



# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL Taunton Group Newsletter

April 2010

[www.amnesty.org.uk/taunton](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/taunton)

## Welcome

All supporters and friends are welcome to our meetings, held at 8pm on the second Tuesday of each month at the Silver Street Baptist Church, Taunton. The next meetings are on:

- 13 April
- 11 May
- 8 June
- 13 July
- 10 August (tbc)

**For more details please contact:**

### Chairman

Martin Shirley  
Email: martin@crich.eclipse.co.uk  
Tel. 01460 62608

### Secretary

Grace Pritchard  
Tel. 01935 823384

### Treasurer

Robin Peeler  
Email: peeler.robin@googlemail.com  
Tel. 01823 284001

### Press Officer

Wendy Collyer  
Email: wendy.collyer@hodder.co.uk  
Tel. 01984 667354

### Newsletter & Website Editor

Heather Greig  
Email: heatherg@clavelshay.plus.com  
Tel. 01278 663991

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## Election Special

The next UK general election is to take place on 6th May. The general election provides a unique opportunity for making contact with your local political candidates and raising their awareness of human rights issues. We invited the main candidates for Taunton Deane to tell us about their opinions on human rights – you can read their contributions on page 2



### Human rights and the general election

Amnesty International has urged all parties to make the following election commitments.

#### 1) The rights of women in the UK and overseas

The world over women face discrimination, abuse and violence, while governments have failed to respect and protect their rights, including the right to life, physical and mental integrity, the right to freedom from torture, and the right to education and health. Amnesty is calling on the UK Government to:

- Adopt an integrated strategy to tackle violence against women, and ensure the strategy has prevention at its core, providing provision of services to all women in the UK irrespective of their immigration status.

- Use its influence internationally to ensure that women are afforded the right to health and life through the reduction of unacceptably high maternal mortality ratios, with particular focus on access to sexual and reproductive rights.

- Improve women's full participation in processes relating to conflict prevention, resolution and peace-building.

#### 2) Security and human rights

Amnesty is calling on the UK Government to:

- End the use of Control Orders; they deny persons suspected of involvement in 'terrorism-related activities' any opportunity for a fair trial, and present a grave threat to human rights in the UK.
- End the 'Deportation

with Assurances' policy that seeks to deport foreign nationals suspected of involvement in terrorism to countries where they could face torture or ill-treatment.

- Establish a full, impartial and independent inquiry into UK involvement in rendition, secret detention and enforced disappearance.

#### 3) The human rights framework in the UK

The human rights protection afforded to individuals in the UK should be strengthened, not weakened, through any process examining the role of the Human Rights Act or contemplating the adoption of a Bill of Rights and Responsibilities.

#### 4) Human rights and poverty

Poverty and human rights violations often go hand in hand, and the UK Government must ensure that efforts to eradicate both are fundamental to its foreign policy. The UK must seek to ensure that the protection and fulfilment of human rights are given full expression in the Millennium Development Goals review process in 2010 and beyond.



## Jeremy Browne MP, Liberal Democrats

My liberalism - and the reason why I am a Liberal Democrat - derives from my emphatic commitment to freedom and human rights. I believe every individual should be at liberty to make his or her own choices so long as those decisions do not meaningfully harm others. From that belief comes my commitment to freedom of speech, democracy, freedom of association and freedom of the media.

I first took an interest in Amnesty when I was at secondary school, writing letters on behalf of prisoners of conscience. I have belonged to Amnesty for several years after being asked to join by the Taunton branch. I have also enjoyed a regular and productive relationship with the Taunton Amnesty branch. In Parliament I have been a consistent defender of human rights in many different guises. I oppose the death penalty and strongly disagree with those who wish to see capital punishment reintroduced in Britain.

I believe Britain can and should offer leadership on human rights, whilst making sure that we practice what we preach at home. We should represent a beacon of hope to oppressed people around the world. My track record and my political instincts do, I believe, mean I can be relied upon by Amnesty supporters to be a champion of human rights in Parliament.



## Mark Formosa, Conservatives

Possibly the best kept secret in politics is the Conservative Party Human Rights Group. Yes, despite sometimes being portrayed as a party opposed to human rights because we want to reform European legislation, we Conservatives do give human rights a high priority.

The group builds on a Conservative commission established in 2005 with my colleague and West Country MP Gary Streeter as founding chairman, following on from a paper written by human rights campaigners James Mawdsley and Benedict Rogers. We work closely with a number of human rights organisations, including Amnesty International, and firmly believe that freedom, democracy, human dignity, opportunity, and the rule of law should be at the heart of our politics.

For instance, we are calling for reform of the United Nations to ensure that any country wanting to be on the Human Rights Council must first address their own human rights records before election, and the creation of a 'Democracy Caucus' within the UN to balance other influential blocks.

Personally, one of my major human rights concerns here at home is to protect our justice system by resisting moves towards trials being held without a jury and for people to be put in custody for up to 90 days without a trial. I firmly believe in people's right to be tried by their peers in an open court, so that justice can continue not only to be done, but be seen to be done.



## Martin Jevon, Labour

As a Parliamentary Candidate you get asked to comment on many things, however its rare that you get an opportunity to talk about something you feel strongly about.

I am a gay man, and I am very proud of the Labour Government's achievements in equalities for LGBT people; the repeal of the hateful Section 28 of the local government act, introduced by the Tories; the equalising of the age of consent; Employment Protection; and Civil partnerships. These and the other advances that Labour have made whilst in office fill me with pride.

However I realise that I am very lucky. In the UK we enjoy freedoms that other people around the world can only dream of.

In Malawi two men face 14 years in prison for holding a commitment ceremony; in Iran gay men have been executed; last year in Uganda a bill providing for the death penalty for 'aggravated homosexuality' and for homosexual 'serial offenders' was

introduced in September; and a US state department report released this month detailed horrific actions against gay men in Iraq.

We live in a world where too many people suffer simply because of their beliefs, gender, religion, sexuality, trade union membership, or many other reasons. Whether I am elected as a Member of Parliament, or not, I will continue to fight for a free and fair world where people can live without fear.

Amnesty International does amazing work in highlighting these issues and I hope that it continues to do so for a long time to come. In the coming elections you all have a choice to make, and of course I hope that you will vote for me. The Labour Party has an excellent record in the field of equalities and Human Rights; if you want more information please visit our website: <http://www.labour.org.uk/Equalities> — or contact me.