

## July 2020 Minutes



# Glasgow West Amnesty International

Attendees: FL, MDS, KM, CC, CCr, JG, MR, GK

Apologies: CA

## Amnesty Lockdown Videoconferences

We held our meeting via videoconference, following on from the weekly Amnesty videoconference organised by our regional rep and Glasgow West member, Malcolm. This week the speaker was Zoe Birchall, Senior Policy & Advocacy Officer at Girls Not Brides on Ending Child Marriage.

If you missed Zoe (or want to find out more), there's plenty of information here:

- Girls Not Brides (GNB) website: <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/>
- GNB Theory of Change <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage-theory-of-change/>
- COVID-19 & Child Marriage <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/resource-centre/covid-19-and-child-early-and-forced-marriage-an-agenda-for-action/>
- GNB Take Action (Links down left hand side to different ways to take action) <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/take-action/>
- Girls First Fund (the Fund supported by GNB to direct funds to community-led efforts to end child marriage) <https://girlsfirstfund.org/>

- Tostan - Zoe referenced this organisation as an example of one of GNBs member organisations doing work in their country/ region, in this case 8 countries in Africa. <https://www.tostan.org/>

This was the last of the weekly Amnesty videoconferences. Mal will be taking a break to think about ways Amnesty groups in Scotland can use the internet to better connect, e.g. bring groups together, gaining access to speakers across the UK, etc. If anyone has any thoughts on what they would like to see and especially if anyone wants to be involved in organising future activity, please get in touch with Mal – [Malcolm.dingwall-smith@amnesty.org.uk](mailto:Malcolm.dingwall-smith@amnesty.org.uk)

## Secretary's Report (FL)

### Phone Catch-Up with Elaine (Community Organising Assistant)

Elaine has been ringing round the secretaries of the local groups over the last few weeks. In our chat we discussed:

- Activities for social distancing – Amnesty will soon be circulating some of the best ideas from other local groups
- Participating in public actions – Amnesty is still encouraging us to get involved with local demonstrations with a human rights dimension. Demonstrators should wear masks and keep to social distancing guidelines as much as possible. If anyone hears of any local demonstrations that they feel Amnesty should have a presence at please get in touch ([Mail@glasgowwestamnesty.org.uk](mailto:Mail@glasgowwestamnesty.org.uk)).
- Training for local group members – Amnesty UK is currently putting together some training for us, including on the best use of social media. This should be available towards the end of the year.

### Local Group Update

Please follow the link to read the latest Local Group Update:

<http://webmail1.amnesty.org.uk/q/11meBeGf3QfjDgmkdrhAX3k/wv>

### New Individual at Risk Case! (MR + CA)

Glasgow West Group has a new Individual at Risk case to work on and, although we are not having normal group meetings at the moment, we hope that you will find the time to write some letters or Tweet about Ruben Gonzalez's detention. Below is a summary of the case and a model letter which you can use or adapt into your own words. We are hoping that we can send some appeals written in Spanish; any volunteers?

Rubén González is a trade unionist who has been arbitrarily detained and subjected to unfair trials on several occasions. On 29 November 2018 he was arbitrarily arrested by the General Directorate of Military Counter Intelligence (DGCIM) on the allegation of having attacked a military officer who tried to arrest him violently, shortly after having participated in a protest against government policies. He was tried by a military court, with no reliable evidence against him, in violation of his right to due process. On 13 August 2019, the same military court that was never competent to try his case in the first place, convicted him of the alleged crimes of which he was accused and sentenced him to five years and nine months in prison.

His role as a defender of workers' rights has been very prominent in Venezuela. His sustained defence of the rights of workers in the state-owned mining company Ferrominera del Orinoco, key in the iron industry, included actions on collective bargaining. His participation in demonstrations critical of the labour policies of the governments of Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro also put him at risk of being victim of the government's policy of repression.

Rubén has suffered from renal failure for more than 10 years, as well as hypertension. His lawyers have repeatedly requested medical attention to the courts, but only once was he transferred to receive medical attention. Authorities repeatedly deny his family's attempts to send him his medication, unless González is experiencing severe pain.

Please write or Tweet (Twitter: @NicolasMaduro) demanding the immediate and unconditional release of Ruben. As sending physical mail to Venezuela is unreliable it is recommended that we contact the local embassy or high commission. It is best to email them ([ambassador@venezlon.co.uk](mailto:ambassador@venezlon.co.uk))

Please let Christine know if you receive a reply to your letter or Tweet - [christinealison@btinternet.com](mailto:christinealison@btinternet.com)

### **Model letter:**

Mr Nicolás Maduro  
c/o Ambassador Extraordinary & Plenipotentiary  
Her Excellency Rocío Del Valle Maneiro González  
Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela  
1 Cromwell Road  
LONDON  
SW7 2HW  
Tel: 020 7584 4206 or 020 7581 2776  
Fax: 020 7589 8887

Dear Mr Nicolás Maduro

I am very concerned about Rubén González's imprisonment and current health condition.

Rubén González, 60, was detained on 29 November 2018 for peacefully standing for labour rights in Venezuela. He has been denied proper medical attention for over a year and is now faced with a serious medical condition that requires urgent treatments.

Rubén González should not be in prison in the first place, since his work as a trade union leader is allowed under the Venezuelan Constitution, and because the legal process has not been in accordance with international fair trial standards.

Since Rubén González is a Prisoner of Conscience, I demand his immediate and unconditional release; and that as long as he remains in custody, he receives urgent and adequate medical treatment, according to his wishes, and provided by doctors of his choosing.

Yours sincerely,

## **Possible second Individual at Risk Case: Saudi Women Human Rights Defenders (FL)**

The Amnesty UK office has also offered us a second long-term case: Saudi Women Human Rights Defenders.

On 15 May 2018, a group of activists, including the country's leading women human rights defenders who campaigned for the right to drive and the end of repressive guardianship laws were arbitrarily arrested. For the first three months of their detention, at least ten of the activists, including several of the women, endured torture, sexual abuse and other forms of ill-treatment when they were held incommunicado and in solitary confinement with no access to their families or lawyers.

A year later, the Saudi authorities charged and tried the women for their human rights activism. At least two human rights defenders detained in the same wave remain to date without charge or trial. Following the first trial session in March 2019, several Saudi women activists were released on temporary and provisional basis (Iman al-Nafjan, Aziza al-Yousef, Amal al-Harbi, Dr. Ruqayyah al-Mharib, Shadan al- Anezi, Dr. Abir Namankni, and Dr. Hatoun al-Fassi and an anonymous activist), while five remain to this day in detention (Loujain

al-Hathloul, Samar Badawi, Naseema al-Sada, Nouf Abdulaziz and Maya'a al-Zahrani) on charges related to their campaigning for women's rights.

At our July meeting, group members expressed an interest in working on this case. However, in order to take this on, we would need a volunteer (or two) from the group to be the lead for this case. The main part of the role is to communicate updates on the case from AIUK or the Country Coordinator. This is usually at our monthly meetings. Other aspects of the role are what you make of it really! For example, you may wish to do the social media updates or work with the Events Group to put on campaigning activities such as speakers, film nights, demonstrations or stalls. It really depends on what you'd like to do and the campaign needs of the case. If this is something you would be interested in trying please email Freya ASAP at [freya\\_lyte@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:freya_lyte@hotmail.co.uk).

## Update from past Individual at Risk case (MR)

MR has been trying to find further info on Salidzhon, our group's former prisoner of conscience, and found out that he had failed to have his conviction overturned despite the UN ruling last year that it should have been and that he should have received compensation. She had another dig under a different spelling (Solizhon) and found an interview given to Amnesty in May this year when he was asked about what it meant receiving letters etc when in prison:

*The first postcard he received (spring 2009) showed a view of a lake in the Netherlands with "We're thinking about you, keep holding on" written on it in Russian. At first he thought that some agent from the Uzbek National Security Service had sent the postcard from abroad to find out his reaction, whether he was connected with any foreign intelligence service. Later that day he was asked if he had friends abroad, in which countries, which of them sent the postcard. He replied that he had no friends and relatives abroad, and he didn't know who sent the postcard either.*

*Then he got a second postcard, with a drawing of a dove with a twig in its beak, against the background of the globe, and the words "We're thinking about you." It had been drawn and written by a child, which he found particularly heart warming. He used to work as a teacher, which I don't think we knew when we were working on the case.*

*Then he had a visit from his wife, who told him that she had received about 300 cards, which brought tears to his eyes. "The warmth of feeling that the world has changed, and that thanks to the Internet and post, people from all over the world can communicate, express their thoughts, and that there are thousands and thousands of people who support a prisoner completely unknown to them, kept me going through the long and painful 3406 days and nights [of my sentence]."*

*When he was released the first thing he did the day after he got home was to look through the huge pile of post, from eg the Netherlands, Britain and France. His 3*

*young grandchildren helped him sort it out and turn it into a display. He wanted his grandchildren to see the letters and postcards from their peers in distant countries in support of their grandfather as a connecting thread, uniting children of the whole world against injustice. He added his grandchildren's drawings to the display.*

*Asked for a message for Amnesty International supporters, he said: "I would especially like to thank the children for their drawings and letters. Many of them are grown up now. I am sure that they are doing lots of useful things not only for their countries, but for the entire planet. If all the children of the world were brought up not to be indifferent to other people's suffering, in the manner of Amnesty International, when they grew up there would be an end to war and people suffering indignity at the hands of other people."*

So even though we never knew if our letters were getting through MR thinks this reinforces the value of taking up the cases of prisoners of conscience. It is humbling to think of Salidzhon/Solizhon carrying on with his activism despite all that time in prison and risking harassment from the authorities since he got out.

## **Future Activities**

### **Online Letter Writing Meeting**

We are organising another online letter writing meeting. A chance for us to write some Amnesty letters together (even if we are still in our separate homes).

Please fill in this online poll to tell us your availability:

<https://doodle.com/poll/9xbbyrxc663emwy6>.

We'll start at 7.30pm. We will then send out an email to all those who have expressed an interest with the exact details and joining information. Any questions? Please email Freya at [freya\\_lyte@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:freya_lyte@hotmail.co.uk)

### **Picnic Social**

This has been postponed until Scotland goes into phase four to ensure this activity is as safe as possible for our members and meets government guidelines.

## **Urgent Actions (MR)**

1. Covid-19 threatens indigenous people's lives

On 1 July, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon (CONFENIAE) reported 1,215 confirmed (45% of 2,673 people tested) and 622 suspected cases of COVID-19 in Indigenous Amazonian communities. They face a higher risk situation due to scarcity of drinking water, food sources,

medical supplies, health services and COVID-19 tests. An oil spill from 7 April and seasonal floods polluted the environment and food and water sources of many communities, increasing their risk of infection. We call on the President to urgently implement an action plan to protect them guaranteeing their human rights.

Take action here:

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions/covid-19-threatens-indigenous-peoples-lives>

Keep checking the Urgent Actions sites for actions you can take from your home:

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions>

## **AOB**

### **Clemency Film Screening (JG)**

You can now watch the brand new Chinonye Chukwu movie, Clemency, online now via the Glasgow Film Theatre. The film, starring Academy Award Nominated actress Alfre Woodard, is a powerful death row drama. Years of carrying out death row executions have taken a toll on prison warden, Bernadine Williams. The emotional wedge in her marriage grows. Memories of a recently botched execution plague her daily. As she prepares to execute another inmate, Bernadine must confront the psychological and emotional demons her job creates, ultimately connecting her to the man she is sanctioned to kill. Thanks to JG for drawing our attention to this screening. Details on how to watch below:

<https://glasgowfilm.org/clemency-watch-online>

### **Next meeting**

Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> August – we will send out joining instructions via our mailing list and social media nearer the time.