



Southampton Group

AMNESTY NEWS

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

If you would like more information about the Group or would like to take part in any activities please get in touch by e-mailing:

AmnestySouthampton@yahoo.co.uk

March 2021

ASYLUM in the time of COVID-19 & BREXIT

Mike Brown, CLEAR Project Manager spoke at the joint meeting with the Romsey Group in February

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Almost 80 million people displaced across the world. 30 million refugees, half under 18; 4 million asylum seekers; and 46 million internally displaced people (IDPs).. Two-thirds of all refugees come from: Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan and Myanmar.

Asylum seekers, are people waiting for decision on refugee status or the outcome of an appeal. They are not eligible for mainstream benefits, but have a subsistence of £37.75 per week and are provided with accommodation. They have full access to the NHS and free education for school-age children. They are not allowed to do any work.

Those with **Refugee status** are allowed to stay in the UK for 5 years, with family reunion rights. They are eligible for all mainstream benefits and full access to NHS care. They are permitted to work, and they must find their own accommodation. They will normally be granted permanent leave after 5 years.

Those **refused refugee status**, must leave the UK *without delay*. They are evicted from their accommodation within 21 days and are liable to arrest, detention & enforced removal. They have no recourse to public funds and no access to free secondary medical care. They are not allowed to live in rented accommodation, or to have a bank account or driving licence and they are not allowed to work.

Those who can't leave the UK immediately are entitled to access **Section 4 Support**. This entitles them to accommodation and £37.75/week. Not allowed cash but have an Aspen debit card which is topped up weekly.

Continued on page 2

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

EFFECTS of COVID-19

There has been a 30% drop in refugees reaching the EU. Even so there have been longer delays in determinations. The dispersal of refugees reaching UK has been halted since March 2020. Move-on has also been suspended. New entrants have been accommodated in hotels. Detainees at risk of infection. Refugees have not had the equivalent of the Universal Credit uplift. Enforced removals have continued through this period.

ASYLUM & BREXIT

Whilst international obligations remain, there is no harmonisation with EU policy and there is no access to EU funding. The Dubs Amendment, which would have ensured that the UK continues to allow unaccompanied child refugees in Europe to reunite with family members here in the UK was voted down by this Government. Whilst part of the EU the British Govt had previously agreed to accept the Amendment. The Dublin 111 agreement, which is the mechanism for determining which member state is responsible for examining an asylum claim, no longer applies to the UK. The Home Office is now responsible for patrolling UK waters.

LIFE as an ASYLUM SEEKER

The following exemplify the life of an asylum seeker:

Loss, trauma/PTSD, culture shock, benefit dependency, language issues, harassment and insecurity/vulnerability.

SITUATION in SOUTHAMPTON

Southampton has 190 bed spaces for asylum seekers, made up of a mixture of single people and families. The accommodation is a mixture of HMOs and flats and houses. There is also hotel accommodation (74 places) for new arrivals. There is a mixture of families, fully refused asylum seekers and refugees seeking work.

CLEAR'S MISSION

To help refugees build new lives in the UK. To provide professional and practical assistance. To

EMPOWER, EDUCATE & ADVOCATE

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BUSINESS MEETING FEBRUARY

1. Agreed we will start working on China again. Mary will be the contact point. Mary will also continue to be the contact point for Eritrea and Peter will be the contact point for South East Asia.
2. Donations: Thank you to all who have been able to make a donation to the Group. All donations have been much appreciated. Further donations of any size are still welcome. The account details are: Sort code: 08 92 09; Account Number: 65125823; Account Name: Amnesty International Southampton City Group.
3. There was a piece about Folk for Freedom in the monthly group mailing. It was the first piece on a series of Sixty years of Amnesty.

TAKE ACTION

ASK YOUR MP TO DEFEND THE DEFENDERS

In recent years, human rights defenders around the world have faced increasing levels of repression . Those working on issues such as environmental, land, women's, LGBT+, indigenous and minority group rights are at heightened risk. The pandemic has made the situation worse.

The UK government has a vital role to play in supporting and protecting human rights defenders globally. It says that promoting human rights abroad is an essential part of its foreign policy, but does not have a comprehensive strategy to support and protect human rights defenders.

On 10th February, Amnesty International UK and the University of York published a report; *“On the human rights frontline: How the UK government can defend the defenders”*.

What to do:

- Find the contact details for your MP at: members.parliament.uk/FindYourMP
- Write them a letter based on the points below. Personalise your letter as much as possible.

IN YOUR LETTER

- Explain that AI UK has just published “On the human rights frontline: How the UK Government can defend the defenders, which calls for a UK Government strategy to support and protect human rights defenders around the world.
- Urge them to write to Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs Dominic Rabb and ask him to commit to developing a cross-departmental gender responsive and adequately funded strategy.
- Emphasise that such a strategy would both help human rights defenders and maximise the UK Government's impact on a range of its foreign and development policy priorities.

FIRST SOUTHERN STATE TO ABOLISH THE DEATH PENALTY

Virginia's move toward abolition is a landmark event. Having been the first state to administer an execution in the USA, Virginia has a long history with the death penalty starting in 1608. Over the course of four centuries, the state has executed a total of 1,390 individuals. This marks Virginia as the state with the highest total number of executions in the United States.

CORONA VIRUS

For the foreseeable future the Southampton Group will not be holding face-to-face meetings. However, we will be arranging virtual meetings see DIARY box. And if possible some external fundraising events

We plan to continue to produce a monthly News Letter.

Each month we will include at least one letter or action, which you will either be able to copy or email, any update we may receive about cases we are working on and news from the web.

DIARY

For details of how to join any of the events/meetings outlined below please contact our secretary, Valerie at our email address:
AmnestySouthampton@yahoo.co.uk

MARCH 2021

Thursday 4th March: : Joint zoom meeting with Romsey Group.

(please note the date change for the March meeting)

APRIL 2021

Monday 12th April: tba

MAY 2021

Monday 10th May: Simon John, Modern slavery

SOUTHAMPTON GROUP WHO'S WHO

Group Officers:

Chair: Giampaolo D'Alessandro

Secretary: Valerie Oswald

Treasurer: Gareth Davies

Outreach and Parliamentary Officer:
Veronica Tippetts

Newsletter: John Williams

Campaigning Activity:

People on the move
Protecting the space for human rights defenders
Death Penalty
HR Act
Snoopers Charter
South Asia
China

Case file: Marielle Franco, Brazil

Individual at Risk: Aster Fissehatsion and Dawit Isaak, Eritea

Issues on the Web

amnesty.org.uk

Include:

Iran: 30+ years in prison for protesting against forced veiling laws.

China: Yiliyasijiang, a young dad, went missing in 2017 and is believed he has been taken to a Chinese "re-education camp".

Egypt: Human Rights Defenders: Free Mohamed, Gasser and Karim now.

Saudi: Woman's rights defender Loujain al-Hathloul.

UK: Human Rights Act, help us hold authorities to account.

NB the views expressed in this News Letter may not necessarily be those of Amnesty International. John Williams editor