

Action

THE LEWES AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL GROUP NEWSLETTER

September 2020



MEDIA RELEASE

Lewes Amnesty International

Protest at market town with launch of “American Crisis” campaign as Tom Paine’s Lewes picks a fight with the United States. Protesters demand justice for the 40 men currently detained in Guantanamo for up to 18 years without charge or trial

15th August 2020



Today protesters in orange jumpsuits took to the streets of Lewes to protest against the continued detention without charge or trial of forty men in Guantanamo. Lewes Amnesty Campaigners were joined by Amnesty members from Brighton and Hove, Tunbridge Wells, Maidstone and Kingston.

They were keen to raise awareness about the continued operation of the illegal detention centre where dozens of men continue to languish without ever having been charged or faced a trial. Being held without charge or trial is outside the rule of law and is a practice which has no place in a modern democracy and is a practice that is unreservedly condemned by the United Nations.

The campaigners also wanted to show the detainees, all of whom have not seen their family members during their detention, that they had not been forgotten. At a recent Lewes Amnesty public Meeting held Puon Zoom Mohammedou Ould Slahi (who was detained for ten

years without charge or trial before being unconditionally released) explained how important it is for those still detained to feel that those in the outside world are still aware of their cruel and unjust plight.

A feature film being produced by Benedict Cumberbatch and starring Jodie Foster as Mohammedou's lawyer is due to be released in early 2021 which will also no doubt raise awareness of the brutally unjust treatment of the detainees.

The action launched Lewes Amnesty Group's year-long "American Crisis" campaign to fight human rights abuses in the United States. And as a one-time home of Tom Paine, the author of Common Sense and The Rights of Man, the town of Lewes has a unique connection to America's original cause of freedom. The group is "Calling America back to the fight for Human Rights" with four demands: Stop the Executions, Free the Refugee Children, Close Guantanamo Bay and Stop Police Brutality.

This planned action on Guantanamo was the first of many actions being planned by Lewes Amnesty International in this US election year to show the authorities that the people of Lewes still remember the principles promoted by Tom Paine in their country.

Along with the US election, this November will see the United Nations do its regular review of human rights in the United States. Amnesty International has written a 20 page document listing the ways that America has retreated from its historic commitment to this cause. The Lewes Amnesty Group has created a Pamphlet summarizing Amnesty's position, written in the style of Tom Paine. They will be sending it to schools and politicians in the States and asking: "What happened?"

Sara Birch, one of the organisers of the vigil, said "It is likely that the detainees will become aware of this action and so by taking this action at the very least we will show these men that they have not been forgotten by the outside world".

Lewes Amnesty is also organising a letter-writing project over the coming months to ensure that each of the detainees receives a letter. Says Birch: "Amnesty International aims to shine a light on the darkness whenever and wherever human rights violations are taking place and this is what we are aiming to do next Saturday on behalf of those men still detained in Guantanamo".

For more information, contact Lewes Amnesty Campaign Coordinator Sara Birch on 07710 789616 (Email: campaigns@lewesamnesty.org) or Lewes Secretary David Burke 07816 610380 (Email: info@amnestylewes.org)

For a copy of Amnesty's report to the United Nations, Lewes Amnesty Group's American Crisis pamphlet and more information about this year-long effort, visit the group's website: www.amnestylewes.org

Cybertorture

There's a modern style of torture that avoids leaving outward damage to its victims but can cause intense mental and psychological harm: "Cybertorture". This is to do with the internet and its use for intimidation, coercion, harassment, surveillance, public shaming and defamation, as well as manipulation of information. It is a vast extension of the potential for harm that anonymous phone calls have. Like with social media in general, victims are usually left without any effective means of defence, escape or self-protection, thus finding themselves in a position of "powerlessness" comparable to physical custody.

The current United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, is Nils Melzer, a Swiss human rights lawyer and professor at Glasgow University. In a recent report, he warns against the increasing use of cybertorture and draws attention to the fact that numerous states are "investing significant resources towards developing

methods of torture which can achieve purposes of coercion, intimidation, punishment, humiliation or discrimination without causing readily identifiable physical harm or traces.”

The report points out that psychological torture occurs in a wide variety of contexts and should be subject to the same scrutiny and guidelines as physical torture. An earlier report by Melzer described the way in which Julian Assange was subjected to extended misinformation to bias members of the public against him, involving several states (the US, UK, Sweden and Ecuador) as an example of psychological torture.

Melzer recommends that States should develop international guidelines on investigative interviewing and associated safeguards. He also calls for specific definitions, interpretations and understandings particularly in the training and instruction of medical, judicial, administrative, military and law enforcement personnel.

This article is drawn from the Quaker Concern for the Abolition of Torture Briefing No 65, July 2020.

The whole article, with references, can be found at

<http://qcat.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Q-CAT-Briefing-No-65-July-2020.pdf> .

The website of the UN Special Rapporteur for Torture is

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/torture/srtorture/pages/srtortureindex.aspx>

Chris Lawson

August 2020

Good news - Magai Matiop Ngong is no longer on death row

Several of us in the Lewes group at the Depot last summer sent cards and letters, protesting about the death sentence imposed in South Sudan on Magai, who was a teenager at the time of his crime. The South of Sudan court of Appeal has since quashed his death sentence.

In total more than 765, 000 Amnesty supporters around the world took action for Magai who was 15 when he was convicted of murder, in a killing which was deemed to be an accident. His case will now be sent back to the High Court which will rule on an appropriate sentence.



He was sentenced to death when he was 15 even though the death penalty for children under 18 is strictly prohibited by both International law and South Sudan's Transitional's Constitution



Racial Inequity And The Criminal Justice System In New York: Zoom Call with Attorney Ryan Budhu Lewes Amnesty Group on 12 Nov 2020 7pm

After the killings, the protests and now the election, where does America go from here? Beyond policing, how will the next president tackle the causes of inequality - in housing, education, health care and wealth creation? Will anything change?

Following the death of his brother in police custody, Ryan Budhu became an attorney. He has advised the City of New York on race relations and policing. He also does pro bono work for inmates on death row.

As part of our American Crisis campaign, Lewes Amnesty Group will host a public discussion with Mr Budhu about his work in New York and how he sees the future.

Mr. Budhu's personal and professional connection to these issues places him in a unique position from which to describe what was happening this summer and what is likely to happen now under a new, or just newly empowered, president and congress.

Reading and watching experts on television is useful. But joining a Zoom call with a witness to events is something else. We are lucky to have Mr. Budhu's first hand knowledge and happy for anyone to join us. To take part, or just listen in, visit our website and fill in the contact form: amnestylewes.org

Black lives matter reply

Black history and the curriculum: 31/07/20 - A reply from my MP Caroline Lucas to my earlier email in the June newsletter seeking MPs urge MP Gavin Williamson to ensure that all schools include/emphasis the linkage between our colonial history and present day racism.

“Please forgive the collective email but I received the attached from the Education Minister [Nick Gibb/Minister of state for school standards] and wanted to share it with you all asap.

You’ll know that I added my support to a cross party letter about ensuring the contributions of Black people and People of Colour are fully included in the history curriculum in our schools. The Minister’s response is far from satisfactory. For example, I think that the Government needs to take far more responsibility for ensuring the breadth and depth of British history is taught in our schools and not pass the buck to individual teachers.

I am also working proactively with The Black Curriculum Campaign to urge the Minister to meet campaign representatives and explore these issues further. Thank you for your support on decolonising the curriculum and I will let you know of any further developments.

Best wishes, Caroline

I would agree with the above sentiments. Nick Gibb’s lengthy letter makes the point ‘that the national curriculum is a framework that sets out the content, but not HOW subjects within it should be taught’.

He goes on to give examples within key stages 1, 2 1 and 3 where Black and minority ethnic history *could* be taught [my emphasis] - giving an example in key stage 3 which covers the impact of migration of people to and from the British Isles, plus the development and end of the British Empire and its transatlantic slave trade, its effect and even abolition.

It’s good to hear that Caroline is pursuing this with The Black Curriculum Campaign, urging the Minister to meet their representatives.

Black history month: As October will be ‘Black History month’, I am including Amnesty International’s overview of ‘**10 things Black Lives Activists made happen**’.

- Officers were charged over George Floyd’s death.
- ‘Defunding the police’ conversations’ have begun. Mayors in several cities are considering cutting police funding.
- Monuments memorialising racist history have been removed.
- New state and local laws are addressing police reform - various states have banned the use of chokeholds. Louisville banned the ‘no-knock’ search warrants.
- Some police departments are re-evaluating ‘use of force’ standards.
- Sports leagues acknowledge the impact of racism.
- Corporations act to address racism - Amazon imposed a moratorium on police use of its facial recognition product, ‘Rekognition’; Johnson and Johnson pledged to halt sales of skin-lightening creams.
- Juneteenth is considered for observance as a national holiday - It, the 19th June, commerrates the end of slavery in the USA.
- Federal laws introduced to address police reform and racism
- President Trump signs an executive order banning chokeholds - also requests law enforcement to create a national registry tracking officers who have a record of excessive force.

Lesley Burgess - Editor

Lewes Amnesty Diary 2020

Speaker: Ryan Bhudu - an attorney and advisor to New York City will speak about race relations and police reform [his brother died in police custody]

**12th November zoom at 7pm
AGM?**

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