mill and dwellings
followed by a soup & cheese lunch

Shared transport to Eling. Full details to follow

Tickets £5.00 – booking essential

BRING YOUR FRIENDS!

NEXT GROUP MEETING

Monday 8th March
7.30pm

HUMAN RIGHTS IN GUATEMALA AND MEXICO.

Speaker: Shelagh Kavanagh, AIUK
Coordinator for Central America region

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

ALL WELCOME

DIARY

Monday 8th : International Women's Day.

Monday 8th : Human Rights in Guatemala and Mexico. Speaker: Shelagh Kavanagh, AIUK Coordinator for Central America region

Thursday 18th : Second anniversary of Hu Jia's sentence.

Saturday 20th : Segalula Concert

Saturday 20th : Born Free & Equal - Day conference organised by UNA

BORN FREE & EQUAL?

A DAY CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS AT HOME & ABROAD

Saturday March 20th, 10am - 4pm, Central Baptist Church

This conference has been organised by UNA Southampton in association with a number of other groups with an interest in human rights.

The conference will be opened by Alan Whitehead MP, includes talks on the Amnesty Demand Dignity campaign and sex trafficking. There are also 2 workshop sessions with workshops in children's rights, homelessness, women's right and asylum seekers & refugees.

The cost is £5 per person including lunch.

To register contact 02380 557334

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.

SOUTHAMPTON GROUP - WHO'S WHO

Group Officers		Subgroups
Chair John Williams	Outreach and Parliamentary Officer Veronica Tippetts	Stop Violence Against Women Trish McPherson
Deputy Chair Rob Atkinson	Press Cheryll Pitt	China & East Asia Giampaolo D'Alessandro
Secretary Mary Brown	Newsletter Rob Atkinson	Death Penalty John Williams
Membership Secretary Kulbir Chahal		Central America Rapinder Kaur
Treasurer Giampaolo D'Alessandro		Demand Dignity Rob Atkinson