

Middle East Solidarity

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**‘Solidarity and
resistance
are the way
forward’**

US activists
challenge
Trump’s
Middle East
agenda



Protesting at Philadelphia airport against the 'Muslim Ban'
Photo: Joe Piette

Eyewitness

A struggle for dignity

Palestinian prisoners resist oppression and humiliation even inside Israeli jails

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Students protest corruption in Yemen

Walkouts hit Aden University

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Rebellion rocks the Rif

Morocco's marginalised North shaken by new protest movement, Mehdi Rafiq reports

365 days without Giulio

Protests across Italy mark the anniversary of the PhD student's disappearance

Inside Egypt's social crisis

Anger and frustration grow as Sisi's regime tries to make the poor pay for economic failure



Illustration: Ashraf Omar



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About us

Events in the Middle East often dominate the news, but it is the stories of war, sectarian violence and western military intervention which grab the headlines.

Middle East Solidarity shows a different side to the region.

We report on resistance to repression and imperialism from Morocco to Yemen, covering the strikes and protests which are missed by the mainstream media.

We hope to carry the voices and stories of the women and men who are still fighting for bread, freedom and social justice to new audiences.

Our practical guides to campaigning and resources for activists aim to build a stronger solidarity movement.

Middle East Solidarity is a joint project of MENA Solidarity Network, Egypt Solidarity Initiative and Bahrain Watch, and is supported by funding from UCU, PCS, NUT and a number of Trades Union Councils and local trade union branches.

You can find out more about our campaigns online here:

www.menasolidaritynetwork.com
www.egyptsolidarityinitiative.org
www.bahrainwatch.org

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Source of Inspiration by Andeel

As cartoonist for independent news website *Mada Masr*, Andeel has plenty of opportunities to land satirical punches on Egypt's rulers. In this image Sisi looks up to his new overlord in admiration: "Now that's what I call a leader!"

Andeel also works with Bassem Yousef, the heart surgeon-turned-satirist who took Egypt by storm after the revolution of 2011. Catch an interview with him and more of his work in Sara Taksler's new film *Tickling Giants*.

For more information visit:
www.madamasr.com and www.ticklinggiants.com

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BAHRAIN WATCH

'These attacks are war crimes'

Kim Sharif, a lawyer and director of Human Rights for Yemen, exposes British complicity in the Saudi-led war.

What is going on in Yemen? On 23 January alone there were up to 240 air raids on various parts of the country. These were carried out by a coalition led by the Saudi regime. Its allies in the coalition are Bahrain, Qatar, Emirates, Pakistan, Jordan, Morocco and Egypt: so quite a lot of countries put together.

They are trying to force the people of Yemen to accept Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, the man the Saudi regime regards as the legitimate president.

On 24 January there were 24 air raids in the Sana'a area, the capital city. There were also raids in the Al-Jawf area and the southern parts of Shabwa'. Remarkably, all of these raids are not military targets: they are civilian targets. We do hear about the deaths of soldiers, but these are very few compared to the deaths of civilians.

What sort of places do the airstrikes target? The forces who are 'helping' the people of Yemen to restore order, or its 'legitimate president', have hit (up to day 600 of the air campaign) 719 schools and institutes, 263 health facilities, 202 civilian facilities, 100 sports facilities, 108 universities, 20 media facilities, and 2,317 transportation facilities.

These figures are staggering. Each and every one of these attacks on civilian targets amounts to a war crime. There's no messing about in the definition of what amounts to a war crime. Why would you target schools and institutes, when you've got about 80 British personnel in your war room with the most advanced and sophisticated targeting system?

It is not like the old days when we used to have a red pin on the wall to say this is a target. This is not the Second World War, this is advanced modern technology.

You have a projector on a screen telling you this is clearly a Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors without Borders) building. To then go and do a double tap strike on that building is clearly an intention to hit a civilian target and to kill civilians. And these are the most vulnerable citizens, because who's in a hospital? The sick, the elderly, children and women.

The most recent attack on a school is Al-Falah school in the Na'im district of the capital: 8 children and staff



An airstrike on Sana'a | Photo: Ibrahem Qasim

dead, school destroyed, up to 14 children and one other hurt very seriously.

The most shocking of all attacks in Yemen was on 8 October last year when the Saudi-led coalition targeted a funeral hall of 1,000 people who came together for a funeral. They killed up to 400 people, and many of those people died simply because they couldn't leave the country to seek medical assistance abroad because the airport is subject to a strict blockade.

UNICEF says that every ten minutes a child dies in Yemen because of malnutrition. Why is there malnutrition? Because, in addition to the illegal airstrikes on the country, there is a strictly enforced blockade by the Saudi regime and its allies. So there's not enough food coming in, there's no medicine coming in and people are dying as a result. It is genocide by blockade.

What is worrying for us as a nation, an advanced, civilised, pro-democracy, freedom-loving nation like the UK and the US, is supporting the Saudi regime by supplying it with weapons, logistics and intelligence.

Our own personnel are in the war rooms of Riyadh, guiding them and doing everything. It really pains me to see that my country, Britain, today is making billions and billions of dollars out of the genocide of the people of Yemen.

This article is based on a presentation to UCU London Retired Members branch. Watch more online: <https://youtu.be/UqormnaloCk>



YEMEN

Aden University students walk out

Mirfat Sulaiman

Students from the Faculty of Education at Aden University in Yemen walked out of classes during protests on 15 January.

Lecturers and students jointly rejected the sacking of the new principal, Dr Mohammed Al-Fakeerh.

The students said the real reason for the government's decision is that Dr Al-Fakeerh rejected its chaotic sale of university lands.

The students announced further strikes are to come and said they would continue to protest until the demand for his reinstatement was met.

Meanwhile at Aden University's Faculty of Engineering, five hundred students walked out on 22 January with the slogan "Give us our rights".

Students' demands mainly reflect the post war situation in Aden.

They called for a cap on the price of food in the university canteen and on stationery. They also demanded the reconstruction of bombed buildings and the provision of electricity generators.

In the Civil Engineering Faculty, management have marginalised many of the lecturers because they are known to be supporters of the peaceful movement for the independence of South Yemen (Al-Hirak).

Dr Aidross al-Yahri's salary was stopped on this pretext, for example.

The universities of the Yemeni capital Sana'a have



Aden Engineering students protest against corruption | Photo: Aljanoobalyoum.com

recently seen similar strikes over pay, but some of the lecturers have been killed and many have been arrested by the regime.

Yemen has been devastated by war for the last two years: the outcome of counter-revolution and an imposed intervention by external powers acting in their own interests.

In 2011 the country witnessed a people's uprising against dictatorship (in this case the rule of President Ali Abdullah Saleh).

Five hundred students walked out with the slogan: "Give us our rights!"

In 2013 the Gulf countries, the US and the UK intervened with a shameful treaty which asked Saleh to step down but gave him total immunity from prosecution.

The treaty crowned Saleh's vice-president Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi as the leader in a one-candidate election.

People's hopes for real change were dashed by the continuation of the same corruption as under Saleh's regime.

South Yemen was previously the Democratic Republic of Yemen which united with the northern Arab Republic of Yemen in 1990.

War broke out in 1994 after the South attempted to withdraw from the union, but was invaded and occupied by Saleh's forces. The Southerners' peaceful movement for independence, called Al-Haraak, started in 2007.

The treaty and the election which installed Hadi in power were rejected and boycotted in the South.

In 2014-15 a resurgent Saleh with his forces allied with the Houthi movement staged a coup, taking over the capital Sana'a from Hadi and seizing many other cities with little or no resistance.

Their troops moved South to Aden but faced resistance, from locals who previously were part of the peaceful movement for independence.

They launched an armed resistance movement and fought on the ground for four months.

The Gulf states which backed Hadi also bombed the Saleh-Houthi forces which had seized control of the South. Now the South has been freed from the Saleh-Houthi forces, but it is still under the rule of the corrupt Hadi government.

However, the struggles in Aden have shifted from armed resistance back to a civil struggle for better living conditions in a country rich in resources.

TIME LINE

1874 Treaty establishes British military occupation in Aden, South Yemen

1918 Imam Yahya, ruler of North Yemen declares independence from collapsing Ottoman Empire

1963 British declare state of emergency in Aden as nationalist movement grows

1967 British troops quit Aden, independence of South Yemen

1970 Radical wing of ruling National Liberation Front renames the country People's Democratic Republic of Yemen and forms alliance with USSR

1972 Border clashes between two Yemens

1990 Two Yemens united as Republic of Yemen

1994 Attempted split between North and South. Northern forces capture Aden

2000 First Al Qaeda attacks in Yemen

2011 Arab uprisings reach Yemen; Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi appointed interim President

ITALY

Protests mark '365 days without Giulio'

Carlotta Mingardi

January 25 marked one year from the disappearance of Giulio Regeni, the Italian PhD candidate from Cambridge University who was researching independent trade unions in Egypt for his doctoral thesis.

Giulio's body was found on 3 February 2016 with signs of torture which human rights groups say resemble methods commonly used by the Egyptian security forces.

Since that date the Italian government has been under massive pressure from Italian civil society and particularly from Amnesty International's campaign "Truth for Giulio" (Verità per Giulio) to uncover the truth of who was responsible for Giulio's murder.

Late last year that pressure appeared to be lessening: there was little public opposition to the announcement by the government in December of its intention to restore diplomatic relations interrupted in April 2016 by sending a new ambassador to Cairo.

The scale of the mobilisation organised around the anniversary of Giulio's disappearance tells an entirely different story, however.

Italian civil society (unions, universities, municipalities, students,

citizens) heavily mobilised to call on the Italian authorities not to encourage a normalisation of diplomatic relations and to seriously continue investigating in Giulio's case.

Rallies were held in twenty-five town squares across Italy with hundreds of people attending each event (reaching 2,000 in Fiumicello, Giulio's hometown), while the official demonstration was held in Rome.

National television and newspapers took the lead on the campaign by giving space and voice to Giulio's family and their legal advisor Alessandra Ballerini.

Important figures from academia such as Lucia Sorbera, (lecturer in Arab History at Sydney University) also spoke out.

In an interview with radio SBS, she reaffirmed the connection between Giulio's case and the wider systematic violation of human rights happening in Egypt.

Another academic, Elena Cattaneo, emphasized the intrinsic value of research (a field in Italy currently heavily hit by budget cuts), and called on the government not to surrender to "some comfortable truth".

Overall, the anniversary demonstrations powerfully showed that Giulio Regeni's case has not only awakened something in Italian civil society, but they also provided an example of civil society's power to actually influence, at the moment, Italian foreign policy.

[Turn to page 20 for a full report on the Truth for Giulio campaign in the UK and page 22 for more details on how you can get involved.](#)

Pressure is working

Antonio Marchesi

What is a movement that is concerned about the human rights of everybody, whether we have or don't have something in common.

But in the campaign for Giulio we faced the risk of appearing to be more concerned with Italians being ill-treated in other countries.

So we broadened the range and scope of the campaign to the context of human rights violations in Egypt. Truth for Giulio meant Truth for the Egyptian disappeared as well, and that was very important.

Giulio's family was very helpful in this respect because they allowed us to

use Giulio's case to draw attention to the human rights violations of many non-Italians.

We collected 60,000 signatures calling on the Italian government not to send the ambassador back and we handed them to the Prime Minister's office on 25 January. We were joined by some political figures including the president of parliament.

The campaign is keeping public awareness of the case high.

We will not allow the Italian government to stop putting pressure on the Egyptian authorities.

Antonio Marchesi is president of Amnesty Italy

IRAQ

Hundreds of thousands flee Mosul

Experts from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) warned in March that the long-drawn out battle to recapture the northern Iraqi city of Mosul from ISIS had already led to over 200,000 people fleeing their homes.

Hundreds of thousands more could be forced to leave as fighting intensifies, according to the United Nations.

Iraqi forces leading the assault claim that they are liberating the city from ISIS, and there are many reports attesting to the brutality of ISIS's rule.

But human rights organisations say that the incoming troops are also committing war crimes, sowing the seeds of a new cycle of violence.

Human Rights Watch



Yazidi refugees flee from ISIS in late 2015 | Photo: Marco Gomes

reported in February that forces belonging to the Iraqi government's Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) looted, burned and demolished homes in several villages south west of Mosul.

In the village of

Khoytlah 110 buildings were destroyed, while in neighbouring Ashwa it was 140, while Mashirafat al-Jisr lost 100 buildings.

"Absent a legitimate military objective, there is no excuse for destroying civilian homes," said Lama

EGYPT

Activists rally for Sinai Christians

Opposition parties, civil society groups and hundreds of individual activists have launched a call for solidarity with Christian families forced out of Egypt's Sinai governorate by threats and violence from ISIS-affiliated militants.

Hundreds of families from the Christian community in the Sinai town of Al-Arish fled to

Isma'iliyya and Port Sa'id in late February and early March, following a spate of murders of Christians by ISIS gunmen.

A statement announcing "the start of a mass campaign of solidarity" was backed by a wide range of parties and movements and gathered 500 signatures from prominent activists.

"The forced displacement of dozens of Christian families from North Sinai, reflects the situation for the local population since the province became an open battleground in the fight between armed sectarian organisations, the army and the police.

"The people of Sinai are the ones paying the price for this war as they

have become the target of violations by both sides."

"We affirm that respect for the values of citizenship, the right to belief and respect for human rights are the only way to save all citizens from the influence of armed groups and from the repression of the state", the statement said.

Sally Touma, an activist and well-known psychiatrist, wrote on her Facebook page about how groups and individuals involved in the campaign organised a solidarity convoy to bring donations and practical support to the displaced families.

The activists faced constant harassment from the Egyptian security

Fakih, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. "All the destruction does is to keep civilians from going home."

Mosul fell to ISIS forces in 2014, and the assault on the city by Iraqi forces and their allies has been in going on since autumn last year.

Incoming troops are also committing war crimes, sowing the seeds of a new cycle of violence.

Iraqi troops took control of the eastern side of Mosul in January after 100 days of fighting.

The attack on the city's western districts began on 19 February.

Iraqi army units, Kurdish peshmerga forces and Iranian-backed Shi'a militias are cooperating in the battle with the support of air strikes from a coalition of countries allied to the US, including the UK.

Report by Middle East Solidarity news team

forces, who attempted to disrupt the solidarity campaign.

Violence between the Egyptian army and security forces and ISIS-affiliated militants has increased sharply in Sinai in recent years.

The Egyptian regime's military tactics have come under severe criticism by human rights groups.

The army demolished thousands of homes near the border with Gaza in 2015, and incidents of arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial execution and torture by the Egyptian military and security forces are common.

Report by Middle East Solidarity news team

BAHRAIN

Executions spark fury at British complicity

Anne Alexander

Bahrainis took to the streets to protest the execution of three men convicted after torture and unfair trials.

Abbas al-Samea, 27, Ali al-Singace, 21 and Sami Mushaima, 42, were shot at 3am on 15 January.

Despite the dangers of arrest, hundreds of queued to pay their respects to the three at funeral gatherings.

They had been found guilty of planting a bomb which killed three policemen, but international human rights campaigners are convinced the convictions were unsafe.

Dr Agnes Callamard, a UN special rapporteur, tweeted that the sentences were the result of "torture, unfair trial and flimsy evidence". "These are extrajudicial killings", she added.

The January executions show that Bahrain is regressing with regards to political development and human rights," says Marc Owen Jones, a research fellow at the University of Exeter.

"The fact that these are the first official executions to have occurred since 2010 suggest Bahrain is becoming more, not less authoritarian."

Bahraini human rights campaigner Maryam al-Khawaja accused the UK of complicity in the executions of Al-Samea, Al-Singace and Mushaima.

"Their blood is just as much on the hands of the UK and US governments as



Cartoon: Marc Owen Jones

the Bahrain regime", she said on Twitter.

Certainly, the British government doesn't seem to have a problem with human rights abuses in Bahrain so long as the regime there accommodates British military and commercial interests.

Prince Charles officially opened a major new British naval base in Bahrain in November last year and Theresa May and Boris Johnson both visited Bahrain in December.

"Britain is back East of Suez", bragged Johnson in his speech at the Manama Dialogue conference, referring to the policy of military withdrawal from the Gulf and further East initiated in 1968 as "a mistake".

The scale of Bahraini government funding for the conference which gave

Johnson his platform was revealed by Bahrain Watch, which published leaked memos showing that the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) has received £14.9 million to organise the yearly event since 2013.

The British government doesn't seem to have a problem with human rights abuses so long as the regime accommodates British interests

The IISS promotes itself as an independent 'thinktank', and its experts are frequent commentators in the media.

Yet it received almost a quarter of its funds from

the Bahraini government.

Bahrain Watch said: "Any organisation should be concerned about receiving donations of such a large sum from a single donor, but they should be even more concerned when that donor is an autocratic government with such a terrible track record for human rights."

The Bahraini government is willing to spend so much on the IISS and the Manama Dialogues because they allow the government to portray itself as modern, liberal and business-friendly, in contradiction to the evidence of torture, abuse and political disenfranchisement that has been so well documented by countless credible organisations already."

See p22 for campaigning actions on Bahrain

BUILDING THE RESISTANCE TO TRUMP

Middle East Solidarity spoke to activists in the US about their expectations for Trump's policies in the Middle East and how they are organising in response.

Joanne Landy is co-director of the Campaign for Peace and Democracy which promotes a new, progressive, and non-militaristic U.S. foreign policy.

Seth Uzman is a student organiser at the University of Texas.

Howie Hawkins is a Teamster who works at UPS in Syracuse, New York. He was the Green Party candidate for New York Governor in 2014.

Bill Fletcher Jr is a lifelong activist with several unions **Andrew Pollack** is an activist with MENA Solidarity-US.

Turn to the back page to read more from US Palestinian activist **Sumaya Awad**.



Photo: Fibonacci Blue

Donald Trump regularly contradicts himself, and takes pride in being unpredictable, so it's difficult to say what his foreign policy will actually look like. But one thing is certain: Trump's cynicism and indifference, even contempt, for democracy and human rights will permeate his relations with the rest of the world," peace campaigner Joanne Landy explains.

Trump is an "equal-opportunity endorser of routine human rights violators", she adds. "Trump's admiration of Vladimir Putin is well known by now, but his respect for strongmen isn't limited to the authoritarian Russian president.

Referring to Egyptian president Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi's brutal consolidation of power after the military overthrow of the Mohammed Morsi government in 2013, Trump said "He took control of Egypt. And he really took control of it." He praised Sisi and expressed his "strong support for Egypt's war on terrorism," and described how "under a Trump administration, the United States of America will be a loyal friend, not simply an ally, that Egypt can count on in the days and years ahead."

A key battleground will be the

Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement initiated by Palestinian activists, and now widely supported by the student movement in the US.

"Trump's policies toward Israel/Palestine may be the last nail in the coffin of a two-state solution as West Bank settlements continue to expand, now with U.S. backing, leaving one democratic state as the only viable solution for the left and the peace movement to support", says Howie Hawkins of the US Green Party.

Trump is sending strong signals to the Israeli government that he will support the expansion of illegal settlements in the Occupied Territories, Joanne Landy warns. "In January 2016 Trump called for a veto of the UN Resolution calling on Israel to "immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem."

He has nominated his own bankruptcy attorney David Friedman – a notorious supporter of settlements – for ambassador to Israel, and has said he supports moving the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem."

According to trade union activist Bill Fletcher Jr, a move to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel would not only violate international law and precedent but it would give the go-ahead for further settlements and annexation. "It is clear that there is no two-state solution and that we are looking at a situation much like the fight within apartheid South Africa. It is not only a matter of fighting Israeli apartheid: it is that a separate Palestinian republic is being rendered impossible," he argues.

Seth Uzman, a student activist from the University of Texas says that "It is essential that we deepen

the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel. The international call for solidarity issued in 2005 has been seized by activists across the globe and since then their activities have made serious inroads in isolating Israel, costing corporations billions of dollars and sending the Israeli state apparatus into panic.

“Because of this success, however, we’ve seen a global backlash of legislation (with bipartisan support in the US and large financial backing from Israel) and blacklists seeking to slander, curtail and punish BDS organising and Palestine solidarity activists.

“We need movements condemning the blacklists, local committees that will defend the right to boycott Israel and most importantly, an undaunted BDS movement that will continue an uncompromising, principled struggle amidst repression.”

Defending migrants and refugees lies at the heart of the mass movement against Trump and his government, US activists say.

The assault on migrants’ rights by the state has been accompanied by rising levels of prejudice in society.

But there is also a serious fightback, Howie Hawkins explains. “Trump’s promises to ban Muslim immigration and deport undocumented immigrants will pose serious problems for Middle Eastern immigrants, even for those with documentation because of the racial and religious profiling these policies entail.”

In response to Trump’s proposed immigration policy, Howie says there are plans to defend “sanctuary cities” that do not enforce national immigration laws and forbid police or municipal employees to inquire about a person’s immigration status. “We are also demanding that the U.S admit a much higher number of refugees from the wars in the Middle East.”

Solidarity between Middle Eastern activists and anti-racist activists in the US has been growing over the last few years, Seth Uzman notes. “Palestinian flags, for example, could be seen waving at Ferguson protests in 2014. The next year, 1,000 black activists, intellectuals and artists published a letter in solidarity with the struggle for Palestinian liberation. In 2016, The Movement for Black Lives published a list of demands, connecting the struggle against racism in the U.S. to the struggle against US empire abroad.

“The next steps are to expand and



Photo: Stephen Melkisetian

deepen these movements by building infrastructure for mass mobilization and to include struggles against anti-immigrant racism, struggles for indigenous peoples and to give them all real striking power by integrating the core struggle of labor against capital.”

Andrew Pollack of MENA Solidarity Network-US sees an important connection between activism in solidarity with the Arab revolutions and the movements in the US defending refugees and challenging racism and Islamophobia.

“Supporters of MENA Revolutions, including especially the one in Syria, were at the core of late 2015/early 2016 rallies in support of refugees and against Islamophobia, so the networking done to build such rallies, and to engage in day-to-day work on those issues, will be useful as anti-Trump actions around each and all of his policies come together”.

Continued solidarity with the Syrian Revolution will be “the main task for activists working in solidarity with the Middle East North Africa (MENA) revolutions in 2017” he says.

For Seth Uzman, Trump’s policies over Syria are likely to run up against the contradictions of the rivalry between US and Russian imperialism at a regional level. “While the US and Russia were initially at odds over how best to crush the Syrian Revolution, they both seem to have made their peace with Assad and are now committing resources towards removing ISIS as a reactionary challenge to US and Russian imperialism in the region as it sits on Iraqi oil reserves valuable to Russian and US capital.

“It remains unclear though how far US and Russian collaboration can extend, given their ultimate competing interests as imperialist powers, Trump’s

antagonizing of Russia’s ally, Iran and the US alliance with Saudi Arabia, Iran’s rival in the region.”

Trump’s policies are not all new, of course. In many respects he inherits and deepens policies from his predecessor, Barack Obama.

As Joanne makes clear “We can’t forget the Obama Administration’s proposed nuclear modernisation program – estimated to cost as much as \$1 trillion dollars over 30 years, its support for Israel’s horrific 2014 war on Gaza and \$38 billion aid pact with Israel in 2016; the increased military presence in Europe and murderous drone warfare.” And Seth agrees: “we can expect a continuation and expansion of US drone and air warfare to extend power and wreak havoc in countries such as Libya, Somalia, Yemen, Afghanistan and Pakistan. From drones to the deportation of immigrants, Trump will avail himself of the legal infrastructure and machinery Obama built for him.”

In terms of what we outside the US can do, Seth is positive that mass solidarity mobilisations such as the international success of the Women’s March, and BlackLivesMatter organising lend confidence to the corresponding movements in the US.

“Mass mobilisation must also extend to anti-war organising which needs to be transnational in order to effectively challenge imperialist intervention abroad.”

Joanne also remains hopeful that the promise of mass movements for democracy and justice in the Middle East will be fulfilled:

“We must remind ourselves and others of the tremendous moral and political power of the Arab Spring and Iran’s Green movement,” she says, “and do everything we can to help them to revive, flourish, multiply – and win.”

Inside Egypt’s social crisis

In November 2016 the Egyptian government devalued the currency in order to meet the conditions of an International Monetary Fund loan. Overnight, wages lost half their value and prices surged. **Anne Alexander, Taher Mukhtar and Mostafa Bassiouny** examine the fallout.



Impoverished family: “Lovely to have you Sisi...” Cartoon by Andeel

The devaluation of the Egyptian pound is only one of several brutal conditions imposed by the IMF in order to secure the \$12 billion loan.

A new value-added-tax (VAT) took effect in September 2016, and the government is also progressively reducing or removing subsidies on fuel and electricity.

IMF claims that increased spending on food subsidies will help low-income families through the crisis of the price shock caused by the currency devaluation and the impact of the VAT.

Yet all the evidence from the last two decades of neoliberal reforms points in the other direction.

The winners will be the rich and the losers Egypt’s impoverished majority, despite the fund’s propaganda that the loan will “boost growth and create jobs while protecting vulnerable groups”.

Since 2000 the share of Egypt’s wealth held by the richest ten percent has gone up by 20 percent, from 61 percent to 73.3 percent.

Between 1999 and 2010 the percentage of Egyptians living below the poverty line jumped from 16.7 percent to over 25 percent.

The latest reforms have heaped

further misery on families already struggling to survive.

Even before the currency devaluation took effect, research by the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights showed that the poor were paying twice as much of their income on the new VAT as the rich.

Then came the shock of the November price rises: even according to the government’s own figures the official inflation rate stood at 24.3 in December 2016.

The Egyptian economy relies heavily on imports, so halving the Egyptian pound’s value against the dollar has an immediate effect on the prices and availability of goods in the shops and markets. And as Taher Mukhtar explains in a special report below, drugs and medical supplies have also been badly hit by the devaluation.

The IMF has also encouraged the government’s attacks on public sector employment through reforms which cap annual pay increases and reduce job security, such as Law 18 of 2015 (otherwise known as the Civil Service Law) which raised the spectre of mass redundancies across the civil service.

All this takes place in a context

of extreme repression, where public protest is officially banned, the media tightly controlled and enforced disappearances and torture on an industrial scale are state policy. Yet despite this, resistance continues.

According to information gathered by the Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR) over 1,700 protests took place in Egypt during 2016, the vast majority of which raised demands over social, economic or workers’ rights.

Groups which took action included residents of local neighbourhoods, manual workers and civil servants, students, drivers, teachers, doctors, nurses, shopkeepers and the unemployed.

This resistance remains unorganised at a national level, and the regime’s repression has so far kept a lid on large-scale protests against the IMF deal.

However, as Mostafa Bassiouny explores in a report on page 12, there are signs that wider initiatives challenging the regime’s determination to make the poor pay for the economic crisis are beginning to find an echo, as political activists and trade unionists unite a new campaign: “We want to live”.

The decision to float the currency has affected Egyptians' health at two levels. Firstly, people on low or even middle incomes cannot get access to the drugs and medical supplies they need.

Secondly, the same problems affect the chronically underfunded and overstretched public hospitals which are turning away patients in greater numbers as they cannot get access to vital drugs and supplies.

A lot of patients are dying because they cannot afford health care.

The fall in the value of the Egyptian pound against the dollar means that some medicines are no longer available as they are too expensive to import and local substitutes are not available.

Meanwhile the costs of other medicines have risen astronomically. To compound the problem, other costs of living have risen, so that people have less money available because the price of food, drink and housing has gone up.

Immediately after the floatation of the pound there was a great shortage of medicines. Drugs for treating some heart conditions, albumen for liver patients, contraceptive pills, insulin for treating diabetes are among the drugs which are missing.

The supply of Anti-D immunoglobulin used to treat newborn babies in cases where the mother has Rhesus factor negative blood and father has Rhesus factor positive blood has been seriously affected as well.

Even before the floatation of the pound, many public hospitals could not provide drugs and supplies for patients, forcing them to buy these privately. Now the medication they need is simply not available.

Health care is expensive, even in the poorly funded and resourced public hospitals. Despite the regime's promises to increase funding for the health service there is a massive shortage of hospital beds, particularly in intensive care units.

Patients with chronic illnesses often find that treatment costs are more than their entire salary. A night in a private hospital bed for example costs 5,000 Egyptian pounds while the minimum wage is only 1,200 pounds a month, and many people earn less than that.

Hepatitis C is one particularly important example as an estimated 1 in 10 Egyptians are infected with the disease and there are 165,000 new infections a year, 80 percent of which



Public hospital in Marsa Matrouh province, 2012 Photo: Egyptian Doctors' Union activists

Patients die as medical supplies run short

Taher Mukhtar

occur in hospitals and clinics according to the World Health Organisation.

Dr Mona Mina, vice-chair of the Egyptian Doctors' Union has warned that the medical supplies crisis caused by the IMF deal is directly affecting infection control in hospitals.

She spoke out during a television talk-show programme about a message she received from a doctor who told her that the Ministry of Health is putting pressure on doctors to re-use disposable syringes on the same patient because of lack of supplies.

Rather than fix the problem, the regime has attempted to silence Dr Mina. She was summoned for interrogation on charges of "spreading false news and disturbing social peace".

She was released on bail and in March prosecutors said that they had closed the case against her. The clear aim was to intimidate doctors from organising against the IMF deal.

There have been signs of mobilisation in other quarters, however. The general

assembly of the Pharmacists' Union decided in December to launch a partial strike over the lack of medical supplies from 15 January by closing pharmacies for 6 hours daily.

The strike decision was in protest at the government's handling of the crisis. The government currently fixes prices for medical supplies but does not otherwise support the local pharmaceutical industry.

Rises in the price of medication were announced in June this year and the further price rises after the floatation of the pound failed to address the problem of lack of supplies.

The Pharmacists' Union warned that the government's policies would lead to drug companies withholding supplies waiting for prices to rise further, with the effect that pharmacies would run out.

In the end the strike was called off after Egyptian president Sisi intervened personally by calling the head of the Pharmacists' Union and promised to investigate the causes of the lack of supplies.

The role of the Pharmacists' Union is complicated by the fact that the current head is a police officer who was elected on a pro-regime platform in 2015.

Part of the union's demands focus on protecting pharmacists' own interests to be able to continue selling medicines to patients, and so a deal with the regime may be in the pipeline.

It is clear, however that the government is worried about the possibility of organised resistance to the medicines crisis.

Dr Taher Mukhtar is an activist in the Egyptian doctors' union and a former member of the board of the union's committee in Alexandria.

WE WANT TO LIVE

Mostafa Bassiouny

A new campaign opposing the Egyptian government's latest economic decisions launched in November, bringing together political activists and trade unionists to work against "policies of immiseration".

"We want to live" is an independent trade union and co-operative campaign, engaged in collectively defending Egyptian citizens' interests.

Among the founding signatories are independent trade unions and union federations, political parties and more than 150 individual political activists, trade unionists and leading figures from the youth movements.

The new campaign opposes the move by the Egyptian Central Bank and the Egyptian government on 3 November to float the Egyptian pound, arguing that these policies are forcing the costs of the economic crisis onto the majority of Egyptians who are low or middle-income while the huge savings and property of the affluent minority remain untouched.

These decisions were taken in an undemocratic manner, the campaign points out: the majority which has had to bear the brunt of the price rises had no say in the matter, but the government consulted extensively with business networks and the chambers of commerce and industry.

The founding statement stresses the right of Egyptian citizens to free assembly and peaceful protest, highlighting at the same time the existence of anti-protest laws which prevent them from exercising these rights.

Recent examples noted in the statement include the case of the Alexandria Shipyard workers who were forced to resign from their jobs while facing a military prosecution for taking part in a peaceful protest.

Signatories also demand the immediate release of the Cairo public transport workers, arrested preemptively on charges of organising a strike.

The signatories rejected the government's claim

that its economic decisions were unavoidable, arguing that more just and responsible alternatives exist to policies which have directly affected the lives of millions of Egyptians stunting their ability to meet their basic needs in terms of housing, food, clothing and transport, including millions of wage-earners who have lost at least half their income.

The statement calls on trade unions, organisations, parties and individual citizens to get involved in a grassroots campaign against the government's policies.

The campaign has announced three main demands to counter the actions taken by the government early November, namely, wage increases in line with inflation, adjusting the wage structure to reduce inequality between incomes, and the adoption of fair tax policies in order to spread the tax burden fairly, such as a progressive income tax and the implementation of a tax on stock market transactions.

It also calls for an increase the funds destined to support social protection programs, to be funded from the tax collected from the wealthiest groups.

Hisham Fouad, a member of the journalists' union, a leading member of the Revolutionary Socialists and a founding member of the campaign, said: "The campaign is not the beginning of resistance to the government's economic measures, but an attempt to organize the resistance which already exists."

"The decisions taken by the government have left the Egyptian street in a state of shock."

"We have also seen scaremongering about a planned uprising on 11 November which was followed by unprecedented security measures and this delayed reactions to the government's policies, but it is now impossible to ignore the state of suppressed anger in the Egyptian street and signs of resistance scattered here and there."

Fouad added, "So that we are not taken by surprise by spontaneous eruptions of anger which lack goals, the campaign has set out clear demands in the interests of the poor and working people."

"This campaign emerges from among workers' organisations which are ready to play an active role in resisting the government's economic policies. It is seeking to build a base

of resistance in those areas where people and their children are suffering as a result of those policies: in the factories, neighborhoods, villages and on the university campuses.

"We will use mechanisms of peaceful pressure as guaranteed by the constitution, such as peaceful protests, conferences, workshops and publicity campaigns."

"I expect with the increasingly severe effects of the economic policies of the government in the coming period we will see growing resistance to those policies, especially among workers."

Ilham Aideros, speaking on behalf of the founders of the left-wing Bread and Freedom party, said "the campaign is a necessary step which is long overdue in terms of challenging the state's policies of increasing poverty which have been in effect for a long time now, culminating in the floating of the Egyptian pound and the agreement with the IMF."

"The most important aspect of the campaign in my view is that it is not restricted to political parties and movements, but brings in organisations of a social nature such as trade unions whose members have a basic interest in addressing these economic policies and the repressive measures taken by the state."

"We expect that repression will intensify in the face of increased social demands, as we saw in the case of the public transport workers and Alexandria Shipyard workers, and as we have seen already in the case of democratic demands made by political activists and groups."

"The campaign is open to using all democratic mechanisms and tools to organise," she went on. "In the Bread and Freedom Party we believe that struggles initiated by the different social groups affected by these policies are the most important route to follow."

"We should be putting pressure on the state to convene the so-called National Council for Wages, which was set up in 2003 but has not met yet, and also to stop the parliament from issuing a repressive law on trade union freedoms."

Mostafa Bassiouny is an Egyptian journalist. This is a translation of an article which first appeared in the Lebanese newspaper Assafir



A Gaza rally in support of Palestinian detainees on hunger strike in Israeli prisons | Photo: Joe Catron

A struggle for dignity

Palestinian prisoners continue the battle against Israeli apartheid even within the jail walls, **Alberto Torres** reports.

Fayez Sharary, a diaspora Palestinian and a UK citizen, travelled to the West Bank on September 2016 with his family. They travelled to visit relatives and to observe the Muslim celebration of Eid Al-Adha, hoping to have the opportunity to pray at Al-Aqsa mosque: a dream most Palestinians are prevented from fulfilling.

At the end of their trip, upon their return they were stopped by the Israeli military as they crossed into Jordan to fly back to the UK.

It is common for Palestinians from the diaspora to travel through Jordan, Palestine having no airport of its own and most Palestinians being forbidden to enter Israel. It is also common to

experience hours of interrogation and abuse by the occupation forces.

However, the family were subjected to grief beyond what they could expect from the occupation's symbolic violence. After hours of interrogation, having strip-searched Laila, Fayez' wife, and making their 3-year-old daughter do her necessities in a plastic tray, Fayez was arrested by the Shin Bet (Israel's brutal secret service) and prevented from flying back. The family has not seen him until this date.

It took two months to know the full situation of Fayez' case, during a hearing where the Israeli military court surprisingly admitted the latter was forced to sign a confession during three weeks of "pained and prolonged shackling", psychological pressure, and threats. Fayez was also denied the right to see a lawyer from the date of his arrest on 15 September until 6 October.

Campaigners have been demanding the UK to protect its national citizen and ask for his release as soon as possible.

When *Middle East Solidarity* enquired about Fayez, the Foreign Office stated it could not provide specific details but responded "we are providing consular assistance to a British national who is being detained in Israel, and will remain in contact with local authorities."

One ponders whether this would have been the government's role had this happened to a white British citizen tortured and imprisoned for four months, perhaps in a different country.

Fayez's case is not uncommon. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reports military court judges are Israeli army officers themselves, detainees are often not informed of the charges against them, and the accused and their lawyers are never provided with the time or information necessary to prepare adequate defences.

Confessions are in Hebrew and Palestinians, under pressure, often sign documents they don't know the contents of.

It comes as no surprise that 99.74

percent of prosecutions in Israeli military courts in the Occupied Territories result in conviction, according to Haaretz newspaper.

In the West Bank, civilians living a few kilometres distance from each other are treated under whole different sets of laws. If you are an Israeli Jew, like the 610,000 illegal settlers living in the West Bank, you are treated by Israel's civil law.

If you are Palestinian, every legal process goes through Israel's military law. This apartheid goes beyond the courts: it is present in the roads and transport people use, education, healthcare, jobs, and civil and economic rights. No one can explain it better than Hendrik Verwoerd, South Africa's apartheid architect who said in 1961: "Israel, like South Africa, is an apartheid state".

One of the most stark apartheid policies of the Israeli state is the illegal policy of administrative detention.

It allows the occupation to detain Palestinians for up to six months without the need for a trial or evidence of wrongdoing. These orders can be renewed indefinitely, which means that people see years pass without a trial.

Children as young as 11 are detained under this policy, and it is estimated that since 1967, at least 1 in 3 men in the Occupied Territories has been imprisoned at some point in their lives.

Potential charges are often for activities that even Israel, at least internationally, has recognised as human rights.

Organising demonstrations, waving flags, being involved in non-violent resistance activities, possessing certain literature, or being member of a political party (often designated terrorist organisations under Israel's definition) carry the risk of years of imprisonment.

Although Palestinians are transferred far from home to prisons in Israel in violation of the 4th Geneva Convention, are treated under harsh conditions including refusal to a fair trial, solitary confinement, restrictions on family visits, and medical negligence, it would seem that these hardships often reinforce the Palestinian sense of collective struggle.

Rather than shattering the spirits or morale of the imprisoned, more often than not prisoners use their condition as a symbol of defiance and a badge of struggle.

Palestinian political parties like the PFLP, Hamas, and Fatah have secret and underground prison networks that

politicise new inmates and encourage them to join a faction.

These movements help to provide a sense of control and collective struggle within the prison. They help organise daily life, distribute supplies, mediate disputes, negotiate better conditions with jailers, deliver education programmes, and protect loyalists from informers within the prisons.

There is a dialectical interaction between Zionist repression and Palestinian resistance. In response to the ways in which Israel controls and segments every aspect of their lives, Palestinians have devised methods to resist Israeli colonial subjugation at every level.

The segmentation of the Palestinian people into Palestinians from Israel proper, 1967 Palestinians, and the diaspora can be seen as the first front.

This is followed by the division of Gaza, Jerusalem, and the West Bank into separate, besieged zones.

The third front is the individual control of Palestinian towns and cities harassed by a system of checkpoints, roadblocks, walls, illegal settlements, and the military.

Resistance to this system of control, peaceful or violent, is repressed if not through killings through the ultimate restriction of an individual's freedom: imprisonment at the Israeli jails. Yet this does not end either Palestinian resistance or Zionist repression.

Among Palestinians, prison is often referred as 'the other university'. Factions organise programmes of teaching with imprisoned teachers and professionals, and all kinds of people give instructions on traditional Palestinian life, culture and identity, security outside the prison, the history of Palestine and Zionism, literacy, political education, and even teaching Hebrew and English as second language.

In an effort to suppress this kind of resistance and organisation, the Israeli prison authorities encourage mistrust and self-doubt, hoping that humiliation will lead to the shattering of prisoners' identities.

Beatings, sexual harassment, cold water dousing, electric shocks, cigarette burns, solitary confinement, shackling, cutting down on food and family visits, medical neglect, and threats of rape of female relatives are used to force Palestinians to become informants or collaborators.

And yet in the face of such overwhelming control of people's

psyche and bodies Palestinians still have one last and desperate front of struggle.

Hunger strikes exert control over one's own body by refusing to comply with the prison-structured system of constraint and privation.

And despite the attempts to break them through force-feeding and other inhumane methods, such method has brought significant pressure bear and scored significant victories over the Zionist occupation.

The 71 day hunger strike by Bilal Kayed which ended on August 2016 has been one of the latest struggles to materialise into a definitive victory. Bilal was a prison leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) during the 2011 and 2012 hunger strikes. These historic strikes brought thousands of prisoners together to demand an end to administrative detention and to release 19 fellow comrades from solitary confinement.

Bilal was one of the organisers of the strike, achieving a suspension of Israel's administrative detentions for a period and freeing 18 prisoners from solitary confinement.

Even though Bilal served out his 14.5 years prison sentence this summer, Israel authorities decided into to put him into a 6-month administrative detention as he was due to be released.

Such move not only threatened Bilal's chances of ever coming out of prison, but also those of the other 7,000 Palestinians currently in Israeli prisons. It would have set a precedent that Israel can play with its own laws and processes. Bilal's strike was joined by hundreds of other prisoners and, although it nearly cost him his life, he was eventually liberated on 12 December 2016.

The anti-colonial Palestinian struggle keeps teaching the world that steadfastness and defiance is possible even when confronting the world's richest and most advanced powers.

Even in those instances we would expect resistance to be the weakest. The struggle of Palestinian prisoners, with the international attention it draws and its victories is at the forefront of Palestinian resistance today.

It is this struggle in conjunction with international pressure that will lead to the dismantling of Israeli apartheid.

Turn to page 16 for details on how the BDS campaign is targeting the Israeli prison system



Anti-semitism claims won't silence us, say BDS campaigners

The British government's 'adoption' last year of a definition of anti-semitism proposed by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance is being used to justify a new wave of attacks on critics of Israel, according to BDS campaigners.

This has included increased pressure from university management on the organisers of Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW) events on several campuses, and in at least one high-profile case, the cancellation of a panel discussion on the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) campaign.

The IHRA 'working definition' of anti-semitism includes examples which explicitly connect criticism of the State of Israel with hatred of Jews, such as "claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour", and "applying double standards by requiring of it a behaviour not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation".

University managers, prompted by increasing pressure from the Tory government to meet the demands of its Prevent 'counter-terrorism' programme, appear to be using this definition as an excuse to police Israeli Apartheid Week events.

The University of Central Lancashire cancelled a meeting organised by the university's Friends of Palestine society for 28 February, claiming that the event "contravened" the government's definition of anti-semitism. The meeting organisers relocated to nearby Preston, where the event went ahead with an audience of over 60.

In other cases, university managers have increased pressure on IAW organisers and speakers.

Cambridge University Friends of Palestine Society said that the University's administrative staff harassed the organisers of a Skype talk by Omar Barghouti, founder of the BDS movement, who is



Manchester University students sent a solidarity message by video

MANCHESTER ACTIVISTS CHALK UP NEW BDS VICTORY

Middle East Solidarity spoke to Huda, one of the student organisers of a campaign which succeeded in winning a motion for BDS at University of Manchester Students' Union in November 2016.

"Activists from all different societies and political backgrounds came together in organising meetings on campus with the aim to pass a BDS motion at the university senate.

"At first it was difficult and took time to build. Our first meeting was

five people in the university café! But by contacting other societies and using our networks on campus we were able to build a broad-based campaign, with BDS and the University of Manchester breaking its ties with Israel as the central demand.

"Student societies, members of the Student Union and staff, including 15 members of the lecturers' union UCU, signed up to our pro BDS statement.

"This was important as it showed that different sections of the university body were united around the issue of Palestine."

currently banned from travel by Israel. Israeli Apartheid Week at UCL was postponed, while in Exeter the university reportedly cancelled planned events.

At Liverpool University, management demanded one of the speakers at meeting organised by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign sign up to the IHRA definition by email in advance of the event.

Professor Michael Lavalette, a long-standing campaigner for BDS, told Middle East Solidarity that in his response to the university's request he refused to comply, while highlighting his long track-record of anti-racist activity, including challenging and opposing anti-semitism. Officials did not reply to his email and the meeting went ahead as planned.

BDS campaigners across the country have similarly reacted angrily to attempts to claim that opposition to Israel's occupation and settlement building is by definition anti-semitic.

Over 250 academics signed a letter to the Guardian condemning attempts

to shut down Israeli Apartheid Week activities. "It is with disbelief that we witness explicit political interference in university affairs in the interests of Israel, under the thin disguise of concern about anti-semitism," the letter said.

Meanwhile some critics of Israel have been the subject of smear campaigns in the media.

Anthropologist Dr Miriyam Aouragh, a regular speaker at the Oxford Radical Forum, was attacked in a series of articles carried by Cherwell student newspaper in Oxford, accusing her of "anti-semitism ties".

Dozens of academics signed a joint letter in her defence, noting that allegations of anti-semitism against left-wing critics of Israel were "particularly pernicious at a time when real anti-semitic crimes are taking place, their perpetrators emboldened by the rise of right-wing nationalism."

Middle East Solidarity news team

A new movement erupts in Morocco REBELLION ROCKS THE RIF

Mehdi Rafiq analyses the challenges facing the protest movement over the killing of fish vendor Mohsen Fikri in Al-Hoceima city last October.

At the end of October 2016, overwhelming popular demonstrations erupted in the Rif region in the north of Morocco and over 50 cities and towns nationwide.

The protests broke out following the killing of the young fish seller Mohsen Fikri, who was crushed to death in a bin lorry after local officials confiscated his wares and threw them into the back of the lorry.

Moroccans quickly connected Fikri's terrible death with bigger issues. His killing is a damning indictment of the policies of austerity and the way in which big corporations and the state work together to monopolise fishing and marine industries while unemployment continues to spread among young people.

These were the largest demonstrations to rock the country since the retreat of the 20 February movement of 2011, when protests inspired by the wave of uprisings across the Arab world spread through Morocco demanding political reforms and social justice.

But the new wave of demonstrations did not take place in a vacuum: Morocco has seen several waves of major protest movements against the government's austerity policies in recent years, such as the struggles of trainee teachers and medical students resisting cuts to their student bursaries, as well as strikes over attacks on pensions.

Yet, by and large these movements have been defensive struggles, which are fragmented rather than part of a



Protest in Al-Hoceima on 10 December | Photo: Thomas van Linge

broader political movement.

In the Rif region, the movement which erupted last October is now raising more general social demands.

Yet at the same time, the movement has become more localised, restricting these demands to the problems of the region itself.

For example, on the evening of 14 January, the "Media and Communications Committee" which speaks on behalf of activists in the social movement in the Rif, proposed a set of draft demands focussed on the city of Al-Hoceima alone.

The most important of these included bringing to justice all those involved in the killing of Mohsen Fikri, and the publication of the results of the investigation into his killing. Another key point was the call for the cancellation of order 1.58.381 which designates the city of Al-Hoceima as a military zone. The slogan being raised all over the Rif now is 'No the militarisation of the Rif'.

Lack of higher education opportunities for the region's young people is the focus of another set of demands: calling for the establishment of a public university for the Rif region and the expansion of the network of educational institutions serving the area.

Likewise, the lack of specialist health services in the region is now being raised by social movement activists, with the Media and Communications Committee calling for the creation of a university hospital and a cancer hospital in the city of Al-Hoceima.

Cancer is widespread in the Rif region as a result of the use of poison gases by the Spanish colonial authorities during their suppression of the resistance in the 1920s.

Other demands addressed environmental issues, including the conservation of water resources and improvement of drinking water quality.

Activists are also calling for the punishment of those responsible for corruption in the fishing industry, investment in facilities for preserving fish and food manufacturing, as well as support for small farmers in order to make the region agriculturally self-sufficient.

They want to see the creation of a genuine programme to root out unemployment, cuts in the price of basic goods, electricity and water and an end to policies of land confiscation in the Al-Hoceima region.

Finally, the statement condemned "abuses of power" by the authorities and

demanding the appointment of officials “trained in the culture of human rights.”

The scope of the demands and the scale of the mobilisation in the Rif region reflects a history of resistance to the Moroccan state intertwined with the movement for Amazigh national and cultural rights.

The population in the Rif largely speaks Tamazight. The region is known for its struggle against the Spanish colonial authorities, led by Mohamed ibn Abd-el-Krim who commanded a guerrilla campaign against the Spanish army which he defeated in the famous battle of Anwal in July 1921, leading to the establishment of the Rif Republic on 18 September of the same year.

The region suffered terrible repression in the year 1958, as a result of an uprising triggered by the concessions made by the bourgeois national movement to the Spanish colonisers during independence negotiations which left Moroccan sovereignty incomplete.

The Liberation Army in the region refused to hand over its weapons to the new regime of Hassan II.

Following these events, the region saw the migration of many of its children at the beginning of the sixties to European countries (France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands). A further uprising in the 1984 was also brutally suppressed.

The Rif is historically one of the most marginalised regions in Morocco for the reasons outlined above.

Despite the importance of the current struggles in the Rif region, the relationship between the social movement there and movements elsewhere can be contradictory.

The protest wave which erupted last October over Mohsen Fikri’s killing is now limited to a few cities in the north of Morocco.

There are still some expressions of solidarity in the form of marches or even localised general strikes and protests on some university campuses and in some secondary schools.

Meanwhile, rallies have taken place outside Morocco’s consulates and diplomatic missions in some countries in Western Europe (Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain, France).

However, these are not enough to pressurise the state into meeting the protesters’ demands.

The anti-capitalist left in Morocco is facing serious challenges in these complex conditions.

At the forefront of these



Photo: Mehdi Rafiq

March defends student union

Government attempts to seize control of the National Union of Moroccan Students sparked a campaign of marches and protests by current and former students. The Moroccan government has announced that it intends to confiscate the headquarters of the student union

of the buildings by the Ministry of Youth and Sport. This follows other attempts by the government to restrict democracy on university campuses at a time when the Moroccan student movement in universities and academic institutions is involved in a bitter battle against neo-liberal policies,

austerity, repression and tuition fees, which prevent thousands of children of working class backgrounds from enrolling at university. Large numbers of student activists have also been jailed. To mark the union’s 60th anniversary, demonstrators marched through the capital Rabat on 25 December.

challenges is to reconnect politically and organisationally to the mass movement which has exploded against unemployment and austerity.

It is not enough to simply mobilise solidarity and support for on-going struggles.

This can undervalue the role played by initiatives of mass self-organisation such as coordinating committees against the cuts in pensions, against price rises, medical students, committees of young people for the right to secure and permanent work, trainee teachers’ committees, which have emerged in the new movements.

Of course, there are problems with some of the misconceptions and harmful practices which characterise these emerging movements, such as the tendency to be hostile to trade union organisation and call for people to abandon the unions (unfortunately this trend is widespread among young activists).

This hostility fails to distinguish

between the union as a means for workers’ struggle, and the behaviour and positions of the weak, or even treacherous, union leaders in many workers’ battles.

It is also important for revolutionaries to defend their perspective of revolutionary change on all issues, including those related to the rights of oppressed cultural and linguistic nationalities.

The strained relationship between the Amazigh and the left movement was one of the main reasons behind the weakness of the movement witnessed in the northern regions of Morocco since the end last October.

We need unity between all the forces involved in the popular struggle, uniting calls for those responsible for the death of Mohsen Fikri and the suppression of protesters in Al-Hoceima to be held to account, with demands for an end to the militarisation of the Rif region, for a fair distribution of wealth in the fishing industry and for youth employment.

Rivals prepare for Raqqa assault

Jad Bouharoun analyses the changing balance of forces in the war over Syria

A few months after Assad’s armed forces and their allies took East Aleppo, the Syrian situation appears very fluid.

Having lost their last major urban stronghold after months of siege and indiscriminate bombardment, many of the rebel factions have signed on a ceasefire and decided to attend peace talks in Astana, Kazakhstan.

These talks are sponsored by Russia, Turkey and Iran, the three main powers which have intervened in the war that dictator Bashar al-Assad launched to save his regime from the popular revolution of 2011.

Russia and Iran took the regime’s side from day one, sending financial and military aid to the embattled Syrian army.

Iran sent its own Revolutionary Guards and Lebanese movement Hezbollah to compensate for the Syrian army’s growing manpower shortage, as well as mobilising the Shi’a sectarian militias of its Iraqi allies.

The Russian air force intervened massively and decisively on the regime’s side from September 2015 as Russia sought to prop-up one of its Soviet-era allies and gain a stronger foothold in the Middle East.

Turkey, after years of anti-Assad rhetoric and moderate support to some rebel factions, has reached an understanding with Russia in 2016.

In exchange for Erdogan’s silence on the regime’s onslaught in Aleppo, Turkish armoured divisions invaded Northern Syria last August along with Free Syrian Army infantry, in an operation dubbed ‘Euphrates Shield’.

Officially this operation aims to



Syrian and Iraqi refugees arrive in Greece Photo: Wikipedia

fight terrorism and ISIS, however a crucial motive for Turkey is to prevent the formation of an autonomous Kurdish enclave in Northern Syria.

The Kurds in turn dominate the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a military coalition formed to fight ISIS and sponsored by none other than Turkey’s NATO ally, the United States.

Tensions escalated sharply between the SDF and the Turkish forces of Euphrates Shield in early March, as the latter, emboldened by its seizure of strategic town al-Bab from ISIS, seeks to drive the Kurds away from Manbij.

The Kurds had themselves seized Manbij from ISIS a few months ago, and they reacted to the Turkish threats by handing over Manbij to the Syrian regime forces.

The fight against ISIS is therefore the field of rivalries between the various forces at work in the Syrian war. The question remains: who will seize ISIS capital Raqqa, in Eastern Syria?

Erdogan is vehemently opposed to any SDF assault on Raqqa, as a victory there would greatly reinforce the Kurds. But his hands are tied and

his forces are unable to conduct the assault themselves; to reach Raqqa the Turkish army would have to go through territories controlled by the Syrian government or the Kurds.

Moreover, the Turkish army’s slow advance on al-Bab showed that it would almost certainly get bogged down in a very long and costly war if it attempted unilaterally to seize Raqqa from ISIS.

The weakened Syrian army is unable and unwilling to lead the assault on Raqqa, while the Russians, having no ground forces of their own in Syria, can use their air force as leverage in any scenario (they have intermittently provided air support for both Turkey and the SDF, in addition to the Syrian regime). The SDF are too dependent on US support to attack Raqqa on their own.

The assault on Raqqa will therefore have to wait for a decision by the Trump administration, and will, like the current assault on Mosul, involve myriads of international, regional and local actors who will seek to prop up their interests regardless of the cost in human lives.



Disappearances in spotlight at campaign launch

Egypt Solidarity

A joint campaign to mark the anniversary of the disappearance, torture and murder of Cambridge PhD student Giulio Regeni, who vanished while doing research on independent trade unions in Cairo kicked off in February this year.

Amnesty International and the lecturers union UCU have organised a series of activities and meetings to push for justice for Giulio and other victims of enforced disappearance in Egypt.

The campaign launched with a panel discussion at Amnesty's Human Rights Action Centre in London with Dr Antonio Marchesi, president of Amnesty Italy, Egyptian human rights campaigners and Rob Copeland, UCU's international policy officer.

Around 60 people joined the meeting, hearing first hand from Egyptian activist Ahmed Abdallah the horrific conditions he endured in detention earlier this year, after being arrested in connection with his role as legal adviser to Giulio Regeni's family.

The following day, a further 60 people packed into a lecture in organised by the Centre of Governance and Human Rights at the University of Cambridge to hear Antonio Marchesi's reflections on the massive campaign for Truth for Giulio in his home country of Italy.

Further meetings and events are planned at the LSE in London, Manchester, Warwick and Leeds and Kingston where UCU branches are working with Egypt Solidarity Initiative to organise panel discussions on Giulio's case and the issue of forced disappearances in Egypt.

UCU branches and Amnesty student groups across the UK will be gathering signatures on 'action cards' demanding that the Egyptian authorities cooperate



Daniel Zeichner MP and Cambridge City Council leader Lewis Herbert speak on Human Rights Day | Photo: Cambridge City Amnesty

with investigations into Giulio's disappearance, and bring the perpetrators of other cases of forced disappearance and torture to justice.

The cards will be handed into the Egyptian embassy in London later this year.

MPs, local council and national student leaders have given their backing to the campaign.

Cambridge MP Daniel Zeichner joined Amnesty campaigners on Human Rights Day in December along with with Alex Mayer MEP and Lewis Herbert, leader of Cambridge City Council.

Zeichner also spoke again at a vigil on 3 February to mark the anniversary of the discovery of Giulio's body.

Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell and NUS president Malia Bouattia also endorsed the call for justice, signing UCU-Amnesty 'action cards' at a national UCU conference on education.



NUS president Malia Bouattia shows her support | Photo: Anne Alexander

Public meetings: Truth for Giulio • Justice for Egypt's disappeared

London launch
13 February, 6.30pm
Amnesty International Human Rights Action Centre, 25 New Inn Yard, London EC2A 3EA

Cambridge lecture
14 February, 12 noon
Keynes Hall, King's College, King's Parade, Cambridge

Manchester event
28 February, 12.30pm
Council chambers, University of Manchester Students Union, Oxford Road, Manchester

LSE event
2 March, 6pm,
Room CLM 5.02, 5th floor, Clement House, 99 Aldwych, London, WC2B 4JF

Warwick event
7 March, 12.30pm
Room B2.04/5 (Science Concourse), University of Warwick, Coventry, CV4 7AL

Leeds event
22 March, 1pm
Roger Stevens Building, Lecture Theatre 1, University of Leeds

Kingston event
29 March, 6pm
Kingston University Student Union, Penrhyn Road, KT1 2EE

Further events at Queen Mary, University of London and University of Bath will take place in April. Go to amnesty.org.uk/giulio for more information

IFFCO union leaders tell story of their strike in video appeal

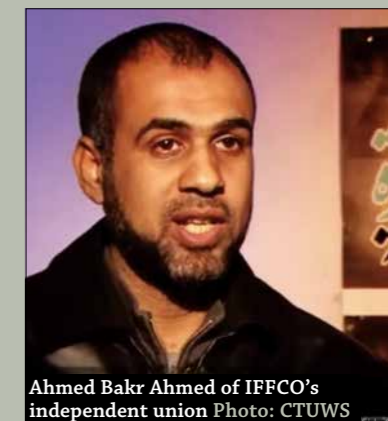
Leading activists from IFFCO's independent union recorded a solidarity video for the Centre for Trade Union and Workers Services (CTUWS), an Egyptian NGO which campaigns for workers' rights.

IFFCO is a multinational firm, explains Ahmed Bakr, general secretary of the independent union, "when it started operations in Egypt in 1998 the company was worth 85 million EGP (the equivalent of £15m today). Now it is worth 4 billion EGP (£2 billion)."

The company can well afford to meet workers' demands for better pay and conditions in the face of rising prices, say union activists.

"This is all about social justice", argues Mohamed el-Sayed, "after the unprecedented rise in prices which affected all of Egypt wiped out the value of our wages workers came to the union committee saying 'we need a cost-of-living bonus'".

In response to the union's



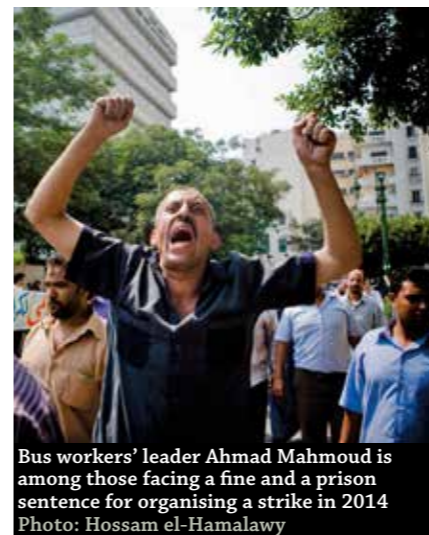
Ahmed Bakr Ahmed of IFFCO's independent union Photo: CTUWS

request, the company director in the Gulf did agree to distribute an extra bonus to the workforce.

However the manager of the Suez plant gave 80 percent of the money to managers, leaving the 800 workers with only 20 percent.

"Workers had no choice but to organise a sit-in", says union activist Yosry Hafez.

Watch the video online: [youtube/ZXwqB9SWarM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXwqB9SWarM)



Bus workers' leader Ahmad Mahmoud is among those facing a fine and a prison sentence for organising a strike in 2014 Photo: Hossam el-Hamalawy

Global solidarity for arrested Suez workers Egypt Solidarity

After Egyptian security forces stormed the IFFCO oils and soap factory in Suez on 1 January in order to break up a strike over cuts to bonuses, trade unionists in the UK and around the world were quick to react.

Ian Hodson of the BFAWU bakers and food workers' union told Egypt Solidarity he was very concerned about the latest attacks on workers' rights in Egypt.

"Clearly it is the right of workers to withdraw their labour in pursuit of a fair settlement when an employer refuses to acknowledge a legitimate grievance – it is this right which marks the difference between workers and slaves."

A dozen leading UK trade unionists followed up with a statement on 8 January condemning the latest attacks on workers' rights in Egypt.

Members of the national executive committees of the UCU university workers' union, PCS civil servants' union and the NUT teachers' union were joined by BFAWU president Ian Hodson in a protest letter responding to the storming of the IFFCO factory in Suez.

The statement also condemned the on-going persecution of the Cairo bus workers' leaders by the Egyptian authorities, as a number of bus

worker activists appeal a two-year jail sentence and a 100,000 LE (£5,000) fine imposed in absentia in relation to a strike in 2014.

The violent attack on the IFFCO workers is only the latest in a spate of arrests aimed at breaking workers' resistance to the economic crisis

"We call on Egypt's military regime to stop the persecution of worker activists and release all those unjustly detained", the statement said.

Thousands of trade unionists and activists also backed a campaign by the IUF global federation of food, farm and hotel workers' unions – in solidarity with the IFFCO workers.

The IUF sent over 4,500 protest emails to the IFFCO director, Shiraz Allana protesting at the company's

decision to bar the workers from the factory .

Workers arrested in early January have now been released, but they are still facing trial.

The nine members of the union committee and several others have been referred for trial by prosecutors in Suez on charges of incitement to strike and criminal damage against company property.

The violent attack on the IFFCO workers is only the latest in a spate of arrests aimed at breaking workers' resistance to the economic crisis.

Prices have spiralled out of control since the devaluation of the Egyptian pound in November, while the regime is pushing through more austerity measures attacking public sector jobs, subsidies and welfare.

Turn to pages 11-13 for more background on how social crisis in Egypt has sparked a new wave of workers' resistance.



BACK THESE CAMPAIGNS

Solidarity with IFFCO foodworkers

Workers at the IFFCO edible oils factory in Suez, Egypt are fighting to defend their independent union. When the workers went on strike in a dispute over wages in December, the company filed a police report against 15 workers, including 9 union members.

On January 3, police stormed the factory and arrested 13 striking workers. On January 29 the workers were acquitted in a Suez court of 'inciting' a strike, but 17, including the union president, vice-president and general secretary are barred from



IFFCO workers on strike in 2013

returning to work.

The attack on the IFFCO union follows severe repression against the Cairo bus workers and Alexandria shipyard workers.

What you can do:

Send a message to the company and the president of Egypt here: tinyurl.com/jtvqglb



BDS Movement

Ten years since its launch, the BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) movement for Palestinian rights is now strongly supported by major civil society organisations from across the world and has achieved significant impact.

However, Israel is now launching a desperate and dangerous fight back. At Israel's request, governments in the US, UK, France, Canada and elsewhere are introducing anti-democratic legislation and taking other repressive measures to undermine the BDS movement.

Support the #RighttoBoycott and hold Israel to account for its violations of international law.

What you can do:

- For more information go to bdsmovement.net
- Help end British complicity in Israeli prisons through the Stop G4S Campaign here: bdsmovement.net/stop-g4s



Justice for Giulio

The torture and murder of Giulio Regeni, an Italian doctoral student at the University of Cambridge, during a research visit to Cairo, has thrown a spotlight onto the hundreds of cases of forced disappearances and torture in Egypt, stirring thousands of people around the world into taking action by gathering signatures joining demonstrations and calling for justice.

Most recently Amnesty and the University and College Union have held a series of high-profile public meetings at UK universities to highlight the need for Regeni's killers to be brought to justice.

What you can do:

Go to amnesty.org.uk/giulio for resources and information

Executions in Bahrain

On 16 January Bahrain executed three torture victims following authorisation by King Hamad.

Sami Mushaima, Ali Al-Singace and Abbas Al-Samea were executed by firing squad. They are the first people executed in Bahrain since July 2010, and the first Bahrainis executed since March 1996.

NGOs like BIRD and Reprieve are working hard to ensure this doesn't set a precedent in the country, and highlighting cases like Mohammed Ramadan's who could be next on the list for the death penalty.

Mohammed, a police officer and father of three, was tortured and sentenced to death for attending a pro-democracy protest.

What you can do:

- Call on the UK Government to end its assistance to Bahrain's death penalty system and take steps to prevent Mohammed Ramadan's execution here: tinyurl.com/z9qutfg
- Go to the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy to read more on campaigns and actions against the death penalty and other human rights abuses in Bahrain: birdbh.org

Subscriptions & further reading



Disabled activists join a protest in Tunisia in 2011 | Photo: Nasser Nouri

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MENA Solidarity

menasolidaritynetwork.com

MENA Solidarity is a network of activists from different unions in the UK engaged in building solidarity for struggle to win social justice and workers' rights in the Middle East. We are supported by the UCU, PCS and NUT unions and a number of other trade union regions and branches.



Bahrain Watch

bahrainwatch.org

Bahrain Watch is an independent research and advocacy organisation formed in February 2012 that seeks to promote effective, transparent and accountable governance in Bahrain.



Egypt Solidarity

egyptsolidarityinitiative.org

Egypt Solidarity launched on 11 February 2014, the third anniversary of the fall of Mubarak, in order to campaign in defence of democratic rights in Egypt.

NOT MY PRESIDENT!

There are so many different ways people are resisting Trump, his cabinet, and everyone he emboldens, reports **Sumaya Awad**

In the hours and days after Trump's victory, hundreds of thousands poured into the streets, united behind one message; Not My President! By late November the Sanctuary Campus movement, launched by Cosecha, a movement to protect and fight for the rights of undocumented immigrants, was in full swing.

Across the US, from NYC to Portland, Oregon, hundreds of students walked out of class and took over campus squares or student life buildings demanding their administration make their campus a safe space for protest and resistance and a immigration police-free zone.

The Women's Marches that took place across the country were possibly one of the largest marches in US history. Most of the big figures in the Democratic Party didn't attend the march. Not only that, but the core of the party has even voted in Trump's dinosaur cabinet appointees in the senate, which is downright shameful.

Other marches and rallies in response to Trump's executive orders banning refugees, freezing funds to Planned Parenthood, building border walls were able to mobilize thousands of people within hours. Mobilizations like this must keep happening on a weekly basis. We need to create extensive emergency response networks so we're ready at a moment's notice to fill the streets.

One important part of the movement needs to be the inclusion of Palestinian rights in the resistance to Trump. Empowering and mobilizing to spread the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement (BDS), and, with the help of organizations like Palestine Legal and different formations of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) exposing the figures and institutions who malign and harass BDS activists.

The imperial wars the US is waging abroad are directly linked to its actions at home. Protesting low wages, unemployment and lousy healthcare should go hand in hand with resisting war and occupation abroad.

After all, it is US tax dollars that fund the missiles that create refugees, and the cost of those missiles is what leads to high taxes, student debt, and poor health care. To break through the cycle we must resist the racist



rhetoric meant to distract us from the real reasons wages are stagnate, poverty levels are skyrocketing, and student debt has reached an all time high.

There are plenty of other ways to connect Trump's foreign policy to his policy at home. On multiple occasions he's used the illegal Israel apartheid wall as a model for the US/Mexico border wall. The surveillance of BDS advocates has enabled the surveillance of Muslims in general.

In some instances we've seen solidarity between those attacked by the US at home and abroad spur up spontaneously. This past December, protesters at Standing Rock sent a message of solidarity to those trapped under Assad's siege on Aleppo.

We need to resist not only Trump but also the very reason he was able to take power in the first place; the Democrats and Republicans that came before him, the same ones that today are pleading with us to 'accept' him and to 'give him a chance'.

We need to organize ourselves and build solidarity between our various movements. Together, we outnumber the two parties and the one class that is responsible for our current state.

They are weak, divided, and few. The more they try to silence, bribe, or manipulate us, the louder and stronger we will become. Solidarity and resistance are the way forward.

Sumaya Awad is a Palestinian activist based in New York City.

