

August 2020 Minutes



Glasgow West Amnesty International

Attendees: FL, MDS, CA, CL, MR, JG

Apologies: CCr

Speaker: Geraldine Chacón

We were very lucky to be joined by Geraldine Chacón who gave an inspiring talk about her experience as a young human rights defender in Venezuela. You may remember Geraldine from Write for Rights 2018 when many of you will have taken action on her behalf. Geraldine is an amazing role model for young women. She is a law graduate and youth activist who set up an Amnesty student group. But for her incredible work, she has been repeatedly persecuted by the authorities in Venezuela. Geraldine is currently studying in the UK.

Restarting Face to Face Meetings

Although it has been brilliant to be able to continue our Amnesty meetings online, I think we are all missing meeting in person. Woodlands Methodist Church, where we hold our face to face meetings, is looking at ways to facilitate groups meeting in person again. MDS is going to attend a briefing meeting and feedback to the group. At the moment, it seems unlikely that we will be able to meet until October at the earliest. The current government guidelines state [a maximum of three households inside and five households outside](#).

Secretary's Report (FL)

Local Group Update

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

[Local Group Update.](#)

Individual at Risk Case: Rubén González (MR + CA)

The 13th August was the one year anniversary of the sentencing of Ruben Gonzalez, our group's new long term case. There is more detail of Ruben and his case below. To mark the anniversary, please take one, or more, of these actions:

1. Email:

Email the Venezuelan Ambassador at ambassador@vencoln.co.uk.

Suggested e-mail (English): Rubén González is one of hundreds of people detained for political reasons in Venezuela, so we will continue to demand that the government of Nicolás Maduro stop the policy of repression in this country and return their freedom, we need justice for Venezuela.

Suggested e-mail (Spanish translation): Rubén González es una de las cientos de personas detenidas por motivos políticos en Venezuela, por lo que seguiremos exigiendo que el gobierno de Nicolás Maduro detenga la política de represión en este país y les devuelva la libertad, necesitamos justicia para Venezuela.

2. Twitter action:

Tweet the head of government, Nicolas Maduro, @NicolasMaduro including the hashtag #MaduroLiberaARuben

Suggested tweet: .@NicolasMaduro Ruben Gonzalez is a prisoner of conscience. His detention and trial in Venezuela were unfair and politically motivated. He should be released immediately. #MaduroLiberaARuben

3. Write to your MP:

Ask them if they would be willing to write an appeal letter to Nicolas Maduro c/o the embassy in London.

4. Reach out to trade unions:

Let us know if you have any contacts with any trade unions based in Scotland or further afield. Since Rubén is a trade unionist we are hoping they will want to show solidarity!

Rubén González - Background

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 email mail@glasgowwestamnesty.com with details of any actions you take on behalf of Rubén so we can monitor our impact.

Online Letter Writing Meeting – Wednesday 2nd September, 7.30pm (FL)

In more ordinary times we have letter writing meetings at each others' homes. It is a chance to focus on writing actions that we may not ordinarily have time to do in our monthly meetings or at other times in the month. All you need is a pen and pencil and a device which connects to the internet. If you can, please come along with an action to share with the group. Joining instructions will be sent via email nearer the time. Hope to see you there.

Urgent Actions (MR)

1. Imprisoned Mapuche life's at risk

Machi (spiritual Mapuche leader) Celestino Córdova Tránsito completed over 100 days on hunger strike demanding to join his community for the period of a mandatory spiritual retreat. He was convicted and in prison in the city of

Temuco for homicide induced by arson in 2014. Authorities failed to dialogue with him and a local Court authorized the possibility of force feeding him. On 10 August, he expressed his intention to enter a dry strike. We demand authorities to urgently initiate a dialogue with Celestino Córdova and abstain from feeding him against his will.

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions/imprisoned-mapuche-lifes-risk>

2. Tortured Iranian Kurd at risk of execution

Arsalan Khodkam, from Iran's Kurdish minority, is at risk of execution in West Azerbaijan province. He was sentenced to death for "spying" after a grossly unfair trial that lasted about 30 minutes and relied on "confessions" he says were obtained under torture. He has never been allowed access to a lawyer of his own choosing. The use of the death penalty for "espionage" violates international law.

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions/tortured-iranian-kurd-risk-execution>

3. Protect peaceful protesters in Belarus

The world is shocked by images and reports exposing police using brutal violence against peaceful protesters as the Belarusian authorities wage a vicious crackdown on their own citizens. Sign the petition demanding that the police violence ends now.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/get-involved/take-action/protect-peaceful-protesters-in-belarus/>

Keep checking the Urgent Actions sites for actions you can take from your home - <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions>

AOB

Europe Must Act online event - Have a cup of tea, write to your MP

On the 15th of August, in the run up to world humanitarian day (August 19th), Europe Must Act UK is launching a letter writing campaign. They will ask our MPs to stand in solidarity with asylum seekers, refugees and campaigners by calling for an end to overcrowded hotspot camps, supporting family reunification and promoting a welcoming environment for refugees in the UK.

To kick off the campaign, they will come together on Zoom to write or type letters, discuss the campaign and inform you about other actions you can take to support Europe Must Act, all with a cup of tea in hand.

[Sign up here](#), and click 'going' to receive updates in the run up to the event!

If you can't attend but want to get involved with the campaign? Go to <http://europemustact.org/more-action>.

Next meeting

Thursday 10th September – we will send out joining instructions via our mailing list and social media nearer the time.