



ABINGDON PEACE GROUP

Newsletter

October 2020

Call to artists, musicians, writers and actors living and working in the creative world.

Raising awareness about the futility and horrors of war and the essential need for militarisation to stop is really difficult. The Arts is one way of crossing barriers and conveying experiences, ideas and possibilities which can be hard to express in words. The Arts can trigger a response, not only to the subject but also 'what can I do about this'?

Would you be interested in discussing ideas for ways we could work together to raise awareness for the Abolition of War. Together we can come up with a plan; or two; and put it into action.

If so, get in touch with Alison Lochhead: alisonlochhead358@gmail.com mobile: 07976272765 (artist and member of MAW executive).

In this issue:

Cameroon – last month's meeting	pp2-4
Croughton report	p4
Black-Palestinian Solidarity meeting report	p4
LCpl Al-Babati	p5
Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh	p 5
Diary	p7

NEXT MEETING, on zoom:

Tuesday, 20th October 2020 at 8pm

Israeli activist Sahar Vardi on:

The enlisted virus – the militarization of Israel during COVID, and the resistance to it

Members have frequently said, with regret, how little we seem to know about the opposition within Israel to that country's policies towards the Palestinians. We read reports in the media about the topic from time to time, but then ... radio silence.

Our speaker in October, Sahar Vardi, is a Jerusalem based anti-militarism and anti-occupation activist. She publicly refused her military service and was imprisoned in 2008. Since then she has been active with Israeli anti-militarist groups such as New Profile and today works as the Israel Program Manager for the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) based in Jerusalem. Today most of her work focuses on conscription, as well as Israel's military industry and export. That would seem to fit the bill perfectly.



She will talk about militarization in Israel and how it manifests itself during Covid. She will include the occupation and current movements, Conscientious Objectors and activism. There may just also be time to report on the arms industry and the recent UAE "peace" agreements.

Joining the meeting: We will send you an email with a link by first thing on Oct 20. If you don't receive it and would like to take part, simply email us using abingdonpeace@gmail.com .

Our meeting in September: the crisis in Cameroon

This meeting had been planned for March, and was to be in our usual face-to-face format. Of course it had to be postponed, and was finally staged as a zoom call in September. Not everyone finds Zoom meetings very congenial, but they do have great potential in drawing participants who couldn't possibly attend in person. And so it proved – three people took part from Cameroon, not to mention Casimir Fotso, a Cameroonian who lives in Abingdon and who co-presented the session.

His co-presenter, Anne Dodd, gave an introduction. The majority of the population of some 26.5 million are francophone, but a substantial minority are anglophone living in the southwest and northwest. The country's valuable mineral resources are here, but political power lies in the French speaking areas. In 2016 the government sought to impose French education and legal systems on the English-speaking areas of the country, which the minority groups resented and protested against. The ensuing demonstrations were suppressed violently and the separatist independence for Ambozonia movement grew rapidly. Military conflict followed and continues to date. It is claimed that there is a high level of support for the military struggle, but this is uncertain.

In his powerpoint presentation, posed the question "What is happening NOW around Cameroon Anglophone crisis?". He showed us a large display of newspaper front pages, mostly in French, but some in English, which gave some sense of what the country – and the conflict – must be like to live in. As a francophone Cameroonian Casimir clearly accepts that the English speaking zones have been the victims of great injustice (going back to the exit from the country of the French colonial regime some 60 years ago), but made it clear that military activity would not solve any problems. He detailed initiatives of senior government players, with President Biya's agreement, seeking a just solution and was sharply critical of the refusal of the militants in the south to reciprocate. One problem was that the anglophone diaspora is divided – all in favour of change, but some advocating support for the armed struggle for an independent Ambozonia.

While Casimir's words perhaps expressed a fine balance between a restrained optimism and an awareness of the menacing difficulties of the present situation, then we heard also other even more 'realistic' views in the open discussion that followed. These particularly concerned the potential roles of the two former colonial powers, France and the UK. For example (taken from the very useful Zoom chat channel): "Don't hold your breath for the French Govt to intervene in any way that will satisfy the Anglophones / Ambazonians... But perhaps we can discuss: Why is the UK Foreign Office "washing it's hands" of any responsibility? UK Companies are profiting from the Oil and Gas offshore from the South Western Region (Anglophone) coastline....". The European powers' potential for playing a beneficial role are obvious – see below for what we might do.

Two other Zoom comments: "There are Regional Elections coming up before the end of the year - the first effort to establish Regional level Government since the Law on Decentralisation that was signed back in 1996 (after the last anglophone protest about marginalisation...). Does anybody think that this is now going to be a solution for the Anglophones ? Or is it too little and far too late?". And, referring to the central government currently led by President Biya, "The end-of-regime crisis, is already playing out... there is a power battle ongoing for who will take control next - and all the players somehow related to Biya".

The meeting also heard about the twinning of the Portsmouth Diocese of the Catholic Church with the Diocese of Bamenda and the funds raised to support projects in Bamenda (in North-West Cameroon) in collaboration with the local communities in the areas of Faith, Health, Education and Social Welfare - £1,000,000. (www.bamendaandportsmouth.com/the-projects.php).

Abingdon Peace Group became aware and interested in the dangerous situation in Cameroon when Rebecca Tinsley visited us and spoke about Darfur. She is very involved in spreading information and lobbying British and other politicians to get involved in ameliorating the situation. In the UK she represents Global Campaign for Peace & Justice in Cameroon (<http://cameroonpeacejustice.ca>). More information below.

Green:
Undisputed
Cameroonian
territory

Red: Part of
Cameroon
claimed by
Ambazonia



Map of French (blue) and English (red) as official regional [languages of Cameroon](#) and adjacent countries. The proportion of [Anglophone Cameroonians](#) is currently at around 16%, down from 21% in 1976.



More info and links

What can I/we do?

1 Feel more informed by getting weekly updates from www.cameroonpeacejustice.ca and canadiansforpeaceincameroon@gmail.com

2 Share your concern ...

3 Write to / email those who are able to influence the decision-makers:

- Layla Moran MP: layla.moran.mp@parliament.uk (for a useful model letter visit www.cameroonpeacejustice.ca – ask her to forward your concerns to the Foreign Secretary and the Minister for Africa.
- Bishop of Portsmouth Diocese – bishop@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk The Portsmouth diocese is twinned with the diocese of Bamenda.

Others able to influence the decision-makers:

- [President Biya: cellcom@prc.cm](mailto:cellcom@prc.cm) – There is a useful model letter, in French and English on the www.cameroonpeacejustice.ca website. French is better.
- Lisa Nandy MP lisa.nandy.mp@parliament.uk She is the Shadow Foreign Secretary. Labour needs to be pressed to take an interest.

4 Keep an eye on the media

- Write and thank if there is any mention of Cameroon
- Write and ask why, if there is no coverage.

Remember that every voice counts and every action makes a difference

Other very interesting follow-up possibilities:

<https://twitter.com/DoubleDownNews/status/1308019013176434689?s=20>

Here George Monbiot might lead you to believe that the Cameroon Anglophone crisis is a by-product of.... wait for it.... UK Corruption.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/minister-for-africa-urges-restraint-and-dialogue-in-cameroon>

1) Harriet Baldwin between 11 and 14 February 2018 to sharing a very gentle diplomatic message to 'both sides' to cease hostilities, but

a) avoided calling a spade a spade, through not acknowledging an entirely asymmetrical power

relationship. By contrast see the analysis by Roxana Willis, who leads the Oxford University 'Cameroon Conflict Research Group' – visit www.law.ox.ac.uk/cameroon . Roxana had heard about our meeting and we were very pleased she could participate.

b) failed to recognise our own role in both the history that created the current mess; and

c) served our current commercial interests that mean UK doesn't want to rock the boat in Yaoundé.

2) Baroness Fairhead's meeting with the Secretary General of the Presidency in the UK sometime back in 2018, followed soon after by ...

3) Liam Fox's visit to Yaoundé in June 2018 to clinch the deal for British Oil and Gas companies

Global War Fighting Starts Here – in Croughton, near Oxford

Members of Abingdon Peace Group and others have been visiting RAF (so-called) Croughton annually for quite a few years. Each time we hear details of the technology - and its further development over the previous year – which underpins the capacity of the US and its allies (aka attack dogs) to launch, for example, drone attacks all over the world. This year the Croughton demonstration took place online under the auspices of National CND, with Oxford CND in the lead and hundreds of supporters logged in. A recording will soon be available on Facebook, You Tube and the CND website. Tony Godfrey has not been to the Croughton demo in the past, but he logged on on October 3rd and gives his reactions here.

Many going past the signs for RAF Croughton will assume it is just another airforce base. However we know that is part of an American-run vast international network of ground-based network stations hacking information, deploying defence and attacking systems.

At the CND webinar, David Webb spoke about the fast developing weaponisation of Space and the desire by the American military for full spectrum dominance. He spoke of the development of hypersonic cruise missiles, unmanned space missiles and drones used already for surveillance and death. The scenario is terrifying with millions being spent on more and more sophisticated weapons while Covid 19 is devastating economies and lives throughout the world.

Black-Palestinian Solidarity : webinar 27.8.20

I joined this webinar out of curiosity, wondering what Black Lives Matter has to do with Palestine, but I was also hooked by the name of one of the two speakers – Angela Davis! Could it really be *that* Angela Davis – she of the big hair, radical feminist activist, supporter of the Black Panther movement in the 60s? Is she even still alive?

Turns out she is only 6 years older than me, and very much alive. She and her fellow speaker, Jamal Juma, a gentle Palestinian professor based in Jerusalem, were introduced by a very lively young gay, black activist called Kristian Davis Bailey. And their conversation was electrifying.

When Mike Brown was shot and killed in Ferguson, Missouri, on August 9, 2014, Black Lives Matter became a rallying cry across the US, and Palestinians recognised only too easily the militarized police responses and tear gas. The link between Ferguson and Palestine became real and visceral: see the short video “**When I See Them I See Us**”. <https://youtu.be/tFVijtMN4dU> . Chants like “from Ferguson to Palestine, end racism now” and “from Palestine to Mexico, all the walls have got to go” are not slogans; they are shared realities that emerge from a common experience under racist, settler colonial regimes.

From racial profiling to police and military brutality, to corporate profiteering off mass incarceration of youth, the systems that oppress the Palestinian people and Black communities in the US are rooted in white supremacy. Both peoples recognize the commonalities in their struggles, leading to a long history of Black-Palestinian solidarity.

Angela's 2015 book “Freedom is a constant struggle” is seminal. Prisons are designed to maintain the status quo and to protect affluent, mostly white people. We need to challenge the militarisation of the

police, and indeed of society, and that means challenging capitalism and colonialism.

Gaza is the biggest open prison in the world and \$3.8 billion goes from the US every year to oppress Palestinians. In the US 50% of federal funding goes to the military and 40-50% of each state's funding goes to the police.

Jamal Juma said, "What we are facing is not occupation but colonialism". If the Middle East is liberated from Zionist colonialist ideology it will benefit both Israelis and Palestinians. But this is not just about the US and Palestine: we need to demand the end of militarism in the Middle East, Kashmir, the US, Mexico, Iraq...

Angela Davis ended with a challenge: Many of our ideas of happiness and success are derived from capitalism. Are our ideas of freedom still based on colonial ideas?

And Jamal ended with a positive message: Solidarity is about our ethics, our morals, what we believe in. What makes you go into the street and demonstrate? It's **hope**.

Learn more: <https://uscpr.org/blackpalestiniansolidarity/> <https://www.freedomfuture.org/> (Sally Reynolds)

Lance Corporal Ahmed Al-Babati

Last month we reported the brave protest conducted by this British soldier, following his denunciation of British policy in supplying arms and military equipment to Saudi Arabia, as it continues to be used to prosecute the devastating war in Yemen (where he comes from). He was arrested and is detained at barracks in Wales. Postcards of support should be sent to:

LCpl Al-Babati, 14th Signal Regt, Cawdor Barracks, Brawdy, Haverfordwest, SA62 6NN

Supportive things you can do:

- There's a Stop the War petition you can sign at: www.tinyurl.com/peacenews3430 .

- Ahmed has also made a truly excellent five-minute video (www.tinyurl.com/peacenews3431) that would certainly be worth forwarding to friends and acquaintances.

- and there's a link to a CAAT page through which you can email your concerns about arms sales to Yemen to your MP: www.tinyurl.com/peacenews3432

Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh

We have been contacted by a local couple of Armenian heritage who are deeply concerned by the effects of the fighting in the southern Caucasus. In particular they are appalled by the scant coverage in British media and have asked if we can help make the British public more aware of the savagery of this war. We are pleased in the first instance to reproduce the following series of press releases from Amnesty.

AZERBAIJAN AND ARMENIA MUST PROTECT CIVILIANS ALONG THE FRONTLINE IN NAGORNO-KARABAKH 29 September 2020

Amnesty International calls on all sides to the conflict in Azerbaijan's breakaway region of Nagorno Karabakh to fully respect international humanitarian law and protect civilians from the effects of hostilities. On 27 September, heavy fighting erupted between Azerbaijan, on the one hand, and Armenia and Armenian-supported Nagorno-Karabakh forces, on the other, over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region. Azerbaijan announced a "counter-offensive" military operation along the entire frontline in Nagorno-Karabakh which it claimed was in response to shelling by Armenian forces, while Armenia and de facto authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh declared martial law and military mobilisation. Dozens of persons are reported dead on both sides with the death toll rising.

On October 5th Amnesty resumed thus:

Protection of civilians caught in the escalating conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region must be prioritised, Amnesty International said today, after corroborating the use of banned cluster bombs in the region.

Over the weekend, footage consistent with the use of cluster munitions in the city of Stepanakert, the capital of Nagorno-Karabakh, was published by the region's de facto authorities. They also reported an unidentified number of civilian casualties after further shelling in Stepanakert and the town of Shushi.

As fighting continues to escalate, civilians must be protected, not deliberately targeted or recklessly endangered.

Amnesty International's Crisis Response experts were able to trace the location of the footage to residential areas of Stepanakert, and identified Israeli-made M095 DPICM cluster munitions that appear to have been fired by Azerbaijani forces.

"The use of cluster bombs in any circumstances is banned under international humanitarian law, so their use to attack civilian areas is particularly dangerous and will only lead to further deaths and injuries," said Denis Krivosheev, Amnesty International's acting Head of Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

"Cluster bombs are inherently indiscriminate weapons, and their deployment in residential areas is absolutely appalling and unacceptable. As fighting continues to escalate, civilians must be protected, not deliberately targeted or recklessly endangered."

Amnesty International has called on all sides to the conflict to fully respect international humanitarian law, and to protect civilians from the effects of hostilities.



(map from Wiki Commons)

Background

On 27 September, heavy fighting erupted between Azerbaijan and Armenia and Armenian-supported forces in Azerbaijan's break-away region of Nagorno-Karabakh. In recent days, both sides involved in the conflict have exchanged artillery and rocket fire.

Azerbaijan reported that the Armenian forces attacked civilian areas in the country's second largest city of Ganja, as well as other towns. While Amnesty International experts have verified that 300mm Smerch rocket artillery systems do appear to have been used by Armenian forces, the photographic and video evidence available from the Azerbaijani side does not yet allow for conclusive analysis of its specific targets, nor whether the rocket warheads contained cluster munitions.

Cluster bombs

Cluster bombs are inherently indiscriminate weapons that inflict suffering for civilian populations years after their use, and are internationally banned by a treaty backed by more than 100 states. Amnesty International is calling on both Armenia and Azerbaijan to become parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

Cluster munitions scatter hundreds of bomblets, or submunitions, over a wide area. It is estimated that between 5 and 20 per cent of cluster bomblets fail to explode. They are then left behind, posing a threat to civilians similar to that of anti-personnel landmines.

The use of these bombs violates the prohibition of indiscriminate attack because of the wide area covered by the numerous bomblets released, and the danger posed to all who come into contact with the unexploded munitions. (Amnesty ends)

A debate on the situation took place in the House of Lords on October 7, with notable contributions from Lord Alton and Baroness Cox. For some coverage of the conflict:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/08/nagorno-karabakh-conflict-both-sides-accused-of-using-cluster-bombs>

Diary

Wed Oct 14: (online) Nuclear Weapons and Disarmament: What does the future hold? Join Jeremy Corbyn MP, Sir Jonathon Porritt, Kate Hudson, Dr Olamide Samuel and David Cullen chaired by Henrietta Wilson for discussions covering the latest updates on the UK nuclear weapons programme, links between civil and military nuclear projects, global threats and the future of disarmament and activism. There will be a Q&A session. NIS event – limited spaces. 2 – 3.30pm

To register <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/nuclear-weapons-disarmament-what-does-the...>

Wed Oct 14: online panel discussion with experts in human rights, ethics and global governance to debate the principles of climate justice and how they can be applied to climate-induced displacement. Speakers: Professor Conor Gearty, Professor Tahseen Jafry, Professor Chukwumerije Okereke. Free event and open to all but pre-registration is required. Registration will open after 10am via Zoom on Wednesday 30 September. For any queries email events@lse.ac.uk. 6.30 – 8.00pm

Sat Nov 7: (MAW) AGM and Annual lecture Fabian Hamilton, Labour Member of Parliament for Leeds North East and Shadow Minister for Peace and Disarmament, has agreed to give this year's lecture. Mr Hamilton was recently re-appointed to the role of Shadow Minister by new Labour Leader, Sir Keir Starmer.

More details soon from <http://www.abolishwar.org.uk/>

Comments, corrections, contributions etc to this newsletter are very welcome.

Abingdon Peace Group meets on the third Tuesday of each month except August. At present our meetings are taking place online. All who are interested in peace and campaigning for it are welcome to take part. The Group has no party political affiliations.

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