

NORWICH NEWS



The Newsletter for Amnesty International Norwich Group

Winter/Spring 2012

Working to Protect Human Rights Worldwide

In the last newsletter I welcomed you to our anniversary edition. Here in Norwich the events celebrating Amnesty's 50th have come to a close although nationally and internationally they will continue until the end of May. But as usual we will be continuing our regular events and campaigning actions.

Our special celebration events have been a great success and I hope there has been something for everyone in our programme. The main intention of holding them was to raise awareness and make the issue of defending human rights more relevant to all of us. However, as a result we have done well on fundraising too as you will read later, and the committee agreed to send £5000 to AIUK last month. This still leaves us with a healthy balance to start the year.

2011 was a year in which Amnesty began to take dramatic steps to partly decentralise its research base from London to other key venues throughout the world. This "closer to the ground policy" will take some time to implement but we all hope that it will improve Amnesty's capabilities in responding to gross violations.

In the meantime there's much to be done. The situation in *Burma* begins ever so slightly to improve, while in **Iran Amnesty's campaign** to stop stoning as a means of carrying out a death sentence continues. Our **Arms Control Campaign** will continue this year as a lead up to the UN conference in the autumn. **The Middle East and North Africa** also continues to be a focus for our activities as does the **Individuals at Risk Programme**. We will play our part in these as the months unfold.

I could not write this newsletter without recording the sad death of **Vaclav Havel** who died just before Christmas. He was a man of great courage and conviction: Politician, writer, human rights activist, former president of the Czech Republic and a writer of politically risky plays in the absurdist manner openly critical of the Soviet grip on his country and Eastern Europe in general. Many of us will recall him as a leading and founder member of Charter 77 and VONS, the committee for the defence of the unjustly persecuted.

I would also like to mention the death, after a long illness of **Dr Edward Gibson**. Edward Gibson was one of our most prolific letter writing members. He was particularly active in the long running case of Akram Awan and more recently Binyam Mohammed a former Guantanamo detainee. He wrote letters every week for many years and his persistence and dedication has been a lesson to us all.

I'd like to look back on the events we've been holding since the last newsletter in early July when we had just held the evensong at the Anglican Cathedral at which the Right Rev Tom Butler gave such a stirring address about Amnesty's work.

In late July Alan Taylor, a Norwich classical guitarist held a concert and raised £159 all of which he donated to us.

We had an information desk at the third Norwich Pride Day with an action about the treatment of gay people in Cameroon. On the last day of the month Georgia and Beth Moseley held a wonderful Amnestea Party at St Thomas's church hall at which they raised £600. There was fun for all ages and they prepared the hall with bunting, balloons and arranged children's events. The cakes were gorgeous and the raffle prizes ensured that takings were excellent. They did so well that they were sent an honorary tea towel by AIUK!

A talk to Freethorpe ladies group raised £46.

August was a quiet month in spite of our preparations for a busy autumn.

In mid **September** we held a coffee morning to raise funds to buy Christmas cards for sale at the Assembly House.

Cinema City began our human rights film season showing five films on successive Mondays. On each occasion we leafleted the audience with a postcard action. The most popular film was the oldest one **To Kill a Mockingbird**. It had an audience of 55 so we almost filled the cinema.

Also in September, **Olu Ogunnowo** spoke about his experiences as an immigration lawyer, at our monthly meeting.

A church in Great Yarmouth raised £180 after featuring Amnesty's work in several of their services again indicating the goodwill and appreciation for our work even during these difficult financial times.

October saw our most ambitious event. **Big Sky choir** gave a concert that included a song cycle specially composed for our anniversary. A full house was hugely impressed by the drama and beauty of the music and its presentation. It was lovely having one of the composers also performing. This was a very fitting climax to our year and we hope to promote the music to other Amnesty groups and choirs around the UK and arrange a recording in Salthouse Church some time this year.

It would be wonderful to have a final concert and I am helping plan this in a London venue.

The annual Philosophy series lectures at UEA took human rights as its theme. Prof Roger Graef of the LSE and **Prof Baroness Onora O'Neill** joined UEA staff to take part in five debates covering many aspects of the philosophy behind rights and wrongs. These were very well attended so we had much interest at our information desk that featured an action about North Korea.

Dr Lee Marsden from UEA's department of Politics spoke at our **November** meeting about the influence of the religious right on US politics and the armed forces.

In **December** we took part in international **Write for Rights Day on 10th** when we held letter writing sessions at the Playhouse Theatre.

Actress Mattie Zeigler, her children, **Simon Wright MP** and **City Councillor Grahame** were some of those writing letters. This was followed by more action when we did our annual greetings card writing at our monthly meeting. Mince pies and mulled wine sustained us a few days before Christmas.

Well that's our very busy year done!

Looking back it has been well worth it, as it has brought our work sharply in to focus to our local community. It is so encouraging to know that local radio, the press, UEA, the Theatre Royal, the Anglican Cathedral and many others are so supportive of our work. Now we need to build on this goodwill.

On behalf of the committee I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has helped in any way with our events over the last twelve months. Without your commitment we couldn't have done it.

Now to a few other matters

Attendance at our regular meetings in the last year has been really good with between 18 and 20 people at each with a high of 38 at one. These meetings are open to all and you are very welcome to join us. We discuss all sorts of actions and issues that you can work on over the weeks between our meetings.

At our **January** meeting we decided to do more campaigning work at our coming meetings and we are starting with action on two Guantanamo detainees. Firstly Shaker Aamer and then Ahmed Belbacha. Writing actions will be forwarded to you very soon, so let's make this a really effective action. Over 200 people writing together from Norwich will surely make a difference!

We hold our **group AGM in March** when we appoint a new committee. This year sees some **key changes, so if anyone would like to join, or learn about what we do, please contact any committee member.** The more offers we have the more we can share.

Our website is going through a transformation which is taking a while as we review how we improve it and keep it up to date. A member who is skilled on these matters is helping us in this and we are very grateful for his continuing help and guidance. We'll ask for your feedback when it's complete.

Well that's it for this edition. I hope you have found something of interest and that you will drop into our meetings and help Amnesty make a difference. If you have any issues to raise please feel free to contact me.

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Contact us on info@norwichamnesty.org.uk

Group website www.norwichamnesty.org.uk

There is also lots of the very latest information on www.amnesty.org.uk

Spring Programme

We hold our monthly meetings on the third Wednesday of each month at 7.30pm at the Charing Cross Centre, St John Maddermarket, Norwich.

- **Sat 4th February** Quiz and dips. Our annual quiz is here again! Prompt start at 7.30pm. St Thomas's church hall, Earlham Road. There has been a good response to the invitation and most tickets have gone.
- **Wed 15th February** A talk by Norwich member Catharine Grasham who is the Amnesty country coordinator for Ethiopia and Eritrea. All welcome.
- **Wed 21st March** Group AGM. Election of new committee, presentation of accounts etc. Brief review of the past year and discussion of the coming year's programme. All welcome.
- **Friday 13th to Sunday 15th April** National AGM University of Manchester. If you would like to attend as a group representative please contact our Secretary.
- **Wed 18th April** Business meeting. Monthly action, discussion, campaigning actions, reports and updates. All welcome.
- **Wed 16th May** Judge Evan Ruth, who specializes in immigration issues will talk about the criteria and effectiveness of current immigration legislation. All welcome.

Other events

- **Thurs 8th March** International Women's Day. Shami Chakrabarti, Director of Liberty, will deliver the John Garrett Memorial Lecture at the Thomas Paine Centre at 6.30pm. Her talk is entitled "The state of rights and freedoms in coalition Britain".